

The breakup of Teisterbant and origins of Culemborg

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Abstract

This paper is about the formation of small, *de facto* independent lordships in the thirteenth-century Low Countries. Specifically of the lordship of Culemborg under the van Beusichem dynasty as a case study within the context of the dissolution of the Carolingian county (*gouw*) of Teisterbant. Using charters (*oorkonden*) as primary sources, particularly from the Oorkondenboek Sticht Utrecht and the Gelre charter collection by Sloet, I will construct my arguments. I will show that the van Beusichem dynasty originated as *ministeriales* of the Bishop of Utrecht, who had come to own Teisterbant around the year 1000 and gradually increased their possessions, titles and influence within the bishopric. They exploited the geopolitical situation of the late thirteenth century, which saw a rivalry between the counts of Holland, the counts of Gelre and the bishops of Utrecht, to further their power and achieve their final *de facto* independence. Finally, I will reflect on the contributions of these findings to the understanding of the formation of feudal polities in the medieval Low Countries.

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Introduction

During the Middle Ages, the geopolitical landscape in the Low Countries was characterized by a patchwork of many feudal polities. When historians examine the geopolitical history of the Low Countries during the medieval period, the focus is naturally drawn towards the largest principalities of the region: the Duchy of Brabant, the Counties of Flanders, Gelre and Holland, and the Bishopric of Utrecht. It is their consolidation by wars and marriage politics that eventually led to the Burgundian and Habsburg Netherlands that shaped the late medieval and early modern Low Countries and would later form the earliest foundations of the modern nation states of the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg. In between these major regional principalities, there were many smaller domains as well, with varying levels of autonomy and some directly answering to the emperor. The most studied example is Frisia¹, which formed a continuous region of communes that encompassed small territories. While nominally under the authority of Utrecht, they progressively increased their autonomy until they had practically no feudal lord to answer to other than the emperor, withstanding frequent attempts by the counts of Holland to subdue them². These communes were not ruled by the feudal nobility, but by local strongmen without formal titles, making the geopolitical situation of Frisia unique in the context of medieval Europe. Outside of Frisia, most small feudal polities in the Low Countries came in the form of the lordship (*heerlijkheid*). These were generally scattered throughout the Low Countries, often in between the larger feudal polities. Such lordships could be vassals to other feudal lords, but some were also independent from feudal obligations besides to the emperor. This was sometimes a *de facto* situation without strong legal basis but sometimes they were officially granted a free legal status. Such a lordship would be called a high lordship (*hoge heerlijkheid*)³.

The Dutch River Area, straddling the borders of what are now the provinces of Utrecht, Gelderland, Brabant and South Holland, saw an unusually large concentration of such lordships: Vianen, Culemborg, Buren, Malsen, the lands of the de Cocq dynasty, Heusden, Altena and Arkel⁴. These lordships were usually only *de facto* independent of feudal obligations, and many lost their independent status over time, but the lordship of Culemborg survived as legal entity until the annexation by the Batavian Republic in 1798⁵. This concentration of fragmented lordships corresponds to the area that once formed the Frankish County of Teisterbant⁶. Its maximal borders are estimated to have been the Lek River to the north, the now dried up Zoel River to the east, the Meuse River to the south and a border to the west around the modern-day area of Rotterdam⁷. During the Merovingian and Carolingian periods, the title of Count was appointed and could be revoked by the Frankish King (and later Emperor). Sometimes, these counties repeatedly fell into the hands of a single family. When power of the later Carolingian kings weakened, some of these families were able to establish hereditary dynasties. Initially this was an illegal *de facto* situation, but eventually this was formalised. These families also often consolidated multiple counties into larger

¹ One of the most recent examples was published in 2026: Oebele Vries, *Het Heilige Roomse Rijk en de Friese vrijheid* (Gorredijk: Uitgeverij Noordboek, 2026).

² Vries, *Het Heilige Roomse Rijk*.

³ Peter de Jong, *Heerlijkheden rond Gorinchem: Over heren, ridders en kastelen* (Woudrichem: Pictures Publishers, 2011), 10-18.

⁴ D. P. Blok, "Teisterbant," *Mededelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, afd. Letterkunde, Nieuwe reeks*, 26, no. 12 (1963): 477.

⁵ Yuri van Koeveringe, *Culemborgs verborgen verleden: Deel II van graafschap tot gemeente*, ed. Theo Boersema et al., *Culemborgse Voetnoten*, no. 79 (Culemborg: Genootschap A.W.K. Voet van Oudheusden, 2024), 43.

⁶ Blok, "Teisterbant," 477.

⁷ Blok, "Teisterbant," 460-466.

units. These processes of consolidation were the origins of most of the medieval high nobility⁸. In most areas this led to relatively large feudal entities, but as discussed earlier, in the Low Countries there were two large-scale exceptions. One being in Frisia, the other in Teisterbant. The focus of this paper will be how Teisterbant ended up in many smaller pieces while its neighbours consolidated. Unlike Frisia, Teisterbant has had little attention in recent historiography. The most definitive paper explicitly dedicated to Teisterbant remains a 1963 article by D.P. Blok⁹. However, some of the lordships of Teisterbant have been studied separately before. Often the link between these later lordships and Teisterbant is merely a footnote, but a notable exception is the work of J.A. Coldeweyj about the lords of Cuijk¹⁰. According to his theory, the van Cuijks originated in Malsen as descendants of the Teisterbant lords¹¹. Over time, lords of Cuijk would shift their geopolitical focus outside Teisterbant and involved themselves more with geopolitics centred on Cuijk. They became an outright fief of Brabant in the fourteenth century¹². This origin from the counts of Teisterbant and shift in geopolitical focus makes their trajectory rather different from the other post-Teisterbant lordships. Therefore, I have chosen to investigate the history of the van Beusichem dynasty and their lordship of Culemborg as a case study contrasted against the history of Malsen/Cuijk. I will build on the previous work by Vermast, who created a genealogy of the van Beusichem family, using the same sources I will use. He explicitly limited himself to the creation of the genealogy¹³, so the analysis of the events the family experienced I will do is a natural continuation on his work. I have chosen the lordship of Culemborg specifically because the Lek region in which Culemborg was situated, is where the Bishops of Utrecht, who had been granted the county of Teisterbant¹⁴, were demonstrably able to retain their worldly power the longest. Culemborg, Vianen and Buren are therefore the lordships most closely associated with the history of Teisterbant. I chose Culemborg specifically among them because the van Beusichem dynasty founded both Culemborg and Vianen, making their dynastic history apply most generally to the region, and among those two there is little difference in trajectory, and the scope of this research does not allow for both to be studied in-depth at the same time. The final decision to go with Culemborg under these circumstances was then made because I am personally most familiar with the history of Culemborg. To investigate this history the central question will be: **How did the lordship of Culemborg achieve the status of *de facto* independent lordship?** I will argue that this independence resulted from a combination of a geographically advantageous position, the deliberate spreading of feudal loyalties across their competing neighbours Holland, Utrecht and Gelre, and the exploitation of their moments of weakness. In this thesis I will first explain my methods and sources, then provide the needed historical background of the fragmentation of Teisterbant and explain the subsequent history of Malsen, building on the work of Coldeweyj to answer the sub-question: **Why did successive dynasties fail to establish a principality in Teisterbant?**

Thereafter, I will show the origin of the van Beusichem dynasty, the founders of the lordship of Culemborg, and their rise in power with the sub-question: **How did the van Beusichem dynasty rise from unknown ministerial servants to positions of political significance in the Bishopric of Utrecht?** Finally, I will investigate how a series of geopolitical events led to the weakening of Utrecht and Gelre, which was exploited by the van Beusichem dynasty to achieve their final independence. There, I will

⁸ Rosamond McKitterick, *The Frankish Kingdoms under the Carolingians: 751-987* (London: Longman, 1983), 182-3.

⁹ Blok, "Teisterbant."

¹⁰ J. A. Coldeweyj, *De heren van Kuyc (1096-1400)* (Tilburg: Stichting Zuidelijk Historisch Contact, 1981).

