

Political representation: communities, ideas and institutions in Europe (c. 1200–c. 1690). An introduction

Mario Damen, Jelle Haemers and Alastair Mann

In the late medieval West, the political representation of subjects was organized under the term “Estates” (*Staten, États*), which regularly met with representatives of the prince with the aim of negotiating central issues such as war, taxation and trade regulations. Due to the emergence of larger administrative structures and the monetization of society, princes were more and more inclined to consult their subjects — especially the urban communities — in order to raise taxes and mobilize support in their struggle with noble contenders and princely competitors. On the other hand, local and regional communities themselves developed representative structures. This implies that the political coordination of a medieval state was not imposed by central authorities; it was always the product of a negotiation process between the various administrations and interest groups with a stake in the territory.¹ What is more, categories of subjects and their representatives had an interest in cooperation not only with each other, but also with those who claimed to rule them. Thus the functioning of a medieval or early modern state can only be understood by recourse to the social and ideological background (i.e. practice and theory respectively) of political representation.

These two structural developments (state-formation and communalism) have until now dominated research on representative institutions and have shown that medieval and early modern governmental politics involved dynamic processes of pressure from below as well as design from above. First, research on the “top-down” formation of so-called “modern states” has outlined that, due to the growing complexity of administration and economic imperatives, princes consulted over tax and to solidify support.² As a result, pressure groups managed to influence state politics through well-established representative institutions.³ A second line of

¹ John Watts, *The Making of Polities: Europe, 1300–1500* (Cambridge, 2009); Michel Hébert, *Parlementer. Assemblées représentatives et échanges politiques en Europe occidentale à la fin du moyen âge* (Paris, 2014).

² Wim Blockmans, “Representation (Since the Thirteenth Century)”, in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 7: *c. 1415–c.1500*, ed. Christopher Allmand (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 29–64; Christopher Fletcher, “Political Representation”, in *Government and Political Life in England and France, c. 1300–c. 1500*, ed. Christopher Fletcher, Jean-Philippe Genet and John Watts (Oxford, 2015), pp. 217–39.

³ Jan Dhondt, *Les assemblées d'états en Belgique avant 1795* (Ghent, 1965); Helmut Koenigsberger, *Monarchies, States General and Parliaments: The Netherlands in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, 2001).

research, the historiography on the “bottom-up” rise of parliamentary institutions, has shown that local and regional communities themselves developed representative structures. In this sense, initiation of representation came from “below” and was not triggered by a territorial prince.⁴

Both the bottom-up and top-down approaches to the study of representative institutions show that political representatives became the main power brokers between kings and princes on the one hand, and the subjects on the other. However, these approaches leave some questions unanswered. Though the political points of view of the prince and his officers are abundantly studied, it remains unclear what interests the representatives stood for. Knowledge of the social background of representatives is, however, crucial for clarifying their exact role in facilitating governmental policies. Princes and their officers accumulated different species of “state capital”, as Pierre Bourdieu would say, such as instruments of coercion, economic resources, competencies, prestige and authority, which enabled them to exercise power over the territory and its inhabitants.⁵ However, in the Low Countries, for example, they did not manage to monopolize “state capital”, since representatives of categories of subjects also accumulated instruments of coercion, which enabled them to influence the process of decision-making. Research is needed to clarify which groups in society these people really represented, and how they were connected with the officers of the prince, who more often than not originated from similar social circles.

Scholarship on late medieval France and Germany has shown that representatives not only needed social and political capital to establish intermediary levels of power; they also needed “symbolic power” to defend their relatively autonomous position. The symbols and rituals used during a meeting of representative institutions were important to convince its participators of the symbolic power of the assembly.⁶ However, the ceremonial aspect in itself cannot fully explain why representative institutions were so powerful. Political ideas and ideological weapons were therefore an essential tool for representatives to convince the people whom they represented of the decisions they took.⁷ Research on discursive strategies

⁴ Peter Blickle, ed., *Resistance, Representation, and Community* (Oxford, 1997); André Holenstein, “Empowering Interactions: Looking at Statebuilding from Below”, in *Empowering Interactions: Political Cultures and the Emergence of the State in Europe, 1300–1900*, ed. Wim Blockmans, Jon Mathieu and André Holenstein (Farnham, 2009), pp. 1–34.

⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, “Rethinking the State: Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field”, *Sociological Theory* 12 (1994), pp. 1–18.

⁶ Tim Neu, Michael Sikora and Thomas Weller (eds.), *Zelebrieren und Verhandeln. Zur Praxis ständischer Institutionen im frühneuzeitlichen Europa* (Münster, 2009).

⁷ Neithard Bulst, “Rulers, Representative Institutions and their Members as Power Elites: Rivals or Partners?”, in *Power Elites and State Building*, ed. Wolfgang Reinhard (Oxford, 1996), pp. 41–58;

and means of propaganda is therefore indispensable to understand the rationale behind the decision-making process of these meetings.⁸ However, studies on representative institutions have not yet fully explored the political ideas of representatives and the discursive strategies they used in their negotiations with state officers.

This book wishes to identify the gaps in academic research on representative institutions and open up ways for the methodological renewal of this area of research by looking at:

1. the balance between a bottom-up and top-down approach (the ways in which representative institutions functioned as a platform for political dialogue);
2. ways to link the achievements of prosopographical research with changes in political dialogue;
3. patterns in which political discourses were triggered by these developments.

Thus it is geared towards the identification and the analysis of the agency of networks and the circulation of ideas, as a way to overcome the limits set by historical and theoretical studies on political representation.

In a chronological sense, the starting point of this collection of essays is the thirteenth century, the age in which representative structures institutionalized at a higher than just local level. Its final point is situated around 1650, tailing off in the 1690s, when, at least in Western Europe, most of the “modern states” had reached their basic form. Traditionally, research on representative institutions is characterized by a national, or sometimes a regional, approach. Researchers have been predominantly interested in the history of their “own” national representative institutions. They have tended to focus on legitimating modern states, and they were not particularly inclined to make a cross-boundary comparison of developments and structures. Comparative research is, therefore, relatively scarce. Moreover, as research traditions were modelled along the lines of the nineteenth-century nation state, political units, which existed in the Middle Ages and the early modern period, but did not have a “follow-up” in more recent history, have usually been neglected. In short, this collection of essays aims to

Martin Gosman, *Les sujets du père: les rois de France face au représentants du peuple dans les assemblées de notables et les états généraux, 1302–1615* (Paris, 2007).

⁸ Jens Feuchter and Jörgen Helmrath, eds., *Politische Redekultur in der Vormoderne. Die Oratorik europäischer Parlamente in Spätmittelalter und Früher Neuzeit* (Frankfurt am Main, 2008); Graeme Small and Jan Dumolyn, “Parole d’Etat et mémoire collective dans les pays bourguignons: les discours prononcés devant des assemblées représentatives (XVe–XVIe siècles)”, *Publication du Centre Européen d’Etudes Bourguignonnes*, 52 (2012), pp. 15–28.

address the origins of representation, its implementation and institutional development in a comparative European framework.

