

AGRICOLA, BORDON AND OBRECHT AT GHENT: DISCOVERIES AND REVISIONS*

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With an estimated population of about 64,000, late-Medieval Ghent was the largest city in Europe north of Paris.⁽¹⁾ Its prominence and influence as a musical centre in the fifteenth century are as yet to be fully determined, yet the city can already lay claim to being the birthplace of three internationally known composers from that period. Jacob Obrecht, as well known, was born about 1457 or 1458 as the only child of the Ghent city trumpeter Willem Obrecht and his wife Lijsbette Gheeraerts.⁽²⁾ The now obscure Pieter Bordon was slightly older, probably from the late 1440s; his parents were the Ghent citizens Valeriaen Bordon (himself a part-time singer) and Margriete van Wijmeersch. Alexander Agricola was the oldest of the three. Born around 1446, he was, as new evidence reveals, the son of Heinric Ackerman and Lijsbette Naps, and had a brother, Janne Ackerman, who may well be identical with the composer Johannes Agricola.

All three composers seem to have left Ghent in their twenties and none of them is known to have returned, at least not permanently: Bordon is last sighted at Siena in 1484, Obrecht died at Ferrara in 1505, and Agricola succumbed to a raging fever at Valladolid in 1506. However, records documenting their family connections in the town have survived in the city archive, and the process of uncovering and evaluating these has only yet begun. The following article, which presents new evidence concerning the Ghent backgrounds of the three composers, is an attempt to advance our understanding of their early years as well as of the environments in which they grew up. The text is structured into three case histories, reflecting the fact that the men came from very different backgrounds. It is the aim of this study to elucidate those backgrounds in as much historical depth as present evidence allows. As will soon become apparent, however, it is in the

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Unless specified otherwise, all documents are from the city archive of Ghent (SAG); shelf numbers typically consist of a series number followed by a volume number (e.g. 330.58 means series 330, volume 58). The yearbooks of the magistrates of inheritance (*scepenen van ghedeele*) constitute series 330; those of the magistrates of the by-law (*scepenen vander keure*) series 301. All amounts mentioned in documents are converted to a single coin, the Flemish groat; see the note on currencies in Rob C. Wegman, *Born for the Muses: The Life and Masses of Jacob Obrecht* (Oxford, 1994), p. xxiii.

(1) Walter Prevenier and Wim Blockmans, *The Burgundian Netherlands* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 32.

(2) For this and the following sentence, see Wegman, *Born...*, p. 21-73.

pursuit of precisely this aim that significant further progress is to be anticipated from future research.

Pieter Bordon

If his surviving output is anything to go by, Pieter Bordon would appear to have been a very minor figure in the history of fifteenth-century music. Only one composition survives with an attribution to him, and even that is an *opus dubium*: the three-part arrangement of *De tous biens plaine* which is ascribed to “Petrus Bourdon” in Petrucci’s *Odhecaton A* appears with a conflicting attribution to Alexander Agricola in the Segovia choirbook.⁽³⁾ On the other hand, financial documents from Siena cathedral reveal that in August and September 1484, “maestro Pietro Bordone di Fiandra” received payment for having composed and copied “motetti, credi e altri chanti figurati per la chiesa”, evidently on commission, since he is not otherwise known to have been employed at this church.⁽⁴⁾ The wording of the payment suggests a sizeable and varied compositional output for these two months alone. Nothing of that output survives under Bordon’s name, yet much may have found its way anonymously into SienBC K.I.2, a choirbook compiled at Siena cathedral probably in the 1490s or later.⁽⁵⁾ Moreover, since Bordon could hardly have received a commission from the cathedral without an established reputation as a composer, one assumes that he had written a good number of other compositions before this time. (In two of the Siena payments he is in fact mentioned as “maestro Pietro Bordone *chonpositore*”, as if this were his primary occupation.⁽⁶⁾)

Bordon disappears from the historical record after his last known payment at Siena, which was made to him on 15 September 1484. By then he appears to have lived in Italy for at least five years: in August 1479 to February 1480 he had turned up as “presbiter Petrus Bordonus de Flandra, musicus et cantor praes-

(3) SegC s.s., f. 173v; *Harmonice musices odhecaton A* (Venice, O. Petrucci, 1501), f. 79v-80 (index: “Pe. Bourdon”). Modern editions: Otto Gombosi, *Jacob Obrecht: Eine stilkritische Studie* (Leipzig, 1925), *Notenteil*, XVI and p. 28-29; Helen Hewitt (ed.), *Harmonice Musices Odhecaton A* (Cambridge, Mass., 1946), p. 161 and 373-74. Gombosi, p. 40-41, offers a brief style-critical evaluation of the piece, suggesting influences from what are described as the Cambrai and Ockeghem circles, and suggesting that the latter’s stylistic ideals are being developed in the direction of Agricola. Another work that may be by Bordon is the four-part arrangement of the anonymous combinate song *Il sera pour vous / L’homme armé* ascribed to “Borton” in RomeC 2856, f. 156v-157 (Wegman, *Born...*, p. 71).

(4) Frank A. D’Accone, “A Late 15th-Century Sieneese Sacred Repertory: MS. K.I.2 of the Biblioteca Comunale, Siena”, *Musica Disciplina*, XXXVII (1983), p. 121-70, at 131-32, acknowledging Vittorio Lusini, *Il Duomo di Siena*, 2 vols. (Siena, 1939), II, p. 158, n. 1.

(5) For a facsimile edition, see Frank A. D’Accone (ed.), *Siena, Biblioteca Comunale degli Intronati, MS K. I. 2* (New York - London, 1986; “Renaissance Music in Facsimile”, 17); an inventory was published in D’Accone, “A Late...”, p. 151-70; for the date of the choirbook, see most recently Wegman, *Born...*, p. 100, n. 12.

(6) For the historical significance of this designation, see Wegman, “From Maker to Composer: Improvisation and Musical Authorship in the Low Countries, 1450-1500”, *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, XLIX (1996), p. 409-79, esp. 435, n. 74.

tantissimus” in the records of the cathedral of Treviso, thirty kilometers north of Venice.⁽⁷⁾ His activities and whereabouts in the five-year period between Treviso and Siena are unknown, yet the designation “maestro” in the Siena payments suggests that he had pursued and successfully concluded university studies in the interim, possibly in this very town.

At both cathedrals Bordon was called a Fleming and indeed, moving further back in time, the thread of his biography turns out to be traceable to Ghent: “dominus Petrus Bordon” is mentioned in a quarterly list of payments to the priests and singers of the parish church of St Michael in 1478; the formal accounting date of this document is 23 September, less than a year before the composer’s first appearance at Treviso (Doc. 6; see Appendix).⁽⁸⁾ This, as it happens, is only the last in a long series of similar payments to Bordon at Ghent, both at St Michael’s and at the nearby parish church of St James. In the latter we find him continuously between June 1466 and June 1469, and then again between October 1470 and June 1472 (Doc. 5), followed immediately by employment at St Michael’s until March 1474, to which church he briefly returned four years later, in June-September 1478 (Doc. 6). By the time Bordon had moved to Italy, then, and was described there as “musicus et cantor praestantissimus”, he could indeed boast some thirteen years’ experience as a singer of chant and polyphony in two of Ghent’s major parish churches.

The kinds of payment lists in Ghent in which Bordon’s name appears are part of the annual accounts of the so-called *cotidianen*, institutions designed to promote the daily singing of Mass and Office in the nave of parish churches and funded mostly by the gifts, bequests and endowments of the parishioners. The administration of these latter sources of revenue usually takes up most of the receipts section of such accounts, while the expenses section is devoted largely to the quarterly lists of payments to the priests and singers. (The latter were known as *cotidianisten* and normally varied in number between about 12 and 20.) By the early fifteenth century at the latest, each of the four main parish churches of Ghent – St John, St Nicholas, St Michael and St James – could boast a *cotidiane*. Sadly, the state of survival of their accounts is very uneven before 1500: none from St Nicholas, one from St John (1484/5), fewer than twenty from St Michael (1466/7-1485/6), and only St James has two fairly extended series (1379-1393 and 1437/8-1479/80). Consequently, while the four churches together must have employed between fifty and eighty *cotidianisten* at any time, it is only during the late 1460s and 1470s that we are fortunate enough to have documentation on (at best) half of those singers. Together with the virtually complete loss of all perti-

⁽⁷⁾ Giovanni D’Alessi, “Maestri e cantori fiamminghi nella Cappella Musicale del Duomo di Treviso, 1411-1531”, *Tijdschrift der Vereeniging voor Nederlandsche Muziekgeschiedenis*, XV (1939), p. 147-65, at 157; and id., *La cappella musicale del Duomo di Treviso (1300-1633)* (Treviso, 1954), p. 49.

⁽⁸⁾ For the *cotidiane* of St James, see Frans De Potter, *Gent, van den oudsten tijd tot heden*, 8 vols. (Ghent, 1883-1901), VII, p. 43-56 and 507-13, and Frans Verstraeten, *De Gentse Sint-Jakobsparochie*, 2 vols. (Ghent, 1976), I, p. 46-49 and 149-56.

ment documentation from the wealthy collegiate church of St Veerhilde, also in the city centre, this means that our knowledge of church music in fifteenth-century Ghent is fragmentary at best. (It may be a reflection of the poor state of survival of *cotidiane* accounts that of the three composers discussed in this article, Bordon is the only one for whom musical activities can be demonstrated in the parish churches of Ghent.)

Despite these limitations, it is clear from the accounts that survive that the body of *cotidianisten* usually consisted of two distinct groups: first, a relatively permanent core of up to twelve priests who could expect to accumulate an income of 500-1,000 Flemish groats annually (enough, in other words, for a single adult to live from), and second, a less stable group of laymen, clerics in lower orders and (probably unbeneficed) priests, whose total income did not normally exceed 250 groats per year and for whom the *cotidiane* would not ideally have constituted the only or chief source of income. Within this latter group the boundary line between amateur and professional musicianship may have been hard to draw, and one would not be surprised to find here, along with talented professionals in the earlier stages of their career,⁽⁹⁾ parishioners whose primary sphere of activity was in fact in one of the local crafts or trades.⁽¹⁰⁾ Throughout his years in St James and St Michael's, Bordon is found among this latter group, never earning more than 250 groats annually and in some years significantly less than that.

Yet there is another side to Bordon's life in Ghent which is revealed to us by legal sources, particularly the yearbooks of the magistrates of inheritance (*gedele*). The peculiar nature of these sources requires some comment.⁽¹¹⁾ The chief task of the magistrates of *gedele* was to protect the inheritance of under-age orphans. Upon the death of either or both of the parents they immediately assumed chief guardianship over the children, depriving the remaining parent temporarily of all

⁽⁹⁾ A case in point concerns the Rogier Ghelderop who appears in the *cotidiane* accounts of St James's, Ghent, during the seven quarters between 1 Oct. 1472 and 24 June 1474 (Archive of St James, 1204-5) and who must be identical with the tenorist Rutger van Geldrop employed at 's Hertogenbosch from early May 1474 to late February 1479, briefly returning there for three weeks in 1499/1500. He ended up singing alongside Alexander Agricola and Pierre de La Rue at the Burgundian court in the year preceding his death in 1501. See Albert Smijers (ed.), *De Illustre Lieve Vrouwe Broederschap te 's-Hertogenbosch* (Amsterdam, 1932), p. 154-64 and 214; Georges Van Doorslaer, "La Chapelle musicale de Philippe le Beau", *Revue belge d'archéologie et d'histoire de l'art*, IV (1934), p. 21-57 and 139-65, at 146.

⁽¹⁰⁾ On lay participation in the performance of liturgical polyphony, see Wegman, "From Maker...", p. 417-18.

⁽¹¹⁾ The following account is based on Wegman, *Born...*, p. 36-37; see also David Nicholas, *The Domestic Life of a Medieval City: Women, Children, and the Family in Fourteenth-Century Ghent* (Lincoln, Nebr. - London, 1985); Marc Boone, "De Gentse staten van goed als bron voor de kennis van de materiële cultuur: mogelijkheden en beperkingen (late middeleeuwen - vroege moderne tijden)", in Frank Daelemans (ed.), *Bronnen voor de geschiedenis van de materiële cultuur: staten van goed en testamenten*, (Brussels, 1988, *Archief- en bibliotheekwezen in België*, special issue 25), p. 51-73; and especially Marianne Danneel, *Weduwen en wezen in het laat-middeleeuwse Gent*, (Louvain - Apeldoorn, 1995; "Studies in Urban Social, Economic and Political History of the Medieval and Modern Low Countries", 3).

parental responsibility. The magistrates then appointed an acting guardian, normally a close relative of the deceased who had no rights of inheritance himself. The guardian was given forty days to negotiate the orphan's inheritance with the other inheritors (usually the remaining parent and all adult children); after the matter was resolved to everyone's satisfaction, the guardian returned to the magistrates and submitted a full report on the inheritance of the children, the so-called *staet van goed*. This report was then read out in the presence of the assembled families and, upon their approval, was copied in the yearbook of the magistrates. The magistrates did not normally intervene in matters of inheritance in which no children were involved; they did, however, register testaments, quitclaims, claims to the estates of deceased citizens, or denunciations of the same, and a range of minor issues pertaining to the management of orphans' estates. The massive yearbooks of inheritance (*scepenbouken van gedele*) survive almost uninterruptedly for the period 1349-1795 and are a uniquely rich source of information on burgh families in Ghent, including those of Bordon, Obrecht and Agricola.

The earliest documentary reference to Pieter Bordon in the yearbooks is the appointment of a guardian upon the death of his father, Valeriaen Bordon, on or before 26 January 1465 (Doc. 2):

Lieven Denijs⁽¹²⁾ became guardian of Pieterkin Bordon, son of Valeriaen with Margriete van Wijmeersch, formerly his wife, inherited *de patre*, surety Katheline van Wijmeersch, aunt of the orphan, being an independent woman. Done on 26 January 1465 [n. s.].

The document immediately establishes that Pieter Bordon was the only child (or the only child alive by 1465) of Valeriaen Bordon and his wife Margriete van Wijmeersch. At the time of his father's death Pieter was still legally under age; we can tell this from the suffix *-kin* in his first name, denoting minority in Ghent legal documents, but more particularly from the fact that his rights of inheritance required protection through the appointment of an acting guardian. Still, there is no reason to doubt that Pieter was in his mid-to-late teens by 1465, if only because we find him working as a singer at St James's by the summer of the next year; his employment at that church may well have marked the beginning of his professional musical career (see above and Doc. 5).

In this connection it may not be without significance that Pieter's father Valeriaen had himself worked as a singer at St James from 1440 to 1452; the quarterly payments during this twelve-year period are in fact the only known

⁽¹²⁾ In the two subsequent Docs. 10 and 11, Pieter Bordon's guardian is called Lieven Parijs. He may be the Lieven Parijs who had been a *cotidianist* at St James alongside Valeriaen Bordon in 1442/3 (Archive of St James, Ghent, 1175), and perhaps the Lieven Parijs who was *prince d'amours* of the chamber of rhetoric *De fontein* in 1436 (De Potter, *Gent...*, III, p. 515). For another candidate for identification, see below, n. 48. It is possible that Lieven Denijs and Lieven Parijs are different individuals, yet there is no record of an approval of a change of guardian, and the possibility of a scribal mistake in Doc. 9 cannot be ruled out.

documentation on the composer's father before his death in 1465 (Doc. 1). It seems reasonable to assume, therefore, that the earliest and perhaps decisive musical influence on Pieter might have come from his father. Yet Valeriaen Bordon does not appear to have been a professional musician: the annual salary he accumulated at St James never amounted to more than about 90 groats, which must have been a trifle compared to the earnings from his proper trade, whatever that was.⁽¹³⁾ By the time of his death, as we will shortly learn, Valeriaen was sufficiently well-off to leave his wife and son a canal house in the parish of St James worth almost 2,000 groats, as well as goods and chattels probably in excess of 6,000 groats.

