Graves and memorials as an expression of status:
the case of Utrecht (1300-1600)

The salvation argument
With regard to the frequent use of the salvation argument in art, devotional literature and charters, most historians - from the romantic impressions in Johan Huizinga's *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (1919/1924) onward - recognize a change in mentality in the fourteenth century. They generally interpret this often repeated reminder of death and Last Judgment as a token of anguish. Thus the fear of death became the central feature in our characterization of late medieval mentality. The Papal Schism (1305-1439), the Hundred Years' War (1337-1450) and the Plague (from 1347 onward) are held responsible. Ever since, the emphasis in the debate on the religious mentality in the Late Middle Ages is on the significance of salvation.

This perspective on the 'calamitous fourteenth century' has become so common that until recently it has not been questioned[1]. But obviously these calamities could not have the same impact everywhere, nor can apparently free people live in fear for generations. And more importantly: for the sake of the argument, any positive developments have been ignored. In the fourteenth-century city of Utrecht, for instance, the economy grew at a fast rate. The Dom tower and the brick houses along Oudegracht still reflect this prosperity. Surely, Utrecht was not an exception. Apart from material, technical and scientific achievements, the salvation argument is not explored enough within its broader social context. The phenomena that are automatically associated with the salvation argument, like the memorial and burial cult, are not sufficiently investigated in content, purpose and process. In this paper I will show that references to the soul could also serve practical, material and earthly goals[2].

Sources
My research is based on written and material sources within the prosperous Episcopal city of Utrecht, a city-state in the Low Countries that was independent until 1528. It grew from approximately 6,000 inhabitants in 1300 to approximately 30,000 in 1600. About fifty per cent of the male Utrecht inhabitants were citizens, which meant they were members of one of the 21 Utrecht guilds as well. As such they had to perform political and military duties: the annual vote and the city defence. Most of these artisans and craftsmen were (small) entrepreneurs who could read and write, at least a little. They were well aware of their town's history, on which they took great pride. They even called themselves '*Zinte Martijns dienstmannen*', a title originally reserved for the lay elite or *ministerialen* who served the bishops.

To arrive at a better understanding of their mentality and inner cohesion, I made an integral analysis of the following sources: decrees, sentences and accounts of the city council, as well as regulations and accounts of church wardens, fraternities and charitable institutions. I conducted intensive research into the memorial cult in the *Buurkerk*, the oldest, richest and most important parish church, and in two chapter churches, both the Dom and St Peter's. I also took art and literature into account, not forgetting genealogical and prosopographic research.

By studying urban society from such a broad perspective, new patterns in urban social relationships could be distinguished, which shed new light on late medieval mentality. The results of my investigation fit in with other research projects that also focus on the local context of the memorial cult and on the material consequences of the salvation discourse[3].

Some intriguing facts
My new appraisal of the term 'salvation' is based on detailed serial research and attentive observation in medieval towns, churches and museums. Features and data that did not match the current view made me wonder. Gradually all disconcerting items fell into place as I changed my perspective. The things that intrigued me I present here, so that you can follow my development and argumentation.

- A grave within the church
It is generally acknowledged that church graves were common practice by the 1300s. Yet the account of 1420, which is the oldest account of the *Buurkerk*, lists only nine parishioners who were buried

within the church. In that same year three tomb stones were transferred from the graveyard into the church. The removal of the slabs seems to indicate a new trend and this is confirmed by the series of accounts that was preserved from 1435 onward. In that year 23 bodies were buried within the church. This number rose steadily, as Table 1 shows. In the decade of 1560/1570 an average of 98 deceased were buried in the church each year.

Table 1: Ten-year table with the average annual number of church burials in the *Buurkerk*

Decade	Average annual number	Decade	Average annual number
1430-1440	21	1500-1510	65
1440-1450	17	1510-1520	63
1450-1460	40	1520-1530	61
1460-1470	18	1530-1540	67
1470-1480	48	1540-1550	75
1480-1490	57	1550-1560	92
1490-1500	40	1560-1570	98
Annual average in the fifteenth century	**34**	**Annual average in the sixteenth century**	**74**

Numbers based on the church wardens accounts of the *Buurkerk*. This table is explained in Bogaers, *Aards, betrokken en zelfbewust*, 379.

The curves in the fifteenth century can, among other causes, be attributed to wars and the Plague. Only in the sixteenth century did the numbers become more stable. More people could then be buried within the church, because it was continually being enlarged: the cross church was first transformed into a hall church (1434-1455) and then into a five choirs and five aisles church (between 1500 and 1540). In the first seven decades of the sixteenth century 145 graves were sold to private persons.

The number of church burials does not include people who were buried inside a guild or fraternity grave. Could they have been counted, - which is impossible for lack of fraternity accounts on the one hand and the fact that brotherhoods did not pay for the opening of graves on the other -, the numbers would double or more. In Utrecht, 101 fraternities could be positively identified, of which the majority was founded in the fifteenth century. This is - by the way - a huge number in a city that counted approximately 15,000 to 20,000 inhabitants at that time. The number reflects the self- and the status consciousness of the *burghers*. Brotherhoods offered citizens the possibility of a church burial, long before they could acquire private graves for themselves. The church burial was one of the reasons why brotherhoods were so attractive.

