Cities, Texts and Social Networks, 400–1500
Experiences and Perceptions of Medieval Urban Space

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The attackers had chosen the moment of their offensive without any scruple. On that Christmas Eve of 1332, almost everyone had gone to church, and only a few were on guard. After the well-armed men had taken the walls, they killed everyone they met in the streets, and then turned to the churches to continue their work. Finally, they burned down all the buildings and did not even spare the houses of God.

Only one of numerous atrocities that history can relate, one might say. But in this case, it was not a foreign army that committed these terrible acts. Attackers and victims alike were citizens of the same town, Hildesheim. On that Christmas Eve, the inhabitants of the old city centre had conquered the neighbouring quarter, called Dammstadt; the people of Dammstadt, who had been expecting such an attack, had already built a wall around their quarter for fear of their ‘fellow-citizens’, but to no avail. After that burning and killing, the quarter was never rebuilt. It would remain deserted for the next 300 years.1

The Hildesheim incident of 1332 underlines a problem often overlooked by historians. With some exceptions—Christiane Klapisch-Zuber is one2—the unity of the medieval city, especially the German city, is mostly taken for granted. But the sometimes very far-reaching autonomy (de facto and even de jure) of guilds

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and neighbourhood quarters within a city's walls can tell a different story. It is true that most cities somehow managed to avoid civil wars, or at least the wholesale destruction of entire city quarters, as in Hildesheim. And after a crisis, most cities were able to reintegrate hostile factions. But how was this accomplished? And why is this a problem with which modern historians should be concerned?

This essay suggests some answers to these questions, in six stages. First, the above-mentioned incident will be set in a wider historical context, with reference to Max Weber's insistence on the unity of the occidental city, a thesis that is very well known and widely taken for granted by most scholars today. Second, I will focus on the city of Braunschweig (Brunswick), the second-largest town in Lower Saxony after Lübeck and (in German-language urban historiography) a city famous for the political and constitutional independence of its five city quarters, which prevailed until the late sixteenth century. Stage three of my argument shows that 'the city within the city' is a widespread phenomenon among medieval towns, and gives some reasons for this. In stages four and five, I will critically examine the assumption that religious processions and other rituals were successful tools for the construction of a unified urban identity, through a comparison of secular and religious rituals in Braunschweig. Finally, in stage six, I will offer some conclusions.

THE UNITY OF THE MEDIEVAL CITY IN A WIDER HISTORICAL CONTEXT

According to Max Weber, the medieval western city, administered by city councils and economically based on long-distance trade, can be seen as a forerunner of modernity. Moreover, according to Weber, the occidental medieval city differs in two central respects from premodern urban centres elsewhere: first, in its growing independence from local lords and the resulting political autonomy of the citizens; and second, in its unity. While in other parts of the world (Weber argued) families, kinships and the court of the sovereign dominated urban centres, in Europe it was the commune that formed the basis of social and civic life. In the East, moreover, identity was accordingly linked to families or to the saints venerated by kin-groups rather than to the town community as such - hence, Weber reasoned, the distinctive structure of the occidental city of modernity is a function of western Christianity, whose meaningful units of organization were the parish and local community, not the family. Crucial for him is Galatians 2:11, where the question of a common meal shared by (baptized) Jews and (baptized) Gentiles is under discussion, and Paul strongly emphasizes its importance. For Weber, this is how Christianity surmounted the boundaries of sacral kinship through shared ritual: this incident looks ahead to the development of a parish community centred on a ritualized meal, a community that offers everyone full membership. For him, this Christian concept of community membership is a cornerstone for the development of medieval towns.

Weber's assumptions - whether right or wrong - do not offer a solution to the problems evident in Hildesheim or (as we shall see) in Braunschweig, because in these cases it was not families or kin groups who were fighting, but rather different quarters within the same city. In short (and I will return to this point later), even if strong family ties did not disrupt the coherence of the European town, associations, guilds and especially autonomous quarters within the same city surely could. For instance, it was not a rare phenomenon for different quarters of one city to join with rival foreign powers and thus to take sides against one another. This clearly undermined the independence of the whole city and thus calls into question Weber's model of the autonomous, self-governed town.