As said before, after the appointment of the guardian a period of forty days was granted to establish the property of the orphan and to submit a *staet van goed* for ratification by the magistrates of inheritance. In many cases much less time was needed: for instance, when Jacob Obrecht's grandfather Andries Gheeraerts died, in 1450, the guardian settled the complex inheritance of the three under-age children (among whom was the composer's future mother Lijsbette) within twenty-four days.⁽¹⁴⁾ In Pieter Bordon's case, on the other hand, it was to take almost eight months until his inheritance was finally settled, the acting guardian could be discharged, and Margriete van Wijmeersch was permitted to resume legal responsibility over her son. The principal cause for the delay was what might be called an orphan's nightmare scenario: Margriete had remarried almost immediately after Valeriaen's death, even before the *staet van goed* had been drawn up, and her new husband Laurens Vreethoof proceeded to manage the patrimony without any apparent regard for Pieter's rights of inheritance, leaving the guardian Lieven Parijs no option but to bring the situation to the attention of the magistrates (Doc. 3):

Since Lieven Parijs, as guardian of Pieterkin Bordon, son of Valeriaen with Margriete van Wiemeersch, formerly his wife, and also the same Margriete, mother of the orphan, has come etc. [before] the chief guardians of the same orphan [i.e. the magistrates] and has advised them that Lauwerijnse Vreethoof, who is currently married to the aforesaid mother of the orphan, has some time ago taken it upon himself to appropriate and remove from the estate of the aforesaid Valeriaen certain chattels worth up to 3,120 groats, as the aforesaid Margriete, mother of the orphan, has herself confirmed and declared for the notification of the magistrates: thus it is that the aforesaid magistrates and chief guardians, in order that the aforesaid orphan be compensated and reimbursed for the aforesaid 3,120 groats, up to the sum of 3,120 groats, have consented and consent that the aforesaid guardian will seize, confiscate and sequester, to deduct from these 3,120 groats, half of a house belonging to the aforesaid Lauwerijnse Vreethoof and his wife Margriete, situated at the canal

⁽¹³⁾ It is possible, however, that Valeriaen was related to the Johannes Frederic *alias* Bordon who worked as a singer in the chapel of Pope John XXIII in 1413-18 and was a canon of Angers in 1418; see Alejandro Planchart, "The Early Career of Guillaume Du Fay", *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, XLVI (1993), p. 341-68, at 355-56.

⁽¹⁴⁾ Wegman, *Born...*, p. 37-38. The forty-day term was often exceeded with the permission of the magistrates, and in a small number of cases no *staet van goed* was drawn up at all, either because the inheritance was too small to be worth the trouble or because the family preferred to treat it as an internal matter. See Danneels, *Weduwen...*, p. 141-46.

between the Laghelkins and Ostkins bridges, in order to recover for the orphan as much as [the house] can yield. Done on 22 June 1465.

It is not difficult to imagine what might have happened here. Margriete and her son shared equally in the estate of Valeriaen, but since Pieter was under age, she had to manage his inheritance along with her own, at least once the magistrates would restore her guardianship over him. Moreover, according to Flemish law she was to retain half the usufruct of Pieter's portion for as long as she lived. On the other hand, the household had now lost its chief wage earner and, unless the patrimony could yield enough interest to live from, Margriete may have faced the difficult task of supporting herself and her son with whatever work outside the home she was skilled and (as an independent woman) licenced to do. Depending on her age and socio-economic position, immediate remarriage (to which canon law posed no impediment) may well have seemed the more attractive alternative.⁽¹⁵⁾ However, remarriage would almost certainly entail the loss of Margriete's self-sufficiency and independence. The new head of the household would be lawfully entitled to manage her and Pieter's inheritance and, although his handling of these was formally subject to her consent, there was little but his conscience to stop him if he decided to operate without it.⁽¹⁶⁾ For the most desperate or most calculating bachelors in Ghent, a widow like Margriete van Wijmeersch, with only one dependant (who in any case was close to earning his own living now), might well have represented, amongst other things, a convenient solution to debts and liquidity problems.

What happened in the case of Margriete van Wijmeersch, however, seems to have been a great deal worse. Her new husband Laurens Vreethoof evidently decided that he could not wait for Pieter's *staet van goed* to be confirmed before the magistrates. He almost immediately withdrew goods and chattels worth thousands of groats from the estate, possibly expecting it to be much harder for Pieter to identify and prove his part of the inheritance if much of the estate had been removed before the inventory was drawn up. The difficulty, of course, was that the orphan's interests were being looked after by a guardian, Lieven Parijs, whose task it was to be vigilant against precisely this sort of manoeuvre. It is not certain that Laurens intentionally embezzled goods and chattels and if yes, how he might have expected to get away with it, yet Margriete had clearly decided, by 22 June 1465, not to allow this to harm her son's interests: she testified before the magistrates that her husband had indeed removed possessions from Pieter's share in the inheritance, amounting to 3,120 groats. (Her own share would have been 3,120 groats as well, yet she did not testify about this, since it was owned jointly with Laurens in marriage and thus could not legally be said to have been misappropri-

⁽¹⁵⁾ From a sample of 662 inheritance cases in Ghent over the period 1450-1500 it appears that about one in three widows remarried before their children's *staeten van goed* had been drawn up, that is within at most two months; Danneels, *Weduwen...*, p. 313-14.

⁽¹⁶⁾ See Danneels, *Weduwen...*, p. 332-44.

ated.) If Margriete's testimony suggests that the marriage had by now lapsed into disaffection and separation, the subsequent course of events does nothing to disprove that – if only because Laurens is nowhere to be seen to act in his capacity as head of the household, thus leaving his wife to be solely answerable for the goods he had removed.



Map of Ghent 1534 (Copyright IRPA-KIK, Brussels)

As a provisional measure the magistrates allowed Pieter's guardian Lieven Parijs to confiscate half of the house left by Valeriaen, now owned jointly by Laurens and Margriete, and situated at what is today the Ottogracht, in order to recover as much of the debt as possible.⁽¹⁷⁾ (The other half of the house had already gone to Pieter as part of his inheritance.) This was a radical measure, which not only underlines the gravity of the situation but suggests that alternatives (whether direct repayment by Margriete from other resources or confiscation of Laurens's assets) were apparently unavailable. To put it bluntly, it begins to look as if Laurens Vreethoof had simply disappeared, having taken and sold off everything of value except the house itself.

After the provisional measure, dated 22 June, we do not hear about the matter again until nearly three months later, on 11 September 1465 (Doc. 4). By then it is indeed apparent that Laurens is no longer living with Margriete, for the house is described as "owned by the aforesaid Laurens Vreethoof and Margriete his wife... in which the orphan's mother is currently living". It is also apparent that Margriete possesses little else to offer towards repayment of her son's 3,120 groats than her own half of the house, which remains confiscated for that purpose and which has meanwhile been officially valued at 960 groats. For the remaining 2,160 groats, her sister Catheline van Wijmeersch has agreed to step in. She undertakes repayment in the form of a life annuity, that is, for the rest of his life Pieter will be entitled to an annual pension of 240 groats (just over 11 per cent of the sum in question), which is to be collected by his guardian until he reaches legal majority.

In his capacity as guardian, Parijs now declared that he was satisfied concerning the inheritance of his charge, and the magistrates consequently regarded the matter as settled. Although they did not enter a *staet van goed* (evidently because there were no goods and chattels of any value left to be listed), they recorded the details of the agreement, summarized above, and concluded the matter as follows (Doc. 4):

And with this the aforesaid orphan has been fully assured of his 3,120 groats, which is the property that the same orphan has [inherited] from his aforesaid late father, and thereupon the aforesaid guardian has legally acquitted the aforesaid Margriete, the orphan's mother, of the inheritance of the aforesaid Valeriaen, his late father, and the same guardian was released and acquitted of his guardianship, and the mother became guardian of her aforesaid child, and being guardian, she warrants the orphan's goods with her [own possessions], and the surety for her is Catheline van Wijmeersch, her sister. Done on 11 September 1465.

Margriete van Wijmeersch had paid a heavy price for her precipitate remarriage with Vreethoof, yet ultimately it was she, not her son, who had been responsible

⁽¹⁷⁾ See Figure 1 for the 1534 map of Ghent (Bijloekemuseum, Ghent), on which the most important locations mentioned in this article are indicated. For maps of the inner city of late-medieval Ghent, see Nicholas, *The Metamorphosis of a Medieval City: Ghent in the Age of the Artevelde, 1302-1390* (Lincoln, Nebr. - London, 1987), p. 68-69, and *The Domestic Life...*, p. 14-15.

for this step and the magistrates saw to it that Pieter's interests would under no circumstance be harmed as a result – to the point of forcing his mother to call on her sister for financial help. It is unclear whether Laurens Vreethoof ever returned, or indeed what became of the marriage. It would not be unprecedented if Laurens had felt remorse or if his confessor had perhaps instilled contrition, although actual repayments, so far as we know, were usually left to the last will or even the deathbed. In any case, when Margriete appeared before the by-law seven years later, on 2 December 1472, she was referred to as “Margriete van Wijmeersch, widow of... Valeriaen Bordon”, and no mention was made of any current husband with whose necessary consent she appeared alone before the magistrates (Doc. 7). Judging from this later document, however, Margriete's financial situation seems to have greatly improved in the intervening seven years, for what brought her to the by-law was a gift to Pieter on the occasion of his imminent ordination to the priesthood:

Be it known etc. that since Pieter Bordon, son of Valeriaen, is intending shortly to join, by the grace of God, the state of the priesthood, Margriete van Wijmeersch, widow of the aforesaid Valeriaen Bordon, mother of the aforesaid Pieter Bordon, has come before the magistrates and declared that she has given and gives to the same Pieter Bordon, her son, out of good will and love, the sum of 480 groats per annum as an annuity on the life of the same Pieter...

That Pieter's ordination must have been imminent on 2 December 1472 is confirmed by the *cotidiane* accounts for 1472/3 of St Michael's, which mention him with the sacerdotal title *dominus* for the first time in the quarter ending on Christmas day, just over three weeks later (Doc. 6). We may infer from this that he had spent the previous years, during which his presence at Ghent can be documented almost continuously (Docs. 5 and 6), in minor orders, supporting himself with his aunt's annuity as well as with his daily earnings as a *cotidianist*, together amounting to about 480 groats per year. Margriete's annuity, which doubled that annual income at once to a comfortable 960 groats, may have been intended chiefly for the 'lean years' Pieter was likely to spend initially as an unbeneficed priest. She was able to undertake the annuity by offering two houses in the parish of St James as collateral: the canal house inherited seven years previously from Valeriaen Bordon (of which she must therefore have regained her share as well as the usufruct) and another house, not mentioned previously, in the nearby Nieuwpoort. Quite how the latter house had come into her possession is unclear: had Laurens Vreethoof perhaps died and left it to her as repayment?

Interestingly the Nieuwpoort house features again in a document from the yearbooks of the by-law, dated 10 May 1475 (Doc. 8). On that day Pieter Bordon himself appeared before the by-law and declared that he had sold the house for 1,440 groats to the furrier Janne Aenbec. (One assumes that he had inherited it from his mother, although there is no other evidence to indicate that she had died by 1475.) We learn from the document that the occupant was a *her* Jan Planke, priest, and that Pieter Bordon consented to payment by yearly instalments on condition that Planke could continue to live in the house for the next fourteen

years (that is until 1489), albeit with the proviso that the new owner would have the use of the main room on the ground floor (evidently as a shop looking out onto the street). The arrangement may seem puzzling at first and would seem to suggest some personal acquaintance, if not friendship or a family tie, between Pieter Bordon and Jan Planke.

As it happens, it is the *cotidiane* accounts of St James that shed light on the matter: from June 1471 onwards they list a *her* Jan vander Plancken among the better-paid *cotidianisten* (around 700 groats per annum) and also, from the first months of 1475, a Johannes Haenbec among the lesser-paid singers (around 250 groats per annum). Both men remain continuously in service through the 1470s, being still listed in the last surviving account, of 1479/80 (Archive of St James, 1203-1210*bis*). (Interestingly, in 1481 Jan Aenbec is mentioned as a sworn member of the guild of furriers, which was based in the chapel of St Catherine in the church of St James: like Valeriaen Bordon he seems to have been a parishioner who made his living in a well-established trade yet participated in the *cotidiane* as a semi-professional singer.⁽¹⁸⁾) It would appear, then, that the sale of the house in the Nieuwpoort was a transaction between three parishioners connected through their past and present ties with the *cotidiane* of St James. The connections between them were close enough for Pieter to insist, and Janne Aenbec to accept, that their colleague Jan vander Plancken should be assured of a place to live for the next fourteen years. That the network of these connections had also extended to include Pieter Bordon's late father Valeriaen, and perhaps his erstwhile guardian Lieven Parijs (see n. 12 above), suggests that the composer had grown up in a tightly-knit musical community, firmly anchored in the parish life of St James.

What caused Pieter Bordon to leave that community in 1478-9 may well have been the aspiration to study at an Italian university, rather than any desire to start a 'new life' in another country: as noted before, he is styled "maestro" at Siena some five or six years after his departure from Ghent, just about the interval it would have taken to earn the master's degree. Elsewhere I have suggested that Bordon might have studied at the university of Siena; although there are no extant records of examinations at this university until 1484, those that have survived do mention a "dominus Petrus, tenorista Almanius" who served as a witness on 23 February 1485 and who may have been the composer.⁽¹⁹⁾ Yet wherever Bordon was to spend his university years, in the first instance he seems to have travelled directly to Treviso, arriving there by August 1479. It is tempting to speculate that this destination, however unobvious at first sight, might have suggested itself through contacts with Gerardus de Lisa, the well-known printer, bookseller, schoolmaster and musician who had lived and worked at Treviso since

⁽¹⁸⁾ De Potter, *Gent...*, VI, p. 53-66, esp. 58, n. 1.

⁽¹⁹⁾ Wegman, *Born...*, p. 71; Giovanni Minnucci, *Le lauree dello studio senese alla fine del secolo XV* (Milan, 1981; "Quaderni di Studi Senesi", 51), p. 18.

1461.⁽²⁰⁾ Gerardus was himself a native of Ghent⁽²¹⁾ and he would have been ideally positioned to introduce Bordon as “cantor et musicus praestantissimus” at Treviso cathedral, having worked as a singer at that very church from 1463 to 1476.

To sum up, Pieter Bordon’s documented career spans the nearly twenty years between 1465 and 1484. He must have been born in the 1440s, most likely towards the end of that decade, and hence would have been close to forty by the time he disappears from the historical record. After that, nothing but the ascription in Petrucci’s *Odhecaton A* reminds us of his existence and compositional activities. Perhaps some of the “motetti, credi, e altri chanti figurati” composed for Siena cathedral in 1484 may be identified one day, whether in SienBC K.I.2 or elsewhere, but for the present Bordon’s *Werkverzeichnis* remains limited to the one song arrangement of *De tous biens plaine* ascribed to Alexander Agricola elsewhere.