Top-down or bottom-up? Princes, communities and representation

In the first part of the volume, the focus is on institutional developments of representative institutions in Western Europe. It would be too simplistic to maintain that this process was only a reaction to the growth of princely power. Meetings of the representatives of subjects were not only dependent on the initiative of the ruler. In several areas of Europe, the catalyst for representation came from “below” and was not triggered by a territorial prince. It was firmly grounded in different kinds of collective action, aiming for self-organization and cooperation at a local level which had been flourishing since the twelfth century. Particularly in the more urbanized societies, like Northern Italy and the Low Countries, which were highly dependent on (international) commercial relations, these platforms had to resolve all kinds of problems concerning trade and judicial and economic issues. Nevertheless, in agricultural regions where princely power was relatively weak — Northern Europe, Switzerland, parts of the Holy Roman Empire — subjects, often well-organized after centuries of struggle and negotiations with local lords, took the initiative as well. In short, there was not a “standard model” for representation, as in principle a representative institution was the expression of the political desires of the most powerful actors in society. The balance of power between these political actors differed from place to place and depended greatly on social-economic structures. Equally, the comparative perspective of this volume demonstrates that medieval and early modern princes and elites were also conscious of the institutional fashions evident in the actions of neighbouring states and kingdoms. Authority, legitimacy, affirmation, consultation and indeed representation itself were attractive developments for a wide range of political entities and participants. Hence in the first part of the book the different institutional settings of representation in late medieval and early modern Europe will be discussed.

The over-simplicity of the distinct top-down or bottom-up approaches to the creation of representative institutions is challenged in this collection by both Peter Hoppenbrouwers and Tim Neu. A more nuanced blending of motivations is suggested. The essay by Hoppenbrouwers provides a wide-ranging survey of the different types of assemblies of estates, their foundations and purposes, all including the third estate rooted in urbanization; following Blockmans, the presence of cities is a necessary ingredient for “popular” representation and in definitions of representative assemblies as opposed to royal or princely

councils.⁹ Assemblies in non-royal principalities and in composite states add to the variability of institutional conditions. The importance of urban representatives to the appearance of Estates is nevertheless balanced by their growing importance and regular gathering on their own in the more urbanized societies of the Low Countries and Italy. Hoppenbrouwers differentiates between temporary gatherings and permanent institutions with enhanced levels of power and authority. In particular, the various estates of the Low Countries, of the Iberian *Cortes* and the “near-ubiquitous” English Parliament are explored to plot the origins of assemblies of estates beginning, accepting Marongiu’s “watershed”, with the Cortes of the kingdoms of Leon and Castile summoned by Alfonso IX of Leon in 1188. There, nobles, clergy and men of the towns were present to consult over matters of peace and war.¹⁰ Hoppenbrouwers then outlines the beginning of parliamentary discourse, emerging from classical and biblical foundations and underpinned by Renaissance ideologies and through an anatomy of parliamentary competency, showing aspects both universal and optional.

Seeking watersheds in representative development, Neu replaces examination by typologies and terminologies with a methodological approach aimed at understanding how representative Estates emerged. He also rejects the “dualistic” response of princes versus assemblies. Hintze’s top-down model of competitive political culture in Europe, with princes and representative institutions evolving in response to an atmosphere of competition, is contrasted with David Stasavage’s territorial and economic analysis, where elites with liquid capital promote representative assemblies with access to credit and with tax moderating powers. However, Neu deploys Michael Saward’s novel methodology where both claims to represent as a political actor and claims to influence taxation as a collective political actor were preconditions for the appearance of representative assemblies.¹¹ Neu uses these tools to test whether the Estates of Hessen and Württemberg can be explained as representative institutions that satisfy the preconditions of this “claim-making” criteria.

⁹ Wim Blockmans, “A Typology of Representative Institutions in Late Medieval Europe”, *Journal of Medieval History* 4 (1978), pp. 189–215, at 204–9.

¹⁰ For instance, Antheun Janse, “Noble Representation in an Urban Society: The Case of Holland in the Fifteenth Century” in *Town and Country in Medieval North Western Europe: Dynamic Interactions*, ed. Alexis Wilkin et al. (Turnhout, 2015), pp. 241–64; Antonio Marongiu, *Medieval Parliaments: A Comparative Study*, trans. Stuart Woolf (London, 1968), pp. 29–32.

¹¹ Felix Gilbert, ed., *The Historical Essays of Otto Hintze* (Oxford, 1975), pp. 302–53; David Stasavage, *States of Credit. Size, Power and the Development of European polities* (Princeton, 2011); Michael Saward, *The Representative Claim* (Oxford, 2010). See also Tim Neu, *Die Erschaffung der landständischen Verfassung. Kreativität, Heuchelei und Repräsentation in Hessen, 1509–1655* (Köln, 2013).

Neu's essay concludes a series of national studies following on from Hoppenbrouwers' general survey. The first of these is Maria Asenjo-González's consideration of the Cortes of Castile in terms of representation and fiscal engagement. Castile's Cortes, with its autonomous cities, is contrasted with other Iberian assemblies. The former was the more easily manipulated but crown control evolved over time, particularly during the fifteenth century. Entering the century, two or three urban representatives, or *procuradores*, represented each city. Then, in stages, they became increasingly independent of their urban deputies as the crown paid their salaries, until in the 1440s their numbers were much reduced to a core of "court *procuradores*", even though the cities issued mandates that limited the extent to which they were bound by the votes of their *procuradores*. These individuals became not merely more dependent on the crown but also, by the second quarter of the century, elements of a "royal council" supplanted the role of the full Cortes. By the time the Cortes returned in 1455, the level of gentrification had solidified the link between Cortes and court. However, although it no longer had legislative power into the next century, the Cortes still embraced an important role in fiscal oversight and tax approval, moderating and agreeing the *servicio* and *millones* taxes, with power in particular over how these taxes were raised from their own areas. Asenjo-González shows that for all its authoritative weaknesses and self-interested urban oligarchy, the significance to the fiscal state of Castile and the frequency of meetings before 1640, the Castilian Cortes was a representative assembly with peculiar yet mutable characteristics.

Marco Gentile's essay on the duchy of Milan in Northern Italy develops a case study of representation without the more expected representative assembly. Stasavage's view of the city state is questioned, as is the conventional and partial view of the Milanese duchy as merely the sum of city states. The dualist paradigm of cities versus princes is rejected and Gentile highlights various territorial and non-territorial political actors that were represented, sometimes indirectly but represented nevertheless. Distinctions are drawn between the Milanese ducal council, not a representative institution in the late medieval period, and urban city councils, and also semi-corporate urban factional groups within the cities. Parma, Piacenza and Alessandria are especially considered as having local or civic councils that had bilateral relationships with the ducal council. Even though some of their council members were chosen from a shortlist that had ducal approval, such councils had a significant role in taxation. More remarkably, these cities were, from the fourteenth century, each divided into distinct quarters that fed into councils. Political representation in a vertical manner was built around aristocratic families and personal ties in this quartered orientation. They offered an

alternative representational feature, not in the traditional sense, not necessarily elected as their selection procedures varied, but representative in its way.