What remains valid in Weber's argument that in terms of independence, self-government and autonomy, the western city is different, and it is evident that the autonomy from the lord of the city requires a certain unity, otherwise the town...
would have been too easy to defeat. In other words, in order to understand what is specific about the medieval western city, it is fundamental that we understand how this necessary cohesion was formed. What was the glue that kept different quarters together, that helped to build up a sense of community sufficient to defend a city against encroachments? What was the crucial ingredient needed for the maintenance of an autonomous political structure within a society dominated by lords and their vassals?

On first view, the map of Braunschweig looks like any other map of a medieval city (fig. 10.1). But the five districts (Weichbilder) shown on this map – called Altstadt, Hagen, Neustadt, Sack and Altwiek – were more than administrative sub-units; they were independent cities within the city. They had their own histories and their own rights and administrations. In 1227, for instance, Duke Otto the Child granted different rights to the Altstadt and the Hagen in two different charters. The charters of the smaller Altwiek can be dated back to the 1240s. The Neustadt and the Sack got their charters about 60 years later, around 1300. Furthermore, each of these five city-quarters had its own council. True, a common city council (Gemeiner Rat) was founded in 1269 by the Altstadt, Neustadt and Hagen quarters, joined in 1325 by the quarters Sack and Altwiek. But during these efforts to obtain freedom and independence from the lords of the city – or rather, cities – it was not the common city council that played the decisive role. Rather, it was the city council of the wealthy Altstadt and/or the councils of the individual quarters that bought these rights from their permanently bankrupt lords. In consequence, with respect to internal affairs, the common council had little to say. It is a telling fact that during the fourteenth century, each of the five councils of the city's subsections built a town hall of its own, while the council of the entire city had at its disposal only a single chamber in the Neustadt town hall. By the end of the fourteenth century, Braunschweig had seven mayors: two nominated by the Altstadt, two by the Hagen and one by each of the other three quarters. Furthermore, the administrative and political independence of the quarters went hand-in-hand with marked differences in the relative social status of the cities' populations. While in the Altstadt one would find wealthy merchants and long-distance traders and rich goldsmiths, the dwellers of the Altwiek were mainly agricultural labourers. Craftsmen, among them the wool-

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*Fig. 10.1* The five city quarters of Braunschweig (Weichbilder): Altstadt, Hagen, Neustadt, Altwiek and Sack. Their boundaries (Grenzen) are marked by dashed lines. The five different Town Halls are marked. The city council of the whole town had no building of its own, but met in the Neustadt Town Hall. (After Gerd Spies (ed.), *Brunswiek 1031 - Braunschweig 1981: Die Stadt Heinrichs des Löwen von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*; vom 25.4.1981 bis 11.10.1981 (Braunschweig, 1981), p. 95). Scale 1:20,000.

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7 The story of how and when rights were purchased, impounded, resold by various dukes and councils is not easy to follow; see Garzmann, *Stadtherr und Gemeinde*, pp. 79ff.

8 Moderhack, 'Abriß Geschichte Braunschweig', p. 11.

9 To paraphrase a statement of Martin Kintzinger: 'The legal inner differentiation in city quarters was always matched by an economic and social differentiation as well' ('Die Weichbildordnung reprasentierte stets auch eine oekonomische und soziale Binnendifferenzierung Braunschweigs'); Martin Kintzinger, 'Handwerk, Zunft und Stadt im Mittelalter', in Kintzinger (ed.), *Handwerk in Braunschweig. Entstehung und Entwicklung vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart* (Braunschweig, 2000), p. 17.
weavers, settled in the Hagen quarter. Thus, I agree with Bernd Schneidmüller, who characterizes the history of Braunschweig as, in essence, the history of five (independent) towns with five city-councils and five town halls.