¹¹ Coldeweyj, *De heren van Kuyc*, 13-4

¹² Coldeweyj, *De heren van Kuyc*, 174-5

¹³ P. G. F. Vermast, "De Heeren van Bosinchem, voor het jaar 1300," *Bijdragen en Mededelingen Gelre* 53 (1953)

¹⁴ Blok, "Teisterbant," 475-477

try to answer the sub-question: **How did the van Beusichem dynasty navigate late thirteenth century regional geopolitics to achieve their *de facto* independence?**

Sources and methods

In this research I have made extensive use of charters (*oorkonden*) as primary source. While in medieval legal historiography, a distinction is often made between charters and decrees¹⁵, in the Dutch tradition these are both understood as *oorkonden*¹⁶. Since I am working in that context, I will use charters as a word to refer to the Dutch concept of *oorkonden* rather than the stricter definition. According to the Huygens Institute, charters cover every imaginable aspect of medieval life, from land sales and papal favours to government regulations, court rulings, and decrees of command (*bevelschriften*)¹⁷. Any official, sealed record of medieval governance or legal action can be seen as a charter. This makes them vital sources for understanding the medieval geopolitics that I will be studying.

The most important primary source I have used in this thesis is the *Oorkondenboek Sticht Utrecht tot 1301*¹⁸ (Also referred to as OSU). The OSU is a compilation of charters from the Sticht Utrecht, the worldly possessions of the bishop of Utrecht, from the earliest charters that have survived up to 1301. This end point at 1301 was chosen due to the increasingly overwhelming number of charters and the new charters being written in Middle Dutch, instead of the usual Latin, which makes for natural cutoff. The compilation is part of a long tradition of attempts at transcribing and unifying the vast corpus of charters in the Netherlands that started in the seventeenth century and is unfinished. The OSU is the most complete set of charters related to the Sticht Utrecht. It is part of a series of compilations digitalised by the Huygens Institute and originally created in the twentieth century along with the *Oorkondenboek van Holland en Zeeland tot 1299*¹⁹, *Oorkonden van Noord-Brabant 690-1312*²⁰ and the *Oorkondenboek van Gelre en Zutphen*²¹. These charter compilations together cover the regional politics of the main feudal polities of the medieval Netherlands.

It is important to note that it was not uncommon for charters to be forged during the medieval period. This makes the verification of seals and textual integrity necessary to verify the authenticity of a charter²². The standard practice in modern charter compilations is to meticulously document descriptions of seals and their conditions and textual anomalies such as erasures, interpolations or unusual Latin phrasing. The enduring reliability of the OSU is attested by its status as foundational source material for most authoritative historians of the medieval Bishopric of Utrecht and its nobility.

¹⁵ J. A. Cannon, "Charters," in *The Oxford Companion to British History*, ed. John Cannon and Robert Crowcroft, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), s.v. "charters."

¹⁶ <https://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/oorkondenboekstichtutrecht>

¹⁷ <https://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/oorkondenboekstichtutrecht>

¹⁸ S. Muller Fz., A. C. Bouman, and K. Heeringa, eds., *Oorkondenboek van het Sticht Utrecht tot 1301* (Utrecht: A. Oosthoek/ Rijksuitgeverij, 1920–1959).

¹⁹ A. C. F. Koch, J. G. Kruisheer, and E. C. Dijkhof, eds., *Oorkondenboek van Holland en Zeeland tot 1299* ('s-Gravenhage/Amsterdam: Martinus Nijhoff / KNAW / Huygens Instituut, 1970–2006).

²⁰ H. P. H. Camps, M. Dillo, and G. A. M. van Syngel, eds., *Oorkondenboek van Noord-Brabant tot 1312* ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff / Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis, 1979–2000).

²¹ E. J. Harenberg, ed., *Oorkondenboek van Gelre en Zutphen tot 1326*, Rijks Geschiedkundige Publicatiën ('s-Gravenhage: Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis / Huygens Instituut, 1980–2003).

²² Cannon, "Charters," s.v. "charters."

Coldeweij, Vermast, Palmboom and van Bavel cite the OSU extensively.²³ Admittedly, a full analysis of the 142 charters I used from the OSU to independently verify their authenticity is beyond the scope of this research. However, by relying on the OSU rather than the raw unedited manuscripts, the integrity of the primary source data remains sufficient.

Using the index of the OSU, I was able to quickly find all mentions of the van Beusichem dynasty from the immense set of charters it includes. This still left 42 charters that had to do with the van Beusichem dynasty specifically, and about 100 more in which one or more of its members was listed as a witness for the bishop or chapters of Utrecht in charters not directly involving the van Beusichem dynasty. The oldest references to the van Beusichem dynasty occur in the form of such mentions in a witness list of a charter. It often listed secondary parties involved and when the charter was issued by the bishop or the chapters it often included the foremost servants of the bishop. To make sense of these 100 charters in a period of about 100 years I chose a quantitative method and have created a graph to track historical developments. The earliest members of the van Beusichem dynasty start appearing in 1196 as such servants (*ministeriales*) of the bishop with increasingly significant titles. These charters continue to appear throughout the thirteenth century. The charters that involve the van Beusichem dynasty directly cluster in the second half of the thirteenth century. I have used the graph of witness sources, supported by the genealogical work made by P. G. F. Vermast²⁴, to track the rise of the van Beusichem dynasty by looking at the increasing titles and functions dynasty members appear with. From the sources with direct van Beusichem involvement, I have read all 42 charters and selected the set of charters that are most relevant for the analysis and narrative of this thesis. I also included this set of charters in the graph to compare with the witness charters. The OSU has been divided into five parts in chronological order. It covers the period between 694 and 1197, II between 1198 and 1249, III between 1249 and 1267, IV between 1267 and 1290, and V between 1290 and 1301. Each charter has a unique number to identify it. The charters have been transcribed from the original handwritings but have not been translated. Each charter entry includes a short summary of its contents and notes on the origins of the charter, dating, place names mentioned in it and textual oddities like evidence of erasure and replacement of text in the manuscript, or unusual Latin word uses.

I have read these texts using my limited knowledge of Medieval Latin and Middle Dutch, supplemented by dictionaries and by comparing it to translations of the texts by large language models, specifically using Google Gemini 3.5 and Claude Sonnet 4.6. Limitations of AI translation are that it often does not translate personal names and specific medieval terms well. For example, the many spellings of Beusichem, like *Boesingham*, would appear as *Boesingham* in the translation as well. The term *pincerna* would be translated as “butler”, which does not fully encapsulate the title of *pincerna* because it invokes the image of a nineteenth century butler cooking food and cleaning the house. The title of *pincerna* was given as an honour to a close member of a lord in his court²⁵. While the *pincerna* originated as someone that would pour drinks for the lord, his function was more like an advisor. Cupbearer might be a more appropriate translation due to the more medieval connotations of that term. My Latin proficiency is mostly centred on medieval terminology and foundational grammar. Therefore, I used the AI translation as a guide for my own to help with Latin words I am not

²³ Coldeweij, De heren van Kuyc. Vermast, "De Heeren van Bosinchem." Th. A. A. M. van Amstel, *De Heren van Amstel 1105-1378: Hun opkomst in het Nedersticht van Utrecht in de twaalfde en dertiende eeuw en hun vestiging in het hertogdom Brabant na 1296* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1999). Kappittel van Utrecht, B. J. P. van Bavel, *Goederenverwerving en goederenbeheer van de abdij Mariënweerd (1129-1592)* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1993).

²⁴ Vermast, "De Heeren van Bosinchem, 27.

²⁵ Vermast, "De Heeren van Bosinchem, 28.

familiar with and to ensure correct understanding of the grammar. The quote translations are my own. I have focused my readings on analysing the mentions of van Beusichem dynasty members and their titles and the terms of treaties, matters which appear in quite unambiguous language other than the occasional strange spelling of places and personal names, which have been extensively analysed in the OSU compilation itself. With all this combined, I believe my translation methods are sufficient for this paper.

