

The Arrest of Pierre aux Truyes:
Theatre History in the Archives of Lille

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In June of 1489 Pierre aux Truyes, a brewer, was arrested and imprisoned for having blocked the passage of several wagons that were decorated for staging “les jeux de la Procession”. He was later brought before the city aldermen (*échevins*) who imposed a heavy fine on him for his unruly conduct. The account of this relatively minor incident is found in the *Registre aux mémoires de la Ville de Lille* (Archives municipales de Lille, 15920, fol. 62v). It is written in a very hasty hand, using many abbreviations, which suggests that it may have been recorded live during the hearing. The account is listed in the Table of Contents of the Register as follows:

Condamnation de Pierre aux Truyes, brasseur a la brasserie des Freres Mineurs, de faire amende honorable et voiage pour ne point avoir osté le noc [=conduite d'eau] estant auprès la fontaine traversant la rue, pour passer les chars de la procession, quoy que sommé de ce faire, et avoir injurié le sergent d'echevins.

The text of the main article reads:

Le xxiiij^e jour de Juing, l'an mil iiij^c iiij^{xx} ix, Pierre aux Truyes, brasseur demourant a le brasserie des Freres Mineurs, qui au commandement d'eschevins s'estoit rendu prisonnier es prisons de la Prevosté pour ce que par instruction il estoit apparu auxdicts eschevins que ledict Pierre le jour precedant au soir sur ce que Bertran Tournemine, sergent d'eschevins, au conmandement desdits eschevins avoit esté devers ledict Pierre affin qu'il rostast le noc estant emprés la fontaine traversant la rue pour passer aucuns cars hourdéz pour jouer les jeux de la procession, avoit differé de roster ledict nocq, meimes avoit injurié de parolles ledict Bertran et aussi proferé langages inhonestes a l'encontre desdits eschevins, soy efforchant encore de viloner de fait ledict Bertran. Et après que ledict Pierre fut oÿ en ses excuses et que dudict meslis il se fut rapporté en eschevins, icellui Pierre fut condampné de faire ung escondit en halle, chief nut, en disant qu'i fut mal advisé en ce. Et ce fait, fut condempné de faire ung voiage et pelerinage a Trois Rois a Coulogne, a partir endedans xv jours et dudict voiage avoir fait repporter lettres ou autres leyaulx [enseignemens aux] eschevins, sauf que peult, se bon lui semble, racheter ledict voiage de iiij milliers de bucque¹ au prouffit de ladicte ville.

¹ I have been unable to find the meaning of this word.

The following somewhat free translation of the main article attempts to eliminate some of the more confusing sinuosities of the scribe's syntax:

[On June 23, 1489, Pierre aux Truyes, a brewer at the Franciscan brewery, appeared before the aldermen, who had ordered him taken prisoner and placed in the Provost's jail because on the evening of the preceding day they had sent their police officer, Bertran Tournemine, to Pierre to have him remove the water conduit placed across the street to channel water from the fountain so that wagons decorated for staging the plays of the procession could pass. On investigation, it had seemed to the aldermen that the said Pierre had not only delayed in removing the conduit, but had also insulted officer Bertran, made defamatory remarks about the aldermen, and had generally ill-treated the officer. Pierre made his excuses and threw himself on the mercy of the aldermen, after which he was sentenced to make amends by coming bareheaded to the city hall and admitting that his actions were ill-advised, after which he was further sentenced to make a pilgrimage to the shrine of the Three Kings in Cologne, departing within the next two weeks, and to bring back to the aldermen letters or other proofs of his journey. If he preferred, however, he could free himself of the obligation to make the pilgrimage by paying 3,000 ? to the city.]

Though not a major event in the context of the aldermen's many duties, this incident raises a number of questions about the work of planning and organizing the procession. We know that each year the aldermen had to deal with numerous problem situations in order to ensure the smooth operation of this enormous spectacle. The procession was not just a religious event, but was also the most important economic event of the year, bringing thousands of visitors to Lille for several days. The aldermen, therefore, most of whom were businessmen, had a vested interest in assuring the orderly progress of the spectacle that the visitors had come to see. How, then, was the procession planned and organized? How was the sequence of its constituent elements determined? How were the colourful *tableaux vivants* ordered in the march? And how were the mystery plays and farces integrated into the entire event? Documents in the unusually rich municipal archives of Lille can throw light on many of these questions.

