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*Commerce and central courts: trade and traders from the north-eastern Low Countries and the Great Council of Malines (1470-1560)*

This paper studies the importance and use of the Great Council of Malines (a supreme court of the Burgundian and Habsburg Low Countries) for trade and traders from the north-eastern Low Countries, focusing specifically on the regions the Sticht (nowadays Utrecht) and Overijssel during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. While receiving little attention in relation to trade, the Great Council has been described as rather insignificant for traders who, in a context of legal pluralism, opted for speedier (lower) courts to legally resolve or manage conflicts. Instead, this paper will argue in favour of a more positive appreciation of the Great Council. Using both diplomatic and legal sources it will be shown that, although rarely used, the Great Council could be very useful in certain types of cases. Moreover, it is demonstrated that litigants from the north-eastern Low Countries knew very well how and when to use the Great Council, winning virtually every case. Therefore, the strategies used by litigants to win cases will also be studied. Finally, this paper argues that authorities (especially urban ones) used the Great Council in order to defend the commercial interests of their citizens involved in outgoing trade.

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