The Irish Parliament is often seen as a clone of that of England and an example of a colonial institutional development in parallel but following behind the more powerful neighbour. However, Coleman Dennehy's essay confirms a range of contextual conditions that made the Irish model different, in spite of English efforts to the contrary from the thirteenth century. The Irish Parliament may have had Lords and Commons but it evolved distinctly with a state and society differently forged. For example, the "replication thesis" is clearly countered by pre-Reformation conditions. The "lower clergy" as an estate lasted in Ireland for 700 years after they were removed from England, and even had their own chamber, the "proctors" house, until the English Reformation of the 1530s. The racial, political, regional and confessional elements were different in Ireland. It was, with its "marcher society" and Gaelic law, without the mono-cultural qualities of England, and so the English crown had trouble dominating peripheral areas in the extremities of the four provinces of Ireland. Dennehy provides a survey of representation through the Irish House of Commons from the twelfth to the seventeenth centuries in a political landscape that lacked urban features. Even the Tudor and Stuart attempts at domination were hampered after the 1530s as new types of burghs and towns made an intervention by English politics more problematic.¹² Universality is challenged in political but also in structural terms. Indeed, such multifarious circumstances are a deliberate feature of the case studies commissioned for this section. Representation as visited on the medieval and early modern territorial entities of Castile, Milan, Ireland, Hessen and Württemberg offer up more evidence of a range of institutional settings in the European theatre and invite yet more comparative research in the future.

Prelates, nobles and patricians: The composition of the representative institutions

Parliaments and Estates cannot be viewed as homogeneous institutions, but rather as conglomerates of interest groups. Therefore, we have to discern the political strategies of the three estates: the clergy, the nobility and the cities. Evidently, the political strategies of the representatives cannot rightly be understood without analysing their social background. Did they merely represent themselves and their own interests or was there a broader sense of responsibility and representation? The analysis of the social embedding and the political

¹² Henry Richardson and George Sayles, *The Irish Parliament in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 1952), pp. 20–22.

background of representatives can be done by mapping out the relations of the representatives involving kinship, friendship and patronage. The reconstruction of their social networks helps us to understand better not only the different interest groups within the Estates, but also the informal structures that influenced the process of decision-making.¹³ Indeed, given the highly personalized nature of politics in late medieval and early modern Europe, we cannot study the working and development of representative institutions without knowing which persons and officeholders staffed their ranks. In the second part of the book, some relevant case studies for different European regions and countries will be presented. The different chapters explore the ways and methods by which research into the composition of representative institutions is done nowadays.

Since the 1970s, more and more historians working on state and representative institutions have taken a prosopographical approach. First it was only popular among German ancient historians and English (early) modernists. Influenced by new methodological approaches from the social sciences, German and French medievalists began to take it seriously.¹⁴ Nowadays it is commonplace among historians working on institutions in the past to collect data with respect to the origin, family connections, education, career and network of the members and officers of a certain institution. The focus is always on the people who held the offices and who embodied the institutions. This renders it possible to reconstruct how the offices and institutions developed and to detect and reconstruct the underlying political and social networks. However, this labour-intensive task requires the research of a great many sources, most of them hidden in the archives. On the other hand, many collections of edited sources are increasingly used for this type of research. In England, “The History of Parliament” offers hundreds of biographies of members of parliament, which allow researchers to make analysis — chronologically or diachronically — of cohorts of the members.¹⁵ Scotland has the enormous database of *The Records of the Parliaments of Scotland* covering the 1230s to 1707.¹⁶ For the Low Countries, there are the edited volumes of the meetings of the Estates of the different principalities from the thirteenth to the sixteenth

¹³ Reinhard, *Power Elites and State Building*, *passim*.

¹⁴ Hilde de Ridder-Symoens, “Prosopografie en middeleeuwse geschiedenis: een onmogelijke mogelijkheid?”, *Handelingen maatschappij en oudheidkunde Gent* 45 (1991), pp. 95–117, at 97–100; Lawrence Stone, “Prosopography”, *Daedalus* 100 (1971), pp. 46–79, 52–55; Katharine Keats-Rohan, ed., *Prosopography. Approaches and Applications* (Oxford, 2007).

¹⁵ See <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org>.

¹⁶ <http://www.rps.ac.uk>.

centuries.¹⁷ The meetings of the Estates (or States) General were also edited in separate edition projects.¹⁸

The article by Ida Nijenhuis on the States General in the first half of the seventeenth century draws upon this material. The States of Holland dominated in the assemblies of the States General; the latter becoming a sovereign entity after the Dutch Revolt. Thanks to the abundance of the material, Nijenhuis is able to use a statistical approach combined with a qualitative take, which conveys the daily practice of representation. However, new research into political representation demonstrates that it is not always necessary to examine biographical or even statistical information to reveal political movements and networks. Michael Penman's article, for example, focuses on an early episode of political representation in Scotland when less biographical information is available on the attendees to assemblies. He examines the dynamics of Scottish politics and the interaction between the crown and the land on the basis of petitions and legislation during the reign of Robert Bruce (r. 1306–29), a period of regime change. Interest groups, individuals and corporations, as well as in their “estates” through separate external and symbiotic institutions of merchants and clergy, engaged in a dialogue with the crown rooted in petitioning. This process was mediated through changes in participation, attendance and expectation. The insistence that traditional rights of tenants-in-chief be protected in spite of royal demands persisted, regardless of the challenging internal and external security situation. Meanwhile Bruce, to secure his dynasty, was recreating for Scotland the “listening authoritarianism” of Edwardian England under Edward I (r.1272–1307).

Apart from the “normal” representatives from the three or four estates, other participants to meetings of representative assemblies played a political role that should not be underestimated. These men were often either financial or juridical experts, some of them

¹⁷ For Holland: *Bronnen voor de geschiedenis der dagvaarten van de Staten en steden van Holland voor 1544*, I: 1276–1433, ed. Walter Prevenier and Hans Smit (The Hague, 1987); II: 1433–1467, ed. Smit (The Hague, 2005); III: 1467–1477, ed. Hans Smit (The Hague, 1998); IV: 1477–1494, ed. Henk Kokken and Marian Vrolijk (The Hague, 2006); VI: 1506–1515, ed. Jan Burgers, Jim P. Ward and Hans Smit (The Hague, 2006). For Flanders: *Handelingen van de leden en van de Staten van Vlaanderen. Excerpten uit de rekeningen der steden, kasselrijen en van de vorstelijke ambtenaren (1384–1405)*, ed. Walter Prevenier (Brussels, 1959); (1405–1419), ed. Antoon Zoete (Brussels, 1981–1982); (1419–1467), ed. Wim Blockmans (Brussels, 1990–1995); (1467–1477), ed. Blockmans (Brussels, 1971); (1419–1467: *overzichtstabel en indices*), ed. Blockmans (Brussels, 2006); (1477–1506), ed. Blockmans (Brussels, 1973–82).

