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The Nine Worthies in Middle Dutch Miscellanies*

Abstract: This contribution explores the reception of the Middle Dutch short verse narratives about the Nine Worthies by analysing the manuscripts in which they are preserved. It also asks about the influence of their reception environment. Two further general observations are made, on the distribution of the Dutch texts and the combined transmission of Nine Worthies texts and chronicles in multiple manuscripts.

I. Introduction

The Nine Worthies are among the most famous medieval topoi.¹ One can still find the physical evidence of their popularity throughout the Western world: Visitors of New York's The Cloisters (a branch of Metropolitan Museum of Art) will encounter five of the Worthies on fifteenth-century tapestries and visitors of Cologne's city hall cannot miss the early fourteenth-century carvings of all nine: the pagans Hector, Alexander the Great, and Julius Caesar; the Jewish Joshua, David, and Judas Maccabeus;

* This publication has resulted from the project »The Dynamics of the Medieval Manuscript: Text Collections from a European Perspective« (www.dynamicsofthemedievalmanuscript.eu), which is financially supported by the HERA Joint Research Programme (www.heranet.info) and the European Community FP7 2007–2013. I would like to thank Daniël Ermens, Paul Wackers, Bart Besamusca and the editors of this volume, especially Cora Dietl, for their comments on earlier drafts of this article.

1 The Nine Worthies are also known as the Neuf Preux (French), Negen Besten (Dutch), Neun Helden (German), Nueve Preciados de la fama (Spanish), Nive Prodi (Italian) and Ni Helte (Danish); cf. Horst Schroeder, *Der Topos der Nine Worthies in Literatur und bildender Kunst*. Mit 43 Tafeln, Göttingen, 1971, 13. Schroeder's is the seminal work on the Nine Worthies; Horst Schroeder, »The Nine Worthies. A supplement«, *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen* 133 (1981), 330–340, is the most important supplement.

and the Christian Arthur, Charlemagne, and Godfrey of Bouillon.² Their appearance as a set was already noted by Johan Huizinga in his famous *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, where he connects the ›cult‹ of the Nine Worthies to the idea of chivalry:

The chivalrous element and the Renaissance element are also confounded in the cult of the Nine Worthies (les neuf preux). The grouping of three pagans, three Jews, and three Christians in a sort of gallery of heroism is found for the first time in a work of the beginning of the fourteenth century, *Les Voeux du Paon*, by Jacques de Longuyon. The choice of the heroes betrays a close connection with the romances of chivalry.³

Huizinga ascribed the invention of the topos to Jacques de Longuyon (c. 1300), an author at the bishopric court of Thibaut de Bar.⁴ This place of origin led most researchers to an automatic connection of the Nine Worthies with a courtly context. The positioning of the Nine Worthies in a courtly environment is, for the Dutch language area, supported by the presence of tapestries depicting the Nine Worthies at the court of The Hague.⁵ However, Wim van Anrooij has argued that a manuscript fragment containing a Middle Dutch text on the Nine Worthies should be placed in an urban context.⁶ This opposition is the starting point of this paper, which discusses the reception context of the Nine Worthies topos. It does so by examining the manuscript context of Middle Dutch short verse narratives on the Nine Worthies.

There are two different Middle Dutch verse narratives completely devoted to the Nine Worthies: a long verse narrative, originally several hundred lines long, and a short text, counting 72 lines.⁷ Wim van Anrooij ar-

2 For images of the New York tapestries, browse www.metmuseum.org; pictures of the Cologne statues can be found through www.bildindex.de [both websites accessed in August 2012].

3 Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, New York, 1999 (orig. *Herfsttij der Middeleeuwen* 1919), 60–61.

4 Janet F. van der Meulen, »Jacques ou Jacob. Le Nord en l'invention des Neuf preux«, in: Hélène Bellon-Méguelle et al. (ed.), *La moisson des lettres. L'invention littéraire autour de 1300*, Turnhout, 2011, 105–130, esp. 106, and literature mentioned there.

5 Frits van Oostrom, *Het woord van eer. Literatuur aan het Hollandse hof omstreeks 1400*, Amsterdam, 1996, 170.

6 Wim van Anrooij, »Van Vlaanderen naar Europa. De Negen Besten in Ltk. 208«, *Nieuw letterkundig magazijn* 16 (1998), 11–14. The Leyden manuscript will be discussed into more detail below.