Observations
From the above numbers it may be gathered that a church burial was uncommon before 1400, even for the well-to-do. Until then, nearly all parishioners were buried in the churchyard. The rich would already have a family grave over there and the majority of people would have been buried anonymously.

Apparently a church grave was not self-understood. The *taboo* on a private grave inside the church is reflected in the way churchwardens describe the selling of a grave. Even in the sixteenth century they seldom use the word 'purchase'. Most often a person is rewarded with a grave for God's sake, or as a token of appreciation of a service or donation, the latter being paid in the honour of a saint and for the benefit of the church.

The need for private spaces in the church, for graves, altars, benches and pews, was the main reason why medieval churches had to be expanded time and again. This process generally came to an end in the sixteenth century, in the *Buurkerk* because all those people who could afford a family vault already had one. There was no need for more space.

The private graves and accompanying monuments like memorial tablets express the need for individual manifestation in public space from 1300 onward.

- Funeral and prestige

People liked to be buried ceremoniously and this was another reason why Utrecht citizens joined brotherhoods *en masse* in the fifteenth century. Was a solemn funeral too costly to be privately paid for? Or did they prefer to be carried to their grave by their own rank rather than their neighbours? The Utrecht fraternities proved to be extremely rank bound.

The funerals these institutions offered consisted of several ceremonies, which optionally started with a cortege that escorted the deceased from his house to the church, customarily followed by the wake, funeral Mass and the visiting of the (fraternity) grave, and - optionally again - 30 silent masses said in the month after the burial. All these rituals had to be paid for, and that is the main reason why we know of the frequency of their use, as the fees were registered in brotherhood accounts, some of which survive to this very day.

The solemn funeral offered by brotherhoods was so much appreciated that people gained membership even after their death. In the Miserable Souls Brotherhood, *Broederschap van de Ellendige Zielen*, between 1485 and 1528 more than one third of the new members, 252 of 691, had already died at the time of their registration. By paying the fees for entrance and funeral, these posthumous members got the same ceremonies their regular brothers and sisters received. It may be clear that the revenues from these posthumous members were a welcome source of income for this brotherhood. But not all fraternities appreciated them: the fraternity of St Antony's disapproved of posthumous members and doubled their entrance fee in 1514.

Not everyone could afford a solemn funeral. The penniless dead, both children and adults, would be clad in a shroud. Neighbours carried the bier to the church. Some could afford a Mass, others could not. In that case, the deceased would be buried without church ceremony. Most poor dead continued to be buried in the churchyard in an anonymous grave.

- Prayers for souls in purgatory

Praying for the souls in purgatory was a major motive for the foundation of the Miserable Souls Brotherhood in 1436. The thirty Masses in the month after the funeral belonged to its standard ritual. A century later this custom was under discussion. In 1538, close reading of the accounts tells us, four of the six families of deceased members did not pay for the thirtieth. Payments in the following four years included this ritual again, but it was not mentioned between 1543 and 1549. In that last year a general assembly decided to revive the custom by lowering the cost for funerals altogether. Consequently all the dead had their thirty silent Masses in that year, but already in the next year three mourning houses did not pay. The thirtieth is not referred to in later accounts.

This process demonstrates that rituals were not static. Fraternity members reflected upon their functioning. And they were flexible. In the decision to abandon the thirtieth, one can hear the daily debate on the usefulness of prayer for souls in purgatory, a debate that was apparently also taking place within the parish.

- Remembering the dead by their name

Also at other levels the memorial cult in Utrecht does not fit in with current opinions. The *Buurkerk* did not routinely mention the names of deceased people. Not even benefactors were personally named, unless they had created a well endowed fund to do so. Unfortunately we do not have any information about occasional prayers for the deceased from the pulpit, as this was negotiated privately between parish priest and family.

In general, the dead were commemorated impersonally, as a group, in prayers during Mass and processions. This was also the case in most lay fraternities. Large brotherhoods like the Miserable Souls and the Holy Cross did not commemorate their deceased members by name. However, St Antony's Brotherhood commissioned the parish priest to read the dead roll twice a year, at Christmas and on St Antony's day. Although the former commemoration lasted until 1520, the latter was only read twice after 1496: in 1504 and 1519.

In historiography the calling or reading of names is considered standard. The personal commemoration would attribute to their salvation. Gerhard Oexle, the nestor of memorial research, even considers the name calling crucial: *In der Nennung seines Namens wird der Tote als Person evoziert*[4]. This conviction did apparently not prevail in Utrecht, since the ancestors were commemorated in general, institutionalized and anonymous prayers. They nevertheless remained an

essential and inseparable part of the community, as is demonstrated in the nearness of their graves. And of course, beloved persons were prayed to or prayed for as long as their loved ones remembered them.

