



*In Pursuit of a Healthy City. Sanitation and the Common Good in the Late  
Medieval Low Countries*

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Titel proefschrift

**In Pursuit of a Healthy City: Sanitation and the Common Good in the Late Medieval Low Countries**

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Contrary to popular beliefs picturing late medieval cities as pinnacles of disease and dirt, these communities recognized the promotion of population health as socio-economically and politically beneficial, indeed as a prerequisite for their survival. Focusing on the Low Countries, this study aims to reconstruct the range of preventative practices that various late medieval urban actors, most notably local city governments, undertook to protect communal health, sanitize the city, and preserve its spiritual purity. As their efforts have gone largely unnoticed, the present inquiry chimes in with a growing international historiography that aims to make up for this neglect. This study not only expands knowledge of an understudied geographical area, but also employs an innovative approach. It shifts away from curative institutions, medical practitioners and epidemiological crises – the more traditional foci of histories of health – to routine prevention, in a comparative survey with three core case studies: Ghent, Leiden and Deventer. Moreover, with the incorporation of theories on space, governance, and actor-networks, this project investigates the (perceived) health challenges facing late medieval urban communities and the myriad ways these issues were confronted, with responsibilities and tasks divided across spatial and jurisdictional boundaries. It argues that these endeavours were informed by medical reasoning and justified by a conceptual framework that considered public health a part of the common good. Rather than mainly *ad hoc* responses, the promotion of communal health constituted an argument for governmental interventions, and was therefore a shaping force in the urban fabric and its socio-political relations.