The procession was established in 1270 by Margaret II, Countess of Flanders, as an annual event to mark the beginning of a novena in honour of the Virgin Mary. The founding charter required the procession to go around the city (*entour la ville*), which meant that the casket containing the relics of the Virgin was to be carried each year around the exterior of the city walls. In the beginning, the cortège probably included only the clergy of the collegiate church of Saint Peter and a number of the faithful. Over the next century and a half, however, the event grew in size and significance, transforming itself from a purely religious rite to a civic event of major importance. Eventually it included representatives of all the institutions of the city, both religious and secular. The novena with its indulgences, the brilliant spectacle of the parade, and the associated

dramatic performances drew large numbers of visitors to the city from far and wide. The magnitude of the event can be judged by the extent of the parade route, which went from one end of the city to the other and was no doubt lined with spectators all along the way. The procession took place each year on the first Sunday after Trinity. On the morning of that day the first group of marchers gathered at the collegiate church, which was located near the present-day intersection of the Rue de la Collégiale and the Rue d'Angleterre. They processed down the Rue d'Angleterre to the church of Saint Catherine, where they were joined by the trade and craft guilds and their pageant wagons, on which were mounted *tableaux vivants* depicting scenes from the Bible. Then the entire procession proceeded along the Rue Esquermoise to the Grand' Place, which today is the Place du Général De Gaulle. From there the procession made its way to the Porte de Saint Sauveur, located just beyond the church of the same name. At this point the major part of the procession halted while the reliquary was carried around the walls. The break was long enough for the aldermen and other notables to have a festive midday meal before the reliquary was brought back through the gate. Though the documents are not specific about the return, it seems likely that the full procession was then reassembled to accompany the relics back to the collegiate church along the same route.

One can easily imagine that an event of such gigantic proportions had to be carefully organized and strictly controlled in order to prevent it from disintegrating into chaos. The canons of Saint Peter's organized all aspects of the procession relating to the church, such as the the inclusion and handling of the relics of the Virgin, which were kept in the church. These relics, after all, were the principal focus of the procession. The major part of the organization and control of the event, however, was the responsibility of the municipal authorities. It is my purpose in this paper to examine some of the aspects of the aldermen's exercise of that responsibility in the complex task of organizing the annual Lille procession in honour of the Virgin.

The government of Lille in the fifteenth and first half of the sixteenth centuries consisted of a body of thirty-nine men divided into groups with varying powers and responsibilities. This body was referred to collectively as *La Loi* (the Law). The two most important groups were the twelve aldermen, one of whom was designated mayor, and the twelve members of the council. The aldermen exercised both administrative and judicial functions and were therefore called the *Magistrat*. The councillors exercised administrative functions and served in an advisory capacity to the aldermen. A third group consisted of a panel of eight men whose origins date far back, but who were not officially made a part of the Loi until 1467. The *Huit-Hommes*, as they were called, dealt primarily with financial matters, but in the archival documents they are routinely mentioned as having participated in the deliberations of the aldermen and councillors. Each alderman served a term of three years, but could be elected or appointed again after an interim.

Many served multiple terms, which provided a degree of continuity to the operation of the city government. Thus the aldermen, because of their dual administrative and judicial functions, were the most powerful element of the municipal government. In addition, the Provost of Lille, a representative of the Duke, administered the city's prison from which Pierre aux Truyes was brought before the aldermen for his trial and sentencing.

Not only did the *échevins* judge culprits, they also settled disputes of all kinds – their decisions being binding on the parties involved – and they issued numerous ordinances regarding situations they deemed threatening to the good order of the city. In this paper I would like to review a few of the rulings from the aldermanic bench that touch on the annual Lille Procession. The earliest surviving *Registre aux ordonnances du Magistrat* (AmL 373) dates from 1382. One of the first items in the book (fol. 3v) prohibits the staging of any play (*gieu de personnages*) by a neighbourhood youth group or association, and it especially forbids gatherings (*assambleez*) that include contests of skill or strength between two opposing groups. From the point of view of the youths, the winning teams and the dramatic players judged to be best brought honour and renown to their neighbourhood or parish. The problem, however, was that such assemblies often turned rowdy and led to fights in which some participants were wounded or even worse. In regard to the plays, the aldermen were not opposed to plays *per se*. An ordinance of 1402, for example, refers to the option the craft guilds had of presenting plays or representations from the lives of the saints in the procession (AmL 374, fol. 86v). Such plays, however, were examined and controlled, whereas the plays of the youth groups were not. The aldermen therefore feared that such activities might include slander, libel, blasphemy, or even heresy, all of which would bring dishonour to the city and possibly divine vengeance on its people.