Other than the OSU, I have also made use of the much older *Oorkondenboek der graafschappen Gelre en Zutphen: tot op den slag van Woeringen, 5 Juni 1288*²⁶. It is another compilation of transcribed charters, this time about matters concerning Gelre and Zutphen. Unlike the OSU, this compilation was made by a single author, L.A.J.W. Baron Sloet (1806-1890). He published this compilation in 1876, and it was the first charter compilation that had a focus on Gelre. The work is still of great value, since it contains charters that yet have not been transcribed anywhere else. The work of Sloet appears in several of the same leading publications as the OSU.²⁷ This continued status as trusted publication after 150 years is a rare accomplishment for such an old text. I have used these charters to track the submission of Culemborg to the counts of Gelre and the subsequent involvement of the van Beusichem dynasty with geopolitics in Gelre. The compilation ends with a transcription of the *Rijmkroniek van Woeringen*, a poem presumably written by Jan van Heelu, which recounts the events of the battle of Worringen²⁸. The poem is biased in favour of Brabant, for example, the summary by Sloet of the poem states "Raynald, count of Gelre sought a fight with Jan, duke of Brabant" and "Van Keppel takes ignominious flight"²⁹. However, I have used the poem to prove the mere participation of a van Beusichem dynasty member in the battle, which is not as sensitive to biased embellishment that might otherwise compromise the reliability of this source.

The final primary source I used is the city charter of Culemborg from 1318. I used two publications for this. First, a translation and discussion that was commissioned by the municipality of Culemborg for the 700th anniversary as a city in the *Voetnoot*, the journal of the local historical society A.W.K. *Voet van Oudheusden*³⁰. It did not include a transcription of the original and therefore another publication comparing the city charters of Buren and Culemborg was utilised to access a full, original transcription³¹. A comparison between the *Voetnoot* translation and the transcription shows some liberties taken in the translation and therefore I decided to translate the passages used in this analysis myself from middle Dutch to more accurately capture the formulaic language of the original document. An example is the words 'alle deser voerscrevene stucken en(de) punten'³². In the *Voetnoot* it is translated as 'al deze opgenoemde vrijheden.'³³, which in English translates to "all these aforementioned liberties." However, a closer translation would be "all these aforementioned articles and items" The translation provided in the *Voetnoten* was likely a deliberate choice for the sake of clarity but in analysis a literal translation that shows medieval legal phrases is more useful. I have

²⁶ L. A. J. W. Sloet, ed., *Oorkondenboek der graafschappen Gelre en Zutphen: tot op den slag van Woeringen, 5 Juni 1288* ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1876).

²⁷ Coldewey, De heren van Kuyc. Kapittel van St Jan, Van Bavel, *Goederenverwerving en goederenbeheer*.

²⁸ Sloet, *Oorkondenboek Gelre en Zutphen*, no.1150, pp 1110-1114.

²⁹ Sloet, *Oorkondenboek Gelre en Zutphen*, no.1150, p1110

³⁰ Jaap Borggreve et al., "De stadsrechten van Culemborg," *Culemborgse Voetnoot*, no. 64 (2018).

³¹ H. P. J. E. Merkelbach, "Eens gegeven blijft gegeven! Een onderzoek naar de stadsrechten van Buren en Culemborg" (unpublished manuscript and transcript, Genootschap Voet van Oudheusden, 2000), hosted by: <https://www.voetvanoudheusden.nl/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Stadsrechten-Culemborg-Merkelbach-tekst-transcriptie.pdf>.

³² Merkelbach, "Eens gegeven blijft gegeven!", 58.

³³ Borggreve et al., "De stadsrechten van Culemborg, 19.

used this source to prove the *de facto* independence of the lords of Culemborg by that point by analysing the identity of the witnesses of the city charters.

By using the OSU to track the earliest history of the van Beusichem dynasty and the *Oorkondenboek der graafschappen Gelre en Zutphen* by Sloet to track their following pivot to Gelre and the city charter of Culemborg to confirm the final *de facto* independence they achieved, supplemented by secondary works on the genealogy of the van Beusichem dynasty, it is possible to create a relatively complete picture of their trajectory. The high number of charters needed for this means that I have left out many charters that I did study because their content was not relevant enough for discussion within the scope of this research.

Teisterbant

The historical County of Teisterbant lay on the border between Francia and Frisia. During the seventh and eighth centuries, it repeatedly cycled between periods of Frisian and periods of Frankish rule³⁴. The reason for this is that both sides had great strategic interests in the region due to its geographic position in the Rhine and Meuse river deltas and proximity to the city of Dorestad, one of the most important trade nodes in early medieval Europe³⁵. During the eighth century, Frisia was subjugated by the Frankish kings. The rule of Charlemagne around 800 A.D. saw a peak of Frankish power. Administratively, the Frankish realm was divided into large duchies, that were then subdivided into *Gouwen*, also known as counties. The County of Teisterbant was considered part of the Duchy of Frisia³⁶. The kings succeeding Charlemagne saw a decline in their power throughout the Frankish realm. This was due to infighting among the family, a decline in royal authority over the nobility and clergy and the increasing intensity of Viking raids³⁷. After the reign of his son Louis the Pious, the Frankish realm was broken into smaller possessions for each of his sons according to Salian law. Francia was divided into three parts: West, East and Middle Francia. The west corresponded roughly with modern-day France and the east with modern-day Germany. The middle, also known as Lotharingia, named after its first king Lothaire I, initially included northern Italy, Switzerland, Burgundy, the Lorraine region and most of the Low Countries, including Frisia and thus Teisterbant. Its geography meant that the kingdom had long borders and was divided by the Alps. This made the kingdom vulnerable, and it was repeatedly attacked from both sides by the other Frankish kings to take it over and by Viking raids from the north. Eventually this middle kingdom was absorbed into the west and east after the treaties of Meerssen (870) and Ribemont (880)³⁸. Most of the Low Countries ended up under the kings of East Francia, who under Otto I (936-973) were able to gain emperorship, transforming the East Frankish realms into what is now known as the Holy Roman Empire³⁹.

During Lotharingian rule, the Viking raids were very successful, with the Norsemen establishing a base of operations in the River Area. Due to their weak military position, the kings decided to formalise this situation akin to what would later happen in Normandy⁴⁰. A Danish prince was made Duke of Frisia with the hope that he would protect the region from other Viking incursions. This did

³⁴ Blok, "Teisterbant," 462-463.

³⁵ Annemarieke Willemsen and Hanneke Kik, eds., *Dorestad and its Networks: Communities, Contact and Conflict in Early Medieval Europe* (Leiden: Sidestone Press, 2021).

³⁶ Blok, "Teisterbant," 462-463.

³⁷ Barbara H. Rosenwein, *A short history of the Middle Ages*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2023), 107-8.

³⁸ Rosenwein, *history of the Middle Ages*, 107-8.

³⁹ Rosenwein, *history of the Middle Ages*, 151-2.

⁴⁰ Willemsen and Kik, *Dorestad and its Networks*, 22-5.

not have the result that was hoped and the Viking raids continued. After decades of raids, a coalition of local lords formed against these Danish lords and the coalition was able to end the Danish overlordship. This led to the establishment of the County of West-Frisia ruled by a dynasty by a Frisian noble named Gerulf in 889⁴¹. This dynasty initially had two centres of power: one around the mouth of the Rhine River and the other in Teisterbant, specifically around the modern-day city of Tiel⁴². In accordance with the same Salian inheritance law that had split the Frankish realm before, his son Dirk inherited the Rhine River mouth and was the ancestor of the later counts of Holland. Gerulf's other son Waldger inherited Teisterbant. The son of Waldger, Radbod, got involved in the conflicts between West and East Francia over the lands that had belonged to Lotharingia, and he chose the West Frankish side along with some other nobles of the region. They lost to the Eastern Franks at the battle of Andernach. The supporters of West Francia were severely punished and king Louis the Younger revoked the possessions of Radbod in Teisterbant in 944⁴³. It was then given in vassalage to the Bishop of Utrecht, although the official ownership would change hands multiple times the next few decades. By the end of the tenth century, the county ended up in the hands of Ansfried of Huy, who eventually abandoned his title to live in a monastery in 985. In 995 he became Bishop of Utrecht but was generally uninterested in worldly affairs⁴⁴. His actions led to the practical end of Teisterbant as a functional administrative entity, as the territory ended up divided between different owners. The city of Tiel became owned by the emperor directly. Regions on the edges were gradually incorporated by larger bordering feudal polities like Holland and Gelre. The remaining core of Teisterbant came under nominal ownership of the Bishop of Utrecht, who held the official ownership of the county⁴⁵. These lands were practically ruled by various semi-autonomous lords. The local lords that would have ruled these lands in the following period have been largely lost to history. Parts were owned by the counts of Hamaland, an amalgamation of Frankish counties centred on what is now the Achterhoek in Gelderland, that did not survive to the later medieval period. They lost power because in 1018 the last ruling member of its dynasty murdered their rival Wichmann of Vreden, after which all their possessions were seized by the emperor, who then granted them to the bishop of Utrecht⁴⁶.