7 Both are included in Hogenelst's study and repertory of Middle Dutch short verse narratives: Dini Hogenelst, *Sproken en sprekers. Inleiding op en repertorium van de Middelnederlandse sproken*, 2 vols, Amsterdam, 1997. Long text: vol. 2, 37–38 (nr. 33), short text: vol. 2, 229–230 (nr. 328).

gued that the author of the short text knew and used the long one.⁸ This opinion is based on the observation that several lines and/or rhyme pairs in the short text have parallels in the long text. Examples mentioned by Van Anrooij include these striking verses about Alexander the Great, in the short resp. the long text:⁹

*Alexander, Philips zoen van Macidone,
Over al Grieken soe droech hij crone* (ll. 9–10)¹⁰

Alexander of Macedonia, son of Philip, wore the crown of all the Greek.

*Philips sone van mechedone
Die in grieken drouch crone* (ll. 71–72)¹¹

[Alexander] son of Philip of Macedonia, who wore the crown in Greece.

In addition to Van Anrooij's argument, one could add that the short text only contains elements that are also present in the long text; it does not add any new information about the Worthies. Both of these observations do not necessarily ›prove‹ that there is a direct relation between the short and the long Middle Dutch Nine Worthies texts, but together they make it very likely to be true. Through the long and short Nine Worthies texts, the topos appears in seven Middle Dutch multi text manuscripts. These manuscripts will be discussed into detail in the next section of this contribution.

II. The Manuscripts

II.1. Leyden (L)

Leyden, UB, Ltk. 208 is a fragmentary parchment bifolium, dated 1325–50.¹² Overlooking the contents of the manuscript, Van Anrooij argued that it is very likely that this manuscript was made and used in an urban con-

8 Wim van Anrooij, *Helden van weleer. De Negen Besten in de Nederlanden (1300–1700)*, Amsterdam, 1997, 202. This monography is the cumulation of many earlier works done by Van Anrooij; the book focuses on the Low Countries, but considers the whole European Nine Worthies tradition. It is unfortunate that it has not been translated into any major languages.

9 Van Anrooij lists other examples in Van Anrooij (see note 8), 268, n. 35.

10 Napoléon de Pauw (ed.), *Middelnederlandsche gedichten en fragmenten*, part 1, Gent, 1893–97, 599.

11 Herman Brinkman, Janny Schenkel (ed.), *Het Comburgse handschrift. Hs. Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Cod. poet. et phil. 2° 22*, part 2, Hilversum, 1997 (Middel-eeuwse Verzamelhandschriften uit de Nederlanden 4), 1173.

12 Extensive on the Nine Worthies in the Leyden manuscript: Van Anrooij (see note 6).

text, especially because it contains aphorisms referring to city rulers.¹³ It is not clear in what city the manuscript should be placed, but as the language dialect tends to be Flemish, it was probably one of the Flemish ones.¹⁴ The (eleven) aphorisms in the Leyden fragment are preceded and followed by the remainders of two longer texts. The text preceding the aphorisms belongs to the closing part of *Van scalc ende cleric*, a verse dialogue between a bad and a good advisor at court.¹⁵ Frits van Oostrom has summarized that the text circles around the question »Which is the best way to get into the good graces of our lord and masters: integrity or opportunism?«¹⁶ The *scalc* explains his prosperity at court by stressing the importance of lying: it is good to lie to your masters if it brings you success. The *clerc* disagrees and prefers his own, loyal, truly Christian attitude. The lesson of this poem is that rulers should listen more to their faithful clerks than to »impudent rogues«.¹⁷

The text that follows the aphorisms is the long Nine Worthies text. The Leyden manuscript only preserves the prologue of the Nine Worthies text; due to manuscript loss, the text breaks down after 44 lines. These 44 lines can be divided in three parts.¹⁸ In the first part (ll. 1–11), the author explains why he considers himself capable of writing this story: »Because I have in my memory fables and true history, the bible, authorities and chronicles«. The second part (ll. 12–38) continues mentioning the sources of the story, but this time, they do not legitimate the author, but the Worthies that are about to be discussed. In the final part of the text in L (ll. 39–44), the author addresses his audience and encourages them to pay attention: »Now learn, you knights, from this« (l. 39).