- Chantries

In Utrecht not many lay people did invest in personal commemoration. In the *Buurkerk* approximately 203 bequests for eternal memorials could be traced between 1300 and 1600, not even once a year. Eighty per cent stems from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. About 140 people instituted a yearly or monthly commemoration including a wake, a Mass and a visit of the grave, and another 40 a vicariate or chantry. These patrons had often been benefactors of the church. In the view of the current debate it may be surprising that family names mostly occur once, sometimes twice, seldom three or four times in the lists that could be drawn up on the basis of *cartularia* and memorial books of the *Buurkerk*[5]. Quite often people who invested in a personal commemoration were the last of their family branch. It could happen that family members lost interest once the memorial had been created: memorial tablets did not always contain the dates of death of family members who had died after the tablet had been made[6].

The lasting effect of a foundation was determined by the size of the donation: when the funds were not sufficient, the memorial would stop. In the sixteenth century the wardens paid the clergy the meagre sum of 9 Rhenish guilders of 20 stivers each a year. We don't know what services they had to perform for this, but on the basis of other references it can be concluded that this amount of money was enough for the naming of 90 persons once a year. If a more elaborate ceremony was required, then the number of commemorated people would drop considerably: to eighteen weekly name callings or fifteen full fledged annual commemorations. Anyway, a total of ninety is a poor result for 300 years of memorial propagation.

The chantries did not fare much better. In the Visitation of 1569 it was established that twenty out of approximately forty vicariates in the *Buurkerk* were no longer maintained. None of the ones that had survived executed the founder's wishes to the letter, in most cases the number of services had been reduced. This process had already started in the fifteenth century. Memorials were not respected per se.

The ceremonial visiting of graves - a standard procedure in many memorial foundations - had become routine. Many priests could not even maintain a serious facial expression. In 1498, one church warden explicitly stated in his founding charter 'that the priests should visit his grave without laughter or jokes, but as devoutly as is appropriate'[7]. How many grave visits will he have witnessed?

- Bequests

It is often assumed that parishioners bequeathed money to the Church on their deathbeds. From the number of donators in Table 2 it can be gathered that only the well-to-do did indeed do so in Utrecht. Usually they donated one Rhenish guilder, which was just a symbolic gesture for these wealthy people. Occasionally a testator would donate a large sum, which was often registered in an official testament.

The number of bequests - as was also the case with offerings and donations - was highest when a prestigious building or decoration project was going on. The conversion of the *Buurkerk* into a hall church (1434-1455) made people most generous. Between 1456 and 1500 this church was redecorated. When this had been accomplished, the four side choirs and the southern side aisle were added (1500-1520), followed by the northern side aisle (1520-1540). After 1540, these big construction projects came to an end. From the rapidly decreasing number of bequests it can be deduced that the parishioners considered their church completed. Had salvation been a real theme, the spread of bequests would have been more even. Now civic pride and even competition between parishes can be singled out as important motives: St. James' church, a younger parish church and second in rank, had been converted into a hall church before the *Buurkerk*.

The last column of Table 2 contains the average number of palls a year: this was the cloth that covered the coffin or dead body. By custom it was given to the church. In the course of time more and more people invested in a pall. This shows how personal decorum grew in importance. The custom to donate a bequest to the church already wavered from 1485 onward.

Table 2: Ten-year table with the number of preserved accounts, bequests and palls in the *Buurkerk*

Period	Preserved accounts	Number of bequests / a year	Number of palls / a year
1435-1444	8	322 / 40	46 / 6
1445-1454	7	235 / 34	47 / 7
1455-1464	7	140 / 20	----
1465-1474	10	326 / 33	----
1475-1484	10	303 / 30	----
1485-1494	10	122 / 12	----
1495-1504	8	120 / 15	50, in 6 accounts =8
1505-1514	6	177 / 29	93 / 15
1515-1524	7	141 / 20	120 / 17
1525-1534	10	190 / 19	172 / 17
1535-1544	10	98 / 10	199 / 20
1545-1554	9	53 / 6	169 / 19
1555-1564	6	10 / 2	124 / 21
1565-1569	5	4 / 1	80 / 16

Numbers based on the church wardens accounts of the *Buurkerk*. This table is explained in Bogaers, *Aards, betrokken en zelfbewust*, 399-402.

- Donations, offerings and indulgences

Parishioners of the *Buurkerk* were most generous when the church was being transformed into a hall church (1434-1455). Their donations formed 57 per cent of the total income of the church. In this period the average sum on the offertory basin consisted of 119 Rhenish guilders a year, 17 guilders would yearly be found in the offer or indulgence blocks, 11 in the honour of Our Lady, specific donations would yield 101, bequests 58 and other forms of donations 9 Rhenish guilders. In this period donations average 315 Rhenish guilders a year. After 1456 the donations in offer boxes rapidly declined to an average of seven guilders a year, to three around 1500, even less from 1511 onward, and after 1533 they were empty. From 1500 onward Our Lady hardly received gifts in kind anymore. This was a general pattern in all Utrecht churches.