The eleventh century was the height of worldly power for the bishops of Utrecht. This was due to the *rijkskerkenpolitiek*, or imperial church policy. This was a political strategy to grant power to bishops instead of the nobility because they were legally excluded from inheriting land and were appointed by the emperors, preventing dynastic loyalties that had emerged among the nobility and often conflicted with imperial interests⁴⁷. The bishop of Utrecht was granted increasingly more land, and ended up with a territory including Frisia, West-Frisia, Teisterbant, Nedersticht, Veluwe, Oversticht, Twente, and Drenthe. The imperial church policy ended due to investiture controversy, when the pope and emperor entered into conflict over, among other things, the question who had the power to appoint bishops, which ended with the emperors losing their power to do so and thereby the long-term reliability of their bishops⁴⁸. This led to the later decline of Utrecht since they had lost imperial

⁴¹ J. W. M. Oudhof, A. A. A. Verhoeven, and I. Schuurin, *Tiel rond 1000: Analyse van vier opgravingen in de Tielse binnenstad*, Themata 6 (Amsterdam: Amsterdam Archeologisch Centrum, 2013), 125.

⁴² Oudhof, Verhoeven, and Schuurin, *Tiel rond 1000*, 125.

⁴³ E. J. Th. A. M. A. Smit and H. J. Kers, *De geschiedenis van Tiel* (Tiel: Vereniging Oudheidkamer voor Tiel en omstreken, 2001), 14-5.

⁴⁴ Bas Aarts, "Ansfried, graaf en bisschop: Een stand van zaken," in *'Opera Omnia' II: Een verzameling geschieden- en heemkundige opstellen*, ed. J. Coolen and J. Forschelen (Thorn, 1994), 7-85.

⁴⁵ Aarts, "Ansfried, graaf en bisschop," 7-85.

⁴⁶ Anton Kos, "Machtsstrijd in Hamaland: De politieke ambities van Balderik en Adela, circa 973-1016," *Jaarboek voor Middeleeuwse Geschiedenis* 5 (2002): 57-63.

⁴⁷ Rosenwein, *history of the Middle Ages*, 151-3.

⁴⁸ Van Amstel, *De Heren van Amstel*, 46.

support that was keeping them afloat. Neighbouring lords had ambitions on their territory and internal noble factions desired independence. Ultimately, the neighbouring lords, particularly the counts of Holland and Gelre would take large territories from Utrecht during its decline. Frisia drifted away from the bishop's authority, eventually achieving the unique geopolitical state of the Frisian freedom⁴⁹. In Teisterbant, the southern territories were always in an ambiguous position because the borders of the county were never fixed⁵⁰, but the definitive core that had been part of Utrecht had three different trajectories. The area of Tiel became an imperial city and was later taken over by the dukes of Brabant and fought over in a series of conflicts in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries with counts of Gelre, who were ultimately able to take possession of it for good⁵¹. In the areas around the Linge river, centred on Malsen, the exact trajectory is uncertain, but a theory by J.A. Coldewey is that it was owned by relatives of Arnulf of Huy who had inherited a share of Teisterbant⁵². They later acquired the high lordship of Cuijk. Maybe because their position as high lordship and maybe because of their inheritance from old Teisterbant, they seem to have had no feudal relations with the Bishopric. The northern part of Teisterbant, centred on the Lek River and geographically closest to Utrecht would remain within the worldly power of the sticht the longest, and as I will show, its local lords would only achieve a *de facto* independence in the late thirteenth century, at a low point of episcopal power. These lordships were Culemborg, Vianen and Buren. Culemborg and Vianen were both founded by the van Beusichem dynasty. I will compare the trajectories of the van Cuijk and the van Beusichem dynasties to show how the different lordships in the post-Teisterbant landscape had very different trajectories and to investigate if there is any causal relationship between the origins in Teisterbant and later fragmentation.

Malsen

The early history of Teisterbant and the lordships that emerged from it up to roughly the thirteenth century, when they finally start appearing more frequently in the contemporary primary sources, is in large part reconstructed from later sources that were often compiled for individual nobles or families that sought to legitimize their claims to their possessions⁵³. There is often a gap of multiple centuries between the events described and the compilation of these sources, so their reliability is questionable. This effect is compounded by the incentive structures for these later sources. Dynastic connections are often inventions to legitimise claims to territories in the later compilations. To study the local history of this period properly, very close study of the sources is required. One excellent example is the work by J.A. Coldewey⁵⁴. He developed a theory that the lords of Cuijk had dynastic connections with the counts of Teisterbant based on their original land holdings being situated in Malsen, the heartland of Teisterbant⁵⁵. Malsen corresponds to the modern villages of Geldermalsen and Buurmalsen, on opposite sides of each other on the Linge River. The earliest confirmed ancestors of the lords of Cuijk were named in the sources as "van Malsen", and it was common practice at the time to name nobles after their primary land holdings⁵⁶. While the dynastic connection with Ansfried

⁴⁹ Vries, Oebele. 2015. " *Frisonica Libertas*: Frisian Freedom as an Instance of Medieval Liberty." *Journal of Medieval History* 41 (2): 229–48.

⁵⁰ Blok, "Teisterbant."

⁵¹ Smit and Kers, *De geschiedenis van Tiel* 12-32.

⁵² Coldewey, *De heren van Kuyc*, 13-4.

⁵³ For example the *Genealogie van de heren en graven van Culemborg* (1593), critically analysed in Jaap Borggreve et al., eds., "Een genealogie voor de graaf," *Culemborgse Voetnoten*, no. 65 (2019).

⁵⁴ Coldewey, *De heren van Kuyc*.

⁵⁵ Coldewey, *De heren van Kuyc*, 13-4.

⁵⁶ Coldewey, *De heren van Kuyc*, 7.

of Huy, Count of Teisterbant, that J.A. Coldewey argued for⁵⁷ is not certain, the old dynastic inheritance of Malsen is a very strong case, especially since the van Cuijks were not vassals of Utrecht and therefore formed an exception to the transfer of Teisterbant to the bishop of Utrecht as a worldly possession, as with the arrangement in Tiel, where the emperor ruled. Only later did they gain the territories in Cuijk. This makes them part of the old Carolingian nobility. Initially the van Cuijk dynasty had a strong focus on their territories in Teisterbant. They were able to rise quickly to higher positions by aligning themselves with and influencing the church. Andries van Cuijk was elected bishop of Utrecht (1128-1139)⁵⁸, and they founded the abbey of Mariënweerd⁵⁹. They also acquired the title of count of the city of Utrecht (*stadsgraaf*) and, through inheritance, the county of Arnsberg⁶⁰. Consequently, they were deeply entrenched in the Bishopric and expanding their influence rapidly. The van Cuijk dynasty got into conflict with the counts of Holland and their rivalry came to a climax when they murdered Count Floris the Black of Holland in 1133. Because of this, the dynasty was severely punished by the emperor, and their lands were seized⁶¹. The dynasty was later able to return to Cuijk itself but their power in Teisterbant was broken. The abbey became *de facto* independent. This also allowed Holland to expand into the western territories of Teisterbant and Utrecht⁶². After this, the interest of the van Cuijk dynasty in Teisterbant remained for a while in the form of sponsorship of the Mariënweerd abbey but the remaining holdings were eventually sold to the counts of Gelre. The lords of Cuijk themselves ended up in the sphere of influence of Brabant because their geographic position made Cuijk a very important region to control in the rivalry between Brabant and Gelre. In the fourteenth century, they were subjugated fully by Brabant.⁶³

There seems to be a pattern of repeated attempts by different dynasties to form long-lasting bases of power with a core in Teisterbant: the Danes, the dynasty of Gerulf, the dynasty of Hamaland, and the dynasty of Cuijk. All of these met their end in Teisterbant as their actions in pursuit of those ambitions became too bold, leading to rival coalitions to form or the emperor to step in personally. This led to the redistribution of land, leading to the gradual fragmentation and the loss of border regions to neighbouring powers of Teisterbant. The lords of Cuijk fit in this pattern especially well since they attempted to build a base of power in the same lands that their presumed ancestors ruled over. Their failure to establish a more permanent presence in Teisterbant was the last attempt to build a feudal principality with the region as its heartland and thereafter the region would remain a borderland. It is this geopolitical situation as a borderland that would later allow for the development of *de facto* independent feudal polities. It is precisely this environment that the lords of Beusichem developed their *de facto* independent status.