13 Van Anrooij (see note 6), 13–14.

14 G.I. Lieftinck, *Codicum in finibus Belgarum ante annum 1550 conscriptorum qui in bibliotheca universitatis asservantur. Pars I: Codices 168-360 societatis cui nomen Maatschappij der Nederlandsche Letterkunde, descripsit G.I. Lieftinck*, Leiden, 1948 (Bibliotheca Universitatis Leidensis, Codices Manuscripti V), 22. Note that Lieftinck is not sure about the localization: »Vlaanderen?« (Flanders?).

15 An edition of this text can be found in: Matthias de Vries (ed.), »Fragment eener berijmde zamenspraak uit de XIII eeuw, benevens eenige oude spreuken en het begin van een gedicht, getiteld: *Van neghen den besten*«, *Nieuwe werken van de Maatschappij der Nederlandsche Letterkunde te Leiden* 6 (1844), 136–149.

16 Frits van Oostrom, »The dialogue of *Scalc ende cleric* »Rogue and cleric« and the origins of Middle Dutch stanzaic poetry«, in: R. I. A. Nip et al. (ed.), *Media latinitas. A collection of essays to mark the occasion of the retirement of L.J. Engels*. Turnhout, 1996, 289–293.

17 Frits van Oostrom, *Maerlants wereld*, Amsterdam, 1996, 80.

18 Hubert Slings, »De Negen Besten ontcijferd. Getallensymboliek in et Geraardsbergse afschrift van *Van den negen besten*«, *Queeste* 3 (1996), 23.

There are at this point two things to be said about the preservation of a Nine Worthies text in this context. First of all, it is very early. The ›invention‹ of the Nine Worthies topos is commonly ascribed to Jacques de Longuyon (see, for example, Huizinga's quote above). His *Les Voeux de Paon* is dated 1312. The oldest remains of the Middle Dutch story on the Nine Worthies, thus: the Leyden manuscript, is dated 1325–50. This makes the Middle Dutch tradition a very early one, nearly contemporary with De Longuyon himself. Secondly (and more speculative), there is the relationship between this Leyden fragment, the Nine Worthies and the Middle Dutch author Jacob van Maerlant. Wim van Anrooij has suggested that Van Maerlant might be the inventor of the Nine Worthies topos and the author of the longer narrative on the Nine Worthies. He comes to this claim by pointing at the dating of the Middle Dutch texts, for which a *terminus post quem* of the second quarter of the fourteenth century (Leyden fragment) is suggested.¹⁹ Another argument is an apparent medieval custom of ascribing the invention of the topos to Van Maerlant. Van Anrooij mentions the early-fifteenth century *Cornike van Brabant* and the (probably) mid-fourteenth-century epitaph on Van Maerlant's (assumed) grave in Damme.²⁰ Van Anrooij also points at the similarities between the description of heroes in the Nine Worthies text and in (other?) parts of Van Maerlant's oeuvre.²¹ Van Anrooij's identification did not get much acclaim; Janet van der Meulen, for example, rejected his ideas in a recent publication on the origins of the Nine Worthies topos.²² Whether Van Anrooij is right or wrong is not at stake now; what Van Anrooij's study shows, even if one chooses not to follow his reasoning *pro-Maerlant* completely, is a medieval tendency to ascribe the Nine Worthies to Van Maerlant. In view of this discussion, it is interesting to note a similar discussion on the origins of the other text in Leyden, UB, Ltk. 208: *Van scalc ende cleric*. In 1878, Van Vloten ascribed this text to Van Maerlant.²³ This ascription was not unlogical: both form and contents of the poem in the Leyden manuscript are very similar to Jacob van Maerlant's stanzaic poems (*Strofische gedichten*). Yet, his suggestion was without much discussion declined by the patrons of nineteenth-century Middle Dutch philology. Recently, Van

19 The idea that Van Maerlant have could been the inventor of the topos had earlier been suggested by J. W. Muller, »Een nieuw bericht omtrent Maerlant's leven en werken«, *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse taal- en letterkunde* 28 (1909), 282; cf. Van Anrooij (see note 8), 72–73.