The aldermen regulated virtually all aspects of the procession, beginning with annual injunctions for all the inhabitants living on the parade route to clear their street of any trash that would be an obstacle to the movement of the wagons or marchers and to have the street swept clean before the day of the procession. They also regulated the order in which the trade and craft guilds marched. In 1420 a dispute arose between the mercers and the linen weavers because the latter wanted to change the order imposed by the aldermen and march after the former. It is usual in ecclesiastical processions for the most important figures to come last, and in the *Procession de Lille* the precious relics of the Virgin closed the march. Therefore, the closer a group was to the relics, the greater the honour for that group. In this case the aldermen ruled in favour of the linen weavers, allowing them to process after the mercers (AmL 15915, fol. 14). It seems that the ruling was valid only for a limited time, however, because in an ordinance dated 1423 that sets out the order of march for the guilds, we find the linen weavers in their usual place in front of the mercers (see Appendix A).

In the course of the fifteenth century a number of new guilds were established. Each was set up with a charter containing the requirements for membership, the rules by which the guild operated, and the obligations of the members. The aldermen, in consultation with the officers of the guild, drew up and approved all such charters. One of the requirements for each guild was to march in the Corpus Christi procession and, three days later, in the *Procession de Lille*. The entire membership would process behind the bearers of the guild's torches and insignia. The charter of the coopers' guild, drawn up in 1459, states, for example, that because each year the people of Lille honour God and the Virgin in these two processions, the masters and workers of the guild will also participate in the two events, carrying torches and flambeaux "comme par long temps ont fait la pluspart des aultres mestiers de la dite ville" [as most of the other guilds of the city have long done] (AmL 16002, fol. 1r). In 1485 the aldermen issued another ordinance concerning the order in which the guilds must march in the procession (see Appendix B). The new list incorporates all the guilds that had been created since 1423, most of which are placed toward the beginning of the march – that is, farther from the sacred relics – probably because of their newness and lack of prestige. We see that sixty-two years later the linen weavers are still processing in front of the mercers.

In 1462, twenty-seven years before the case of Pierre aux Truyes, another kind of disorderly conduct threatened the seriousness and dignity of the procession, which took place that year on June 20th. A shearer named Parchon Colin was given the honour of carrying one of the torches of his guild. Several times in the course of the march, however, he let the torch slip from his hands and fall to the ground, each occasion being accompanied by "pluseurs derrisions en grant jurement de Dieu et la Verge Marie" [much mockery and swearing of oaths against God and the Virgin Mary]. The record notes laconically that this unruly behaviour was caused "par yvrongnie ou autrement" [by drunkenness or something else] (*Registre aux Mémoires*, AmL 15918, fol. 95r). On that day the alderman Franchois le Hazin had been charged with ensuring the orderly progress of the guilds. When he saw the disturbance caused by Colin, he summoned two cross-bowmen to arrest and hold the offender. Later, as the procession was winding down, seven men – probably fellow shearers and friends of the tipsy Colin – assaulted the two officers and freed the culprit. Ultimately, Colin and the gang of seven were rounded up and imprisoned, along with two masters of the shearers' guild for not having remedied the situation. On July 10th all were summoned to appear before the aldermen for trial and sentencing. The two guild masters and six of the seven assailants were each sentenced to make various pilgrimages, departing from the city before sundown that same day. The seventh member of the group was found not guilty and released. The outcome of the trial for Parchon Colin is unclear, since he is not mentioned in the account as having received a punishment. The incident provides further evidence that, even though the procession

had become a huge civic ritual and a great boost to the city's economy, the aldermen never lost sight of its fundamentally religious nature and made every effort to ensure the dignified solemnity of the event.