Beusichem

The dynasty of Beusichem had a very different trajectory from the van Malsen dynasty. As I will show, they would finally be successful in attaining *de facto* independence. Their origins differ as well. Unlike the van Malsen dynasty, they were not part of the *nobiles*, the class of old noble families that often originated from Carolingian times. Instead, they came from the *ministeriales*⁶⁴, a class of unfree

⁵⁷ Coldewey, De heren van Kuyc, 13.

⁵⁸ Coldewey, De heren van Kuyc, 23-8.

⁵⁹ Van Bavel, *Goederenverwerving en goederenbeheer*.

⁶⁰ Coldewey, De heren van Kuyc, 28-32.

⁶¹ Coldewey, De heren van Kuyc, 32-4.

⁶² Coldewey, De heren van Kuyc, 34.

⁶³ Coldewey, De heren van Kuyc, 174-5.

⁶⁴ Vermast, "De Heeren van Bosinchem, 28.

subjects of a lord that had gained certain duties and privileges. While this class had relatively low status compared to the *nobiles* initially, as time went on, this class experienced similar developments to those the *nobiles* had in the late Carolingian period. As titles and privileges became hereditary and concentrated into certain families, the *ministeriales* developed into a new lower nobility. By the thirteenth century, they would frequently marry into the lower nobility and the distinction between *ministeriales* and this new lower nobility weakened⁶⁵. While the legal distinction remained into the late Middle Ages, in practice, social standing was determined by the titles held rather than original social class. Knights from either social background would be seen as equals⁶⁶. The van Beusichem dynasty went through the later stages of this development rather dramatically. They started out as the early unfree servant-type of *ministeriales* under the Bishop of Utrecht but would eventually rule over lands where they became *de facto* free from their original lord. The lordships of Vianen and Culemborg, that they founded, would outlive the sovereignty of Utrecht. Culemborg was eventually promoted to a county and would only be abolished as a legal entity after the Batavian Revolution in 1798⁶⁷.

Beusichem originated as a manorial farmstead (*hoeve*) as part of the County of Teisterbant⁶⁸. The farmstead is the subject of several charters from the tenth century as part of a donation of this land holding to the Chapter of St. Jan from Utrecht and a subsequent dispute about its rightful ownership⁶⁹. Then, in a charter from 1196, the van Beusichem dynasty finally appears, when a certain Huberto de Būsinchem is mentioned as a witness from the ministerial class in a land dispute in the city of Utrecht⁷⁰. From 1200 onwards, the van Beusichem dynasty members start appearing regularly as witnesses in charters from the bishopric of Utrecht. When mentioned as witness, the title of the mentioned individual is often included and as such the growth of influence of the van Beusichem dynasty can be tracked even with charters that did not have the van Beusichem dynasty as its main subject. In 1200 already, a son of Hubertus appears⁷¹. His name is Alferus, and he is called “scultetus”. The latin term for the Dutch position of Schout, a position that resembles a Bailiff. The schout was an official responsible for parts of the local administration and public order in towns or lordships. Alferus was probably scultetus of Utrecht itself, since the reference to his name does not include any geographic association unlike his father. After this charter, more family members start appearing, and their familial relations are often included with these mentions, allowing for the reconstruction of a genealogy⁷². After some decades, the first charters start to be issued with the van Beusichem dynasty as primary participants. The first example of this is in 1226, when a land dispute is settled between the chapter of St. Jan and Stephen of Beusichem⁷³. The pattern of such aggressive territorial policy, with a willingness to go against their own liege would be repeated many times after. At the same time, the van Beusichem dynasty also expanded their privileges and titles by working for the same liege. Eventually, Stephanus van Beusichem (mentioned 1262-1291, died 1294) would become

⁶⁵ A. L. P. Buitelaar, *De Stichtse ministerialiteit en de ontginningen in de Utrechtse Vechtstreek* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1993).

⁶⁶ Coldewey, De heren van Kuyc, 35.

⁶⁷ Yuri van Koeveringe, *Culemborgs verborgen verleden: Deel II van graafschap tot gemeente*, ed. Theo Boersema et al., *Culemborgse Voetnoten*, no. 79 (Culemborg: Genootschap A.W.K. Voet van Oudheusden, 2024), 43.

⁶⁸ Vermast, “De Heeren van Bosinchem, 28-29.

⁶⁹ Muller Fz., Bouman, and Heeringa, *Oorkondenboek Sticht Utrecht*, I: 336, 465, 485.

⁷⁰ Muller Fz., Bouman, and Heeringa, *Oorkondenboek Sticht Utrecht*, I: 529.

⁷¹ Muller Fz., Bouman, and Heeringa, *Oorkondenboek Sticht Utrecht*, II: 543.

⁷² For example, Muller Fz., Bouman, and Heeringa, *Oorkondenboek Sticht Utrecht*, II: 543. Includes the van Beusichems as witnesses like this: “Hiis testibus presentibus: ... Huberto de Businchem, Stephano filio suo” (The present witnesses: ... Hubert of Beusichem and his son Stephen).

⁷³ Muller Fz., Bouman, and Heeringa, *Oorkondenboek Sticht Utrecht*, II: 759.

dean of the St. Peter chapter of Utrecht (*decanus sancti Petri Traiectensis*)⁷⁴, cementing the van Beusichem dynasty inside the clerical elite itself. From the second half of the thirteenth century onward, charters involving the van Beusichem dynasty directly become more frequent, which both shows the increased importance of the family and allows for analysis of events beyond the increasing number of privileges, land holdings and titles. The type of source and the information it provides can therefore be roughly divided into an early period of the van Beusichem dynasty as witnesses and a later period of the van Beusichem dynasty as both witnesses and active participants. The graph below shows the appearance of the van Beusichem dynasty as witness or main participant in events every five years. It shows a clear start of frequent participation in charters around 1270 which coincides with an increase in witness charters as well. This spike of charters coincides with a dramatic series of regional conflicts that will be the focus of the next few chapters.

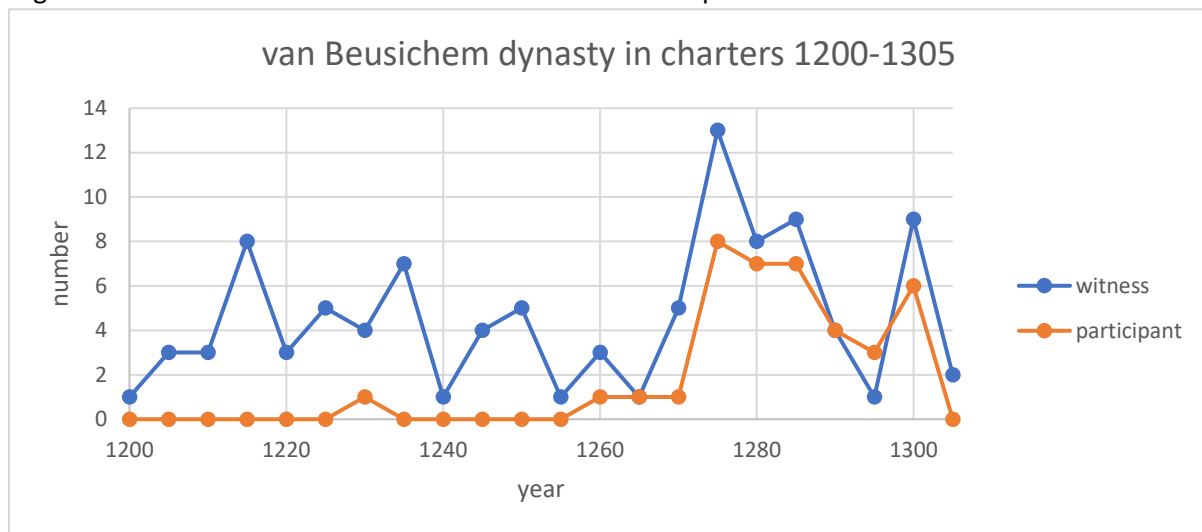


Figure 1: Occurrence of OSU charters wherein van Beusichem dynasty members appear as witnesses or participants every five years 1200-1305.