20 Ibid., 67–70.

21 Ibid.

22 Van der Meulen (see note 4).

23 Cf. Van Oostrom (see note 16), 290.

Oostrom has retaken the hypothesis.²⁴ He describes the dispute between Van Vloten and his opponents and when inquiring the sources of the Middle Dutch story, he finds text 189 from the *Carmina Burana*.²⁵ This text was »in the parallel transmission in the late thirteenth century [...] as well as in secondary literature from that time onwards ascribed to none other than Philippus Cancellarius«, whose poems »are the most conspicuous sources of [...] Jacob van Maerlant's *Strofische gedichten*«. ²⁶ Although it is not, as far as I can see, a decisive argument, it is striking that Leyden, UB, Ltk. 208, even though just a fragment, contains the remains of only two longer texts and both texts are probably not written by, but surely closely related to Jacob van Maerlant; the thought that the compiler of the manuscript aimed to collect works by Van Maerlant is as appealing as improvable.

II.2. Comburg (C)

»Comburg manuscript« is the traditional name for the manuscript Stuttgart, WLB, Cod. poet. et phil. fol. 22. Together with the manuscript Brussels, KB Albert I, 15.589-623 (the »Hulthem« manuscript), it is valued as the highlight of medieval Dutch text collections. In the introduction of their 1997 edition of the whole manuscript, Herman Brinkman and Janny Schenkel described the fascinating genesis of the manuscript into detail.²⁷ They convincingly argued that what we nowadays call the Comburg manuscript is in fact a sixteenth-century gathering of six different smaller manuscripts, or units (numbered in the manuscript in Roman numerals, I–VI).²⁸ These manuscripts share a common history, as they were made by the same or related scribes. They were, however, not produced together and neither were they necessarily planned to be used together after their conception: The manuscripts were capable to function independent. Within the scope of this article on the Nine Worthies, it is therefore valid to focus on the manuscript that contains the text about the worthies: the fifth (V).

24 Van Oostrom (see note 16), *passim*.

25 *Ibid.*, 292.

26 *Ibid.*, 292–293.

27 Brinkman/Schenkel (see note 11), 9–88.

28 *Ibid.*, 82–88, gives an extensive analysis of the becoming of the manuscript as we find it nowadays. Note that I refer to the different parts or units or booklets which together form the Comburg manuscript as »manuscripts«. I acknowledge that this could be confusing, but hope to formulate in such a way that it avoids ambiguities.

The fifth manuscript of the Comburg manuscript counts six quires, made up from a varying number of parchment bifolios.²⁹ Paleographical evidence gives manuscript V a *terminus ante quem* of »end of the fourteenth century«; the dating of one of the texts give the manuscript a *terminus post quem* of 1343.³⁰ Although the dialect used in V is sometimes different than that in the other manuscripts, Brinkman and Schenkel localize V at the same place: the Flemish city of Ghent.³¹

Initially, V was a manuscript containing only excerpts from Jan van Boendale's *Lay mirror* (1325–28), copied by Scribe F.³² At some point Scribe E – who was also largely responsible for the manuscripts IV and (the rubrication in) VI and who was identified by Brinkman and Schenkel as the »editor-in-chief« of these manuscripts together – took over and added 21 texts to V, the Nine Worthies text being one of them.³³ The content of manuscript IV is, concerning the type of gathered texts, similar to V: a collection of mostly short texts, preceded by two relatively long texts, namely *Van sente brandane* (2285 lines) and *Van den vos Reynaerde* (3470 lines). The main difference is that whereas V only has short *verse* narratives, IV also contains a few prose texts. VI is completely different, as it only contains one text: a rhymed chronicle of Flanders.

The Nine Worthies text is the eighth text in the fifth manuscript.³⁴ Apart from the common feature that they are short, the texts in V are also similarly moralistic. The Nine Worthies text slightly differs, as this text is not as much explicitly moralistic as the other texts; rather, it shows its audience a high morale by showing examples of heroes, to which certain values are ascribed. The Comburg manuscript contains the longer Nine Worthies text, but misses the prologue. This omission is not caused by manuscript loss – that is, not in this manuscript; it can, of course, not be excluded that the scribe used a damaged layer. The Comburg text starts, by