In the fifteenth century the security of the city was provided by three sworn military companies (*serments militaires*): the archers, the crossbowmen, and the artillerymen (*canonniers*). In 1482, the latter company requested a new charter to be modelled on that of the artillerymen of Douai, which Duke Philip had granted in 1452. The new charter was drawn up and approved by the aldermen the following year. Of interest to us is an article not found in the Douai charter concerning the requirement for the artillerymen to march in the annual *Procession de Lille*. Since the municipality subsidized the military companies, the aldermen were much concerned about their appearance as representatives of the city. The article reads as follows:

Item, averont lesdis confreres et leur varlet, aux despens de ladicte ville, en deux ans une fois, c'est assavoir lesdis confreres paletos et leur dict varlet une robe de la livree et parure d'icelle ville, lesquelz paletos et robe ils seront tenus porter et en estre vestus le jour de la pourcession de ladicte ville, pour en cest estat, ayant aussy leurs bastons, [...] acompaignier ladicte pourcession a l'onneur de ladicte ville.

[Likewise, every two years the city will provide at its own expense (new) jackets and a robe in the livery of the city, that is to say, the jackets for the artillerymen and the robe for the assistant (to the captain) to be worn on the day of the procession of Lille, so that, dressed in this fashion and having their arms, they can accompany the procession to the honour of the city.]

It would seem, then, that the aldermen decided to pay this repeating expense, which must have been great since there were thirty artillerymen in the group, in order to uphold the honour of the city.

In a sense, the entire procession with its colourful banners and tableaux was one enormous spectacle. As we know, however, there were smaller spectacles embedded in the whole. We have already seen that as early as 1402 the guilds had the option of presenting "jeux ou representacions" [plays or scenes] from the lives of the saints on wagons accompanying each group's torches and insignia. These must have been *tableaux vivants*, since spoken drama would have been lost on the spectators. The option is mentioned again in an ordinance of 1417 (AmL 375, fol. 57v), but because the city did not then subsidize such spectacles, their occurrences were not recorded in the account books. It is therefore impossible to determine how many tableaux, if any, were staged by the guilds in a given year. During that time, the aldermen continued their efforts to control the rowdiness and violence of the unauthorized assemblies of the neighbourhood youth groups – called *les rues et les places* in the documents. They decided to resolve the problem by setting up a contest in which the groups staging best plays would be awarded

prizes. The contest was usually organized and run by a canon of the collegiate church called the Bishop of Fools because he was elected on Twelfth Night, traditionally a night of folly. In 1483, an additional contest was introduced that awarded prizes to the guilds whose tableaux were judged to be the best. The account book for that year records an expenditure of ten *livres* to pay for the prizes awarded to “ceulx des places et mestiers de ceste dicte ville qui ont fait histoires et jeux moralisiéz pour la decoration d’icelle procession” [those of the neighbourhoods and guilds of this city who presented tableaux and moral plays for the embellishment of the procession] (AmL 16222, fol. 91v).

During the last quarter of the fifteenth century and the first quarter of the sixteenth century, the Bishop of Fools and his troupe, the Vicars of Saint Peter’s, organized the contests and distributed the prizes that were paid for by the city. In 1527, however, the aldermen made a drastic change in the procedure and assumed all the functions of organizing the procession and the dramatic contests that had previously been the responsibility of the Bishop and his Vicars. The times had changed, of course, and with the threat of heresy looming, the aldermen felt a need to manage the conduct of the procession in ever greater detail. In 1534 they assigned scenes of the Passion to the guilds as topics of their tableaux. Then in the following year the aldermen devised a way of presenting the major events of the Bible in figural pairs from the Old and New Testaments, each pair of scenes staged on two wagons. The masons’ tableau of the manna from heaven, for example, was followed by the fullers’ tableau depicting Jesus feeding the multitude with five loaves and two fishes. This pattern of presenting the history of the Bible in types and antitypes continued for the next thirty years, at which point the plays and tableaux were suppressed because of the religious wars. It is probable that the aldermen organized the tableaux in this way in order to counteract the reading and interpretation of unauthorized Bibles by individuals.²