¹⁸ The history of one of these edition projects has been studied at length by Marie Van Eeckenrode, “Un fantasme historiographique? La publication des sources servant à l’histoire des assemblées d’états des Pays-Bas”, in *Pour la singulière affection qu’avons a luy. Etudes bourguignonnes offertes à Jean-Marie Cauchies*, ed. Paul Delsalle et al. (Turnhout, 2017), pp. 479–89.

university trained, and in the service of the prince as officers or councillors.¹⁹ Alastair Mann shows in his article the broad range of these “participating officers” in Scotland, from the justice clerk to the chancellor. It is striking that most of these officers up until the fifteenth century were clergymen, whereas after 1500 they predominantly had a noble or baronial background. Mann makes it clear, however, that they did not simply represent the interests of the crown, but that they primarily pursued their “class interests” as land owners protecting their hereditary rights and social status.

The predominance of the nobility is also a theme in Mario Damen’s paper. He stresses the fact that nobles were, thanks to their various positions at the one time, “multi-faceted players in the political arena” of the late medieval Low Countries. They could have a position within the prince’s household and simultaneously occupy an office within the princely administration at a “national”, regional, or local level, or even in the city administration. Damen explores the possibilities of convocation lists as a source for a reconstruction of the composition of the second estate (the nobility) in Brabant, a highly urbanized principality in the heart of the Low Countries. He juxtaposes the result with the attendance of nobles at some important meetings of the Estates in the fifteenth century. He demonstrates that the second estate cannot be viewed as a homogeneous power block but consisted of several networks — based on social, geographical, familial and political bonds — partly overlapping, each with its own interests and trying to pursue its political strategies.

Controlling the Estates and explaining their working: ideas and discourses

As previously mentioned, the birth of representation can be seen as both a top-down as well as a bottom-up development. This resulted not only in political confrontation and cooperation, but also in the creation and maintenance of ideologies and discursive practices justifying princely power and/or the interference (of delegates) of subjects. The third and final part of this book deals with this remarkable “ideological world of representation” from two perspectives: what was the role of the prince and what were the obligations and rights of his subjects? Two different approaches can be taken here. On the one hand, the discourse of political thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas, Baldo degli Ubaldi or Coluccio Salutati has to be investigated. “Rights of resistance” subjects often claimed to have been legitimated by such

¹⁹ Hébert, *Parlementer*, pp. 171–74.

learned discourse.²⁰ On the other hand, however, it can be questioned to what extent local discourses on economic and personal freedom, property, self-organization, taxation et al., as developed by stake-holders and often meant for “internal” use in the communal life of cities or villages, were translated into the many privileges or “constitutional texts”. For instance, the English Magna Carta, the Brabantine *Blijde Inkomsten*, and similar charters that were “granted” by princes throughout the later Middle Ages were mainly based on customary rights.²¹ Though the influence that learned treatises had on contemporary thinking is not absent from this book, most attention goes to the second of the perspectives mentioned. Which resources did the representatives (both delegated by the prince and by the people) use to justify their mandate and the decisions taken? As a result, the essays focus on the political thought of representatives and the rationale which legitimated the existence of the Estates, and on the transfer and circulation of ideas and discourses with regard to representative institutions. Theoretical research demonstrates that what creates the power of words is the belief in the legitimacy of words and of those who utter them, as ideologies owe their structure and functions to the social conditions of the production and circulation of ideas.²² Therefore, the meticulous scrutiny of the political ideology and the discursive practices of representatives and subjects presented here in four essays not only clarifies the interests that were at stake, but also the arguments with which they defended their autonomy vis-à-vis the king or the prince and those whom they claimed to represent.

So, these essays raise a series of fundamental questions concerning the discursive strategies used by representatives, their ideological environment, the origins of their ideas, and the evolution of the discourse of the representatives in time and space. For instance, Robert Stein confirms that urban delegates in general, and the fourteenth-century city clerk of Antwerp Jan van Boendale in particular, developed a sophisticated discourse on political representation which has widely influenced political thinking in the Low Countries. Boendale’s *Brabantse Yeesten*, a chronicle mainly lauding the deeds of the dukes of Brabant, though also paying attention to the interests of the urban elites in Brabant, clearly propagated

²⁰ See some of the essays in Angela de Benedictis (ed.), *Revoluten und politische Verbrechen zwischen dem 12. und 19. Jahrhundert: rechtliche Reaktionen und juristisch-politische Diskurse* (Frankfurt-am-Main, 2013).

²¹ Richard Kaeuper (ed.), *Law, Governance, and Justice. New Views on Medieval Constitutionalism* (Leiden, 2013).

²² Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Oxford, 1991), p. 169. See also Teun Van Dijk, “Politics, Ideology, and Discourse”, in *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*, ed. Keith Brown (Oxford, 2006) pp. 728–40; Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (Harlow, 2010).

principles such as rights of political participation. In Boendale's work, political representation is considered as a core value of late medieval politics and even as a basic principle of a territory's identity. Local custom and regional institutions of political representation are therefore regarded by urban subjects as an integral part of their history.²³ Also in other chapters from this part of the book, we encounter examples from the texts of clerks, chancellors, aldermen, university-trained intellectuals, writers and so on, who have contributed to similar ideas in other regions (see also Alastair Mann's essay). It is on the basis of their writings and texts that historians can reconstruct the ideologies of individuals and collectives concerning political representation. Stein's essay therefore carefully shows that historians should be aware of the hidden agenda of these texts.

The reception of the ideas articulated in the sources that have come down to us constitutes a serious problem. As Jan Dumolyn and Graeme Small point out, at least for the medieval period, we have very few complete texts of speeches and discourses pronounced during meetings of representatives. On the most important discussions, the separate deliberations of the estates behind closed doors, historians have very little information. However, cunningly using speech act theory, Dumolyn and Small show that not only the text itself, but also the setting and the scene where it was pronounced added meaning to the words and phrases uttered by the delegates present in the meeting. The authority of the speakers was greatly influenced by their social position, the mandate of their home town, the rhetorical strategy used, and the language in which ideas were framed. All these aspects have to be taken into account if we want to know how the text was perceived and what the audience did with the many speeches they listened to when meeting at the Estates General. Of course, much of this changed with the advent of the printing press. In the early modern period, political ideas received a much wider audience thanks to print. Pamphlets, for example, were not only directed at the members of parliament but were also intended to mobilize support among the general public. This created an interactive process of decision-making which was very different compared to the medieval period. Though one should not underestimate the power the spoken word retained in later times.²⁴

²³ This is also true for nobles, see, among others, Valerie Vrancken, "United in revolt, common discourse: urban and noble perceptions of "bad government" in fifteenth-century Brabant (1420-1421)", *Journal of Medieval History*, 43 (2017), pp. 579-99.