What were the effects of this structure, in terms of everyday politics? When in the 1290s, for instance, Duke Albrecht II of Braunschweig fought Duke Henry I, the Hagen and Neustadt quarters, led by their Gildemeister (guild-masters), formed an alliance with Henry, while the Allstadt took sides with Albrecht. In fact, during this so called Schicht der Gildemeister (Revolt of the Guild-Masters), Braunschweig saw intense fighting between the different parties involved, with the masters attempting to establish a government of their own. Social tensions between rich Altstadt and the poorer or nouveaux riches inhabitants of the Hagen and Neustadt certainly did not ease the situation. What is more, Martin Kintzinger has interpreted the intra-city fighting on that occasion as not so much fuelled by economic differences but by quarrels rooted in longstanding social differences among the city quarters; if so, this bodes even worse for any theory of urban unity. In any case, all historians who have conducted research into this matter agree that the essential conflict came down to the contra that the Hagen and the Altstadt quarters tried to exercise over the whole city, a conflict which was interwoven with that between the two aforementioned dukes, with each claiming the city as part of his inheritance.

The 'Revolts of the Guild-Masters' was by no means the only incident leading to scenes of violent civil strife in Braunschweig. And as seen in the example from Hildesheim, the safety of any city and its survival as an integrated whole was at stake during such times. Even when alliances between individual city quarters and external powers were forged, the autonomy and independence of the town was in danger. Yet a certain degree of unity, it seems, must be a prerequisite for a city's independence, in order for this experimental urban model of proto-modern society to be realized. So are Braunschweig and Hildesheim merely exceptions to the rule?

THE PEAS-IN-THE-POD PROBLEM

On the contrary, Braunschweig and Hildesheim are more typical of the medieval city than they are anomalous. Looking closely, one finds numerous examples like them: cities consisting not only of two, but often of three or more different internal cities, some very prominent. Recently, Leszek Belzyt called late medieval Prague, and also Krakau and Lemberg, 'agglomerations' of several different cities. In fact Prague, like Braunschweig, consisted of four towns, or even five after 1476. With respect to Cologne, scholarly discussion of the importance of the so-called Sondergemeinden (quarters or boroughs), whose administrations were closely linked to those of parishes (but not identical to them), has been ongoing for almost a hundred years now. Indeed, it has been demonstrated that
the important tasks carried out by these units generated an intense pragmatic literacy, exemplified by the famous Schreinsbücher or property-registers in which the sales of houses in each quarter were recorded. At least until the end of the fourteenth century, these Sondergemeinden were able to maintain a certain independence vis-à-vis the city council. The (now Swiss) city of Lausanne was also composed of two entirely separate municipal administrations, that of the lower Town ... and that of the City, to quote Clémente Thévenaz-Modestin. The lower Town was further divided into four bannières or quarters, which were themselves highly independent units. The peaceful unification of the two cities, which took place in 1481, was by no means an easy task. In southern Germany, Bamberg is an excellent example of a town which consisted of at least two different cities, Gerhard Dilcher, who compares it with Braunschweig, underlines the juridical independence of the different parts of the city.

Instead of continuing to catalogue cities like these, it is more interesting to ask why this phenomenon was so widespread. In my view, two explanations offer themselves: first, the nature of these cities’ origins; and, second, the structure of the city as such. With respect to the first, urban historians have long been aware that many cities are rooted not in one but in two or more nuclei of settlement. As Edith Ennen and others have pointed out, during the tenth and eleventh centuries, an Altstadt (Old Town) frequently came to be built around the seat of a bishop, a monastery or a castle; thereafter, a marketplace and attendant dwellings might come into being, fostered by a secular or ecclesiastical lord. The expression ‘topographical dualism’, used to label this phenomenon, should not obscure the fact that more than two different settlements are often to be found when looking at such early medieval cities. The further differentiation in German urban historiography between this ‘topographical dualism’ of the early centuries and the so-called Doppelstädte (double cities), which are a phenomenon of the twelfth to early fourteenth centuries, need not concern us here. The essential points are that (a) a great number of cities consisted of two or more such foundations, and (b), even more importantly, all of these different co-existing settlements had ‘constitutions’ of their own, that is, were granted (or gave themselves) specific rights and held to certain customs that were valid only for those who lived in that city quarter or district.