Jacob Obrecht

It is a truism of historical research that the longer a family was established in a town like medieval Ghent, the more complex would have been the network of its social and familial connections in the town. Bordon is not a typical Ghent family name (although Van Wijmeersch is); Valeriaen and Pieter are the only Bordons I have encountered in the city archive and this only adds to the suspicion that the composer’s father was not born in Ghent but had come from elsewhere. For Jacob Obrecht, on the other hand, the picture is very different. The Obrecht family was well established at Ghent in the late fourteenth century and by the mid-fifteenth at least a half-dozen distinct branches of the family are identifiable.⁽²²⁾ It is not known to which particular branch Jacob and his father Willem Obrecht belonged, yet it is evident from new findings to be reported below that they must have depended on family connections at crucial points of their lives.

A significant point of similarity between Bordon and Obrecht is that both their fathers were well-connected in the musical life of the town.⁽²³⁾ Jacob’s father Willem Obrecht worked in a band of six trumpeters which operated as a unit both

⁽²⁰⁾ On Gerardus de Lisa (or Gheeraert vander Lijsen, as he would have been called in Ghent), see Victor Scholderer, “A Fleming in Venetia: Gerardus de Lisa, Printer, Bookseller, Schoolmaster, and Musician”, *The Library*, ser. IV, 10 (1929/30), p. 252-73, and “Gerardus de Lisa: Further Notes”, *ibid.*, ser. IV, 11 (1930/1), p. 160-61; D’Alessi, “Maestri...”, p. 151-57, and *La cappella...*, p. 46-57; Dennis E. Rhodes, *La stampa a Treviso nel secolo XV* (Treviso, 1983).

⁽²¹⁾ A thorough search through the yearbooks of inheritance back to 1441/2 has yielded no trace of either Gerardus or his father Martinus, yet possible relatives could be Gillis van der Lijse (330.23, 1443/4, f. 51v), Jan van der Lijsen (330.24, 1448/9, f. 37v, and 330.25, 1451/2, f. 78v), Bertelmeeus van der Lijsen, who became guardian of Katheline, daughter of the late Dieric van der Lijsen, on 21 Feb. 1452 (330.25, 1451/2, f. 85v) and who was a relative of a Joosijne van der Lijsen (330.26, 1454/5, f. 198v), Katheline van der Lijsen, who was married to Gillis Raes (330.31, 1468/9, f. 73v, and 1469/70, f. 10), and Baerbele van der Lijsen (400.34, 1498/9, f. 12).

⁽²²⁾ See Wegman, *Born...*, p. 29-32, for a summary of what could be established up to 1993.

⁽²³⁾ For this and what follows, see Wegman, *Born...*, p. 1-73 and 147-56.

within and outside Ghent and whose members belonged to the guild of city trumpeters, based in the chapel of St Andrew and St Lazarus in the parish church of St John. Yet these musical connections were less clearly rooted in, and supported by, the life of a particular neighbourhood or parish than had been the case with Valeriaen and Pieter Bordon.

Willem Obrecht and his colleagues lived in different areas of the town and belonged to different social circles, whose distinctive definitions were principally in terms of family, neighbourhood, parish and (in some cases) professions other than trumpeting. For instance, Roeland Ghijs and his brother Lodewijk, both also active as woolweavers, lived in the suburban district known as tSant, in what is today the Lange Violettenstraat (opposite the Beguinage of Our Lady at the Hooie), about one kilometer south-east of St John's.⁽²⁴⁾ The house of Mattheus Nijs, on the other hand, was in the well-to-do Kammerstraat, facing the cattle market, about half a kilometer north of the church.⁽²⁵⁾ Arend de Keyser possessed a house twice as far north, in the Steenstraat, beyond the river Leie.⁽²⁶⁾ From this small sample alone, then, it is clear that the trumpeters were not exactly neighbours, or even fellow-parishioners. It seems hardly surprising, therefore, that they were never involved in each other's family affairs (whether as guardians, witnesses, or guarantors) nor sought to forge kinship ties through marriage alliances.⁽²⁷⁾ Apart from strictly professional business, Willem Obrecht had no dealings of any kind with his fellow-trumpeters – or at least none that were sufficiently important to be registered in the yearbooks of inheritance or the by-law. Thus, when he had to produce two sureties for his management of Jacob Obrecht's inheritance from his late wife Lijsbette Gheeraerts, in 1460, he named Victoer Symoens and the taylor Pieter Clays. Since the latter men effectively guaranteed to pay off all debts in case of insolvency (an undertaking not free of financial

⁽²⁴⁾ For houses owned and sold by Lodewijk Ghijs, see 330.24, 1449/50², f. 26v (10 June 1450: inherited a portion of his father's house at "Sint Joris capelle bij de Vijfwintgaten"); 301.46, 1460/1, f. 122 (29 July 1461); 301.50, 1468/9, f. 81v (1 Mar. 1469; one house "voor tBeghijnhof ter Hoyen" and two others "te Voorhoofde in de Papestrate" mentioned as collateral). For Roeland Ghijs, see 330.24, 1449/50¹, f. 4 (9 Sept. 1449; inherited a portion of his father's house "bij Sint Joris capelle") 301.48, 1464/5, f. 31v (6 Apr. 1465); 301.49, 1466/7, f. 142v (13 Aug. 1467, Lodewijk Ghijs mentioned as neighbour); 301.49, 1467/8, f. 68v (15 Feb. 1468); also 20.1, c. 1477, f. 15; 195.1, 1457, f. 5; Rijksarchief Gent, K3957, 1484/5, f. 1v.

⁽²⁵⁾ Mentioned as collateral for a debt in 301.47, 1462/3, f. 33v (23 Dec. 1462). The composer Cornelis Canis, or De Hont, would be the owner of a house in the Kammerstraat in the 1540s (330.98, 1544/5, f. 45v); he was a member of the chamber of rhetoric *Marien tEeren*, based in the church of St James (enrollment and advance payment of death fee in SJG 1472, f. 10: "Mr. Cornelis dHont, sangmeestere der K' M' quam in tgulde up onser vrouwen dach in septembre .lj. [8 Sept. 1551] in stede ter doot x sc. gr."; I thank Daniël Lievois for pointing out this document to me). Both Mattheus Nijs and Willem Obrecht were listed as having taxable property "beyond the gate of St George", north-east of the town proper, but this may have concerned arable land rather than houses; 20.15, f. 42.

⁽²⁶⁾ 301.55, 1478/9, f. 187 (12 Dec. 1479).

⁽²⁷⁾ The only exception known to me is when Mattheus Nijs acted as legal representative of Janne Vrancken and Gheeraert Coernaert in an inheritance case, and cited the trumpeter Jan van Aeltert (also known as Aelterman) as his surety; 330.26, 1453/4, rolle f. 45v (3 Dec. 1453).

risk), one can only assume that they knew and trusted Willem Obrecht, and had been longstanding neighbours or business relations of him and his family.⁽²⁸⁾

All this is not to deny the importance of trumpeting to Willem Obrecht's existence and livelihood, nor to suggest that his professional life was somehow lacking in personal commitment. In fact, some sense of the levels of intensity that could exist within the band of six trumpeters can now be obtained from a document in the so-called *zoendinc* books. These record the administration of criminal justice – literally the justice of conciliation, the remit of the magistrates of inheritance – and contain a wealth of information on a broad range of crimes and misdemeanours, from injurious language, assaults and fights, to murder, seduction and rape.⁽²⁹⁾ It was the responsibility of the magistrates to bring such criminal violations of the peace to atonement, by imposing such sentences as pleas for forgiveness offered in public, fees, blood prices and, not infrequently, pilgrimages for the benefit of the aggrieved parties and their relatives.

On 31 March 1455 the magistrates recorded their decision to postpone,

due to lack of time, the quarrel passed between Ghijselbrecht de Keyser, on the one hand, and Janne Theysbaert, who lives in the lazaret outside the Walpoort, on the other, until after Easter [6 April] (Doc. 12).

Although neither man is mentioned here as a trumpeter, they were both among the six trumpeters who had been appointed (along with Willem Obrecht) on 24 November 1452 in permanent employment of the city of Ghent.⁽³⁰⁾ After that appointment Jan Theysbaert was never again mentioned in the company of the six, and he seems to have been replaced by Jan Aelterman within ten months, by mid-September 1453. The new document, about a year and a half after that, suggests a possible reason for the replacement: we learn that Theysbaert had been admitted to one of the lazarets outside the gates of Ghent, which means that he had contracted either leprosy or another skin disorder understood to be incurable and contagious. Effectively Jan's professional, social and even domestic life would have come to an end upon diagnosis, and one is in fact a little surprised to learn that he still mingled in society enough to become embroiled in a fight with a fellow-trumpeter. On the other hand, it is possible that his admission to the lazaret had only been recent⁽³¹⁾ or that the fight had occurred some time in the past. In

⁽²⁸⁾ Wegman, *Born...*, p. 42 and n. 42.

⁽²⁹⁾ The *zoendinc* books are actually gatherings tucked in the back of the yearbooks of the magistrates of inheritance (SAG, series 330). On criminal justice in Ghent in general, see Nicholas, "Crime and Punishment in Fourteenth-Century Ghent", *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, XLVIII (1970), p. 289-334 and 1141-76.

⁽³⁰⁾ For this and what follows, see Wegman, *Born...*, p. 25-35. For the next sentence, see *ibid.*, p. 34, n. 29. For the leper houses of Ghent, see De Potter, *Gent...*, VIII, p. 421-52.

⁽³¹⁾ Recent enough, it would seem, for him to be able still to appear before the magistrates of inheritance on 19 June 1454, in order to appoint Adriaen van der Stuerme as his authorized deputy in all inheritance matters (330.26, 1453/4, f. 22). An appointment of this kind often indicates an anticipated period of absence.

any event, the postponement of the case was to be much longer than the magistrates had anticipated; only on 15 November 1455, more than six months later, did the first hearing take place and this resulted in the following verdict (Doc. 14):

The magistrates order and sentence Janne Theysbaert to give and pay to Ghiselbrecht den Keyser, for the injury and distress of two evil, painful wounds – one up in the muscle of the left arm, of which the sinews and membrane were badly injured, and the other on the side of the joint of the hindmost phalanx of the left hand, from which he had immediately lost a large piece of bone and a piece of the sinew, of which the same hand festered and was opened three or four times – the sum of 1,200 groats, of which the surgeon is to have 360 for his cure. And in case there were to remain any disfigurement, defect or disability from the aforesaid wounds and injuries to the same Ghiselbrecht, this is to be postponed without prejudice by the aforesaid magistrates until 24 June [1456]. And with this all other matters that have passed and occurred between the parties are acquitted and mended, and the magistrates legally declare *zoending* [conciliation]. Done on 15 November 1455.

Of all documented conflicts between Ghent trumpeters in the fifteenth century (which is very few, if only because the records of the trumpeters' guild are no longer extant⁽³²⁾), this was by far the most serious, as one can tell from the size of the fine alone, if not the no doubt excruciatingly painful injuries sustained by Ghiselbrecht de Keyser, not to mention the (in context) staggering medical costs. It is not clear from the document whether the fight had been a mere tavern brawl or had perhaps originated in a professional disagreement, yet either way the outcome testifies to the intensity of interaction between the trumpeters – even with a former colleague now afflicted by a frightening disease.

To what extent would Ghiselbrecht's trumpet playing, and thus his livelihood, have been affected by the injuries? This question is answered indirectly by the third and final document concerning this case, recorded seven months later, on 12 July 1456 (Doc. 15). After summarizing the previous verdict, the magistrates continued as follows:

... since they have now learned from the town surgeons, who have seen and inspected the scar of the same [Ghiselbrecht] and reported that the aforesaid Ghiselbrecht is greatly mutilated by the same injury in what he has lost, [namely] nearly all feeling and strength in the same hand, and also that it has become worse rather than better, [the magistrates] order and sentence that the aforesaid Ghiselbrecht shall receive for the same loss and mutilation the sum of 960 groats, and that the aforesaid Jan Gheysbaert [*sic*] will pay this: one half within the next two months and the other half within the two months following thereafter. Done on 12 July 1456.

Given the apparent severity of the injuries, there can be little doubt that Ghiselbrecht would have been able to play the trumpet only with great difficulty – even if he needed the left hand only to hold the instrument or, on horseback, to handle the reins. By some coincidence, however, the city accounts of Ghent reveal that on the very day following this verdict, 13 July 1456, “the six trumpeters of this city” left the town to accompany Charles the Bold, then count of Charolais, on his travels through Holland as governor and lieutenant-general of the

⁽³²⁾ Wegman, *Born...*, p. 27 n. 13, 52 n. 13, 56 and 357 (doc. 3), and 363-65 (docs. 23 and 27).

Netherlands.⁽³³⁾ It would appear from this that the quality of Ghiselbrecht's ensemble playing was not perceived to have significantly diminished. So far as we can tell he was indeed to remain involved in all activities and travels of the group, until his death on, or shortly before, 27 March 1469.⁽³⁴⁾ Ghiselbrecht's continuing participation in the band may be a testimony either to its internal solidarity or to the degree to which the group depended on the skills and experience of its most senior member.

As said before, however, trumpeting made up only one part of the environment in which Jacob Obrecht grew up. Many other questions concerning his background remain unanswered, especially with respect to his father Willem: who his parents had been, what trade connections he would have inherited from his family, what role and standing he had within the clan, which neighbourhood he lived in, who were the friends and neighbours he would call on when needing witnesses, guarantors, authorized deputies, money-lenders, guardians, executors, and so on. The best way to reconstruct the network of social connections of any individual in fifteenth-century Ghent is to pursue questions like these not just for this person in particular, but for everybody who is ever mentioned in connection with him and the same for everybody who is mentioned in connection with that individual in turn, and so on. The nature of late-medieval urban society is such that this approach does not lose itself in a proliferation of irrelevant connections, on the contrary. As we have already seen in the case of Pieter Bordon, the connections that are opened up by a new name always somehow tend to lead back into the same circle, by roads that are almost invariably significant and revealing, typically involving kinship, neighbourhood, trade or parish worship. (It can also sometimes lead to unexpected surprises, for instance, that Jacob Obrecht and Alexander Agricola were distant relations by marriage – on which more below.)

Since we do not as yet know who Willem Obrecht's parents were and in what area of Ghent he lived, and since the professional and domestic spheres of his life appear to have been relatively distinct, the most promising connections to explore are those that were established by his two marriages. These do indeed reveal a great deal about the social and familial background of the composer's childhood and youth, although many questions must remain open pending further research. In what follows I will discuss the two marriages in turn, and attempt to amplify the picture as much as present evidence allows.

Willem's first wife was Lijsbette Gheeraerts, who gave birth to their son Jacob in 1457 or 1458 and died soon thereafter, in late July 1460.⁽³⁵⁾ Lijsbette's

⁽³³⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁽³⁴⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 35, 49, 63, 357-9 and 362-64. For the death date, see the appointment, on 27 March 1469, of Justaes Denijs as guardian of the five under-age children from Ghiselbrecht's second marriage, with Lievijne Blocx (330.30, 1468/9, rolle f. 4). For Ghiselbrecht's age relative to that of the other six trumpeters, see Wegman, *Born...*, p. 32-33.

⁽³⁵⁾ For this and what follows, see Wegman, *Born...*, p. 36-44.

background is much better known than that of her husband: some seven years before the composer's birth, in April 1450, her father Andries Gheeraerts had died, leaving his widow Marien Laps and their five children several possessions in and around his native town of Hughersluus (north Flanders).⁽³⁶⁾ Since Lijsbette and two of her brothers were still under age, they needed to be represented by a guardian and the person appointed to act in that capacity was a man called Jan Obrecht *filius* Jans. This is yet another example of ramifying social connections leading back into the same circle: for surely it can be no coincidence that someone named Jan Obrecht should be intimately involved in the private affairs of the very household in which the future wife of a man named Willem Obrecht was growing up; somehow there must be a connection between the later marriage and the earlier guardianship. In fact, Jan was to become similarly involved in Willem's own household, as guardian of the young Jacob Obrecht after Lijsbette's death. Yet what was the connection between Jan and Willem?