²⁴ See, for instance, Arlette Farge, *Dire et mal dire: l'opinion publique au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1992); Elisabeth Horodowich, *Language and Statecraft in Early Modern Venice* (New York, 2008); Thomas Cohen and Lesley Twomey, eds., *Spoken Word and Social Practice. Orality in Europe (1400-1700)* (London, 2015). Compare with two recent studies on deviant speech in the late medieval period: Christian Liddy, "Sire ye be not king": citizenship and speech in late medieval and early modern

Furthermore, texts informing us about the contents of debates at meetings of the Estates seem to be full of *topoi*: the king or the prince is a good governor and defender of the common good. In the speeches of the prince's officers, the good or even affectionate relationship with the subjects is the cement of a political pact. According to many historians, this rhetoric, which is a *mélange* of information and propaganda, appeals to both the reason and the pride, love and loyalty of subjects. The goal is to create a consensus on the course of princely politics and, of course, to obtain consent for the new aides or taxes demanded.²⁵ Clearly, not only princes but also subjects regularly made use of the "common good" ideology to legitimize their proposals to the meetings of institutions of political representation. Framing their demands and wishes in a language that was used by the authorities themselves could enhance the chances of these demands being approved.²⁶ It is, of course, a well-known rhetorical strategy in representative meetings to propose particular group interests as being common to the collectivity of the realm in order to convince governors of the necessity to take care of such interests. Consensus and unanimity were therefore important values for delegates which had to be accentuated when returning to the court or their home towns. As Marie Van Eeckenrode shows in this volume, when studying the ideological consistency of reports of the delegates of sixteenth-century Hainaut, these values were essential for the justification of decisions taken during meetings. Indeed, the lack of references to discord in these reports, though one knows that disagreement was more the rule than the exception for meetings of Estates, demonstrates that they primordially served to legitimize the decisions taken, instead of reporting what truly was said during these encounters. Such a conclusion is a warning, once again, for historians who study such documents.

Another problematic issue being tackled in this volume is the fact that we do not know how these texts (or speeches) were received by audiences. Did the representatives really understand all the references made to classic authors by the prince's officers, and were they so impressed by these wise councillors that they immediately approved the new aides or taxes

England", *The Historical Journal*, 60 (2017), pp. 591–96; Jelle Haemers and Chanelle Delameillieure, "Women and contentious speech in fifteenth-century Brabant", *Continuity and Change*, 32 (2017), pp. 323–47.

²⁵ See, for instance, Jean-Philippe Genet, "Political Language in the Late Medieval English Parliament", and Michel Hébert, "Opening Speeches and Political Oratory in the French Provincial Estates of the Later Middle Ages", in *Parlamentarische Kulturen vom Mittelalter bis in die Moderne*, ed. Jens Feuchter and Jörgen Helmrath (Düsseldorf, 2013), resp. pp. 245–70, and 351–68.

²⁶ Studies on the use of the "common good" as justifying principle can be found in Élodie Lecuppre-Desjardin and Anne-Laure van Bruaene (eds.), *De Bono Communi. The Discourse and Practice of the Common Good in the European City, 13th–16th centuries* (Turnhout, 2010); and in the special issue of *Revue Française d'Histoire des Idées Politiques*, 32 (2010), n° 2.

demanded? We have reason to believe that they made their own story out of it. That is shown by some examples mentioned by Small and Dumolyn, yet it is David Grummitt's essay which really elaborates on this point. He argues that late medieval subjects maintained a public sphere in which parliamentary issues were discussed at length, explained, and criticized. Several historians have already shown that "the public sphere", as defined by Jürgen Habermas (the "*Öffentlichkeit*"), has older origins than the German scholar thought.²⁷ Grummitt adds that fourteenth- and fifteenth-century commoners (i.e. privileged inhabitants of rural and urban communities) had a sophisticated language at their disposal to discuss matters which belonged to the English Parliament. Pamphleteering, murmuring, gossiping et al. belonged to a common repertoire of contention used to voice popular (dis)satisfaction with a certain decision taken by parliament. The language of petitioning, as it has been studied by a number of scholars,²⁸ contained a lot of elements, and was at the same time a resource of popular thinking on governmental issues. Grummitt therefore shows that subjects can no longer be considered as passive receptors of the ideologies used by officers of the crown to justify royal policies. In contrast, they actively absorbed these languages and ideas in order to create a discursive register to talk about political issues. So, state ideology and popular thinking cannot be regarded as two separate worlds, but as overlapping fields of conflict and cooperation; just as the origins of political representation were likewise not as clear-cut.

Summing up, Estates and parliaments have a multifaceted history. The diversity of interests of delegates, local customs and traditions, and different institutional origins determined the outlook and the functioning of representative institutions. This volume demonstrates that the diversity of representative institutions should be regarded as a richness and a challenge for scholarship. By analysing the differences and similarities of political

²⁷ Patrick Boucheron and Nicolas Offenstadt, eds., *L'espace public au Moyen Age. Débats autour de Jürgen Habermas* (Paris, 2011); Laurent Bourquin, Philippe Hamon, Pierre Karila-Cohen and Cédric Michon, eds., *S'exprimer en temps de troubles. Conflits, opinion(s) et politisation de la fin du Moyen Age au début du XXe siècle* (Rennes, 2011); Jean-Philippe Genet, ed., *La légitimité implicite* (Paris, 2015), 2 vols.

²⁸ Mark Ormrod, "Murmur, Clamour and Noise: Voicing Complaint and Remedy in Petitions to the English Crown, c. 1300–c. 1460", in *Medieval Petitions: Grace and Grievance*, ed. Mark Ormrod, Gwilym Dodd and Anthony Musson (Woodbridge, 2009), pp. 135–55; John Watts, "Popular Voices in England's War of the Roses, c. 1445–c. 1485", in *The Voices of the People in Late Medieval Europe. Communication and Popular Politics*, ed. Jan Dumolyn, Jelle Haemers, Rafael Oliva Herrero and Vincent Challet (Turnhout, 2014), pp. 107–22; Christian Liddy, "Urban Enclosure Riots: Risings of the Commons in English Towns, 1480–1525", *Past and Present*, 226 (2015), pp. 41–77; Christopher Fletcher, "News, Noise, and the Nature of Politics in Late Medieval English Provincial Towns", *Journal of British Studies*, 56 (2017), pp. 250–72. See also Jelle Haemers, "Révolte et requête. Les gens de métiers et les conflits sociaux dans les villes de Flandre (XIIIe–XVe siècles)", *Revue Historique*, 677 (2016), pp. 27–55.

representation across Europe, it intends to denounce the prevailing master narrative of such institutions for its reliance on national history, its adherence to a periodization that upholds clearly demarcated transformations between medieval and early modern institutions, and its lack of attention to ideology as a category of analysis. Furthermore, this collection of essays shows that the continuity and intensity of political collaboration in the countries and regions under scrutiny came from the fact that both princes and subjects were at the same time *included* in discussions about the way a territory should be governed. As a result, research on the interests, the social background, the ideas and the rhetorical strategies of delegates should be taken into account when explaining the history of representative institutions. We hope that the results of this volume will inspire further research into the rich world of political representation in Europe.