29 Codicological information derived from Brinkman/Schenkel (see note 11), 57–65.

30 Ibid., 62 and 65, note 141.

31 Ibid., 87f., incl. note 186 on the Brabantine influences.

32 It is interesting to note that the *Lay mirror* also contains a reference to the Nine Worthies: when discussing August (Octavianus), Boendale remarks that it surprised him that his uncle is one of the enlisted pagans instead of August. This part of the text however (book II, chapter XV) is not copied in Comburg (which »only« has chapter XL–LXIV from book II). Cf. Wim van Anrooij, »Een vroege receptiegetuige van het gedicht *Van neghen den besten*«, *Millennium* 9 (1995), 3. For the relevant parts of the *Lay mirror* cf. Matthias de Vries (ed.), *Jan van Boendale. Der liken spiegel. Leerdicht van den jare 1330. Drie delen*. Leiden 1844–1848, part 1, CXXXII–III and part 2, 97–98.

33 Brinkman/Schenkel (see note 11), 83.

34 Cf. ibid., part 1, 92–96: a table of content of the complete manuscript.

introducing the first worthy (»Den eersten rudder settic voeren«): Hector.³⁵ In 68 lines, Hector's major deeds are described, as are the author's sources (l. 2: authorities; l. 32: Homer; l. 59: Aristotle). The mini-*vita* of Hector ends by mentioning his death, 1130 years BC. The other worthies are described in a similar way: after a short, general veneration of the worthies, their achievements are listed – what countries they conquered, cities they established etc. On most occasions, the narrator gives the anecdotes without any sources, but in some cases he does mention the origin of his knowledge, as in Hector's case. The short life description ends by emphasizing the greatness of the worthy and then naming the year of his death. Finally, Comburg preserves a short epilogue in which the author summons his audience to add to this list of Nine: »He who wants to praise better knights or wise men than these Nine were in their days, mention them without delay« (l. 582–585).

In a broader codicological context, it is interesting to take note of manuscript VI. VI was made in the same atelier (or at least circles) as V: the scribe that copied the Nine Worthies text in V, was the rubricator of most parts of VI (scribe E).³⁶ Although there is no indication that V and VI were made to belong together from their creation onwards, they were certainly made in the same context and at some point, they were bound together. The contents of VI is unlike V: it contains only one text, and not a moralistic narrative, but a chronicle. We encounter another Nine Worthies/chronicle combination in the following manuscript, Geraardsbergen.

II.3. Geraardsbergen (G)

The third and last manuscript that preserves the long Middle Dutch Nine Worthies text is Brussels, KB Albert I, 837–845. When one inspects the manuscript that is kept under this shelf mark, one will find a composite volume consisting of two distinct parts.³⁷ The first part is the chronicle of the world written by the Bavaria herald Claes Heynzenzoon. The second part is a multi-text codex, preserving 89 different texts. This part is gener-

35 Brinkman/Schenkel (see note 11), part 2, 1171, l. 1. It is remarkable, yet without meaning that the Comburg text starts exactly where the Leyden text ends.

36 *Ibid.*, part 1, 59 and 71.

37 The codicology of the manuscript is described in the introduction of the 1994 edition of the manuscript; Marie-José Govers et.al. (ed.), *Het Geraardsbergse handschrift. Hs. Brusseljk, Koninklijke Bibliotheek Albert I, 837–845. Met een codicologische beschrijving* door H. Kienhorst. Hilversum, 1994 (Middelieuwse Verzamelhandschriften uit de Nederlanden 1). Online accessible through <http://geraardsbergen.huygens.knaw.nl>. [last access: August 2012].

ally referred to as the ›Geraardsbergen manuscript‹, named after its likely place of origin: the eastern-Flemish town of Geraardsbergen.³⁸ Both manuscripts were copied by the same scribe in the 1460s and bound together in the sixteenth century.