The little interest in indulgences is also reflected in the yield of offer boxes in chapter churches. This must have been a hard blow for those churches that had invested a lot of money to attract pilgrims. Yet they did not come, and the ones who came offered little money. St. Peter's church, for instance, only sold 13 to 22 silver rings to pilgrims a year. Their offerings yielded less than one guilder a year[8]. Clearly, Utrecht was not a centre of pilgrimage.

Even at jubilees the Dom church did not receive substantial donations, even though all people who attended this ceremony could gain an indulgence.

Table 3: Offerings in the Dom Church during jubilees (supposedly every 7 years) in Rhenish guilders

Year of jubilee	Offerings in the Dom church	Total income of the Dom church	Percentage
1473	76	2127	3,6
1481	86	3324	5
1487	40	4928	1,5
1494	370	4135	8,9
1501	77	3737	2
1509	60	4995	1,2
1515	84	5864	1,4
1522	38	5966	0,6

Data: *Bronnen tot de bouwgeschiedenis van de Dom*, II-1, table c.1; II-2, table A, en II-3, table A. The table is dealt with in: Bogaers, *Aards, betrokken en zelfbewust*, 306-308. A sum of 36 Rhen. guilders should each year be added to the offerings. They were paid to the warden of the indulgence altar (*Bronnen*, II-1, 506).

Offerings were not steady. This is mostly due to economic and/or political crises. Wars were often accompanied by hunger, dearth, starvation, economic instability and devaluation. Generosity was also disheartened by the plague and poor harvests. Yet, people were generous in times of prosperity, as was the case in 1494.

The papal indulgence of 1515, issued in Utrecht in 1517, only yielded 182 Rhenish guilders in this city, including 55 guilders for various dispensations. This leaves us with a pure income of 127 guilders, 43 of which were found in offer boxes. In total 147 letters of indulgence were sold for minimally 6 and maximally 17 stivers. Nineteen letters were given for free[9]. These numbers are not impressive when we realize that Utrecht counted at least 20.000 inhabitants. For at least 5,000 of them the costs would not have been a barrier, if they had really wanted such a letter. These people will have had an income of at least forty Rhenish guilders a year, whereas people could survive with an annual income of ten guilders.

When we translate all these figures to the predominant mentality, then it becomes clear that the concept of purgatory was not dominant in late-medieval Utrecht. The concept of salvation must have had another layer than we often assume.

- Confession
In Utrecht as well as anywhere else most people confessed once a year, on Easter Saturday. On this day the parish clergy was so busy that the church wardens served them wine twice while hearing confession. The church was so crowded that an altar boy had to free their way with a burning torch[10]. How much time will the priest have had to admonish a confessant? Confession cannot have been an instrument for moral lessons[11]. The confessor will have acted as civilian and ecclesiastical courts did in similar cases: they will not have imposed heavy penalties, and most certainly not, when an esteemed citizen was at stake, as this would have unsettled society. Whoever had offended community seriously, was to walk at the head of a parish procession. In most cases people got a mild penance, largely consisting of prayers and fasting and the exhortation to make amends and strive for reconciliation[12].

- 'God's will' as motive for poor relief
In Utrecht testaments the argument of salvation was not often used before 1360. In founding charters of poor relief institutions the term occurs only after 1370[13]. Most people referred to God's will when clarifying their motivation for investments in poor relief. The term 'for God's will' implies a moral and social consciousness. This attitude stems from an old tradition. In the oldest preserved charter, from 1307, the founding couple simply remarks that their fund is meant 'to feed and make merry the poor in the honour of the Holy Spirit'[14]. And they explicitly state that no chapel may ever be attached to their foundation, 'for the alms to last forever'. This couple simply wanted to alleviate poverty. Their fund apparently filled a void: many citizens responded with bequests and donations. This secular institution of the Holy Ghost became one of the largest poor relief foundations in Utrecht. All donations came in an anonymous purse. Following the founders' wishes no form of memory was ever created. Thus, these gifts did not elevate or promote the donor in any way.

In later charters the argument 'for God's will' prevails above the salvation argument. Doing 'God's will' and references to soul and salvation may seem to indicate the same, but this is emphatically not the case. The former denotes a spiritual and social awareness, the latter is specifically personal.

- Purgatory in iconography
Purgatory was seldom depicted in Utrecht. Only in one book of hours that was made in Utrecht, purgatory is visualized as a pot on top of the hell. An intense fire is burning inside it. A devil throws bodies in its leaping flames[15]. Clearly, purgatory was not a pleasant place to be. In Utrecht Last Judgment scenes only heaven and hell are depicted in their traditional images: heaven as a place of gold, light and music and hell as a devouring monster. Yet, horrifying as this projection may seem,

Jesus Christ is portrayed in the middle as timeless, merciful and compassionate. The whole picture radiates: people do have a choice.