Conflicts in the Sticht Utrecht

During the 1270s, a factional struggle was brewing in the Sticht. On one side stood the families the van Utengoyes and the van Woerdens, with Gijsbrecht IV van Amstel as their leader. On the other side stood the noble families the van Zuylens, van Abcoudes and van Beusichems. This faction was led by the van Zuylens. Both factions were made up of ministerial nobility that aimed to increase their power to the detriment of the bishops of Utrecht and ultimately achieve independence from their overlordship (*hoge heerlijkheid*). The van Amstel dynasty had been in on- and off conflict against the bishops of Utrecht for decades⁷⁵. This conflict flared up again in 1273, when a revolt broke out against Floris V, Count of Holland, by peasants from Kennemerland. It quickly spread, first to Westfriesland, which had been in a centuries-long conflict against the counts of Holland to retain their independence, and Waterland. Then, the revolt spread to the lands of Amstel, right across the border. Gijsbrecht IV van Amstel decided to take advantage of the chaos and took charge of the revolt. He directed the destruction of castles owned by his rivals, including those at Abcoude, Rijswijk, and

⁷⁴ Vermast, "De Heeren van Bosinchem, 36. Stephen would appear in many charters.

⁷⁵ Th. A. A. M. van Amstel, *De Heren van Amstel 1105-1378: Hun opkomst in het Nedersticht van Utrecht in de twaalfde en dertiende eeuw en hun vestiging in het hertogdom Brabant na 1296* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1999), 114-5

Vianen⁷⁶, the last of which was owned by the van Beusichems. Then, leading rebels from the Kennemerland, he made a move for the city of Utrecht itself, which he was able to take in a surprise attack under the cover of night. The night watch was convinced they were attacked by the Tartars. After taking the city, Gijsbrecht van Amstel set up a new government that opposed the bishop. Many places throughout the Nedersticht took advantage of the new political situation and stopped recognising episcopal overlordship. The bishop was forced to flee to Deventer⁷⁷.

The lands of Amstel lay on a border region between the Sticht and the County of Holland, in a strategic position on the rivers the Amstel and Vecht. The Counts of Holland coveted this and other territories on the border of Holland and the Sticht. Seeing the chaos that was unfolding in the Sticht, Floris V of Holland decided to become involved to pursue his territorial ambitions. He signed treaties of friendship with various parties that were involved, including the townspeople of Utrecht and other cities. The Kennemer rebels that had helped Gijsbrecht van Amstel take over Utrecht, agreed to not involve themselves in the Sticht anymore. This meant that Gijsbrecht van Amstel had lost a significant part of his supporters⁷⁸.

In 1274 the bishop tried to take back Utrecht with the support of his relative Reinoud I van Gelre. This attempt was foiled by an anti-episcopal coalition that included the van Amstel faction but also Zweder van Abcoude, who was part of the van Zuylen faction. Desperate for help, Bishop Jan of Nassau asked for the support of Floris V of Holland against the van Amstel faction, and gave terms that heavily favored Floris V. The combined forces of Holland and the Bishop of Utrecht finally turned the balance of power in favor of the bishop. He sent his marshal, Zweder van Beusichem to take back Utrecht in 1276, which succeeded⁷⁹. The anti-episcopal government was overthrown and the bishop returned to the city. Still, this was not a total victory for the bishop. The van Amstel dynasty no longer ruled the Nedersticht but retained their hold over their family holdings. Due to financial strain, the bishop was forced to sell some of his lands and even sold the castle of Vreeland to the van Amstel dynasty. It has been suggested this might have been orchestrated by Floris V to weaken the bishop further and improve relations with the van Amstel dynasty.⁸⁰ The financial situation did not improve for the bishop and in 1278, out of desperation, he illegally confiscated money from the Dominican church that was supposed to fund crusades in the holy land and a tax that was supposed to finance local pastors in the polders. It was a scandal of great proportion. In response, the prelates of Utrecht refused to conduct church services and funeral rites any longer. Still more outrage from the clergy in Utrecht followed the illegal granting of lands to local lords that had belonged to the chapters of Utrecht rather than the bishop⁸¹.

The desperate measures of the bishop and the resulting unrest in Utrecht was no longer tolerated by his nominal supporters. In the same year, a series of treaties was signed by the van Zuylen faction and then the city of Utrecht to support Floris V against the bishop. The first was a secret treaty between the van Zuylen faction and Floris V. It was signed on August 28, 1278. Interestingly it is written in Middle Dutch instead of the usual Latin for treaties and charters in this time period. It is known that Floris V was one of the first rulers to regularly use of Middle Dutch, but in this case it could also be seen as a deliberate choice to make the treaty more accessible to the lay nobility of the van Zuylen

⁷⁶ Van Amstel, *De Heren van Amstel*, 116-7

⁷⁷ Van Amstel, *De Heren van Amstel*, 116-7

⁷⁸ Van Amstel, *De Heren van Amstel*, 116-7

⁷⁹ Muller Fz., Bouman, and Heeringa, *Oorkondenboek Sticht Utrecht*, IV: 1882. And Van Amstel, *De Heren van Amstel*, 117

⁸⁰ Van Amstel, *De Heren van Amstel*, 118.

⁸¹ Van Amstel, *De Heren van Amstel*, 118-9.

faction and so that the clergy was not needed to read the treaty. In it, Sweder of Zuylen, Zweder van Beusichem and Wiliam of Rijswijk agreed 'in hemelichede ... dat hi machtich werde der stat van Utrecht na onser macht' (secretly ... that he shall become master in the city of Utrecht to the best of our power). With this treaty, the bishop had lost his last military backing. From here, his recently acquired power unravelled quickly. A week later, on 5 September 1278, two treaties were signed (again in Middle Dutch) between Floris V, the van Zuylen faction and the city of Utrecht, wherein a regency council was set up including Zweder van Zuylen and Zweder van Beusichem. With this, the bishop of Utrecht had again lost his worldly power in the Nedersticht. The church was no less forgiving. On the same day the Pope issued a charter ordering the archbishop of Cologne to force John of Utrecht to repay the money he had illegally seized from the church with the threat of excommunication if he would fail to do so. He also ordered John to personally travel to the papal court at Viterbo to face judgement for his misdeeds⁸².

The city of Utrecht had now become an easy target, and it was taken by 500 men under Nicolaas Van Cats, who stormed the city gates⁸³. Some months later, in 1279, bishop John finally surrendered completely. He surrendered the administration of his entire territory to Count Floris V and the council he had set up in Utrecht. The terms included that Floris takes over all tax revenues, courts and jurisdictions and that John was legally bound to never make a political decision without approval from Count Floris V. In return for this, the bishop got fifteen hundred pounds of Holland denarii to pay back the money he had stolen from the clergy and had been demanded back by the Pope. The combination of the three factors: papal pressure with the threat of excommunication and the loss of military power with the betrayal by the van Zuylen faction and of course the mountain of debt bishop John was in, had ultimately proven to be too much to handle. As witnesses in this letter stood Zweder van Zuylen and Zweder van Beusichem. The van Zuylen faction and Floris V had won together. A new period of rule by Holland and the van Zuylen faction started, which would only end with the murder of Floris V in 1296. After taking power, Floris V entered into conflict with the van Amstels and other ministerial lords from the Sticht on the border with Holland, which was eventually won by Floris V. The van Beusichem dynasty was not involved with this and instead focused on consolidating their position.