Obviously the composition of the aldermanic bench changed completely over the period that concerns us, yet the goals and concerns of the men who held the office seem to have changed little from one generation to the next. They all wanted to ensure order and stability in the city so as to create a climate in which business and the economy could flourish. Of course, disruptions over which they had no control, such as the depredations that a plundering army might inflict, could come from the outside, but the aldermen and other officials prepared assiduously for such eventualities. The most likely threats, however, came from within – from the everyday disputes between competing groups that could spin out of control; from the high spirits and drinking that were part of holiday festivities. The aldermen therefore used their judicial powers to settle disputes and to

² Because I have described these developments at length in a recent article, I will not repeat them here. See “Guild Pageants and Urban Stability in Lille” in *Urban Theatre in the Low Countries*, ed. by E. Strietman and P. Happé, Turnhout: Brepols, 2006, pp. 187–208.

punish disorderly behaviour; they micromanaged the procession and other events involving the whole city so as to create edifying spectacles in an atmosphere of security that would attract large numbers of pilgrims and visitors.

Since a majority of the aldermen were wealthy businessmen, their strong desire to maintain order in the city is understandable. This, however, was not their only serious concern. Throughout the registers of their ordinances, one senses an ever-present fear of allowing something to happen that would offend God. If the offence were grave enough, the Deity might well punish the whole city by sending plague or famine or some other catastrophe. In 1483, the aldermen expressed both of their major concerns in an ordinance prohibiting the unlawful and unauthorized “assemblees de sottes ou de belles compaignies” [assemblies of joyous and merry companies] because they lead to “pluiseurs derisions et oeuvres illicites” [many mockeries and illicit deeds] and also because they offend, “comme il fait a doubter, Dieu nostre benoit createur” [as is to be feared, God our blessed creator] (AmL 378, fol. 193r). It should be added that the aldermen were also fearful of allowing any kind of activity that would be offensive to higher political authorities, because they wanted to protect the privileges of the city and to preserve whatever degree of autonomy that had been granted to Lille.

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APPENDIX A

1423

[AmL 15916, fol.17; Espinas, 2:380]

S'ensuit l'ordonnance faite par eschevins de Lille [...] sour l'ordene de mestiers et marchans qui yront aux Sacrement et procession de Lille avoec leurs torses et candeilles:

1. Primes, porteurs a le coulliere³
2. Porteurs au sacq
3. Chavetiers
4. Varles de cordewaniers
5. Trayeurs de vin
6. Potiers d'estain
7. Couletiers de toutes marchandizes
8. Crassiers
9. Escringniers
10. Carbieurs
11. Parmentiers
12. Carpentiers
13. Machons
14. Foulons
15. Tisserans de draps
16. Vieswariers
17. Cordewaniers
18. Tondeurs a grans forces
19. Armoyeurs
20. Marissaux, Fevres, Seruriers, Caudreliers
21. Tainteniers
22. Detailleurs de draps
23. Brasseurs
24. Taneurs
25. Poissoniers
26. Bouchiers
27. Orphevres
28. Vairiers
29. Tisserans de toilles
30. Merchiers
31. Boulenghiers
32. Taverniers
33. Le confrerie Saint Jaque

Tous lesquelx marchans et mestiers dessus escrips, le darrain jour de may l'an mil cccc xxij, pour ce apparant par devant eschevins en halle, de chacune marchandise ou mestier, deux personnes pour tous les autres acorderent ceste ordonnance et promissent d'aller en ordene ainsi et par le maniere que cy dessus est escript.

³ A *coulliere* was a cord or strap passing around the neck and shoulders that served to carry a load on one's back. It seems that some merchants carried their merchandise in this manner.

[Order of the Craft and Trade Guilds]

Here follows the ordinance issued by the aldermen of Lille concerning the order of the craft and trade guilds that will process with their torches and flambeaux on Corpus Christi day and the day of the Lille procession:

1. First, the Merchandise Porters
2. Sack Porters
3. Cobblers
4. Shoemakers' Apprentices
5. Drawers of Wine (from the cask)
6. Pewterers
7. Intermediaries in sales transactions
8. Oil Merchants
9. Joiners
10. Carbieurs (?)
11. Tailors
12. Carpenters
13. Masons
14. Fullers
15. Wool Weavers
16. Rag Merchants
17. Shoemakers
18. Shearers with large shears
19. Armourers
20. Farriers, Blacksmiths, Locksmiths, Coppermiths
21. Dyers
22. Retailers of Wool Cloth
23. Brewers
24. Tanners
25. Fish Mongers
26. Butchers
27. Goldsmiths
28. Glaziers
29. Linen Weavers
30. Mercers
31. Bakers
32. Innkeepers
33. The Confraternity of Saint James

On the last day of May in 1423 all the trade and craft guilds listed above sent two representatives to appear before the aldermen in the city hall, where they accepted this ordinance and promised to process in the order set out above.