Conclusion. Reconsidering Political Representation in Europe, 1400-1700

This collection of essays was structured as a triptych: we wanted to highlight three themes which we consider essential for the study of political representation in the later Middle Ages and the early modern period. The first panel of our triptych had an institutional framework in which we tried to analyse the balance between a bottom-up and top-down approach, and wanted to assess the ways in which representative institutions functioned as a platform for political dialogue. In the second panel we focused on the persons in and behind the representative institutions and looked for ways to link the achievements of prosopographical research with changes in political dialogue. In the third panel we directed our attention to the ideological world of representation and tried to discern patterns in which political discourses were triggered by institutional developments.

Two recent books on political representation have initiated reflections and reactions of both approval and disagreement in many of the essays in this volume: *States of credit. Size, power, and the development of European polities*, published in 2011 by David Stasavage, a professor of politics at New York University; and *Parlementer. Assemblées représentatives et échange politique en Europe occidentale à la fin du Moyen Âge* published in 2014 by the Canadian historian Michel Hébert. Apparently, it was only possible to write a synthesis on late medieval political representation in Europe from across the Atlantic Ocean, although the scope and the size of both books (224 and 687 pages respectively) differ substantially. Whereas Hébert's book is source-based and more intended as an overview of representative practices throughout Europe and is especially well informed on the Iberian Peninsula, Stasavage is more hypothesis-driven and focuses on the trilateral relationship between political representation, public credit and state formation, stressing the differences between territorial states and city-states.

Following in Hébert's footsteps, Peter Hoppenbrouwers in his article gives an overview of political representation in some "core areas" of Europe, at the same time questioning the use of terms such as "political representation", "representative institution" and "parliament" by late medieval and early modern historians. Most historians nowadays, however, are cautious about drawing direct lines between our present-day representative institutions and those of the past. Hoppenbrouwers underlines that assemblies of estates, his preferred term, can only be considered as such, when the third estate, the delegates of the town, were involved in a structural way. Otherwise it is difficult to distinguish these meetings

from those organized by the prince or the monarch within his or her “own” institutional framework. The analysis of the participation of urban representatives in the assemblies should therefore be a major focal point for future historians of the history of representation.

Of course, the “urban element” has already been well studied concerning the Low Countries (see the various essays in this volume) but also in the Iberian Peninsula. Maria Asenjo reveals the complicated relationship between the towns and the monarchy. The procurators in the *Cortes* of Castile originally defended the interests of the towns vis-à-vis the king. In practice, however, it was difficult for the towns to control their delegates especially when they became vassals of the king, from 1419 onwards. The social profile of the procurators included more and more members of noble lineages, an indication that the separation between the second and third estates was not very clear-cut, much like to the situation in the Low Countries.

Tim Neu draws our attention to the Holy Roman Empire, which did not garner many pages in the works of Hébert and Stasavage. Neu challenges Stasavage’s comparative approach because in his view it is too narrowly focused on “affordability”; in smaller political units, the frequency of representative assemblies was higher than in larger ones because of relatively low transport and communication costs.²⁹ Instead, Neu proposes a comparative framework on the basis of the ideas of Michael Saward. In Saward’s view, representation is a dynamic relationship based on performative claim-making, a “basic form of the representative claim”.³⁰ In Neu’s essay, he compares political representation in Hesse and Würtemberg using Saward’s model and looking at collective agency and practices of representative claim-making. This could be a viable way to go, if we really want to compare political representation on a European level.

Comparisons can reveal similarities and differences in the form and function of assemblies of estates across Europe. Institutions were not “invented” or established from one day to another. They grew out of “representative practices”, as described *in extenso* by both Wim Blockmans and Peter Hoppenbrouwers in this volume. The power relationships between different political actors (princes, aristocrats, clerics and urban elites) were decisive for the outcome of the kind of assemblies of estates. But Blockmans distinguishes other factors that determine this process of institutionalization: geographical and socio-economic circumstances, the formation of political communities and political conflicts and events. In

²⁹ As Stasavage indicates in his first footnote, this was already noted in 1978 by Wim Blockmans in “A typology of representative institutions in late medieval Europe”, *Journal of Medieval History*, 4 (1989), pp. 189-215.

³⁰ Michael Saward, *The Representative Claim* (Oxford, 2010), p. 36.

that sense, it is crucial to bridge the medieval – early modern divide, as Coleman Dennehy does in his essay focusing on Ireland. The special geographical position and the political circumstances on the island, which was predominantly agrarian, determined in fact the development of a relatively weak and docile institution. He shows, however, that the institutional development of parliament in Ireland was by no means a replica of that in England. Moreover, the Gaelic Irish, the aristocrats, the clergy and the urban elites, were poorly represented in the Irish parliament.

Marco Gentile in his essay, using Stasavage as a counterpoint, argues that “in late medieval Italy political representation in practice went far beyond the concept of the representative and territorial assembly”. Gentile stresses, like Damen in his essay, that alongside the official “horizontal” forms of official political representation, vertical forms of representation existed, in the shape of factions in which the most powerful aristocratic families were the nucleus. Ties of dependence, factions and networks of political actors all influenced the process of decision-making, both inside and outside the formal institutional structures. Uncovering these ties and networks is certainly a road for historians to follow in the future, but this, of course, requires a labour-intensive prosopographical approach.

The second section of this collection has, through case study, steered us between competing interpretations of representation. John Watts’ thought-provoking “domination of structures” synthesis has been seen as less fundamental to the study of members of parliaments and how they represented, in spite of the traditional understanding of the prominent role of separate estates by Helmut Koenigsberger and others.³¹ There is a need to study political actors who as individuals were influential constituent parts of representative institutions. Prosopography, meanwhile, has been vital, but our contributors have avoided Namierite excesses and collective biography has been explored in the context of key societal events and political shocks which produced changes in representative culture. At the same time, the “bottom-up” views of institutional foundation and representative strength, as argued by the likes of Blickle in his analysis of “communalism” within state building, has been set aside in favour of “interest”; a quality that, as each contribution has shown, acted simultaneously at individual and corporate levels.³² Michael Penman’s essay has confirmed

³¹ J. Watts, *The Making of Polities: Europe, 1300-1500* (Cambridge, 2009), p. 420; H.G. Koenigsberger, “Parliaments and estates” in R.W. Davis (ed), *The Origins of Modern Freedom in the West* (Stanford, CA, 1995).