Here the trail divides, as there were two individuals named Jan Obrecht *filius* Jans in Ghent, who are often hard to tell apart, not only in the *staet van goed* of Lijsbette Gheeraerts but in numerous other documents as well. The first had lost his mother and father in 1418 and 1419 respectively, had subsequently been raised by his uncle Bertelmeeus Obrecht, and reached legal majority upon marriage in 1439.⁽³⁷⁾ Significantly, all the lands he had inherited from his parents were in the north-Flemish villages of Peerboom and Steelant, where Andries Gheeraerts, too, owned manors and lands. Jan's wife from 1459 (at the latest) until her death in March 1470 was the damsel *joncvrouw* Johanna van Impe; the couple possessed a

⁽³⁶⁾ Situated approximately in what are today the southernmost outskirts of Terneuzen (about 1 km. west of the village of Driewegen), Hughersluus was a market town comprising probably no more than about 200 houses. It had been granted city privileges by 1291, had its own bench of magistrates of the by-law (documented by 1326) and seems to have been relatively prosperous during the fourteenth century, at least until the city was burned down during the Ghent War of 1379-85. Philip the Good restored the weekly Wednesday market and toll in 1434, allowing the town once again to become a center for the trade of cattle, grain, beer and peat. Hughersluus perished forever in the floods of summer 1488. See M. K. Elisabeth Gottschalk, *De Vier Ambachten en het Land van Saafinge in de Middeleeuwen: een historisch-geografisch onderzoek betreffende Oost Zeeuws-Vlaanderen* (Assen, 1984), p. 219, 238-89, 388-89, 414-15, 512 and 521-22. Andries Gheeraerts's other lands were in the parishes of Willemskerk, Steelant and Peerboom (all within a radius of about 4 km. of Hughersluus); of these villages, only Willemskerk survived the floods of 1488 (*ibid.*, p. 531-32).

⁽³⁷⁾ 330.17, 1418/9, f. 1 (30 Aug. 1418: appointment of guardian after death of his mother Lijsbette van Houtem) and f. 23 (28 Nov. 1418: his father Jan Obrecht is away on a pilgrimage to Rome); 330.17, 1419/20, f. 3, 10 and 23 (3 Oct. 1419: appointment of Bertelmeeus as guardian after death of father, plus two matters handled by him later on), and 33v (14 Mar. 1420: *staet van goed*, mentioning, amongst others, a great-uncle Mathijse Willaerts *alias* Gheeraerts). Further documents on him in 330.20, 1430/1, f. 52v (17 Apr. 1431: money lent to an Arent Gheeraerts *filius* Roegers); 330.20, 1431/2, f. 43 (14 Mar. 1432: updated *staet van goed*); 330.21, 1434/5, f. 47v (11 Jan. 1435); 330.21, 1436/7, f. 53v (11 May 1437); 330.22, 1438/9, f. 73 (3 Mar. 1439: Jan Obrecht has married and acquits Bertelmeeus of the guardianship). See also Wegman, *Born...*, p. 31, n. 19.

house in the street called Kwaadham, near the square known as the Zandberg, in the parish of St John.⁽³⁸⁾

The second Jan Obrecht *filius* Jans was the well-known and politically influential shipper and spice-trader, who is distinguishable from the first in that his father Jan was still alive as late as 1452, that he was married to a Petronelle Goethals from 1452 (at the latest) until her death in September 1470, and that the lands they possessed were east rather than north of Ghent, in the region of Lokeren.⁽³⁹⁾ This second Jan Obrecht *filius* Jans owned a house at the Schipgracht, in the parish of St Michael.⁽⁴⁰⁾ He was a nephew of the shipper Jacop Obrecht, whom we will presently encounter in another context.

If the two namesakes are considered from the point of view of the Gheeraerts family, it is the first Jan Obrecht who seems the more likely to have been the guardian appointed in 1450. To begin with, it would appear that Andries Gheeraerts had settled in Ghent only very recently; consequently he would probably have tended to rely on connections from his native region in matters requiring trust. As late as November 1444 the magistrates of the by-law described him still as someone from out of town: “Andries Gheeraerts, living in Hughersluus”.⁽⁴¹⁾

⁽³⁸⁾ Johanna van Impe, illegitimate daughter of master Jan van Impe, is mentioned as the wife of Jan Obrecht *filius* Jans by 5 June 1459 (330.28, 1458/9, f. 114v and 133v); she died on, or before, 8 March 1470, leaving one under-age child, called Jan (appointment of guardian: 330.31, 1469/70, rolle f. 20; *staet van goed*, approved on 13 Dec. 1470: 330.31, 1470/1, f. 20v; the boy had an elder sister Lijsbette Obrecht, who was married to a Jan van Huusse by 10 Mar. 1473; 330.32, 1472/3, f. 29). The *staet van goed* of her son mentions a house in the Kwaadham. This allows identification with the Jan Obrecht who brought a complaint before the by-law on 20 December 1445 concerning his neighbour Cornelie Lauwaerts. She let her sewage run over his premises in the Kwaadham, right before his dining room, “of which the aforesaid Jan experienced great discomfort”; the magistrates ordered Cornelie to stop this (301.38, 1445/6, f. 62). The last two documents establish that this branch of the Obrecht family lived in the parish of St John, more specifically in the streets around the Zandberg: it is in this same neighbourhood that the family of Willem Obrecht’s second wife was based (see below). The Kwaadham was connected to the Zandberg through the Talboomstraat (today Ursulinenstraat), in which Willem Obrecht and Beatrijse Jacops owned a house in 1485-8 (Wegman, *Born...*, p. 147-56).

⁽³⁹⁾ Wegman, *Born...*, p. 29, n. 16 and 17. He is still mentioned as being under age in May 1439, when his stepmother Kataline Snoers is mentioned as the supervising guardian; 330.22, 1438/9, f. 101v (I thank Erik Verroken for pointing out this reference to me). Petronelle Goethals died on or before 26 September 1470, leaving seven under-age children (330.31, 1470/1, rolle f. 2; appointment of guardian). Jan’s parents were Jan Obrecht *filius* Heinricx and Beatrijse Maertsoons (who is mentioned as his widow by 26 April 1459; 330.28, 1458/9, f. 138 and rolle f. 12). The ownership of lands around Lokeren in this branch of the Obrecht family goes back to Jan’s grandfather, the shipper Heinric Obrecht (d. 1442; see Wegman, *Born...*, p. 29, n. 16, and 43, n. 43).

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Mentioned as collateral for a hereditary rent in 1461 (301.46, 1460/1, f. 115). Probably not coincidentally, the Schipgracht borders on the Grauwpoort, where Jan’s grandfather Heinric Obrecht was mentioned as living on 27 Nov. 1407 (301.19, 1407/8, f. 19v). Evidently this branch of the Obrecht family, all of whose male members are known to have been shippers, had traditionally been resident in this part of the parish of St Michael, in a district of which Nicholas (*The Metamorphosis...*, p. 91) writes: “It was dominated overwhelmingly by shippers and shipwrights, with a scattering of others. Over half of the [fourteenth-century] shippers whose residence I have located resided in [this region and another region south of it].” Not surprisingly, the shippers had their guild chapel (of the Holy Cross) in the church of St Michael.

⁽⁴¹⁾ 301.48, 1444/5, f. 58 (14 Nov. 1444): “Andries Gheeraerts woenende te Hughersluus”.

Within the next few years, however, the emphasis of his activities must have shifted to Ghent. One possible sign of this comes on 24 December 1447, when both he and his son Jan were sentenced to go on pilgrimage to southern France, for the benefit of a Janne van der Hille: they had assaulted this man when he was on his way to testify under subpoena concerning a complaint made by Andries (Docs. 9 and 10). Although no details are given on the nature of the complaint, this is the kind of offence that normally occurred only between neighbours, next of kin, colleagues or parties in a transaction. If anything, therefore, the incident would seem to confirm that Andries Gheeraerts and his son had become more deeply involved in their Ghent affairs by 1447.

To become a burgess of Ghent, however, it was necessary to have lived in the town for at least a year and one day (as neighbours had to be able to confirm in case of doubt).⁽⁴²⁾ Andries must have fulfilled the requirement by the time of his death in 1450, as his three under-age children were entitled to the protection of the magistrates of inheritance, which was denied to strangers; their *staet van goed* does indeed include, in addition to the house and the manor at Hughersluus, a house with thatched roof along the Meerhem canal in the far north-east of Ghent, towards the old Muide Gate.⁽⁴³⁾ However, ties with Andries's native area must have remained close: Hughersluus was only 28 km. north of Ghent and there was almost continuous cargo traffic with that area through the connecting waterways (of which the Meerhem, continuing beyond the Muide Gate, was one).⁽⁴⁴⁾ It seems all the more probable, therefore, that the Jan Obrecht *filius* Jans to whom his orphaned children would be entrusted, should have been a man who himself was a landowner in villages within walking distance of Hughersluus, and yet was well-established enough in Ghent to be able to assure the magistrates of his solvency.

⁽⁴²⁾ Johan Decavele, "De Gentse poorterij en buitenpoorterij", in *Recht en instellingen in de oude Nederlanden tijdens de middeleeuwen en nieuwe tijd. Liber amicorum Jan Buntinx* (Leuven, 1981), p. 63-83.

⁽⁴³⁾ The Meerhem ran parallel to what are today the Sleepstraat and Sint-Salvatorstraat, in the parish of Sint-Kerst. The house was not yet fully paid off when Andries died: 1,740 groats were still due to a Jacop Gauwe; Wegman, *Born...*, p. 37-38 and 355-56.

⁽⁴⁴⁾ The area to which Hughersluus belonged, the so-called Four Shires (Vier Ambachten), was Ghent's chief supplier of peat, for which reason many Ghent citizens, especially shippers, had interests in the area. The following comments in Nicholas (*The Metamorphosis...*, p. 238-40) provide a background to the activities of the Gheeraerts and Obrecht families:

Burghers had invested in the bogs of northeastern Flanders since the late thirteenth century, and speculation in peat was an important source of income for many... The price of bogs was very high in the fourteenth century, and the parcels became fractionalized. Many burghers resold soon after buying, evidently as a speculative venture, but others exploited them directly and took a considerable profit... Since the shippers had other interests in northeastern Flanders and the peat was being transported back to Ghent in boats, it is not surprising that many prominent shipping families had interests in the bogs. Poorer shippers also invested... Some Ghent shipping families divided their residence between the city and northeastern Flanders, probably to take advantage of the peat trade.

It is against this background that one might understand the apparent efforts of Willem Obrecht and his wife Lijsbette to add more lands to her inheritance in this area: the *staet van goed* of their son Jacob reveals that they had acquired 2.23 ha. of land in Hughersluus and Steeland in marriage, yielding 420 groats annually (Wegman, *Born...*, p. 42 and 360-61).

Moreover, since some of the lands left by Andries were located in the very same villages as the lands of this Jan Obrecht (namely Peerboom and Steeland), the latter would have been in an ideal position not only to assess those lands for the *staet van goed*, but also to represent the orphans' interests *in situ* if necessary.⁽⁴⁵⁾ The same would still have been true ten years later, in July 1460, when Lijsbette Gheeraerts died as the wife of Willem Obrecht, and in turn passed on her inheritance at Hughersluus and Steeland to her son Jacob – the guardian being a Jan Obrecht, surely the same man.

Within four years after the death of Lijsbette Gheeraerts, by September 1464 at the latest, Willem Obrecht had remarried with Beatrijse Jacops, daughter of Pieter Jacops and Lijsbette Smeets.⁽⁴⁶⁾ The profile of Beatrijse's family, as it emerges from the documents, is very different from that of Willem's first wife: this was a family well-established in Ghent, with lands and possessions northwest of the town (in the region around Eeklo) and by all accounts distinctly more upmarket. What connections or shared interests might account for this second marriage alliance? How could Willem have come into contact with the Jacops family? Was Jan Obrecht *filius* Jans once again involved?

A very early document concerning Beatrijse Jacops allows us to address these questions with a little more confidence (Doc. 11). It turns out that Beatrijse, too, had become orphaned while under age, upon the death of her mother some time before 23 July 1445. The particular yearbook of inheritance that contained the *staet van goed* of Beatrijse and her siblings happens to be no longer extant, yet an update was entered five years later, on 22 April 1450, and it is here, in the course of a long list of possessions, that we come across an intriguing constellation of names:⁽⁴⁷⁾

Item, the aforesaid children possess, in common and undivided, a twelfth part of the house and homestead at the Zandberg in which the father lives, with such expenses as it annually involves. Item, the six children own the sixth part of a house next to Andriese Gheeraerts, with such land excise as it annually takes and further charged as a whole with an annuity of 240 groats on the life of Janne Jacops, their uncle, canon at Dronghen. Item, the four orphans are entitled to all profit that may come from Jacop Hoebrecht, concerning which there is a legal copy.

⁽⁴⁵⁾ As with respect to Andries Gheeraerts's purchase of lands in Steeland from a Janne Ghuus (or Huus):

Kenic zij etc. dat Marie Laps wedewe Andries Gheeraerts, Jan Gheeraerts, Jan van der Baten ter causen van Catelinen Gheeraerts zijnen wetteliken wive, ende Jan Hobrecht *filius* Jans in den name ende als vooght van Ghiselen, Ghelaine, ende Betkin Gheeraerts, de voorscreven v kinderen gheel hojr van den voorscreven Andriese Gheeraerts haerlieder vader was, an deen zijde, ende Jan Huus, an dander zijde, commen zijn voor scepenen, kenden ende lijden dat van den coepe van tusschen xiiij ende xiiij ghemeten erven ghelegghen in de parochie van Steelant, die Andriese Gheeraerts voortijts cochte jeghen den vornoemden Janne Huus, zij vriendelik gheappointeert zijn... (330.24, 1449/50², f. 24, 11 May 1450).

It may add to the plausibility of the identification with the first Jan Obrecht *filius* Jans that the latter's daughter Lijsbette is mentioned as being married to a Janne van Huusse on 10 March 1473; Jan Obrecht had been a surety for the same man on 25 Sept. 1472 (above, n. 38; and 301.52, 1472/3, f. 18v).

⁽⁴⁶⁾ For this and what follows, see Wegman, *Born...*, p. 43-44 and 147-56.

⁽⁴⁷⁾ For other documents concerning this inheritance, see 330.24, 1449/50², f. 5v (22 Apr. 1450) and 330.28, 1459/60, rolle f. 20v (12 July 1460).

What we have here, some seven or eight years before the birth of the composer Jacob Obrecht, is a document concerning his future stepmother Beatrijse Jacobs which mentions, in successive sentences, his maternal grandfather Andries Gheeraerts as neighbour and his namesake, the shipper Jacop Obrecht, as debtor. Is this yet another example of social connections leading back into the same circle?