This quality also applies to other religious scenes that have survived in Utrecht. They all have a highly personal, transcendent quality and radiate an inspiring intensity and warmth. All evidence indicates that the theological concept of purgatory had not made much impression in late-medieval Utrecht. And how could it have been otherwise? Postponement of amends was not an option in a society that valued reconciliation. Honesty and honour were key concepts in a society that depended on trust and cooperation[16]. As Thomas a Kempis wrote: 'a patient man has his purgatory here and now'[17]. By which he means that people better make amends now, in honesty and without excuses. He shared the denial of purgatory with teachers like Suso and Erasmus. The latter wrote: *There be but two ways onely. The one whiche by folowyng ye affectyons ledeth to perdycion. The other whiche through mortyfying of the flesshe: ledeth to lyfe. Why doutest thou in thyselfe: There is no thyrde way*[18].

A first synthesis
My detailed source analysis allowed me to discover that in Utrecht many customs involving funeral and memorial culture deviate from trends that are treated as common knowledge. They were less timeless and general than is often assumed. Moreover, religion functioned differently from our present-day understanding. As a start for further analysis I should like to sum up the facts that made me wonder and give some preliminary conclusions:

- Around 1400 a church burial was not customary in an important parish church such as the *Buurkerk*.
- The fifteenth century saw a growing demand for solemn funerals, as is exemplified in the rapidly accumulating number of brotherhoods and by the wish of deceased people to become posthumous members of fraternities.
- The institutionalised anonymous prayers for the souls satisfied both parish and most brotherhoods.
- Only rich lay people invested in personal memorial services, which became boring routines for the priests who had to execute them.
- The special prayers for the souls in purgatory were abandoned by the brotherhood that was created to this end.
- Gifts to the church were highest when it was involved in a prestigious project.
- Parishioners supported building campaigns for religious and social reasons: the parish church was their community house and they wanted it to look the best they could afford.
- Poor relief was more often motivated by 'God's will' than 'salvation of the soul' or other arguments on the donor's behalf.
- People did not donate money in times of crisis.
- Prestige and rank were important.
- Ordinary inhabitants were often buried without ceremony in an anonymous grave in the churchyard.
- If the argument of the soul was as important as we assume it was, descent should not have made a difference for funeral ceremonies. On a collective level all souls matter.
- If salvation was the real issue, then offerings would have been more steady and not limited to building and decoration campaigns, and more evenly distributed over family members.
- Purgatory was not a vital concept in late medieval Utrecht.
- God was portrayed as merciful.
- Religion was part of daily life. People abided by the liturgical rhythm of the year. They will have found inspiration and consolation in the church's teachings. Yet, I would characterize their spiritual outlook as pragmatic rather than zealous. Christianity may not have been rooted as much as we suppose.
- The term 'salvation' may have had more layers than we assume.

Questions
Was Utrecht atypical? Under the next caption I will argue that this was not the case. As the sources and data cannot be changed, we have to turn around and look at the historian's perspective. May it then be concluded that our observations are coloured by the stance we take? Could it be that the common depreciation of late medieval mentality is coloured by our appreciation of Renaissance and Reformation? Did we start looking at the preceding times through the eyes of humanists and reformers

who foremost ridiculed the salvation argument? Did we - following their example - take references to the soul too literally? Did we equate Church doctrine with the people's morality? And last but not least, have we taken the admonishments of preachers and reformers to be general convictions? After the exposé on Utrecht I will trace the actual development of the grave, memorial and funeral cult in Utrecht and present my final conclusions and outlines for further research.

Was Utrecht atypical?

To answer this question: I suppose not, even though it is true that Utrecht did not have a strong central government until the Habsburgian-Burgundian prince Charles V succeeded in conquering the city in 1528. Until then, Utrecht was indeed an independent city state, officially under bishop rule, but of course this fact did not prevent the town from experiencing the political, economical and social upheavals and developments that were going on everywhere at the time. In the absence of a strong government the Utrecht people had to join forces. Already for centuries, the counts of Holland and the dukes of Guelders tried to incorporate the bishopric in their realms by intrigues and force. When a bishop was weak, as was often the case, the three Estates of Utrecht, clergy, chivalry and city, had to forge alliances between themselves and with foreign powers.

This may be the main difference in comparison with other countries: Utrecht was such a small scale society that no single estate or faction could dominate the councils for a longer period of time. Also because the estates were interwoven on the family level. Time and again people of different opinions and aspirations had to work together and join forces against powers that threatened them. And although common sense and civic pride were meaningful concepts in this town, civil strife and warfare were repeated features of Utrecht's medieval history. Yet these upheavals did not paralyse the city's economy. Utrecht continued to be an important political, church and economic centre. The town was prosperous, the arts were flourishing. The Utrecht monuments are still worth visiting.