³² P. Blickle (ed.), *Resistance, Representation and Community* (Oxford, 1997); A. Holenstein, “Empowering interactions: looking at state building from below”, in W. Blockmans, J. Mathieu & A. Holenstein (eds.), *Empowering Interactions: Political Cultures and the Emergence of the State in Europe, 1300-1900* (Abingdon, 2016), pp. 1-34. Holenstein describes Blickle’s rendering of community as ‘too homogenous or holistic [and tending to] ‘disregard the hierarchies within communities’.

that during a dynastic crisis, and with the backdrop of war and civil war, “interest”, as expressed in traditional terms through petitioning by individuals and clerical and commercial groups, continued in juxtaposition with princely priorities. Kingdoms or states on a war footing, territorial states, city-states, or a merging of both as with Scotland, do not neatly fall into definitions of intensive representation on the basis of frequency of meeting as suggested by Stasavage, and the nature of representation cannot be separated from the reason that saw the estates convened in the first place, in this Scottish case, of course, to obtain affirmation to a new regime and the subsequent succession. Also, as Graves puts it, “frequency was no yardstick of importance”.³³ Mario Damen’s article shows that the medieval duchy of Brabant better fits Stasavage’s model, after Blockmans, of a small-scale geographical unit with frequent “affordable” meetings and intensive representative engagement, yet also that the detailed and regionalized convocation lists reveal a bureaucracy that systematically encouraged participation.³⁴ Work needs to be done to measure comparatively such bureaucracies in other theatres. His study of the Brabantine estates in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, especially the nobility, highlights through attendance data the difficulties of definition when diverse types of nobles existed who, while exhibiting some “representative consciousness”, nonetheless were often weakly divided from the third estate in a series of networks that pursued particular interests; the Brabantine Estates were but a “conglomerate of interest groups”, surely a universal truism.

Ida Nijenhuis also analyses attendance data, this time of deputies’ participation in decisions from the resolutions of the States General of the early seventeenth century, focusing especially on the provinces, their rivalries and the domination of Holland, the largest and most wealthy. She confirms that the procedural and representative sophistication of the States General owed much to the example of the States of Holland but also included a revised committee-based form of decision-making which, though efficient, created provincial resentment reminiscent of that observed by Brown and Mann over committees of the Scottish parliament in the late seventeenth century, if not quite the fears of corruption emphasized by Elliot and Metcalf for the committees of Catalonia and Sweden.³⁵ Holland and the Dutch Republic represent the archetypal example of Stasavage’s “state of credit”, where a tight

³³ D. Stasavage, *States of Credit: Size, power and the development of European polities* (Princeton, 2011), pp. 65-68; M.A.R. Graves, *The Parliaments of Early Modern Europe* (Harlow, 2001), p. 108

³⁴ Blockmans, “Representation (since the thirteenth century)”, pp. 53-61; Stasavage, *States of Credit*, pp. 50-51

³⁵ K.M. Brown and A.J. Mann, “Introduction”, in *The History of the Scottish Parliament*, vol. 1: *Parliament and Politics in Scotland, 1567-1707*, ed. Brown and Mann (Edinburgh, 2005), pp. 24-33, 40-44; J.H. Elliott, *The Revolt of the Catalans, 1598-1640* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 134-7; M.F. Metcalf (ed.), *The Riksdag: A History of the Swedish Parliament* (Stockholm, 1987), p. 102

geography and a wealthy urbanized merchant group facilitated intensive representation, and thereafter enhanced access to credit.³⁶ However, it is notable that in spite of the powerful position of Holland, it still worked for political support from other provinces, electing not to undermine the traditional “superiority” of Guelders, the highest-ranked province, when it came to voting and many procedural matters. The continuing war effort made cooperation more necessary than disputation and fostered a degree of institutional solidarity. We would expect solidarity with the monarch to be a feature of crown-appointed officers of state, although, as Alastair Mann’s study of Scottish officers confirms, loyalties and common cause existed on a horizontal basis, to their “class”, as well as vertically upwards to the crown. Somewhat like the foundational significance of canon law and church councils to medieval parliaments, as traced by Graves and others,³⁷ government bureaucracy in a Scottish parliamentary setting moved increasingly into the hands of secular, honorific nobles and “professional” administrators (often lawyers) and away from the clerical incumbents of the late medieval period. This new breed had in common concern for property, land, inheritance, tax, commercial investments and confessional nuances, as well as the social priorities of husbands, fathers and sons. While it is problematic to see these officers as an estate in their own right, within the committees of the Scottish parliament they sat in equal numbers to the conventional estates. Within these committees and before the whole house, some even opposed crown policies out of principle and in a manner that confirms that a panoply of “interest” was, as these studies have shown, a “selfish gene” that motivated all members of all parliaments.

Our volume demonstrates that not only the institutional and social perspectives have to be taken into account when historians want to understand the history of political representation more fully. Some years ago, in a piece called “Verfassungsgeschichte als Kulturgeschichte”, the German historian Wolfgang Reinhard made a plea for a cultural approach to the history of political thinking, constitutional texts and representative institutions. Followed among others by Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, historians have since then increased their attention to the ideological and performative aspects of representative institutions.³⁸ The essays in the third part of this volume give us an insight into exactly these

³⁶ Stasavage, *States of Credit*, pp. 72, 150-55.

³⁷ Graves, *Parliaments of Early Modern Europe*, pp. 8-9.

³⁸ W. Reinhard, “Verfassungsgeschichte als Kulturgeschichte: historische Grundlagen europäischer politischer Kulturen”, *Jahrbuch für europäische Geschichte*, I (2000), p. 115-31; B. Stollberg-Rilinger, “Verfassungsgeschichte als Kulturgeschichte”, *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte. Germanische Abteilung*, 127 (2010), pp. 1-32.

“cultural practices”, and the ideas that underpinned the daily activities of deputies who were present at the meetings of the Estates. The contributors to this part focus on the discourse used by the representatives and the ideological background to their speech and writing. . For instance, Robert Stein’s essay convincingly shows us that texts were produced to legitimize the opposition of urban deputies at representative meetings against political opponents. The fourteenth-century chronicle *Brabantsche Yeeften* by Jan van Boendale contains several passages in which the Antwerp clerk justified the motivation of the aldermen of his home town in raising their voice against nobles who at the same time tried to influence the decision-making process in the duchy of Brabant. Ideology and propaganda are therefore intermingled in the chronicle, which was in essence a historical account of the lives and deeds of the Dukes of Brabant. The biased historical narrative showed that princes should take the interests of the subjects in general, and of the governors of the main cities in the duchy in particular, into account when they made decisions. “It is not a game to be prince”, in Boendale’s words, “because more than anyone else they ought to be concerned about governing the land for the common good” (see the quotation of the *Brabantsche Yeeften* by Stein). Boendale’s ideas were shared by many citizens and influenced several subsequent generations.³⁹ In sum, the ideas of chroniclers reporting on the functioning of the Estates, as well as the beliefs and thoughts of the representatives themselves are worth considering by historians because they shed a light on what Reinhard would call “the cultural history of political representation”.