The least that can be concluded with certainty is that the family of Beatrijse Jacobs had conducted business with members of the Obrecht family well before her marriage to Willem – a situation which almost exactly parallels that of the Gheeraerts family. Moreover, there is the tantalizing possibility that the families of Willem's first and second wives, as owners of adjacent houses, had been acquainted as well, and consequently that the two marriages might have originated within a single neighbourhood in Ghent. This is indeed a possibility – even a plausible one if one considers the new information in light of everything else that is known of Jacob Obrecht's backgrounds in Ghent. However, two qualifying circumstances need pointing out:

1. It is possible but not certain that the Andries Gheeraerts mentioned here was the composer's grandfather, as there are two individuals of that name who can be traced in Ghent in the 1440s and 1450s. Confusingly, the second Andries Gheeraerts also had a daughter Lijsbette, who is mentioned by 1446 as being married to (of all people) Lievin Parijs.⁽⁴⁸⁾ However, he is distinguishable from the first Andries in that he was married to a Jaquimine Dominijs (or Doetminets) by 1440, that he had a son called Gillis, and that he died between 1452 and 1454, two to four years after the death of his namesake.⁽⁴⁹⁾ It is entirely possible that the house "next to Andriese Gheeraerts" was indeed situated next to Jacob Obrecht's grandfather, at the Meerhem canal, yet this cannot at present be taken as established.⁽⁵⁰⁾ Moreover, it is apparent from the excerpt cited above that Beatrijse herself had grown up in the house at the Zandberg.
2. There is no particular genealogical significance to the fact that the man who owed money to the Jacobs family should have been a namesake of the

⁽⁴⁸⁾ Lievin Parijs's wife is called "Lijsbette Gheeraerts *filia* Andries" on 4 April 1446; 301.38, 1445/6, f. 102v. She cannot be identical with the composer's mother, as the latter was still under age in 1450 (see above). Even more confusingly, both Lijsbettes had sisters called Kateline Gheeraerts: the composer's aunt was married to a Jan van der Baten in 1450 and had remarried with Cornelis Beelenzone by 1460 (Wegman, *Born...*, p. 355 and 360-61), whereas her namesake had given birth to the illegitimate daughter of Philips sGraven some time before 1456 (330.27, 1455/6, f. 337v; Gillis Gheeraerts is mentioned in this *staet van goed* as the orphan's uncle; Lievin Parijs became guardian of the orphan on 17 December 1457, see 330.28, 1457/8, rolle f. 4).

⁽⁴⁹⁾ 330.22, 1440/1, *zoendinc*, f. 13; 301.41, 1451/2, f. 109v and 111; 330.26, 1453/4, f. 109v; 330.26, 1454/5, f. 67v (mentions Gillis as heir of his late father Andries Gheeraerts).

⁽⁵⁰⁾ The fact that the children inherited a sixth part of the house from their mother indicates that it had already been partitioned in one or more previous divisions of estates, and hence that it had been in the mother's family, De Smet or Smeets, for at least two generations.

composer, since children were named after their godparents rather than ancestors: first names did not necessarily run in lineages. (A third individual with the name, Jacop Obrecht *filius* Laureins, has meanwhile been traced in Ghent in 1432/3.⁽⁵¹⁾) Even so, the debtor mentioned in the *staet van goed* was undoubtedly the shipper Jacop Obrecht *filius* Heinricx, since we know from other documents that he also had a longstanding debt with a Lievinkin Smeets, who is probably identical with either Beatrijse's aunt or (more probably) her cousin of that name.⁽⁵²⁾ It would appear from this that Jacop the shipper was well-acquainted with the family of Beatrijse's mother, De Smet or Smeets, quite possibly as someone living in the same neighbourhood. (Note that the children had inherited his debt from their mother.) This, in turn, might provide an explanatory background to Beatrijse's later marriage with Willem Obrecht.⁽⁵³⁾ One potential problem, however, is that the shipper Jacop Obrecht was the uncle of the second Jan Obrecht *filius* Jans, the man whom, we just concluded, was less likely to have been guardian in the Gheeraerts household. It may well be that the two branches of the Obrecht family were in sufficiently close contact for Willem to rely on connections in both, but for the moment the evidence remains as tantalizing as it is inconclusive.⁽⁵⁴⁾

Having stated these qualifications, it is only fair to admit that a strong circumstantial picture is nevertheless beginning to emerge, one that seems focused suggestively on the neighbourhood where Willem Obrecht is known to have spent his last years: the Zandberg, in the very heart of the city. It is in this neighbourhood, at the Kwaadham, that we found the first Jan Obrecht *filius* Jans, the man who is likely to have acted as guardian of Lijsbette Gheeraerts. Although Lijsbette's father Andries owned a house in the far north-east of Ghent (where the family of Beatrijse Jacobs' mother may, or may not, have possessed a house next-door), Jan Obrecht is likely to have known him because of the proximity of their lands in Steeland and Peerboom, and possibly because of commercial interests they may have shared in that region. It is also at the Zandberg that Willem's

⁽⁵¹⁾ 330.20, 1432/3, f. 351 (I am grateful to Erik Verroken for pointing out this reference to me).

⁽⁵²⁾ 330.24, 1447/8, f. 53 (8 Feb. 1448); 330.28, 1459/60, f. 19 (5 Dec. 1459); the amount was 720 groats. A Lievine Smeets is mentioned as Beatrijse's cousin in 330.40, 1495/6, f. 8v (23 Oct. 1495); the wife of a Jan dHont, she died in January 1498 (330.41, 1497/8, rolle f. 12v). For Beatrijse's aunt, the wife of Lievin van der Speye, see 330.28, 1458/9, f. 137v (26 July 1459).

⁽⁵³⁾ Jacop Obrecht had been born some time before 1389, when he was mentioned as Copkine, son of Heinric Obrecht and Kerstine Utenhove (301.11, 1389, f. 49; I am grateful to Erik Verroken for pointing out this document to me); he would have been in his sixties by the time Beatrijse Jacobs' *staet van goed* was drawn up. 330.15, 1413/4, f. 56, mentions a Jacop Obrecht who was married to a Kateline sGraven, and who may be identical with the shipper (31 Mar. 1414).

⁽⁵⁴⁾ Two namesakes of Willem Obrecht himself, both active as brewers, turn up in the years around 1400 (Wegman, *Born...*, p. 31, n. 19). Erik Verroken has kindly shared with me his discovery of several documents which reveal that the elder Willem Obrecht was a brother of Gillis Obrecht (on whom *ibid.*): 330.10, 1393/4, *zoendinc*, f. 79v; 301.15, 1398, f. 7 and 301.15, 1399, f. 48 (the latter two documents concern a house in Wachtebeke which had been bought by a Jan Hacke from Gillis Obrecht).

second wife, Beatrijse Jacops, had grown up during her childhood and where nearly all her relatives can be located.

To amplify this picture it will be helpful now to take into account the family of Beatrijse's father, Pieter Jacops, as well. Important evidence in this regard is provided by the case of her cousin Liefkin, son of Pieter's brother Lievin Jacops. Liefkin's mother Katheline van der Donct had died in 1453; his father then remarried with Kateline Rondeels and had another son, Copkin, but died soon thereafter, in 1455. The relevant *staeten van goed* from this household are all extant, and it is immediately apparent from these that the Jacops family, too, was firmly established in and around the Zandberg.⁽⁵⁵⁾ From his mother, Liefkin inherited portions of two houses at the Zandberg itself, while his father left him and his half-brother Copkin three houses in the adjacent Baaisteeg and Koningstraat, as well as the Nieuwstraat. We already know that Beatrijse's parents lived at the Zandberg (Doc. 11), and thus it is not surprising that her father Pieter should have acted as guardian for her cousin, being a neighbour as well as a close relative.⁽⁵⁶⁾ In fact, it only confirms the picture of tight social and familial integration that a member from Beatrijse's maternal family, her uncle Jacop de Smet, was also intimately involved in this case,⁽⁵⁷⁾ and that even her later husband Willem Obrecht was to make an appearance before the magistrates in connection with it.⁽⁵⁸⁾

The Zandberg and adjacent streets, all within minutes walk of St John's, were among the most prosperous areas in Ghent, probably the wealthiest of any that we have encountered so far.⁽⁵⁹⁾ The profile of Willem Obrecht's second marriage is thus quite different from that of the first: while Lijsbette Gheeraerts had been the daughter of a northern-Flemish trader who had only recently settled in the outskirts of Ghent (and whom Willem may have known chiefly because of connections in northern Flanders), Beatrijse Jacops came from a well-established Ghent family, and had grown up in one of the most prosperous areas in the inner city.

A small but telling illustration of the social position of Beatrijse's family concerns her brother Fierin, for whom her father, in the mid-1450s, had arranged a tin-smith apprenticeship lasting no less than eight years – a sizeable investment to secure a livelihood in one of the most respectable trades.⁽⁶⁰⁾ As for Beatrijse's

⁽⁵⁵⁾ 330.25, 1452/3, f. 190v (20 Feb. 1453); 330.27, 1455/6, f. 110-110v (31 Dec. 1455); 330.28, 1459/60, f. 135 (12 Aug. 1460). See also 330.28, 1457/8, f. 4, and 330.30, 1466/7, f. 87 (23 Dec. 1466).

⁽⁵⁶⁾ Appointment in 330.27, 1456/7, rolle, f. 13v (17 Jan. 1467); see also f. 50v and 60v in the same volume, and 330.28, 1457/8, f. 4 (by which time Pieter Jacops shares the guardianship with Symoen van der Wissche). Pieter Jacops was to remain guardian of Liefkin until his death in September 1464; after that, his son Jacop Jacops was to share the guardianship with Symoen van der Wissche (261bis.8, 1465/6, f. 59v and 71; 330.30, 1466/7, f. 87). Curiously, however, the man who had initially been appointed as guardian was Beatrijse's maternal uncle Jacop de Smet, who was hardly a blood relation (see below).

⁽⁵⁷⁾ He had in fact been the first guardian of Liefkin; see 330.27, 1455/6, f. 47v.

⁽⁵⁸⁾ 261bis.6, 1463/4, f. 88 (12 June 1464).

⁽⁵⁹⁾ Nicholas, *The Metamorphosis...*, p. 80-82.

⁽⁶⁰⁾ 330.27, 1456/7, f. 87v (15 Jan. 1457).

own education and upbringing, she appears to have been boarded out to her maternal uncle Jacop de Smet, who is mentioned as her *houder* (board provider) by July 1459.⁽⁶¹⁾ This is not without significance, as Beatrijse's uncle was married at this time to a Lijsbette Matthijs, who herself had previously been the fourth wife of a Cornelis Ackerman and the stepmother of his children – one of whom, upon Cornelis's death in November 1453, had been placed under the guardianship of a Heinric Ackerman.⁽⁶²⁾ The latter man, with whom Lijsbette had had to negotiate the inheritance of her stepchildren in 1453, will be encountered shortly as the father of the composer Alexander Agricola. (Ironically, having thus dealt with the father of one composer in 1453, she would deal with the father of another twelve years later: on 29 April 1465 Willem Obrecht, on behalf of his wife Beatrijse Jacobs, acquitted Lijsbette Matthijs, widow of Jacop de Smet, in connection with all inheritance matters.⁽⁶³⁾)

From a genealogical point of view the relationship between the two composers is of course so distant as to seem insignificant. However, in a city of about 70,000 inhabitants it does suggest something about the proximity of their social and familial backgrounds that a connection like this could have existed at all: after all, one did not marry just anyone. This may have been true especially for the Ackerman family, which belonged to the aristocracy of Ghent and most of whose members – including Cornelis in his first three marriages – were careful to marry only nobility (see below). Apart from anything else, therefore, the fact that Beatrijse's aunt had been the wife of Cornelis Ackerman provides another confirmation of her family's social standing within Ghent.

To summarize, Willem Obrecht's two marriages involved families with quite different social profiles; the difference between these families may well have reflected a rise in social position for the young trumpeter himself in the 1450s and 1460s. Lijsbette Gheeraerts was the daughter of a trader from Hughersluus who had only recently settled in the northern outskirts of Ghent. Her family was not exactly poor (apart from anything else she brought in a dowry of 2,400 groats), but Andries was new to the city, and in all probability better connected at home than here. Lijsbette's marriage seems explicable in terms of these northern-Flemish connections: a Jan Obrecht *filius* Jans owned lands within walking distance of Hughersluus, in the villages of Peerboom and Steeland. Although there is no proof of his kinship ties with the trumpeter Willem, he seems to have been the man who acted as Lijsbette's guardian after her father's death in April 1450, and again as Jacob Obrecht's guardian after Lijsbette's death in July 1460.

By contrast, the family of Beatrijse Jacobs was well established in the city, on and around the square known as the Zandberg, one of the most prosperous neigh-

⁽⁶¹⁾ 330.28, 1458/9, f. 137v (26 July 1459). For this type of arrangement in Ghent, see Danneels, *Weduwen*, p. 43-55.

⁽⁶²⁾ 330.26, 1453/4, rolle, f. 41v; and 330.28, 1459/60, f. 3v.

⁽⁶³⁾ Wegman, *Born...*, p. 44, n. 44.

bourhoods in fifteenth-century Ghent. It is not clear what connections might account for her marriage to Willem Obrecht, yet the Jan Obrecht *filius* Jans who possessed lands in Peerboom and Steeland also happens to have lived close to the Zandberg – just around the corner, in fact, from where Willem and Beatrijse are known to have lived in 1485-88. Alternatively, the contact may have been established through a different branch of the Obrecht family, in particular the aging shipper Jacop Obrecht, who seems to have been well-enough acquainted with the family of Beatrijse's mother, Smeets or De Smet, to have undertaken sizeable and longstanding debts with them.

Willem Obrecht and Beatrijse Jacobs are known to have bought a house in the Talboomstraat (yet another street off the Zandberg) in 1485, yet there is every reason to assume that they had lived in this neighbourhood throughout the more than thirty years of their marriage.⁽⁶⁴⁾ If one tentatively had to situate the composer's childhood anywhere in Ghent, it is in this neighbourhood, virtually in the shadow of the church of St John (today St Bavo), where Willem worshipped regularly in the guild chapel of the trumpeters as well as the confraternity chapel of Our Lady. Jacob Obrecht was always to maintain ties with this part of the town: after Willem's death on 22 November 1488, he and his stepmother each inherited one half of the house. Within the next four years Beatrijse remarried with a Zegher de Leenheer and moved in with him in the Koestraat (about 250 m. on the other side of St John's). In November 1492 the composer bought her half of the house as well, and issued a quitclaim for Beatrijse and her new husband concerning all inheritance matters that had passed between them. There is no record of his ever having parted from the house in the remaining years of his life.

New documentary findings allow us, by way of conclusion, to sketch the final chapter of Beatrijse Jacobs's life. Within nine months after the final settlement with Jacob Obrecht, by August 1493, her second husband Zegher de Leenheer died as well, and she had to come to a similar settlement with his son Joes from a previous marriage.⁽⁶⁵⁾ Beatrijse continued to live alone in the Koestraat (she was probably in her early fifties or somewhat older), yet within the next two years her health deteriorated seriously. By October 1495 she was reported to be no longer able to walk, stand up or lie down without help, and consequently Beatrijse had to arrange for herself to be housed, cared for, taken to her confessor and (in due course) properly buried, by her cousin Lievine Smeets with her husband Janne de Hont, in return for granting them the full usufruct of everything she owned.⁽⁶⁶⁾ Some six months later, on 6 May 1496, we learn that Beatrijse had "recently" passed away, leaving only one heir, her elder brother Jacop Jacobs.⁽⁶⁷⁾

⁽⁶⁴⁾ For this and what follows, see Wegman, *Born...*, p. 147-56.

⁽⁶⁵⁾ 330.40, 1493/4, f. 1v (31 Aug. 1493).

⁽⁶⁶⁾ 330.40, 1495/6, f. 8v (23 Oct. 1495). See also Danneels, *Weduwen...*, p. 392.