On July 4, 1281, charters were issued⁸⁴ that gave castle of Culemborg as an allodial (owned without external obligations) land holding to the van Beusichem dynasty. In it, Diederik van Altena, provost and archdeacon of the Oudmunster chapter of Utrecht, granted these lands that were owned by the chapter of Oudmunster to Hubert III of Beusichem. Hubert had already tended to this land as a vassal and had built the castle of Culemborg there, but it was now granted to him without any feudal obligations: '*nos Theodoricus de Altena, Dei gratia prepositus et archdiaconus ecclesie sancti Salvatoris... contulimus Huberto de Bosinchem, pincerne Traiectensis, conservatori presentium, libere mansum nostrum situm in Kulenburg, in quo castrum predicti Huberti de Bosinchem est fundatum*'⁸⁵ (We, Diederik van Altena, by grace of God, provost and archdeacon of the chapter of Oudmunster ... have granted Hubert van Beusichem, cupbearer of Utrecht, the holder of this document, freely our plot of land situated in Culemborg, on which the castle of the same Hubert has been built). In return, Hubert granted some lands next to the Bisschopsgraaf and a plot of land nearby called *Bodelstrate* to the chapter: '*et idem Hubertus contulit et resignavit econverso nobis libere proprietatem mansi, siti iuxta Fossam Episcopi in superiori parte iurisdictionis de Lancsmere, et proprietatem dimidii mansi, siti*

⁸² Muller Fz., Bouman, and Heeringa, Oorkondenboek Sticht Utrecht, IV: 1987.

⁸³ Van Amstel, *De Heren van Amstel*, 119-120.

⁸⁴ Sloet, Oorkondenboek Gelre en Zutphen, no.1031, pp1002-3.

⁸⁵ Sloet, Oorkondenboek Gelre en Zutphen, no.1031, p1002.

*in inferiori parte eiusdem iurisdictionis in loco dicto Bodelstrate*⁸⁶ (and the same Hubert has in return, freely granted and resigned to us the ownership of a farmstead situated next to the Bisschopsgraaf in the upstream part of the jurisdiction of Lanxmeer and the ownership of half a plot situated in downstream part of the same jurisdiction in a location called *Bodelstrate*). Both are situated near the town of Culemborg. Hubert traded some agricultural properties for the independent ownership of his castle. Now, Hubert owned his castle directly without any feudal obligation as a so-called *allodium*, but that did not make him automatically independent, since he did not have the right or ability to administer justice on his territory as a ruler.

Pivot to Gelre

The previous charters were followed on 21 November 1281 by an act in which Hubert sold his castle to Count Reinoud I of Gelre for the equivalent of 100 Holland pounds: *‘Ego Hubertus dictus de Bosincheym presenti scripto protestor et recognosco evidenter, me nobili viro, domino Reynaldo, comiti Gelrensi et duci Lymburgensi castrum meum dictum Culenburgh ... pro centum libris Hollandencium denariorum hereditarie vendidisse*⁸⁷ (I, Hubert, called of Beusichem, with this writing, openly declare and acknowledge that I have sold to the nobleman, lord Reinoud, count of Gelre and duke of Limburg, my castle called Culemborg as a hereditary possession ... for one hundred pounds of Hollandic denarii). Then, the castle was given back as a fief under the count of Gelre according to Zutphen law, which allowed for female inheritance. *‘Ego etiam Hubertus predictus ac mei heredes a comite predicto suisque heredibus castrum predictum hereditarie tenebimus et possidebimus iure Sutphaniensi*⁸⁸ (and I too, the same Hubert, and my aforesaid heirs, shall also possess and hold as fief the same castle hereditarily from the aforesaid count and his heirs under Zutphen law⁸⁹). One might wonder why Hubert would willingly become a vassal of Gelre when he had so recently gained full land ownership rights from Utrecht in the aftermath of the coup. This might be explained by the fact that becoming a vassal to Gelre meant that the count would have to protect Culemborg⁹⁰. This would be very useful since Floris V of Holland had shown in Amstel that he was a threat to the independence of the lordships that originated in the Sticht and if the bishop were to regain his power, he might try to regain overlordship in Culemborg. Furthermore, the lack of authority to administer high justice, meant very little was actually given away in this agreement. The 100 Holland denarii was also no trivial sum of money. Instead of a cash payment, the income-generating lands in Lexmond and Lanxmeer were given to Hubert as a security until the money was paid in full: *‘Pro dictis vero centum libris assignavit michi idem comes et meis heredibus bona sua apud Laxmonde et Lanxmere iacentia, prout ad ipsum spectare dinoscuntur, titulo pignoris tenenda et possidenda et eadem, dum sibi placuerit, pro centum libris monete predictae redimere potest et aquitare*⁹¹ (in return for the said one hundred pounds, the same count has assigned to me and my heirs his goods at Lexmond and Lanxmeer, as far as they are known to belong to him, to be held and possessed by title of pledge, and he can redeem and acquit the same, whenever he pleases, for the aforesaid hundred pounds of

⁸⁶ Sloet, Oorkondenboek Gelre en Zutphen, no.1031, p1002.

⁸⁷ Sloet, Oorkondenboek Gelre en Zutphen, no.1039, p1007.

⁸⁸ Sloet, Oorkondenboek Gelre en Zutphen, no.1039, p1007.

⁸⁹ Zutphen law was special since it allowed for females to inherit land.

⁹⁰ Yuri van Koeveringe, *Culemborgs verborgen verleden: Deel II van graafschap tot gemeente*, ed. Theo Boersema et al., *Culemborgse Voetnoten*, no. 79 (Culemborg: Genootschap A.W.K. Voet van Oudheusden, 2024), 16.

⁹¹ Sloet, Oorkondenboek Gelre en Zutphen, no.1039, p1007.

money). This expanded his territory and tax-base. This political move should therefore not be seen as mere submission, but instead as a way to acquire land and protection.

Still, the political alignment with Gelre did not come without a cost. The count of Gelre was in a succession dispute with the dukes of Brabant over the Duchy of Limburg. Large regional coalitions were formed on each side. The Brabant coalition included, among others: the Counts of Loon, Jülich, Berg and Mark. The coalition of Gelre included the archbishop of Cologne, and the counts of Luxemburg and Nassau. The van Beusichem dynasty, as vassals of Gelre, were also included. On 5 June 1288, the battle of Worringen was fought, which ended in a disaster for the Gelre coalition. Many nobles were killed or captured. Reinoud I of Gelre was captured and had to pay an enormous ransom that forced him to sell off many properties and even to use the County of Gelre itself as collateral for the count of Flanders. His time in imprisonment left him mentally ill for the rest of his life⁹². The van Beusichem dynasty was not spared either. Part of the *Rhyming Chronicle of Worringen* recounts the prisoners of war:

*'In dat conroot waren dese heeren: Van Batenborch, van Brunnencorst,
Van Murse, van Knellenborch, van Vorst,
Van Genepe, van Masene, van Sole
Her Ernest, her Knif, her Ote Bole,
Pape Otte van Borne, die proefst van Nerre,
Her Hombrecht van Viane, die Boc van Mere,
Van Gelre her Heinric, die bastaert,
Enne oec van Driele her Alaert,
Ende her Vrederic van Baren,
Ende andere vele die daer waren
Menich ridder en menich seriant,
Die besten van al Gelrelant,
Die ie genoemen al niet en conde;
Her Geraert van Kelne, ende Rumonde
Die voget: dese bleven allen gevaen.'*⁹³

We see here that a certain '*Her Hombrecht van Viane*', or Hubert of Vianen, was among those taken captive. This Hubert of Vianen was not the same Hubert who had sold his castle of Culemborg in 1281 but instead his cousin. Another mention is of the lord of Zoelen: '*van Sole*'. He was also part of the larger van Beusichem dynasty since the van Zoelen dynasty had split off as vassals of Gelre a few generations earlier. It is likely that even more van Beusichems took part in the battle. Right around 1288, several family members who had been referred to as squires, now started appearing as knights in the charters. An example is Hubert of Vianen himself. Before the battle, on 1 April 1288, he is

⁹² Wybe Jappe Alberts, *Van heerlijkheid tot landsheerlijkheid* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1978), 72-4.