APPENDIX B

1485

[AmL 378, fol. 213v]

Ordre des mestiers de ceste ville de Lille pour le Procession de Lille

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| 1. Porteurs a l'escouliere | 29. Couvreur de thieule |
| 2. Porteurs au sacq | 30. Carpentiers |
| 3. Plaqueurs | 31. Machons |
| 4. Cartons | 32. Foulons |
| 5. Wantiers et Boursiers | 33. Bourgeteurs |
| 6. Cordiers | 34. Sayeteurs |
| 7. Goreliers | 35. Tixerans de draps |
| 8. Chavetiers | 36. Vieswariers |
| 9. Varles de cordewaniers | 37. Cordewaniers |
| 10. Coueurs | 38. Tondeurs |
| 11. Patiniers, Fustailliers, Banseliers | 39. Seelliers |
| 12. Potiers de terre | 40. Armoyeurs |
| 13. Carliers | 41. Tonneliers |
| 14. Soyeurs d'ays | 42. Caudreliers |
| 15. Carbartiers | 43. Fevres |
| 16. Trayeurs de vin | 44. Tainturiers |
| 17. Fruytiers | 45. Detailleurs de draps |
| 18. Pigneurs de sayette | 46. Brasseurs |
| 19. Cappeliers | 47. Taneurs |
| 20. Bonnetiers | 48. Poissonniers de mer |
| 21. Espenniers | 49. Bouchiers |
| — Potiers d'estain [<i>barré</i>] | 50. Orphevres |
| 22. Laigniers | 51. Peletiers |
| 23. Craissiers | 52. Tixerans de toilles |
| 24. Escrigniers | 53. Merchiers |
| 25. Paintres et Voiriers | 54. Chiriers |
| 26. Barbieurs | 55. Boulenghiers |
| 27. Parmentiers | 56. Taverniers |
| 28. Coroyeurs | 57. Saint Jacque |

**Order of the guilds of the city of
Lille for the Lille Procession**

- | | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| 1. Merchandise Porters | 29. Tile Roofers |
| 2. Sack Porters | 30. Carpenters |
| 3. Plasterers | 31. Masons |
| 4. Wagoners | 32. Fullers |
| 5. Glovers and Purse-makers | 33. Velveteen Weavers |
| 6. Ropers | 34. Say Weavers |
| 7. Saddlers | 35. Wool Weavers |
| 8. Cobblers | 36. Rag Merchants |
| 9. Shoemakers' Apprentices | 37. Shoemakers |
| 10. Leather Curriers | 38. Shearers |
| 11. Makers of thick-soled Shoes,
Casks, and Baskets | 39. Seal-makers |
| 12. Clay Potters | 40. Armourers |
| 13. Cartwrights | 41. Coopers |
| 14. Board Sawyers | 42. Coppersmiths |
| 15. Carbartiers (?) | 43. Blacksmiths |
| 16. Drawers of Wine | 44. Dyers |
| 17. Fruiterers | 45. Retailers of Woollens |
| 18. Say Combers | 46. Brewers |
| 19. Hatters | 47. Tanners |
| 20. Cappers | 48. Sea Fish Merchants |
| 21. Pinner | 49. Butchers |
| — Pewterers [<i>crossed out</i>] | 50. Goldsmiths |
| 22. Wood Merchants | 51. Furriers |
| 23. Oil Merchants | 52. Linen Weavers |
| 24. Joiners | 53. Mercers |
| 25. Painters and Glaziers | 54. Wax Chandlers |
| 26. Barbers | 55. Bakers |
| 27. Tailors | 56. Innkeepers |
| 28. Curriers | 57. [Confraternity of] Saint James |