⁽⁶⁷⁾ 330.40, 1495/6, f. 51v (6 May 1496).

During Beatrijse's last years Jacob Obrecht lived and worked at Antwerp (about 50 km. north-east of Ghent), and it seems plausible that he would have visited his home town on occasion. The nearest we have to documentary evidence of a possible visit comes in the year after Beatrijse's death. In the summer of 1497 Ghent's prestigious archers' guild of St George organised a six-week archery contest, for which participating guilds from other towns were invited to arrive by 20 May.⁽⁶⁸⁾ A local chronicler reported that the Antwerp delegation "went to church in very stately fashion, with great splendour, and had a Mass sung very solemnly, with twelve singers all dressed in red". Since Antwerp's bowman guild of St Sebastian and the two archers' guilds of St George were all based in the church of Our Lady, where Obrecht was choirmaster, it is possible that the singers accompanying them during the Ghent visit had been recruited from the church. As it happens, the number of endowed positions for singers of polyphony in the church of Our Lady (one of which was held by the composer) was exactly twelve.⁽⁶⁹⁾ There is thus a good probability that the archery contest provided one more opportunity for Obrecht in the late 1490s to visit his home-town.

Alexander Agricola

"We ourselves would opt for the vicinity of Ghent if one asked us to advance a plausible hypothesis": thus wrote Edmond Vander Straeten in 1885 on the question of the birth place of Alexander Ackerman, the composer universally known in his time as Agricola.⁽⁷⁰⁾ Vander Straeten footnoted his comment with a reference to the sixth volume of *La musique aux Pays-Bas*, where the actual page cited, curiously, had presented no evidence to suggest Ghent even as a possibility: the most one finds there is citations of two individuals named Ackerman (neither necessarily related to the composer), one in Bruges and the other in the county of Brabant.⁽⁷¹⁾ Even so, this appears not to have deterred Vander Straeten from calling him "le maître gantois" in his eighth and final volume, published in 1888.⁽⁷²⁾ Subsequent scholarship has treated Vander Straeten's hypothesis as it has so many of his more adventurous speculations: with discreet silence. However, documentary corroboration of the hypothesis came a few years ago, when Bonnie Blackburn discovered a hitherto unknown lament and epitaph for the composer in a sixteenth-century manuscript at Brussels. While the introductory lament, from

⁽⁶⁸⁾ De Potter, *Gent...*, II, p. 171-83. For the next sentence, see *ibid.*, p. 177.

⁽⁶⁹⁾ Wegman, *Born...*, p. 294, n. 16.

⁽⁷⁰⁾ Edmond Vander Straeten, *La musique aux Pays-Bas avant le XIX^e siècle*, 8 vols. (Brussels, 1867-88), VII, p. 134. On p. 131 of the same volume, he had presented documentary confirmation of his earlier suggestion that *Agricola* was a Latinization of the Flemish family name *Ackerman*: the Burgundian court accounts for the year 1500 record the administration of a gift to "Alexander Ackerman, chantre de la chappelle domesticque de mondit seigneur" to enable him to purchase a horse.

⁽⁷¹⁾ *Ibid.*, VI, p. 38-39.

⁽⁷²⁾ *Ibid.*, VIII, p. 359.

the viewpoint of Agricola's biography, is relatively uninformative, the concluding eight-line epitaph provides two valuable pieces of information: it calls the composer "ung Ganthois", and specifies the date of death as 15 August 1506 (Doc. 18).⁽⁷³⁾

Epitaph. Here lies one whom death ensnared: a Ghenter, formerly called Master Alexander Agricola, well spoken of in music. Death dispatched him on 15 August 1506: God grant that he be comforted and seated among the righteous. Amen.

Ever since the mid-nineteenth century the principal source for Agricola's biography has been another epitaph, *Musica quid defles?*, which survives as the text of an anonymous four-part motet printed in Georg Rhau's collection *Symphoniae iucundae* of 1538.⁽⁷⁴⁾ Cast as a dialogue between the poet and Music, it follows standard late-medieval epigraphy in recording, successively, the identity of the deceased, the virtues that had won him fame, the date, location, and cause of death, and the age at which he died:⁽⁷⁵⁾

Music, what wailest thou? My care and my glory has died.
Is it Alexander? Even he, my Agricola.
Pray tell, what manner of man was he? Renowned for his sounds and for his workmanship.
Which was the place that seized him? The land by Valladolid.
Who had brought this Belgian along? The Great King, Philip himself.
Of what disease did he die? He perished of a raging fever.
What was his age? As old as the sixtieth year.
The sun, what was its position? Virgo was at the zenith.

This much, then, has been known for more than a century: that Agricola had died at age sixty in the employ of Archduke Philip the Fair of Burgundy, king of Castile, during the latter's fated second journey to Spain in 1505-6. Court accounts confirm Agricola's appointment as a singer at the Burgundian chapel on 6 August 1500, and record the last known payment of his salary at Valladolid on 22 July 1506, three weeks before his death.⁽⁷⁶⁾ Before the calendar reform of 1582 the sun entered Virgo on 13 August;⁽⁷⁷⁾ the Brussels epitaph confirms Agricola's

⁽⁷³⁾ Chronique of Nicaise Ladam, Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MSS 14864-65, modern foliation f. 70v-71. I am deeply grateful to Dr Blackburn for sharing her discovery with me and permitting me to publish it here (private communication, 8 Mar. 1996).

⁽⁷⁴⁾ First published in François-Joseph Fétis, *Biographie universelle des musiciens*, 8 vols. (2d ed.; Paris, 1868), I, p. 33-34 at 33; the biographical information is evaluated in Robert Eitner, "Alexander Agricola", *Monatshefte für Musik-Geschichte*, XV (1883), p. 111-13, and Vander Straeten, *La musique...*, VII, p. 132-34. For an edition of the motet, see Georg Rhau, *Musikdrucke aus den Jahren 1538 bis 1545 in praktischer Neuauflage*, ed. Hans Albrecht (Kassel, 1959), III, p. 165-68. In his review of the latter edition, Ludwig Finscher (*Die Musikforschung*, 16 (1963), p. 203-6, at 206) suggested that the epitaph might have been set to music by Heinrich Isaac, since the *Nil prosunt lacrimae*, which follows the epitaph in Rhau's print and is ascribed to Isaac, seems to be a postscript.

⁽⁷⁵⁾ Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death* (New York, 1981), p. 216-30.

⁽⁷⁶⁾ Fétis, *Biographie universelle*, I, p. 33; Van Doorslaer, "La chapelle...", p. 47, 53-54 and 139.

⁽⁷⁷⁾ I thank Dr Leofranc Holford-Strevens for this information.

death-date as 15 August. The epitaph printed by Rhau names “Valdoletanus ager” as the place of death, which would seem to suggest some area outside the gates of Valladolid. The Brussels lament adds that Agricola “est dedens Veldoli inhumé”, indicating that he was interred within the city walls (Doc. 18).

While there is no reason to call into question any of this information, the figure given for the composer’s age should probably not be taken too literally. It is entirely possible that Agricola was exactly sixty years old when he died, yet one cannot rule out that the poet would also have chosen this round figure if the composer’s actual age had been, say, sixty-two or fifty-seven – not just for poetic reasons, but because the age of any individual in this period tended to be remembered and recorded only with a considerable degree of latitude and imprecision.⁽⁷⁸⁾ Thus, while the Rhau epitaph establishes 1446 as Agricola’s year of birth, it seems prudent to assume, for the purposes of archival research, that he could have been born at any point within a margin of about five years on either side of that date.

A thorough search through the yearbooks of inheritance for the period 1441/2 to 1469/70 has yielded ample documentation on the family Ackerman,⁽⁷⁹⁾ but no evidence that a child named Alexander had lost either or both of his parents during this period: there is no appointment of a guardian, let alone a *staet van goed*. Needless to say, this outcome only confirms the truism, illustrated by the cases of Bordon and Obrecht, that our knowledge of any individual in fifteenth-century Ghent tends to correlate with the level of mortality in his or her family. Still, even if no business concerning Alexander appears to have been conducted before the magistrates of inheritance during the years of his minority, documentary confirmation of his family ties in Ghent has in fact emerged in a very different type of source and at a much later date: the city accounts of 1498/99. The city of Ghent charged a so-called *exuwe* or *yssue* tax on all possessions of non-burgesses that left the town through inheritance, marriage, ordination, or foundations and charitable donations outside the town. The *exuwe* receipts were always meticulously recorded in the annual city accounts; we owe it to an entry of just this kind, in the accounts of 1488/89, that Jacob Obrecht was first discovered to

⁽⁷⁸⁾ For instance, Danneels (*Weduwen...*, p. 235-36) concludes on the basis of her own research in the yearbooks of inheritance at Ghent in the late fifteenth century:

If someone already went as far as to state a figure, he would add immediately that this indicated the age only by approximation. The expressions that were available to make that restriction seem to have been inexhaustible. One stated that someone was *omtrent, verre* or *wel* so many years old. Another favourite expression was *wel... of meer*. One could also express one’s uncertainty by stating two figures. The difference between the two alternatives could sometimes amount to several years.

⁽⁷⁹⁾ I learned about Agricola’s Ghent origins only during the final stage of my doctoral research on Jacob Obrecht, having by then already sifted systematically through the yearbooks of the by-law and inheritance for the period 1440-1505; consequently, the research on Agricola has had to involve a new search through these same sources, and the picture available at present is considerably more sketchy than that for Obrecht and Bordon.

be of Ghent origin.⁽⁸⁰⁾ Alexander Agricola's case is described in 1498/99 as follows (Doc. 17):

Item, concerning the inheritance of Lijsbette Naps, over the entire estate, which was shared by Jan and Alexandre Ackermans, brothers, children of Heinderic, [a tax of] 408 groats, 26 groats deducted for the announcer, the *exuwe* officials and the messengers, remains net 379 [recte 382] groats.

The document establishes that Alexander Agricola was the son of Heinric Ackerman and Lijsbette Naps, and that he and his brother Jan were the only children of this marriage alive in 1498/99. Given that Alexander was born around 1446, Lijsbette Naps must have died at age seventy at the very least; she was evidently a widow, since her husband Heinric is not mentioned as one of the inheritors. Since the *exuwe* rates were 15% for movables and 12% for immovables, it can be established that the effects which were identified as taxable were worth 2,720-3,400 groats. It is not possible to determine whether this was in fact the whole of the estate (though that seems unlikely), nor why the Ackermans brothers were liable to paying *exuwe* tax, from which burgesses were exempt. In the case of Alexander we know that he had spent more than two decades in Italy and France, and it may well be that he had relinquished his status as Ghent burgess upon or after his departure, although I have found no record of his having formally done so. His brother Jan, on the other hand, was evidently a burgess, as he registered his claim to Lijsbette Naps's estate with the magistrates of inheritance, for whose protection and mediation only burgesses were eligible (Doc. 16):

Meester Jan Ackerman wishes to share in the goods and the entire inheritance left by Lijsbette Naps, his late mother, desiring to benefit from the assets and promising to honour the debts, according to the law of the *poort*, and he insured this upon himself and all his possessions, his surety being Clais Helscap, yet the same master Jan Ackerman promises to keep the aforesaid Clais, his surety, free from all costs and to acquit him, ensuring this, too, upon himself and all his possessions. Done on 23 February 1499.

There is a case for identifying this *meester* Jan Ackerman with the composer Johannes Agricola of whom a very modest oeuvre survives: besides the *Fors seulement* arrangement by "Jo. Agricola" transmitted in SGallS 461, there is a three-part song *Dat ic mijn lijden aldus helen moet*, ascribed to "Jannes Agricola" in FlorBN BR 229 but given to Petrus Elinck in SegC s.s. The case for identifying this composer with the brother of Alexander Agricola rests chiefly upon evidence from the Confraternity of Our Lady at 's-Hertogenbosch, which in 1486-93 and again briefly in 1496, employed a singer Johannes Agricola who is described in

⁽⁸⁰⁾ Berten de Keyzer, "Jacob Obrecht en zijn vader Willem: De Gentse relaties", *Mens en Melodie*, 8 (1953), p. 317-19, at 319; see also Wegman, *Born...*, p. 149-52.

the records as a Ghenter.⁽⁸¹⁾ On the other hand, unlike Alexander's brother the 's-Hertogenbosch singer is never mentioned with the academic title of master. This might argue against identification (unless the degree had been obtained some time in the late 1490s), yet there is little reason to doubt that the Johannes Agricola from Ghent who was active at 's-Hertogenbosch was at least a close relative of the composer Alexander.

The death of Alexander Agricola's mother, shortly before 23 February 1499, comes in one of several periods in his life for which documentation on his whereabouts is lacking. It occurred nearly five years after his last appearance at the court of Naples, in March 1494,⁽⁸²⁾ and a year and a half before he was to accept employment at the court of Burgundy, in August 1500. It is unlikely that Alexander would have been living in Ghent at the time of his mother's death, since the tax whose administration has enabled us to identify him was levied on effects taken out of the city – and this usually implies that the inheritor lived abroad. It has been suggested that for part or all of this period Agricola might have been active at the court of France (where he had already worked for some time before 1492). This would make good sense, since Charles VIII is known to have undertaken repeated diplomatic efforts in 1492-3 to have the composer (who had apparently left his service without permission) returned to the French royal chapel.⁽⁸³⁾ These efforts had extended as far as Florence and Naples, and one reason why they appear to have been discontinued after 1493 could be that the strategy proved successful and that Alexander did in fact return to the French court.

As far as the family Ackerman in Ghent is concerned, and especially the household in which Jan and Alexander grew up, we are as yet some way away from the kind of social profile that has become available for Jacob Obrecht and Pieter Bordon. Of the three composer's families considered so far, however, Ackerman does seem to have been the most influential and wealthy, a family of patricians. During the notorious Ghent War of 1379-85, one of its members, the dean of woolweavers François Ackerman, had played a key role in the city's

⁽⁸¹⁾ Albert Smijers (ed.), *De Illustre Lieve Vrouwe Broederschap te 's-Hertogenbosch* (Amsterdam, 1932), p. 181-94 and 200; the composer is called "Johannes de Gandavo" in 1487 (*ibid.*, p. 182). Johannes Agricola arrived together with a *heer* Laurens on 13 December 1486, on which day they were rewarded for their expenses in travelling from Bergen op Zoom. He worked continuously at 's Hertogenbosch until 24 June 1493, altogether almost exactly six and a half years. Johannes returned for a period of two weeks in the spring of 1496 but the confraternity did not wish to retain him at that point (*ibid.*, p. 200).

⁽⁸²⁾ Allan W. Atlas and Anthony M. Cummings, "Agricola, Ghiselin, and Alfonso II of Naples", *The Journal of Musicology*, 7 (1989), p. 540-48.