⁹³Sloet, *Oorkondenboek Gelre en Zutphen*, no.1150, p1113.

recorded as *famulus*: a squire. After the battle, on 19 October 1289 he is recorded as *miles*: a knight⁹⁴. Hubert van Beusichem and his brother Splinter were recorded in 1282 as squires and in 1287 they were first recorded as knights⁹⁵. Alard van Beusichem, another cousin, is mentioned in 1287 as squire and in 1294 as knight⁹⁶. There is a clear pattern of van Beusichem dynasty members being knighted around the time of the battle of Worringen. It is likely that they participated in the battle, but it is not known what their fates were other than their survival. This shows that the van Beusichem dynasty formed a shared political dynastic network. The vassal obligations and loyalties tied to the family network led to the participation of multiple dynasty members and the subsequent capture of at least Hubrecht of Vianen and likely more.

The ransom demands for captives of the battle are known to have been ruinously expensive⁹⁷. There is no such record for members of the van Beusichem dynasty, but it is safe to assume it applied to them as well since this was standard practice. How they dealt with the payment is unsure, but it might be that the burden was relatively light due to the steadily increasing wealth from the previous decades. What does show is that after the battle, the count of Gelre no longer appears in official dealings involving the van Beusichem dynasty until after the Culemborg city charter, when the counts of Gelre were treated as foreign lords. This hints at *de facto* independence from Gelre, which is plausible since the count of Gelre was forced to cede his lands in Limburg to the duke of Brabant and pay an enormous ransom, for which he was forced to hand over the County of Gelre itself to Flanders as collateral in return for the count of Flanders paying the ransom⁹⁸. For years Gelre would be ruled by the Flemish, who were more interested in extracting money than the exact boundaries of their temporary possession.

The definitive proof that these events eventually led to the *de facto* independence of the van Beusichems is that a few decades later, on 6 December 1318, the founding city charter of Culemborg did not include the names of any overlord as witness: *'so hebbe ic desen porteren van Culenborch desen brief beseghelt met minen seghel teerre orkonde alle deser voerscrevenre stucken en(de) punten en(de) hebbe ghebeden eraftighe lude mine lieve maghe alse Hubrecht minen outsten soen Sueder van Vianen Ghisebrecht van Kaets Jhan van Linden Gerraet van Rossem dat si desen brief mede beseghelt hebben tenen orkonde om die meerre sekerheyt en(de) wie Hubrecht Jans soen Sueder van Vianen Gisebrecht van Kaets Jhan van Liinden Gerraet van Rossem lien dies dat wie om beden wille Jhans van Bosinchem ons vader en(de) ons neven desen brief beseghelt hebben mit onsen seghelen tenen orkonde alre voerscrevene vorwarden'*⁹⁹ (and so have I, for the citizens of Culemborg, sealed this letter with my seal to validate all these aforementioned articles and items, and have requested the honourable men, my dear relatives—Hubrecht, my eldest son, Zweder van Vianen, Gijsbrecht van Caets, Jan van Lienden, and Gerard van Rossum—that they would also seal this charter for greater security. And we—Hubrecht, son of Jan, Zweder van Vianen, Gijsbrecht van Caets, Jan van Lienden, and Gerard van Rossum—have, in accordance with the request of Jan van Beusichem, our father and our cousin, sealed this charter with our seals to affirm all the aforementioned agreements).

Members of the family: Hubrecht IV, Zweder van Vianen, Johan van Beusichem and some more distant relatives: Gijsbrecht van Caets, Johan van Lienden and Gerrit van Rossum - were sufficient for

⁹⁴ Vermast, "De Heeren van Bosinchem, 40.

⁹⁵ Vermast, "De Heeren van Bosinchem, 30.

⁹⁶ Vermast, "De Heeren van Bosinchem, 35-6.

⁹⁷ Jappe Alberts, *Van heerlijkheid tot landsheerlijkheid*, 72-4

⁹⁸ Jappe Alberts, *Van heerlijkheid tot landsheerlijkheid*, 72-4

⁹⁹ Merkelbach, "Eens gegeven blijft gegeven!", p58.

even such an eventful decision. The van Beusichems were able to act independently of any feudal overlord.

Conclusion

The formation of lordships in the wake of Teisterbant happened very differently for different parts of the old county. The borderlands of Teisterbant quickly drifted away while the core around the Lek and Linge rivers became divided into three distinct zones. Tiel became an imperial city and later ended up in Brabant and then Gelre. The lords of Malsen clung to their ancestral holdings in Teisterbant but lost their increasing power due to overextension. Meanwhile, the areas around the Lek became owned by the bishopric of Utrecht. It is in the context of its declining power and the fall of the associated van Cuijk dynasty, instead of the immediate dissolution of Teisterbant itself, that the independence of the lordships near the Lek should be seen. Within the bishopric of Utrecht, the van Beusichems were by no means unique as a ministerial family in their long-term ambition to achieve independence from the bishop of Utrecht. The two opposing factions of the van Zuylens and the van Amstels, struggling for power in the Sticht, were both made up of lords who had similar ambitions. What makes the van Beusichems unique then, is that they were the most successful in their goals. Most of the lordships held by the van Amstel faction were too important for both the bishop of Utrecht and the count of Holland to allow them to be independent. When they were able to take power in the Sticht, which was possibly a premature move, since their military power rested on peasant rebels rather than a more stable force, they became easy targets for the count of Holland. The van Beusichem dynasty, on the other hand, remained loyal to the bishop until the very last moment before the bishop fell completely. They had been rewarded for this with great positions, that gave them military command in the Sticht and when they ultimately betrayed their overlord, he was already alone and surrounded. There would be no chance of defeat. Then, instead of throwing their weight behind Holland and Floris V fully, perhaps to only become a vassal of this new lord, they spread their loyalties, between Utrecht, Holland and Gelre, so that no single power could dominate them. Even when they suffered the consequences of alignment with Gelre during the battle of Worringen, that same battle also weakened Gelre enough to allow the final achievement of *de facto* independence, finally confirmed with the city charter of Culemborg. It is only in 1798, some five centuries later, that the lordships, by then, the county of Culemborg, would finally disappear, having outlasted almost all other feudal political entities situated in the modern Netherlands. The inability of any dynasty to form a large feudal principality from Teisterbant, the decline of Utrecht and Cuijk, the geography situated in between the larger principalities of Holland, Utrecht and Gelre, the pragmatic politics of the van Beusichem dynasty and the opportune weakening of their neighbours is what allowed the van Beusichem dynasty to establish their *de facto* independent lordship of Culemborg.

Within the core of Teisterbant, the Lek area, exemplified by Culemborg, was the only one that saw *de facto* independent lordships well into the Early Modern period. Although the lordship of Buren was not included in this study, their common origins within the Sticht Utrecht point toward the same trajectory: a local dynasty navigating factional politics within the Sticht and achieving independence through the spreading of loyalties and a geographic position in between Holland, Utrecht and Gelre. Zooming out further, Teisterbant resulted in fragmented polities due to the contingency of dynasties that were unable to form a lasting principality from Teisterbant, followed by the granting of land to Utrecht and its decline. The history of Teisterbant provided conditions that made formation of *de facto* independent polities possible, and the Lek area was the part of Teisterbant where the conditions were most favorable. Within the wider study of the Low Countries, the study of Culemborg and Teisterbant might provide a valuable contrast and comparison to Frisia, which also developed in

the context of the decline of Utrecht but had a very different outcome in the form of communal government rather than lordships. And finally, within the study of Medieval Feudalism there seems to be a wider European trend of small feudal entities of communal nature. The most famous examples are Switzerland, Northern Italy and Frisia. Teisterbant, on the other hand, was ruled by lords of lower nobility. This contrast is an interesting subject of future study.

This study of Teisterbant and Culemborg, while interesting and helpful, only scratched the surface of what can still be discovered about the breakup of Teisterbant. Particularly a study of the lordship of Buren might support or disprove my theory that the core of Teisterbant can be divided into the Lek area, Malsen and Tiel as having separate trajectories or whether there was divergence even within these categories. The lands that were not part of the Teisterbant core also deserve further study in how connected they truly were to Teisterbant or only represent a theoretical maximum extent with little deeper connection to the county. A study comparing Teisterbant to Frisia might also be highly productive since it would both show the decline of Utrecht from the perspective of its fringe and compare different trajectories for the formation of feudal entities in general.

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