Both Stein (on Brabant) and Marie Van Eeckenrode (on Hainaut) demonstrate the importance of the role of clerks in the creation of sources that are used for the study of the history of Estates. Not only Jan van Boendale used his pen to distort and distribute memories about the functioning of the Estates, but also the city clerks in the town of Mons (and elsewhere) have reshaped the history of the Estates when reporting on their meetings. Historians are, of course, well aware of the fact that sources only represent a certain vision of the past, and that the archives at their disposal are the product of many processes, strategies and tactical moves of contemporaries to transmit that vision to future generations. Archives and record-keeping have a social history, and their creation and conservation is influenced by political strategies.⁴⁰ Therefore, many reports of the assemblies of estates try to convince their

³⁹ V. Vrancken, “United in revolt, common discourse: urban and noble perceptions of ‘bad government’ in fifteenth-century Brabant, 1420-1421”, *Journal of Medieval History* 43 (2017) pp. 579-599.

⁴⁰ See, for instance, the overview of the literature available on this topic for the early modern period: A. Walsham, “The Social History of the Archive: Record-Keeping in Early Modern Europe”, in *The Social History of the Archive: Record-Keeping in Early Modern Europe*, ed. L. Corens, K. Peters and A. Walsham, Past & Present Supplement, 11 (Oxford, 2016), pp. 9-48.

readers that decisions were taken by unanimity. Counter-arguments against final decisions or disputes dividing meetings are hardly mentioned in these documents. Their political function hinders a clear view of what has exactly been said during meetings because they have to show that the land is governed for the common good of everybody. As a result, reports eclipse the diverging interests of subjects by spreading the message of concord and conviviality. One of the main reasons for the existence of the Estates was to maintain peace in the land. Therefore, mentioning discord and quarrels was not what was to be expected in the documents informing us on the content of meetings. Historians can become frustrated over this, though Van Eeckenrode has outlined that studying the discursive practices of such reports opens an interesting world of political ideas yet to be investigated.

Rhetorical strategies used by deputies in order to show that they wanted to maintain the peace, and more general performative aspects of meetings of representatives, are also studied in this volume. Of course, historians should not overemphasize the central notion of performance, as Peter Burke has argued,⁴¹ although it is clear that meetings of representatives have a strong performative aspect. It is important not only to study what was said, but how it was said, , where, in which tone, etc. The “act sequence” of such meetings is crucial, to paraphrase the terminology used by Dell Hymes (quoted at length in Small and Dumolyn’s essay). The weight of certain allegations or arguments made at meetings depends on the moment it was said, by whom, and in which language. As has also been noted for the presence of craftsmen during meetings of urban councils,⁴² it may perhaps be true that some of the representatives did not have real power to influence decisions taken during meetings with the prince, yet the fact that they were present, or that they may have said something, shows that they constituted part of the body politic of the realm. Uttering claims at meetings (as Tim Neu also shows in this volume) is part of a political process, often ritualized and sequenced, but not meaningless. Without the presence of representatives of subjects, albeit that their political influence may have been minor, assemblies of estates cannot be labelled as being representative. Therefore the rituals, speeches and performances taking place at these meetings are essential to understand their meaning.

⁴¹ P. Burke, “Performing history: the importance of occasions”, *Rethinking History*, 9 (2005), pp. 35-52.

⁴² For instance, for sixteenth-century Lyons: C. Fargeix, “Mémoire urbaine et opinions politiques: réflexions méthodologiques à partir des registres consulaires de la ville de Lyon”, in *La comunidad medieval como esfera publica*, ed. Rafael Oliva Herrero, Vincent Challet, Jan Dumolyn and Maria Antonia Carmona Ruiz (Sevilla, 2014), pp. 137-152. A similar argument is made by A. Rigaudière, “Conclusions autour de certaines manières d’aviser”, in *Consulter, délibérer, décider. Donner son avis au Moyen Âge (France-Espagne, VIIe-XVIe siècle)*, ed. M. Charageat and C. Leveaux-Teixeira (Toulouse, 2010), pp. 335-55.

The fact that subjects were not passive during meetings underwrites a redefinition of the political that renders claims that subordinate groups were either powerless or lacked political awareness difficult to sustain. Furthermore, David Grummitt's essay demonstrates that common people were well aware of issues that were discussed by representatives of the estates in their meetings with higher powers, though their influence on the agenda and the outcome of such meetings was, of course, generally minimal. However, Grummitt — and many scholars with him⁴³ — has shown that historians were wrong when they reduced the political actions of commoners to the violence used during periods of unrest. Pamphleteering, petitioning, speaking and shouting in the streets of the late medieval and early modern city were popular means of discussing politics among commoners. Grummitt shows that issues dealt with at the meetings of representatives were echoed in the streets and taverns of late medieval England. Arguments before representatives were translated into popular discourse with the aim of influencing the minds of many. Presumably the graffiti of citizens and the cries of fellow townsmen and women did not reach all representatives, yet perhaps some of them were aware that the populace was following discussions. Clear evidence of the interaction between representatives and the people in the street will perhaps never be found by historians — too few had the interest to write information on such encounters on a sheet of paper — but that does not mean that representatives lived totally separately from the people they were supposed to represent. By no means did the assemblies of estates take place within a vacuum. As this volume has shown, representatives were people who were part of a vibrant society that was full of ideas and beliefs on how it should be governed. Therefore their words and deeds are well worth further study in the future.

In conclusion, we can say that an exclusive focus on the relationship between institutional development on the one hand, and finance and credit on the other (as, for instance, in Stasavage's approach) is too narrow. In fact, it may be a truism in historiography but this volume again shows that all institutional history has to take into account social and cultural aspects when studying the history of political representation.⁴⁴ When we know more about the members, the officers, the clients and their networks, and when we know more about their ideas, speeches, procedures and rituals, then we get to understand how political representation really worked. Clearly, some of the conclusions made by the authors in this

⁴³ We refer to the essays in J. Firnhaber-Baker and D. Schoenaers (eds.), *The Routledge History Handbook of Medieval Revolt* (London, 2016).

⁴⁴ This is also the direction taken in the volume J.-P. Genet, D. Le Page and O. Mattéoni, *Consensus et représentation* (Paris, 2017) which appeared when this volume went into the process of editing.

volume confirm that a common pattern of European political representation existed, although local history, custom, scale and geography mattered. Dynamic economic and political circumstances were unpredictable catalysts acting on a range of idiosyncratic and common factors. Explaining the genesis and the functionality of Estates and Parliaments is therefore not an easy task for historians, but this book shows that it is surely worth the effort.