⁽⁸³⁾ Edward Lerner, "Agricola, Alexander", *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London, 1980), I, p. 162-64, at 162; Martin Picker, "A Letter of Charles VIII of France Concerning Alexander Agricola", in Jan LaRue (ed.), *Aspects of Medieval and Renaissance Music: A Birthday Offering to Gustave Reese* (New York, 1966), p. 665-72; Allan W. Atlas, "Alexander Agricola and Ferrante I of Naples", *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, XXX (1977), p. 313-19.

political affairs, being at one point even installed as regent of the town.⁽⁸⁴⁾ Closer to the composer's time is the François Ackerman who is mentioned among the Flemish nobility in 1457, holding a fief at Warebeke (30 km. southwest of Ghent), and carrying a shield with three martlets at the top.⁽⁸⁵⁾ Archival sources reveal that he and his brothers Cornelis and Ghiselbrecht were the sons of François Ackerman and the damsel *joncvrouw* Lijsbette tSuuls.⁽⁸⁶⁾ The composer's father Heinric Ackerman was evidently a close relative of the three brothers, probably a cousin. This can be concluded from the fact that upon the death of Cornelis, in November 1453, Heinric was appointed guardian of his orphaned daughter Annekin, and was to act in that capacity for more than three years, until February 1457.⁽⁸⁷⁾ (Tragically, the nine-year-old Annekin had already lost her mother, *joncvrouw* Margriete sBrunen, in January 1452, and her elder half-brother Pieter in September 1453, just two months previously.⁽⁸⁸⁾) As a guardian Heinric would have had to sort out the effects and come to an arrangement concerning the inheritance and upbringing of Annekin, with Cornelis's widow Lijsbette Matthijs, who had been his (fourth) wife for less than twenty-two months. In fact, a final settlement between Lijsbette and the Ackerman family was not to be reached until April 1457, and even after that there would be the occasional inheritance matters that passed between them, as in August 1459 – by which time Lijsbette had already remarried with Jacop de Smet, the uncle of Jacob Obrecht's future step-mother Beatrijse Jacobs.⁽⁸⁹⁾

As far as the family of Alexander Agricola in Ghent is concerned, this is more or less the picture as it can be established at present. There are numerous other documents in which Heinric Ackerman is mentioned tangentially, yet the broader picture within which these documents could become more than isolated particles of archival evidence is as yet lacking. Failing that kind of picture there

⁽⁸⁴⁾ The literature on this troubled episode in Ghent's political history is extensive; for accessible introductions in English, see David Nicholas, *Medieval Flanders* (London - New York, 1992), p. 227-31 and 317-20, and, for the larger historical background, id., *The van Artevelde of Ghent: The Varieties of Vendetta and the Hero in History* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1988).

⁽⁸⁵⁾ Ernest d'Hane-Steenhuysse and Jules Huytens, *La noblesse de Flandre du X^e au XVII^e siècle* (Brussels, 1863-4), II, p. 21.

⁽⁸⁶⁾ For two documents concerning the division of the estate of their late mother, see 330.22, 1441/2, f. 27v (14 Dec. 1441) and 85v (6 July 1442).

⁽⁸⁷⁾ See 330.26, 1453/4, rolle f. 41v (15 Nov. 1453): Heinric Ackerman is appointed guardian over Annekin Ackerman after the death of her father Cornelis; 330.27, 1456/7, f. 16 (18 Feb. 1457): *joncvrouw* Agneeze Ackermans, cousin of Annekin, becomes guardian in place of Heinric.

⁽⁸⁸⁾ 330.25, 1451/2, f. 32 (11 Jan. 1452): Pauwels de Brune became guardian of Annekin Ackermans, daughter of Cornelis, after the death of her mother *joncvrouw* Margriete sBrunen, Cornelis's third wife. Annekin was to be described as being "xvij jaeren oud" on 3 June 1461 (330.29, 1460/1, f. 89-89v) and consequently she was born in 1443-4. For the death of Pieter Ackerman, son of Cornelis with his second wife, *joncvrouw* Margriete van der Varent, see 330.26, 1453/4, rolle f. 27v (15 Sept. 1453); see also 330.23, 1442/3, f. 46 (5 Nov. 1442) for the death and the inheritance of his mother. Cornelis's first wife, *joncvrouw* Marie sCleercx had died without leaving any children; see 330.23, 1443/4 (21 Oct. 1443).

⁽⁸⁹⁾ 330.27, 1456/7, f. 107v (30 April 1457); 330.28, 1459/60, f. 3v.

is as yet no point in asking the kinds of questions that can now be addressed with some confidence in the case of Obrecht – questions about the intricate networks of family, profession, neighbourhood and parish connections, and the ways in which these were intertwined. However, given the apparent wealth and status of the Ackerman family within Ghent, there is every reason to expect that further research will bring to light the kind of information that has now given greater depth to our knowledge of the early years of Pieter Bordon and Jacob Obrecht.

Having thus outlined the Ghent backgrounds of three fifteenth-century composers, the chief question that remains is whether there was anything in those backgrounds that predisposed them for the creative careers they eventually pursued. In general it would appear that background made little difference, since any boy with a good ear and a good voice, no matter what the social position of his parents, had an equal chance of being admitted to a choral foundation if offered an audition. Indeed, given that these foundations were essentially charitable institutions, they may well have represented one of the few areas in fifteenth-century society where poor boys were at a greater advantage than usual. And the best way to capitalize on that advantage beyond one's years as a chorister was to opt for a clerical career, thereby becoming eligible for scholarships supporting further education.

Yet Bordon, Obrecht and Agricola were not poor – we would probably have known much less about them if they had been. In his mid-to-late twenties, Bordon was already the owner of a house worth 1,920 groats, sold another for 1,440 groats and collected an annual income of 720 groats from two annuities – all this from his inheritance alone, never mind what paid work he might choose to accept in addition. Similar figures have been established for Obrecht⁽⁹⁰⁾ and those for Agricola may well turn out to have exceeded those of his two fellow-Ghenters. Did the three men then pursue a compositional career because they could afford the luxury?

In the cases of Obrecht and Bordon it might be argued that their primary vocation was in fact the priesthood, and that such positions as choirmaster or *cotidianist* could at least initially have been regarded as ways of getting by, in anticipation of beneficed pastoral positions. (This is not to deny that both had fathers who had been active as practical musicians – though neither composer had actually inherited their father's musicianship as a proper trade.) The trajectory by which composition, in their own perception, developed from a sideline to something resembling an artistic calling might well have been so gradual as to have involved no single conscious choice at all. Precarious and unpredictable though the musical existence was, within the framework of an ecclesiastical career one was at least not forced to lead it for reasons of economic necessity.

⁽⁹⁰⁾ Wegman, *Born...*, p. 39-43.

From this perspective the case of Alexander Agricola seems a great deal more interesting, even though it remains as yet the least well documented. Agricola was not a cleric but made his living entirely as a musician – as a “recreeur des seigneurs et des dames” as the lament says (Doc. 17). He supported a family; one of his children, in fact, may have been the Alessandro Agricola who turns up as a singer at the court of Mantua in 1522-3.⁽⁹¹⁾ If this suggests the possibility of a family trade, it seems only the more interesting that Agricola’s brother Janne Ackerman is likely to have been a singer and composer as well. One may well wonder, if that is the case, what it was about their background that led them to this career choice, and indeed what kind of people their parents Heinric Ackerman and Lijsbette Naps had been. What makes this question particularly intriguing is the fact that the Ackermans are known to have been among the patrician families of Ghent, and belonged to a social stratum that was not traditionally associated with the professional exercise of practical musicianship.

Questions still abound, then, yet what makes it so rewarding to entertain them is the realistic expectation, justified by findings such as reported here, that answers will be forthcoming – even if they are sure to be different from anything one might venture to predict at present. The Ghent city archive is one of the richest in the Low Countries and whatever it may demand in patience and persistence on the part of the scholar, it has never yet failed to repay with astonishingly rich results.

⁽⁹¹⁾ Vander Straeten, *La musique...*, VIII, p. 527.

APPENDIX: DOCUMENTS

PIETER BORDON

Doc. 1 (1440/1) Archive of St James, Ghent, *Cotidiane* accounts, 1174

Accounting dates of quarters are as follows: (1) St Bavo: 1 October; (2) Christmas Eve: 24 December; (3) "half-March": 15 March; (4) St John the Baptist: 24 June.

1440/1	(1) Valeriaen	xvj sc. par.
	(2) Valeriaen	xix sc. par.
	(3) Valeriaen Bourdoen	xix sc. par.
	(4) Valeriaen	xvj sc. par.

Doc. 2 (26 January 1465): SAG 330.30, 1464/5, rolle f. 11v

Lieven Denijs wart voocht van Pieterkin Bordon Valeriaenszone bij Margriete van Wijmeersch, zinen wive was, versterfte de patre, borghe Katheline van Wijmeersch, der weesen moeye, haer selfs wijf zijnde. Actum xxvj^a die januarij anno lxiij^o [1465 n. s.]

Doc. 3 (22 June 1465): SAG 330.30, 1464/5, rolle f. 15v

Uute dien dat Lieven Parijs, als vooght van Pieterkin Bordon Valeriaenszone bij Margriete van Wiemeersch zijne wive was, metgaders derselven Margriete der weesen moeder, commen es etc. den oppervooghdn van der selven weese, ende heeft hemlieden te kennen ghegheven dat hem Lauwerijnse Vreethoof, die nu in huwelike begrepen heeft der weesen moeder vornoemt, tanderen tijden vervordert heeft int steerfhuus van der vornoemde Valeriaen tanverdene ende wech te draghene seker catteylic goet weert wesende totter somme van xij lb. gr., ghelijc de vornoemde Margriete der weesen moeder ter kennesse van scepenen vornoemt selve ghekent ende verclaert heeft: So eist dat scepenen den oppervooghdn vornoemt, omme de vorscreven weese jeghen de vornoemde xij lb. gr. gherecompenseert ende begroot te zijne ooc totter somme van xij lb. gr., gheconsenteert hebben ende consenteren dat de vornoemde vooght in minderinghe van desen xij lb. gr. doe panden, eyghendommen ende afwinnen de heelt van eenen huus ende stede toebehorende den vornoemden Lauwerijnse Vreethoof ende Margriete zijnen wive, staende up de gracht tusschen Laghelkins ende Ostkins brugghen omme der vornoemde weese tzijne daer an te verhalen in also verren alst ghedraghet. Actum xxij die junij anno lxx^o.

Doc. 4 (11 September 1465): SAG 330.30, 1465/6, f. 4v

Kenlijc zij etc. dat uute dien dat Margriete van Wijmeersch, weduwe van Valeriane Bordon, nu wettich wijf van Laurens Vreethoof, ende Pieterkin Bordon, der vornoemde Margrieten zone bij den vornoemden Valeriaen, haren man was, daer vooght af es Lieven Parijs, al noch ter tijt niet verdeelt noch verpaert gheziin en hebben van der versterften van de vornoemde Valeriaen, daer de weese vorscreven gheheel hoir af es, ende dat hem de vornoemde Laurens Vreethoof tanderen tijden vervordert heeft int tvornoemde sterfhuus te anverdene ende wech te draghene zeker catteylic goed, wert wesende toter somme van xij lb. gr., also de selve Margriete selve ghekent heeft ter kennesse van scepenen den overvooghdn, zo eist dat de vornoemde weeze jeghen dese xij lb. gr. wel ende ghetrauwelic gherecompenseert ende begroot te zijne, ooc toter somme van xij lb. gr., al nu commen es voor etc., die in dese jeghewordeghe kennesse haerlieder consent ghedaen hebben, Catheline van Wijmeersch, zuster van de vornoemde Margriete, moeye van de vornoemde weese, haer selfs wijf zijnde, ende heeft ter ontlastinghe ende in quitenesse van de vornoemde Mergriete, haren suster, den vornoemden weesen gheven te sinen proppen goede de somme van xx sc. gr.

siaers lijfrente, tsinen live besedt, naer den uutwijsene van de cyrographie dier af es, ende ditte in betalinghe van de somme van ix lb. gr. ten claren verstante dat de vornoemde Margriete, der weesen moeder, bij consente van Cathelinen haren suster, de vornoemde xx sc. gr. siaers lijfrente jaerlicx up heffen ende ontfanghen zal, mids dat zoe deselve weese hautd ende sustineert van cleedren ende habituacien, toot an dat de vornoemde weeze zijn zellefs man worden es, ende dan aller eerst zal de vornoemde weese de vornoemde xx sc. gr. siaers hebben ende heffen ende ontfanghen zijn leven lanc gheduerende, naer den uutwijsene van der vorscreven cyrographie. Ende voor tsorplus van der vornoemde xij lb. gr., heffende iij lb. gr., es wettich ghepart ende gheeyghent de heelft van eenen huus ende stede toebehoorende de vornoemde Laurens Vreethoofte ende Margriete zijnen wive, daer af de vornoemden weezen van te vooren dander heelft toebehoorde bij de versterften van de vornoemde Valeriaen, zijnen vader was, tselve huus staende up de gracht tusschen Laghelkin ende Oskins brugghen, daer der weezen moeder nu ter tijt in woont, welke heeltscheede bij den ghezwoeren erfscheeders van der vorscreven stede van Ghend ghepresen es, wert wesende boven de commer dier jaerlicx outgaet de somme van vier lb. gr. Ende hier mede es de vornoemde weese vulbewijst van zijnen xij lb. gr., dwelke tgoedt es dat de selve weese heeft van zijnen vorscreven vader was, ende hier up heeft de vornoemde vooght wettelic quite ghescolden de vornoemde Margriete, der weesen moeder, van der versterfte van de vornoemde Valeriaen, zijnen vader was, ende de selve vooght wert verlaten der vooghdien ende quite ghescolden ende de moeder wert vooght van haren vorscreven kinde. Ende zo vooght zijnde versekert de vorscreven weesen staet up haer etc., ende voort was borghe over haer Cathelinen van Wijmeersch, haer zuster. Actum xj^a die septembris anno lxxv^o.

Doc. 5 (1466-1472): Archive of St James, Ghent, *Cotidiane* accounts, 1198-1203

Accounting dates of quarters are as follows: (1) St Bavo: 1 October; (2) Christmas Eve: 24 December; (3) "half-March": 15 March; (4) St John the Baptist: 24 June.

1466/7	(1) Pieter Bordoën	xxij sc. vj den. par.
	(2) Pieter Bordoën	xxxij sc. par.
	(3) Pieter Bordoën	xxxvij sc. par.
	(4) Pieter Bordoën	xxxvj sc. par.
1467/8	(1) Pieter Bordon	ij lb. xvij sc. par.
	(2) Pieter Bordon	ij lb. par.
	(3) Pieter Bordon	xxxix sc. par.
	(4) Pieter Bordon	ij lb. par.
1468/9	(1) Pieter Bordon	ij lb. ix sc. par.
	(2) Pieter Bordon	ij lb. iij sc. par.
	(3) Pieter Bordon	lvj sc. par.
	(4) Pieter Bordon	lv. sc. par.
1470/1	(2) Pieter Bordon	xlviij sc. par.
	(3) Pieter Bordon	xlviij sc. par.
	(4) Pieter Bordon	lvij sc. par.
1471/2	(1) Pieter Bordon	ij lb. iij sc. par.
	(2) Pieter Bordon	lij sc. par.
	(3) Pieter Bordon	xliij sc. par.
	(4) Pieter Bordon	xxiij sc. par.

Doc. 6 (1471/2-1478/9): RAG 524, *Cotidiane* accounts of St Michael's, Ghent, 1471/2-1478/9

Accounting dates of quarters are as follows: (1) St Tecla: 23 September, (2) Nativity: 25 December, (3) Annunciation: 25 March, (4) St John the Baptist: 24 June.

1471/2 (4) Petro Pardoen ij lb. viij sc. par.
1472/3 (1) Petro Burdoen iij lb. xvij sc. par.
(2) Domino Petro Burdoen ij lb. xvij sc. par.
(3) Domino Petro Burdoen ij lb. xv sc. viij den.
(4) Domino Petro Bordoem ij lb. xvj sc. par.
1473/4 (1) Domino Petro Burdoen iij lb. xvij sc. par.
(2) Domino Petro Burdoen iij lb. par.
(3) Domino Petro Burdoen ij lb. xij sc. par.