The 89 texts of the Geraardsbergen manuscript are of many forms: One can find a pilgrimage, (pseudo-)scientific (*artes*) texts, riddles, calendars and moralistic toddlers (mostly aphorisms) – and as the 89th text the narrative about the Nine Worthies. In their introduction, the editors of the manuscript distinguished three different groups of texts: religious texts, ethical-moralistic texts and texts that are helpful for a physically and economically prosperous life.³⁹ It is uncertain by and for whom the manuscript was made. The editors have suggested that the copyist and compiler were one and the same person; the unbalanced unstable use of blank lines and rubrics point in that direction.⁴⁰

Like the Nine Worthies texts in the Leyden and Comburg manuscripts, the version of the text in the Geraardsbergen manuscript is incomplete: the text breaks off during the description of the last worthy, Godfrey of Bouillon. It has been the subject of discussion whether the incompleteness of the Geraardsbergen version is caused by manuscript loss of this manuscript or of its layer. According to the editors, the latter hypothesis is the most likely one, as on the last verso, the number of lines is irregular (a line was added), probably to fit the whole available text in this quire.⁴¹ Slings, on the other hand, has another explanation for the irregular number of lines on the last folio of the manuscript and he has advocated the hypothesis that the text loss in the Geraardsbergen manuscript is caused by a missing quire. He showed that the text missing in this manuscript consists of 88 lines – 48 lines in the description of Godfrey (similar to the text in Comburg) and a 40 lines epilogue (similar to the prologue). This suggestion is likely to be true since, as Slings showed, the number of lines in the Geraardsbergen version of the Nine Worthies text is very regular: it circles around 40 or a manifold of that (see table 1).⁴² The 88 missing lines would have fitted on the (now missing, thus hypothetical) fol. 184^r–185^v, but on this last folio, it would only have taken four lines. Slings argued that this is unlikely to be true; the Geraardsbergen copyist wanted longer texts at the end of a folio, in order to be able to begin with a new text on a new folio. To accomplish

38 Govers et. al. (see note 37), 12. For a more recent review of the localization issue, cf. Herman Brinkman, »Weerzien met Geraardsbergen. Op het spoor van Percheval van den Noquerstocque«, *Literatuur* 21 (2004), 11–13.

39 Govers et. al. (see note 37), 10.

40 Ibid., 20.

41 Ibid., 13.

42 Slings (see note 18), 36.

this in this situation (so: to keep fol. 185^v ›free‹ from the Nine Worthies), the copyist needed to add one line to the four pages preceding fol. 185^v, starting with the now last page of the manuscript, fol. 183^v. The reconstruction of Slings is more satisfying than that of the editors, because it explains the extra line on the last known folio by relating it to a more general feature of the Nine Worthies text in the manuscript, namely the ›obsession‹ with numbers.

	L	C	G
Prologue	44		40
Hector		68	80
Alexander		66	80
Julius		109	120
Joshua		24	40
David		28	40
Judas		58	80
Arthur		102	120
Charlemagne		48	40
Godfrey		76	72*
Epilogue		4	

Table 1: length of text / text parts in various manuscripts⁴³

The exact structure of the description of the worthies in 40 lines or a manifold of that is not a general feature of the Nine Worthies tradition, but unique for the Geraardsbergen manuscript – as can be seen in table 1. In order to fit the descriptions of the worthies in the desired number of lines, the copyist (or compiler, if these were different persons) needed to manipulate the text from an earlier version.⁴⁴ There does not seem to be a programmatic line in the manipulations: sometimes, things have been added (for example, when the text informs the reader that Arthur had the Virgin as his ›shield lady‹),⁴⁵ and sometimes information has been omitted (for example, Caesar’s remark that the British were family of the Romans).⁴⁶

43 Slings (see note 18), 27.

44 The other way around is also possible: the original text (of which Geraardsbergen is a copy) had the ›number structure‹ and the Leyden and Comburg versions are re-workings, neglecting the structure. I do not think this is very likely, although, admittedly, I do not have strong arguments to do so.

45 Govers et. al. (see note 37), <http://geraardsbergen.huygens.knaw.nl/f180r.html>; <http://geraardsbergen.huygens.knaw.nl/f180v.html>, ll. 524–526 [last access: August 2012].

46 Which is present in C; Brinkman/Schenkel (see note 11), part 2, 1176, ll. 189–197.

Slings has pointed at one remarkable constant difference between the different versions: wherever Comburg speaks of *ridderlijk* (»chivalrous«), Geraardsbergen speaks of *redelijk* (»reasonable«).⁴⁷

II.4. The Hague and Haarlem

As introduced above, the long Nine Worthies text is not the only story about them known in Middle Dutch. A second text solely devoted to them is significantly shorter than the text discussed above: in not more than 72 lines (9 x 8), the names, major achievements and deaths of the Nine Worthies are listed.⁴⁸ Such a description looks like this:

Aertuer, van aventueren genant,
 Coninc van Britangen wael bekant,
 Sijn rijke hoff dat hij regierde
 Dair men in stac ende toyrnierde.
 Hi was milde ende vroem ter hant
 Als hij Onser Vrouwen bannier ontwant.
 Hij starff, men wist niet wair,
 Nae Christus Vc ende XL jair (ll. 49–56).