The church funeral in its local context

The trend for a church burial was not new in the *Buurkerk* in the fifteenth century. Its earliest funeral regulations date from 1313. They list the price of a church grave and the costs of the opening of a church grave and the ringing of bells, and states that the pall was to become church property. At that time church graves and ceremonious burials apparently became items that needed regulation. From the fifteenth-century numbers we can gather that a church burial in the fourteenth-century *Buurkerk* was a privilege for the elite.

Where did citizens get their inspiration? They looked at the chapters, which set the example at all levels with their fraternities, church burials and memorials. Utrecht had five chapter churches, of which the Dom and Oudmunster were the eldest, the richest and the most venerable.

Even the rich canons were not buried within the church around 1300. In general it can be said that church burials had long been forbidden for hygienic, social and spiritual reasons. An exemption was traditionally made for princes and prelates. These customs are still expressed in the so-called "Book of Laws" of the Dom chapter of 1342, where it is written that only *prelatus vel miles* are buried in the nave of the church. They only are allowed a coffin[19]. These rules imply that in 1342 Dom canons were officially still buried in the churchyard, clad in a shroud.

But already in 1342 these rules were not strictly maintained. The first known canon who was buried in a church grave was Johan van Westende[20]. He died around 1324. His case is special: he had been a great benefactor of the church, as he had instituted twelve chantries on the six new altars in the new choir aisle between 1295 and 1303. Out of gratitude the chapter will have granted him his grave in the holiest spot of this aisle. Here we find a direct relationship between donations and the privilege of a church grave. This pattern holds also true for the next two canons who were buried inside the church, respectively in 1328 and 1333. Once the example was set, it did not take long before all canons were buried in the church. The writer of the Book of Laws obviously took these three church burials as exceptions to the rule, but they happened to be the trendsetters.

The reformation of the memorial cult in chapter churches

The chapter churches revised their memorial cult around 1300 as canons wanted to be paid for their attendance[21]. Most older foundations did not dispose of enough financial resources to fulfil this wish.

Around 1300 these insufficient funds were simply cancelled or anonymously heaped together. Apparently a memory was not worth treasuring for memory's sake.

New chambers were created to administer the funds. To keep track of the memorials *necrologia* were written and they are our main source of information. Between 1300 and 1350 all Utrecht canons were - under heavy financial pressure - forced to fund an annual commemoration. If they refused to do so, their heirs would not receive their 'year of grace', the income out of the benefice for thirteen months after their death. This commemoration had to be well endowed so that canons and vicars could be paid for their attendance.

The financial incentive incited many a canon to be present at memorials. Thus it can be said that the memorial cult in chapter churches became a major instrument in keeping the corporate spirit alive. At the same time it can be said that without the duty to establish an annual and without the attached attendance fees, the memorial cult would not have lasted in its full glory until the Reformation. From 1300 onward memorials in chapter churches were associated with money, status and corporate esprit.

Funeral rites and prestige[22]

The earliest remaining funeral protocol from the five Utrecht chapters dates from 1209, but of course many of the described ceremonies are much older. The document lists the duties, ceremonies and prayers canons had to perform in the dying process of a fellow canon and afterwards, during the wake and funeral, and the commemoration. The protocol emphasizes above all in how far the final goodbye was a community affair. These statutes were regularly revised. In the course of centuries old traditions perished, new ones were created, but corporate honour and status remained important, as the ringing of bells, cortege, wake, *pallium*, mourning garments, and the alms and wines that were distributed after the burial, all demonstrate. The funeral was used to display the wealth of both the chapter and the deceased. Lay people imitated this example in a top down process, the citizenry followed the elite. The brotherhoods played a key role in making this kind of ritual available to a large number of people.

The church as a stage for the elite[23]

All the graves, altars and chapels with their altar pieces, statues of (patron) saints, memorial tablets and stained glass windows changed the once undivided Holy Church into a myriad of private islands. From a community centre the church became the domain of small units.

The private use of the parish church must have affected the sense of community in both a positive and negative way. Families and corporation members could attend Sunday Mass around their own altar, sitting on private benches that were placed upon their own graves. Or even listen to a private Mass that was read just for them. On feast days the elite could distinguish itself even more by buying *monigwijn*, unconsecrated wine, that was served at the indulgence table. The new customs made social distinction visible within the church. With one gaze it was clear who the insiders and the outsiders were. This must have caused social tension, be it inarticulate. In the course of time this display of power would raise sympathy for the Reformation in Utrecht. In the meantime it is equally and undoubtedly true that many parishioners took pride in the wealth the *Buurkerk* radiated. The parish church was their community house.

Social division and status display did not vanish after the Reformation. The need for private space remained in the form of family pews that were decorated with cushions on which the family coat of arms was embroidered. Personal commemoration remained as important as it had been in Catholic times. In all churches wooden mourning plaques could be found, with the coats of arms and the names and antecedents of the deceased painted on them. In 1795, as many as 583 of these plaques hung in the *Buurkerk*. Leading families also erected impressive memorial monuments or acquired their own funeral chapels. As soon as the French invaded the city in 1795, angry people started to destroy these much-hated symbols of the Regency.