1478/9 (1) Domino Petro Bordon xxx sc. par.

Doc. 7 (2 December 1472): SAG 301.52, 1472/3, f. 46v

Kenlic etc. dat uute dien dat Pieter Bordon Valeriaenszone in meeninghen es bij de gracie Gods hem curtelings te voughene ten state van den priesterschepe, so es al nu Mergriete van Wijmeersch, weduwe van Valeriaen Bordon vornoemt, moeder van der vorscreven Pieter Bordon, commen es voor scepenen, ende kende dat zoe uut goeder joncsten ende minnen heeft ghegheven ende gheeft den zelven Pieter Bordon, haeren zone, de somme van twee pont gr. siaers lijfrente ten live van den zelven Pieteren, te betaelen ten tween paymenten in elc jair, dair af deeste payment draghende twintich scellinghen gr. vallen ende verschijnen sal te Kerssavende int jair lxij eerstcommende, ende dander payment insghelicx draghende xx sc. gr. tSente Jansmesse anno lxxij daer naest volghende, ende also voort van jaere te jaere, telken Kerssavende ende telken Sente Jansmesse achtervolghende xx sc. gr., gheldende tleven lanc van den voorscreven Pieter Bordon gheduerende ende niet langhere, altijte met zulken ghelde als telken daghe van paymente ghemuent, courant ende ganc hebben sal binnen Ghend, welke voorscreven ij lb. gr. siaers lijfrente de vornoemde Margriete van Wijmeersch heeft wel ende redelic gheassigneert, bewijst, versekert, ende besedt up twee huusen ende steden metten lochtinghen, ghelaghen ende aysementen daer toe behoorende, deen huus staende up de gracht over de Vrindachmarct tussen Laghelkins ende Ostkins brugghen, Joes Sorghe ghehuust an deen zijde ende Jan de Stobbeliere an dander zijde, ende dander huus staende inde Nieuport, Jan van den Hecke ghehuust an deen zijde ende Pieter Voshol an dander zijde, in zulker wijs ghemelt dat de voorscreven Pieter in toecommenden tijden ghebrec hadde van betale van eeneghen payment van der voorscreven lijfrente, dat hij selve ghebrec zal moghen verhalen ende verrekenen ande voorscreven huusen ende steden als pant ende zeker van der voorscreven lijfrente bij pandinghe ende eyghendomme naer de wet van de poort, wel naer staende ghemelt dat de voorscreven pant ende zekere naermaels bij brande of onghevalle of andersins ghedestruweert worde ofte gheede, soe heeft de zelve moeder beloofd den zelven Pieter haren zone de voorscreven lijfrente eldere wel ende souffisant te versekerne ende bewarene, dair hij wel bewaert wesen sal, al twelke de selve moeder beloofd [ende] bekent ten overstont als landheer, als ontfangher van der wettelike rente van der stede van Ghend, Jan Damman etc. Actum ij decembris anno lxxij.

Doc. 8 (10 May 1475): SAG 301.53, 1474/5, f. 108

Her Pieter Bordon presbytre kende dat hij vercocht heeft wel ende dueghdelic Janne Aenbec filius Raes, lammerwerkere, een huus ende stede staende in de Nieuport, Jan van der Hecke ghehuust an deen zijde ende Pieter Voshol vrouwe over andre, twelc nu bewoene es her Jan Planke presbytre, met allen den ghelaghen, lochtinghen, plaetsen, ende aysementen alsser toebehoren ende ancleven van voren toot achter, belast met viere sc. ij lb. [sic] gr. siaers erfrente zonder meer commers; den coep es ghedaen omme de somme van zes lb. gr. daer of dat ten passerene van desen de voorscreven her Pieter kende van den voorscreven Janne Aenbec ghereet ontfanghen hebbende de twee lb. x sc. gr., ende heeft den zelven Janne daer

of wettelic quite ghescolden, ende tsurplus draghende drie lb. x sc. gr. te betalene bij paymenten, te weten binnen vj sc. gr. binnen xiiij jaeren eerstcommende, ende dan voort alle jare vj sc. gr. betalende totter vullen betalinghen, twelke de voornoemde Jan Aenbec belooft, bekent, ende versekert heeft etc., wel verstaende dat al eist zo dat de voornoemde her Jan Plancke tbeset van den voornoemden huus hebben moet de voorscreven xiiij jaer lanc gheduerende, ende niet langher, zo es nochtans vorwerde dat de voornoemde Jan Aenbec den zelven tijd gheduerende int voorscreven huus hebben ende ghebruken mach of doen ghebruken de nedercamer van den zelven huus, zonder yet daer voren te ghevene, ende thenden den voorscreven xiiij jaeren so sal de zelve Jan Aenbec, of zijn hoir ende naercommers, up dat zijns ghebrake tselve gheel huus ende stede metten toebehoren ...den ende ghebruken ombelast van den bewoeninghe van den voorscreven her Jan Planke, van welke voornoemde coep van den voorscreven huus ende stede metten toebehoeren de voornoemde her Pieter Bordon presbyter de voorscreven Jan Aenbec ghewarandeert ende belooft heeft paisivel te doene ende laten ghebruken jeghen elken teeweliken daghen zonder den zelven Janne eeniche ontpaschement, onghebruuc, calaenghe, moeyte, cost, oft last ghedaen te werdene, maer es de zelve her Pieter te dien gherenuncieert ende afghegaen van allen rechte, privilegien, clergien, vrijhijt, oft statute die hem in contrarie te laten ende den voornoemde Jan ten baten soude moghen commen, hem over stond als landheer van den voorscreven huus ende stede meester Jan Damman, als ontfangher van der stede erflike rente binnen Ghend. Actum x^a majj lxxv.

JACOB OBRECHT

Doc. 9 (15 August 1447): SAG 330.24, 1447/8, *zoendinc*, f. 2v

Ghijsselbrecht Gheeraerts, als maegh in derden of naerden van Andriese Gheeraerts sinen vader ende Janne Gheeraerts sinen broeder, de selve verinnende om betre voor hemlieden te doene naer de titule van den banne achtervolghende de costen van der cameran, blijft up c lb. par. contra Janne van der Hille borgh over Ghiselbrecht Roeger Braderic ende borgh over Janne.

Doc. 10 (24 December 1447): SAG 330.24, 1447/8, *zoendinc*, f. 8v

Scepenen termineren etc. dat over dmesgreep, messuse, ende mesdoen dat Andries Gheeraerts ende Jan siin sone mesgrepen, messuseert, ende mesdaen hebben up Janne van der Hille, int ghuent dat sine ghevrees hebben van sinen live, ende up voor ghedaen boven dien dat de voorscreven Andries adde doen dachvaerde den voorscreven Janne van der Hille omme orconscip te segghene up de clachte van den voorscreven Andries, ende dit binnen der selver dachvaert te welker de voorscreven Jan paisivelic quam, gaende hem gheene quaets bevroedende, ghelijct dat blijkt bij der tijtelen van den banne ghepromiciert tanderen tijden bij scepenen van der kuere, so sullen de vornoemde ij personen doen hare peregrimage ter eeren van Jannen van der Hille [ende] sinen maeghen etc., te wetene Andries Gheeraerts tOnsser Vrouwen tAvergon, ende Jan Gheeraerts svorscreven Andries sone tSint Gillis in Provenche, ende hiermede kennent scepenen etc.

Doc. 11 (22 April 1450): SAG 330.24, 1449/50², f. 51v (excerpts)

Kenlic etc. dat dit es den staet van goede toebehorende Copkine, Fierkine, Betkine, ende Johannekine, Pieter Jacops fs. Pieters kindren bij Lisbetten Smets, sinen wetteliken wive was, den vorscreven weesen toecommen, verschenen, ende verstorven van Lisbetten, haerlieder moeder was vornoemt, daer zij hojr af sijn van den vier deelen van den vj, de gheele versterfte in zessen ghedeelt, mids van den soorpluuse hojr zijn Lieven Jacops, der weesen broeder, zine sellefs man in state van huwelike, ende Clare Jacops, der weesen broeder, zijn sellefs man, dat Lievine Onghenade up bracht voor onse heeren scepenen ghelijc dadt ghegadert ende ghetrocken es uten ouden state, die brocht was ter kennessen van scepenen den xxiiij sten dach in hoeymaent anno xlv int scependom her Joris van Moere, her Jacops tSutters, ende hoiren ghesellen, folio clj, also eene copie daer uut ghegheven ende mertroen maect, den welken staet nu ghesloten ende gheconcludert es bij den vooght ende maghen ende vrienden also hier naer verclaert staet. [...] Item hebben

de vornoemde kijndere ghemeene ende onverdeelt een .xij. ste deel int huus ende stede anden Sandberch daer de vader in woent, met sulken comer alsser jaerlix huut ghaet. Item hebben de selve vj. kijnder tsesten deel van eender loeve naest Andries Gheeraerts met sulken lantseinse alsser jaerlix huut gaet ende vort belast int gheele met xx sc. gr. siaers lijfrenten ten lijve van her Janne Jacops haerlieder oem, cannoenic te Dronghene. Item sijn de vier weesen gherecht in alsulken bate als commen mach van Jacop Hoebrecht daer een wettelicke coupie af es. Item verclaert de vooght dat alder weesen deel ende recht van alden ghereeden goede, iuweelen, inhaven, cattheylen, ende sculden van baten, meere dan de scult van Jacop Hoebrecht hier voren genoempt, al gheghaen, bekeert, ende bekent sijn in de goede sculden, comeren, ende lasten die ten sterfhuussen vander moeder waren, metghaders den costen van harer sepultueren, uutfaert ende dies daer an cleeft, die alle af gheleit ende betaelt sijn, so dat men niet meer commers ende weet dan hyer onder verclaert es, waer bij den vornoemden weesen gheen ghereet ghelt bleven en es. [...] Actum xxij. dach in april.

Doc. 12 (31 March 1455): SAG 330.26, 1454/5, *zoendinc*, f. 4

Scepenen omme de curthede van den tijde stellen den twijst ghesiet tusschen Ghijselbrecht den Keyser, an deen zijde an deen zijde [*sic*], ende Janne Teysbaert, wonende in de lasarie uuter Waelpoorten, an dander, onverlet ute ende datte toot naer Paesschen eerstcommende, dan de betere daer af te gheschiene ghelijc of zoe in paeschavonde utghegheven ware. Actum ultimo martij anno liijj^o [1455 n. s.]

Doc. 13 (20 August 1455): SAG 330.27, 1455/6, *zoendinc*, f. 1

Jan Teysbaert blijft up c lb. par. contra Ghiselbrecht den Keysere, borgh over Janne e converso over Ghiselbrecht.

Doc. 14 (15 November 1455): SAG 330.27, 1455/6, *zoendinc*, f. 1v

Scepenen termineren ende wijsen Janne Theysbaert te ghevene ende betaelne Ghiselbrechte den Keysere, over sijn quetsuere ende smerte van twee quaden griefliken wonden, deene boven in den pester van den luchter aerne, daeraf dat den zenewen ende pannykel zeer gekuets was, ende dandere noechs in den cant van den junctuer van den achtersten leede van der luchter handt, waer huut hij verloos ter stont een groot stic van den ghebeente ende een stic van den zenewen, waeraf de zelve handt apostonerde, ende was gheopent te drien of vier steden, de somme van lx lb. paris is daeraf den suerugien thebbene over zijne cuere xvij lb. par. Ende bleve den zelve Ghiselbrecht van den wornoemden wonden ende quetsueren eeneghe mynke, letten, of ghebric, dat stellen scepenen voornoemt als onverlet ute tot Sinte Jansmesse eerstcommende. Ende hier mede alle zaken tusschen partijen meer ghevallen ende ghesiet quite ende te menten, mids datte niet meer af benouden en es, ende hier mede kennent scepenen wettelijc zoendync. Actum xv^a die novembris anno lv.

Doc. 15 (12 July 1456): SAG 330.27, 1455/6, *zoendinc*, f. 5

Scepenen, achtervolghende den vonnesse bij hemlieden ghewijst tanderen tijden angaende der beteringhe van der quetsuere die Ghiselbrecht de Keyser ontfinc van Janne Theysbaert, in den pestel van den luchtere arm ende in den cant van der junctuer van den achtersten leden van der luchten hant, tselve vonnesse onder dander begripende, bleve den selven Ghiselbrecht eeneghe minke van der selven quetsuere, letten of ghebrec, dat zij dat huut stelden tot Sente Jansmesse die eerstcommende ende nu lestleden, omme dan daer af beteringhe te gheseleve naer tghuent dat mer af boven den soude ter ordenancien van hemlieden: over mids dat hemlieden al nu ghebleken es bij overbringen van den suerigene van deser stede, die tlijttekin van den selven ghesien ende ghevisenteert hebben, ende over-

brocht dat de vorscreven Ghiselbrecht van der selver quetsuer groetelic verminct es in tghuent dat hij verloren heeft, bij naer al tberoeren ende de cracht van der selver hant, ende es ac meer ghescerpen te aergherene dan te beterene, terminooren ende wijsen den voornoemde Ghiselbrecht thebbene over tselve verlies ende minke de somme van xlviii lb. par., ende dat de vornoemde Jan Gheysbaert die betalen sal deen heelt binnen twee maenden eerstcommende ende dander heelt binnen twee maenden daer naer volghende. Actum xij^a julij anno lvj.

JAN AND ALEXANDER ACKERMAN

Doc. 16 (23 February 1499): SAG 330.41, 1498/9, rolle f. 5v

Meester Jan Ackerman comt in ghedele van zulken goede ende versterfte als dair Lijsbette Naps, zijn moeder was, ende van gheelden versterfte, uute verstorven es, begheerende van dien bate theffene ende beloofden commet af te gheldene naer de wet van den port, ditte hij versekerde up hem ende al tsijne, borghen over hem Clais Helscap, dies belooft de zelve meester Jan Ackerman der vornoemde Clais, zijnen borghen, van der zelve berecht costeloos te houdene ende quitene, dat ooc versekerende up hem ende al tsijne. Actum xxiiij^{em} in sporcle xcviij [1499 n. s.]

Doc. 17 (1498/9): SAG 400.34, city accounts 1498/9, f. 15v

Item van den versterften van Lijsbette Naps, van den gheheelen goede dat deelden Jan ende Alexandre Ackermans, ghebroeders, Heindericx kinderen, xxxiiij sc. gr., afghetrocken voor den anbringher ende yssuers booden ij sc. ij den. vl. gr., blijft net xxxj sc. ix den. vl. gr.

Doc. 18 (after 15 August 1506): Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MSS 14864-65, f. 70v-71 (text discovered and kindly made available for publication here by Dr Bonnie Blackburn)

Epitaphe de maistre Alexandre Agricola.

O dure mort quy les phisiciens
Reverse embas ou ton dard fais depandre,
Tu as frappé dessus maistre Allexandre,
Chantre excellent sur tous musiciens.

Tu as mis bas le comble musical,
Le recreeur des seigneurs et des dames,
Le frequenteur de maintz diners reaulmes,
Large du sien et le tout liberal.

Tu as cassé la triumpante voix,
Quy excedoit et passoit les driades,
Les dieux d'amours, et les aucadriades,
Les seraines et les niimphe des bois.

Tu as rompu et contrainct de morir
La bouche exquise en musicque famée,
Laquelle doit estre oien embasmée
Pour le garder sans le laissier pourrir.

Tu as conchiet le sens ingenieux,
Le perdessus de joie melliflue,
Du quel par tout la memoire en afflue,
Jour les accordez des tons armonieux.