Arthur, known from adventures, the famous king of Brittany, reigned his rich court, where people jousted. He was generous and pious of heart when noticed [?] Our Lady's flag. He died, one does not know where, after Christ 540 years.

The text is preserved in four manuscripts: The Hague, Royal Library (KB), KA110 (fol. 1r–2r), The Hague, Royal Library (KB), 155 (fol. 21^v–22^v), Haarlem, Noord-Hollands Archief SA 21 (fol. 17^r–18^r) and Haarlem, Noord-Hollands Archief SA 22 (fol. 9^v; incomplete). In none of these manuscripts, the text has a title or opening rubric. I will refer to it as the »short Nine Worthies text«, to distinguish it from the formerly discussed longer one. In all complete manuscripts, the short Nine Worthies text counts exactly 72 lines and there are no significant textual variations; in the last, incomplete manuscript, the preserved text matches the other versions up to the point where the manuscript loss starts.

All manuscripts containing this Nine Worthies text are related to Haarlem, a city in Holland. SA 21 is probably the oldest manuscript of these four (1475–1500). Next to the Nine Worthies text, it preserves a chronicle

⁴⁷ Slings (see note 18), 32.

⁴⁸ Hogenelst (see note 7), 229–230. L.D. Petit, *Bibliographie der Middelnederlandse taal- en letterkunde*, vol. 2, Leiden, 1910, 96 (nr. 1612), 161 (nr. 2032). It is remarkable that Petit initially put this text category »Boerden, sproken, verhalen en gedichten« (»Fabliaux, dits, stories and poems«), 96, but corrected this at a later stage to »Berijmde geschiedschrijving« (»Rhymed historiography«), 161.

of Haarlem, various city laws from the same city and a chronicle of the counts of Holland.⁴⁹ The same scribe who made SA 21 also produced CX, which is dated 1475–1500. In CX, the Nine Worthies text opens the manuscript and is followed by the chronicle of the counts of Holland also encountered in SA 21.⁵⁰ The other manuscripts were copied by a different scribe, but their contents are very similar. It is likely that the manuscripts were all made in the same context, probably in the same workshop. They all combine the general history represented by the Nine Worthies, with specific histories of the area in which the manuscripts were made and contemporary, local relevant texts.

L/S	Manuscript	Localization	Dating	State of text (length)	Co-text
L1	Leyden	Flanders (urban)	1325–1350	Only prologue (44)	Aphorisms, <i>Scalc ende cleric</i>
L2	Comburg	Ghent (Flanders)	1343–1400	Lacks prologue (583)	Various short verse narratives
L3	Geraardsbergen	Geraardsbergen (Flanders, east)	1460s	Lacks end (711)	Chronicle, various short verse narratives
S1	Haarlem [...] SA 21	Haarlem (Holland)	1475–1500	Compl. (72)	Chronicle
S2	Haarlem [...] SA 22	Haarlem (Holland)	1500–1525	Incompl.	Chronicle
S3	Den Haag [...] CX	Haarlem (Holland)	1475–1500	Compl. (72)	Chronicle
S4	Den Haag [...] CLV	Haarlem (Holland)	±1500	Compl. (72)	Chronicle

Table 2: Middle Dutch Nine Worthies short verse narratives

III. Conclusions

Having given an overview of the manuscript preservation of the Middle Dutch Nine Worthies texts, I will now ask what we see if we analyse this manuscript tradition. What do we learn about the reception of the topos in the Low Countries, looking at the short narrative tradition? I will discuss two points: their preservation in manuscripts made in an urban context and their appearance in the vicinity of chronicles.

⁴⁹ Van Anrooij (see note 8), 202.

⁵⁰ Cf. entry »Den Haag, KNAW, CX« in the online *Bibliotheca Neerlandici Manuscripta*, <http://bnm.leidenuniv.nl>.