To gain true insight into the social meaning of the memorial cult, it would be better not to limit the research to Roman Catholic times. The continuity in both funeral and memorial customs before and after the Reformation shows that status and prestige always had been dominant features. The ways in which the elite took possession of the holy, public space affected the social cohesion and always created social tension and anger in the end, as is testified by the iconoclasts, in Utrecht in 1566, 1579, 1580 and 1795.

The meaning of the term 'salvation'
The term 'salvation' turns out to be crucial for understanding these developments. As said before, in Utrecht testaments the argument of salvation was not often used before 1360. In founding charters of poor relief institutions the term occurs after 1370. The explanation can be found in the development of last wills and testaments. In Utrecht the phrasing of testaments was completed around 1360. By that time all testaments were standard drawn up by a notary. The 'salvation of the soul' was part of the official terminology. The phrase was needed to give bequests a legal status.

This needs some explanation. Customarily the heritage went to the heirs undivided. Only with their univocal permission could money be spent on a good cause. The Church had already been fighting this custom for centuries. The salvation argument turned out to be the key phrase to put an end to this practice. For who would deny anyone the right to humbly invest in his salvation? And so - in a process that took several centuries - the salvation argument also acquired a judicial connotation. As a consequence, any reference to the soul in judicial documents cannot be taken as an expression of mentality.

From 1360 onward the reference to the soul can be found in wills and founding charters, but not always. And not always in the same way: testators may mention their salvation as a motive for alms and donations, sometimes they ask for prayers from those who benefit from their gifts.

When ordered chronologically, the term is used more often in periods when a pious movement made headway: the Modern Devotion around 1400, biblical humanism around 1500, and the Counter Reformation after 1545.

The different layers of the salvation argument
The salvation argument in late medieval Utrecht from 1300 onward effectuated that patricians and burghers could manifest themselves prominently in churches, at that time the community centres *par excellence*. The salvation argument allowed the elite and middle classes to transcend social barriers and traditions. The more often the argument was used, the more dividing lines were drawn. Common people were buried in the churchyard, the well-to-do in the church. The poor occupied the empty spaces in church, the well-to-do had private areas and benches. Descent and wealth determined the dividing lines. Ranks had always been present, but now became ever more explicit and fixed.

The reference to the soul indicates repentance and devotion, yet in effect it contributed to the creation of personal monuments and decorum. The material foundations of this development can be found in the growing economy. But before this individual manifestation at the expense of the collective could take place, a change in mentality was needed. The salvation argument had prepared and successfully convinced people's minds that it was all right to break away from the collective. In the end it legitimized ego-centeredness.

In its need of money the Church had cultivated the salvation argument on many levels. A judicial-doctrinal layer was added to the evangelical notion of salvation, as can be gathered from the Church's decrees and proceedings around confession, indulgences and testaments. Meanwhile devotional movements that stressed pious, modest behaviour flared up time and again. The argument of salvation was continually being alluded to in various discourses. Manipulation deflated this originally moral and religious concept and paved the way for its material exploitation.

The paradox of the salvation argument
This process is unfathomable. One cannot wonder enough how a term referring to the soul and conscience became instrumental in gaining prominence and prestige. This process may indicate that Christianity had not rooted as much as we assume. Those people for whom religion is more than a concept, have a notion that salvation cannot be gained by outward behaviour. Compassion and charity are at the heart of every religion. *Memento mori* is a wake-up call to live well in the here and now, not first on one's deathbed or beyond. Both the gospel and the current devotional literature emphasize this message. A well known Church adage says: *Facientibus quod in se est Deus non denegat gratiam*, God is merciful to anyone who does what he can. This image of a concerned, merciful God is visible in all images of the holy that have survived in Utrecht. The message was clear: heaven awaits anyone who does whatever he can in his life time.

And yet the argument of salvation was exploited by the Church and the well-to-do for their own sake, as the late medieval memorial cult shows. To achieve this, the Church had taken upon itself the role of intermediary, acting as if she could dispose of God's grace. Through all these developments the term 'salvation' got many connotations. To judge its meaning for individual people, we have to look not only to their intent, but foremost to their deeds. With their investments in the Church people did not so much buy a seat in heaven (as if that is possible), but on earth, even beyond death. This form of family marketing was at the expense of social cohesion and collective traditions.

The impact of the shift in mentality that took off around 1300 has not been recognized enough yet, even though the individuation process that gradually delineated itself, had been of great significance for Western civilisation. Because the argument was veiled in religious terminology - and could it have been otherwise at that time? -, historians failed to grasp its material implications. Also because many intellectuals are no longer familiar with religiosity. Religion then becomes merely a mental concept, whereas for religious people it is a source of inspiration, a moral guideline and above all a way of life and of social communication.

