



Wim Cöp, *Het spel van de macht. De familie Van Broecheven en de politieke en economische elite in 's-Hertogenbosch tussen 1597 en 1629* (PhD Tilburg University 2014; Hilversum: Verloren, 2015, 344 pp., ISBN 978 90 8704 464 0).

Central to *Het spel van de macht* [*Power Games: The Van Broecheven Family and the Political and Economic Elite in 's-Hertogenbosch between 1579 and 1629*] are the questions of how the Van Broecheven family were able to gain and consolidate power and standing in 's-Hertogenbosch, and how this power was used to influence urban decision-making. In this thesis, which earned Wim Cöp his doctorate at the University of Tilburg in 2014, the author frames this analysis by examining the entire city administration. The analysis starts in 1579 with the reconciliation with Philip II during the Dutch Revolt and ends in 1629 with the integration of the city into the Dutch Republic. These were turbulent years in which 's-Hertogenbosch, one of the northernmost fortresses of the Spanish Netherlands, faced the consequences of the war between the Southern and Northern Netherlands on a daily basis.

This book connects with dozens of monographs, published over the past few decades, on urban elites and the functioning of city administrations in the Netherlands. Some of these publications focused on 's-Hertogenbosch, which until 1629 was one of the four Brabant capital cities with a vote in the Estates. In 1998 A.H. Schuttelaars dedicated a monograph to the higher administrative echelons of the city between 1500 and 1580. A recent publication is Jord Hanus's analysis of socio-economic structures and the distribution of income during the long sixteenth century (see A.H. Schuttelaars, *Heren van de Raad. Bestuurlijke elite van 's-Hertogenbosch in de stedelijke samenleving 1500-1580* (Nijmegen 1998); J. Hanus, *Affluence and Inequality in the Low Countries: The City of 's-Hertogenbosch in the Long Sixteenth Century, 1500-1650* (Brussels, Leuven 2014)). Cöp uses both to put his own analyses in a wider perspective. Schuttelaars's book was certainly an important source of inspiration, as seen from the analogous composition of Cöp's monograph and the similar division of the urban elites under scrutiny. However, Cöp does more than simply apply methods and theories elaborated by other researchers to a neglected period in the history of 's-Hertogenbosch. His purpose is to accommodate urban history and family history and to test the methodological possibilities of the latter. Therefore the book engages in different domains, such as elite research, the investigation of decision-making processes and the analysis of urban political practices. The marriage between family history and urban history opens up interesting perspectives and

results, but does not always benefit the clarity of the argument, as explained below.

Cöp's merit is to have processed an abundance of sources and source types in a very original way. The manner in which the author systematically defines the concepts used – for example political power, economic power, social-cultural power, inequality, social stratification and standing – and translates this into applicable historical research methods, deserves praise. Moreover, the analysis happens in a constant dialogue with historiography on other cities, such as Breda, Antwerp, Zwolle and Hoorn. Time and again, Cöp questions the singularity of his research subject. For instance, he confirms that in 's-Hertogenbosch a certain division existed between political and socio-economic elites, as opposed to cities in the province of Holland.

Cöp goes on to discuss the political organization of the city, its connections with higher levels of administration, the position of the Van Broecheven family and its individual scions, the political power of the elites, the economic situation of the city and its dignitaries and the distinct sources of power of the Van Broechevens. He does so primarily through quantitative prosopographical methods and tries not only to discuss power, but also to measure it. This is illustrated by the analysis of dynasty formation among aldermen in the period under scrutiny. The question of whether this group oligarchized is tackled by combining calculations of the number of terms of office per alderman and per alderman's family, the 80 percent criterion (percentage of the aldermen filling 80 percent of the posts) and the 'oligarchization index' (the ratio of the actual number of posts to the theoretically possible maximum number of posts). Furthermore, in a very insightful section and thanks to this combination of quantitative and qualitative research – the latter consisting of content analysis of resolutions and the reconstruction of decision processes – Cöp shows that the city council did take the guilds into account in the administration, contrary to older views on the subject.

Unfortunately, qualitative research is sometimes pushed into the background. For example, it is made clear that the Van Broechevens, primarily *pater familias* Henrick and his brother Rogier, managed to gain remarkable influence in the city administration in only a couple of decades thanks to a series of complementary networks and the accumulation of political and socio-economic power. However, it is seldom made clear how they managed to mould policy to their wishes, which dossiers they were able to influence to their benefit, and to what degree they acted within or against specific factions and lobbying groups. This is regrettable, as Cöp explicitly calls the analysis of political decisions and the process of policy formation the most adequate strategy to answer his research questions. He also rejects historical network analysis, claiming it is hardly possible. I do not agree with this position. Not only is the reconstruction of so-called whole networks relevant, as Cöp seems to suggest, but ego networks around specific key figures can also be very

telling. The data Cöp selected can certainly be used to calculate the density of the connections between the nodes in the network of the 's-Hertogenbosch city administrators, as well as other aspects of these relationships. Cöp's conclusions about the rise of the Van Broechevons could have been reinforced through social network methods.

The combination of urban and family history is certainly fruitful. Presented as a form of microhistory, the author analyses the actions of the Van Broechevons and compares their ascendancy with the often quite distinct trajectories of their fellow city administrators. The second chapter on the history of the family until 1570 is, however, incongruous. The meticulous genealogical research is superfluous to understanding the author's central argument. Minor criticisms include missing references in the sketch of the administrative system of the Duchy of Brabant, and the confusion regarding 'Geheime Raad' and 'Privéraad' on page 56: both terms refer to the same institution – the Brussels Privy Council.

However, these observations do not outweigh the merits of Cöp's monograph. He lists the positions the Van Broechevons obtained and what goals they served. In doing so, he participates in the debate on what is more important for building up power: the exercise of key positions, or the personality and capacities to extend their range of action. For Cöp, the latter seems no less important than the former. This book also gives us fresh insights into the significance of informal decision-making and the promotion of interests for an early modern city. There is more than one mention of the role of the city's representatives in the Estates of Brabant and lobbying the Brussels central government apparatus. Finally, Cöp's most convincing conclusion is the finding that different factors benefitted the power position of the Van Broechevons. They coupled capacities and adaptational power – such as the emphasis on university degrees – with clever career strategies. Thanks to their numerous sons, Henrick and Rogier and their descendants were able to be simultaneously active as alderman, *rentmeester* – functionaries responsible for collecting taxes – and pensionary, to participate both in the 's-Hertogenbosch administration and higher administrative levels, and to engage in political and commercial activities at the same time. This breadth explains their remarkable advance in 's-Hertogenbosch in the period under scrutiny and laid the foundations of the family's further rise up the political and social scale in the seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Southern Netherlands.

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