III.1. Urban Context

In the introduction, it was stated that the Nine Worthies topos originated at and is usually associated with the court.⁵¹ Van Anrooij has earlier argued that the Leyden fragment was copied in an urban context. In addition, he pointed at other early urban representations of the topos in Cologne, Arras and Uccle (near Brussels).⁵² The other manuscripts discussed here support the idea that the Nine Worthies were also received and used in cities, with manuscripts coming from different major cities in the medieval Low Countries (and none from non-urban areas). Not only at a later stage of their existence, but already in the fourteenth century, the topos of the nine heroes was used in texts copied in cities in the Low Countries. From this perspective, it is interesting to take a second look at Slings' observation that the Geraardsbergen manuscript continuously replaced *ridderlijk* («chivalrous») with *redelijk* («reasonable») (see above). Slings interpreted this change as »ontridderlijking« («deknighthification»).⁵³ Van Anrooij has gone even further, by arguing that Comburg has more chivalrous elements in the text than Geraardsbergen does (and suggesting that Comburg is more original), thus that Geraardsbergen is more urban than the other manuscripts.⁵⁴ In my opinion, this goes too far; for one, not all chivalrous elements are omitted, most noteworthy in the prologue, when in Geraardsbergen (just like in Leyden; Comburg does not have a prologue, so that comparison cannot be made) the narrator addresses the audience with »rudders« («knights»).⁵⁵ Perhaps the situation is more nuanced and the line between city and court is not as sharp as Van Anrooij wants to argue. The fact that the short Nine Worthies text was copied multiple times in Haarlem is an interesting case from this perspective, as it embodies how court and city can be intertwined: Haarlem acquired town privileges in 1245.⁵⁶ In the following centuries, Haarlem grew, especially thanks to ship-building, the brewing industry and cloth-manufacturing.⁵⁷ In the fifteenth century, Haarlem was one of the most densely populated cities in Holland (together

51 Note that, even if not De Longuyon, but Van Maerlant, was the inventor of the topos, it was still a courtly invention, as Van Maerlant was a court author as well.

52 Van Anrooij (see note 6), 14.

53 Slings (see note 18), 32.

54 Van Anrooij (see note 8), 214.

55 Govers (see note 37), l. 37; <http://geraardsbergen.huysgens.knaw.nl/f171r.html> [last access: 31/08/2012].

56 Wim Blockmans, *Metropolen aan de Noordzee. De geschiedenis van Nederland 1100–1560*, Amsterdam, 2010, 80.

57 *Ibid.*, 202, 289–290, 573.

with Leyden and Amsterdam).⁵⁸ But although Haarlem was an urban centre, it was also the structural *pied-a-terre* for the counts of Holland. This is for example shown by the fact that various rulers were inaugurated here.⁵⁹ Summarizing, the preservation of Middle Dutch short verse narratives on the Nine Worthies shows that (a) the topos was certainly not received in courts only and (b) one should be careful with a sharp demarcation between urban and courtly reception.

III.2. Chronicles

It is remarkable how often the Nine Worthies appear in a manuscript that also preserves one or more chronicles. This is most apparent in the manuscripts preserving the short Nine Worthies text, where the chronicles are the only other extensive text in the manuscript. But as I have shown, also the Geraardsbergen and Comburg manuscripts preserve chronicles in the vicinity of the Nine Worthies text. It has to be stressed that it goes beyond the reach of this contribution to claim or even suggest that Nine Worthies texts and chronicles are in general meant to be conjoined, but it is interesting that they are found together so often.⁶⁰ If we allow ourselves a leap that might turn out to be a bit (or even much) too far, it is interesting to see that when found close together, a chronicle and a Nine Worthies text form an interesting combination that has a two-way effect. A Nine Worthies text is a moralized synopsis in narrative form of the history described in the chronicles, summarized around nine heroes, and v. v., the chronicles are factual, wider histories, (usually implicitly) putting the achievements of the Nine Worthies in a broad historical context. Even if this is not the intention, the effect is noteworthy and could be a starting point for comparative research.⁶¹

58 Blockmans (see note 56), 543.

59 Ibid., 76, 391, 395.

60 For example: it should be remembered that not in all of these cases, the texts were copied by the same scribe and/or even in the same production phase.

61 It could be interesting, for example, to find out how (if at all) the men listed as Worthies are described in the chronicles.