Undoubtedly anti-Catholic sentiments contributed to later misunderstandings as well. Humanists and Reformers already stumbled over overt pious behaviour of contemporaries. Their aversion fed the negative perception of soul searching that is common today. This is understandable. The improper use the Church made of salvation has discredited the concept of soul to this very day. By focussing on a negative interpretation of salvation, i.e. the buying of a place in heaven, the real stories remain untold. Stories of spirituality as well as of materialism and ego-centeredness. Focussing on the latter, as is the topic of this paper, it becomes clear that the connected processes of individualization and elitization were already well on their way in the fourteenth century. In all sectors of life, people liked to display their wealth and status and sought ever new ways to do so. In Church matters the salvation argument was abused.

Towards a new paradigm

A new, more materialistic sense of the self caused the shift of mentality around 1300, rather than fear of the soul. The burial, grave and memorial cults were its chosen domains of manifestation. Using traditional religious concepts the elite shaped itself a new social world, with great consequences for political and economic relationships, for the sense of community and for the Church itself.

Looking at what the salvation argument actually achieved provides a more realistic view of late medieval mentality and a better understanding of late medieval people. With regard to the current debate my research demonstrates that parish life was not coloured by the death cult[24], nor did the deceased form a separate age group[25]. The memorial cult was indeed a 'total social phenomenon'[26], not in an exalted way, but naturally, as death is - almost by definition- a catalyst on an individual and cultural level. But no matter how often death presented itself, it was an accepted phenomenon. How could it be otherwise? It was no use to fight death. And more important: people had to earn their daily bread and find answers to challenges that confronted them. Fear of death was not an item, people had to deal with life as it presented itself. Family, neighbourhood, community, survival and celebration were meaningful concepts that made life worth living.

This earthly interpretation of late medieval mentality is in line with the grandeur that many medieval towns still radiate. It does away with the dichotomy in our traditional perspective in which late medieval people were on the one hand prosperous and keen traders and builders, but on the other hand fearful and anxious. It is time to highlight their rationality and vitality and to look anew at their spirituality. But the theological and doctrinal discourse of the Church can no longer serve as the most important guide for late medieval mentality and religiosity. We have to look at their context and at the deeds and performances of individual men and women. Only then can we start seeing their world through their eyes.

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[1] Tuchman, *A distant mirror. The calamitous 14th century*.

[2] I extensively deal with these questions and paradigms in my thesis *Aards, betrokken en zelfbewust.* All information I give on Utrecht memorials, burials, etc. can be found in this book.

[3] Panofsky, *Tomb sculpture*; Herklotz, 'Grabmalstiftungen; Blockmans and Janse, *Showing Status*; Van der Velden, *The donor's image*; Hengerer (ed.), *Macht und Memoria*.

[4] Oexle, 'Die Gegenwart', 30.

[5] Bogaers, *Aards, betrokken en zelfbewust'*, appendixes 15 and 16.

[6] Bogaers, *Aards, betrokken en zelfbewust'*, 656-660.

[7] Het Utrechts Archief, Stadsarchief I, 586 (*Cartularium Buurkerk*), 176, 22 augustus 1498.

[8] Bogaers, *Aards, betrokken en zelfbewust'*, 602-605.

[9] Fredericq, *Les comptes des indulgences*, 70.

[10] Het Utrechts Archief, Stads Bewaarden Archieven II, 3 (*Cartularium Buurkerk*), f. 68v.

[11] Ozment, *Reformation in the cities*, 22-32, and *Age of reform*, 216-219, claims that confession was *very demanding*. This severity drove the faithful towards the Reformation. Critics reproach him for neglecting confessional practice. Rittgers, 'Anxious penitents', gives an overview of the reactions. Burgess, 'A fond thing', 59, postulates that confession was more important than communion: the sacrament of confession *played, if anything, a more formative role in shaping men's priorities and actions*. But then he has to give plausible arguments that confession was more than a routine affair, limited to busy Easter Saturday.

[12] Comparable with Bossy, *Christianity in the West*, 45-50.

[13] Cappon, *De opkomst van het testament*, 18-19, 97, appendix 1.

[14] Muller Fz., 'Stichtingsbrieven', 44-46.

[15] Van Bueren, *Leven na de dood*, 144-145.

[16] See also my paper 'Neighbourliness in Utrecht through the ages', www.eauh2010.ugent.be, S34.

[17] Kempis, *Imitatio Christi*, I, 24, 5.

[18] Erasmus, *Enchiridion Militis Christiani,* 89.

[19] Muller (ed.), *Het rechtsboek van den Dom*, 250, 261.

[20] Rikhof, Vikarissen, 182-189; idem, 'Kapelanieën', 55-57; Borst, *Graven en begraven*, 83.

[21] Bogaers, 'Commemoration'.

[22] For an overview of developments in burial customs of canons: Van den Hoven van Genderen, 'Utrecht canons'.

[23] The following is a summary of the conclusions in my thesis *Aards, betrokken en zelfbewust*.

[24] Galpern, 'The legacy', 149.

[25] Davis, 'Some tasks and themes', 326-335; Bossy, *Christianity in the West*, 30.

[26] Oexle, 'Memoria und Memorialbild', 394.