With respect to the second point, the structure of the city, one should not overlook the fact that – in contrast to today – the smallest units of a medieval city were not individuals, but corporations. Not only was political participation linked to membership in guilds and other collectives, but these corporations as such united to form the city. In this respect, the medieval town resembled

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22 Edith Ennen, Die europäische Stadt des Mittelalters, 4th edn (Göttingen, 1987), pp. 97–9 (see the maps of Verdun and Bonn, respectively). Ennen highlights the fact that one often sees more than two Siedlungszeilen, and a number of examples are given by Ernst Pitz, Europäisches Städte- und Bürgertum: Von der Spätantike bis zum hohen Mittelalter (Darmstadt, 1991), pp. 174ff.


24 Isenmann, Deutsche Stadt, pp. 44ff. (e.g. Regensburg, Lübeck, Braunschweig, Hildesheim).


a raw pea-pod more than a well-cooked pea soup, and people were proud of their own 'pea' and defended its integrity within the 'pod'. Hence it may be said that the way independent 'districts' - or rather, different cities - were formed was nothing but an aggrandizement of the peas-in-the-pod structure common to almost every medieval city of central Europe, and in many other European locales. Max Weber's insistence that the occidental city is different from towns elsewhere because of the emphasis placed on community is certainly right in some respects, although today we would paint a more nuanced picture. But as the examples given here in this brief overview of urban structures demonstrates, this emphasis on community did not solve the problem of urban unity. Communities within towns that formed independent entities within the city, or were even founded as independent entities and granted their own rights by a local lord, quite often fostered intra-city tensions, alliances of city-quarters with opposing foreign powers, or even civil wars. It is true that in most cases we do not find the total destruction of a city quarter, as in Hildesheim, or two quarters siding against one another with two competitive dukes, as in Braunschweig. Most cities obviously managed to establish a unity stable enough to avoid this type of conflict - which, it is important to note, would put at risk the whole project of free citizens dwelling in a city independent from external control. The question is, how?

**RELIGIOUS RITUAL AS A TOOL FOR CREATING UNITY?**

In the search for an 'identity adhesive' that could hold a city together, games, feasts and processions are often held up as excellent candidates. Especially those processions that took place to honour the patron saint of a city have seemed to be ideally suited to fostering a feeling of unity in the urban population. Why feasts and processions? If I understand it correctly, there are two different approaches to these allied phenomena that lead to the same argument: performative acts are able to create a feeling of community, a sense of togetherness. The first approach finds its classic articulation in Émile Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912), in which rituals are viewed as the crucial way to make people identify themselves with a community. Durkheim's position, which emerged from nineteenth-century sociology, is that festivity, play and sport are able to bring together the different social groups and classes of an otherwise fragmented society and that, through these activities, coherence and togetherness are manufactured. It seems that many German and Anglophone scholars are, at least implicitly, inclined to this theory. The second approach seems to derive from Arnold van Gennep's contemporary *Rites of Passage* (1909). In the words of Edward Muir, processions, triumphs and entries project 'the image of a perfectly harmonious government'. Through religious rituals, therefore, the premodern city was able 'to transubstantiate ... disparate characteristics of a community into a mystic body, a mystified city', and thus to create a unified urban identity. It is not an accident that these theories parallel those dealing more generally with performance, which most of the time forms part of a ritual. Together, performance and ritual not only mirror society, but themselves have the power...
to create social realities. Their analysis is now seen as central to understanding premodern phenomena. Yet bearing in mind J.L. Austin's 'speech acts', we note that performances have this power without the necessity of involving religion or the invocation of the sacred. I will return to this point.

The patron saint of Braunschweig is the so-called Saint Auctor. In the late fourteenth century, two processions, on the 24th of June and the 20th of August, were held in his honour. The first was to thank him for his help during the plague of 1348, the second to commemorate the victory of the city against King Philip of Swabia in 1200. A representative example of the many interpretations advanced by scholars who have worked on these processions is that of Klaus Naß who, well aware of the autonomy of the Braunschweig city quarters, stated that these processions were 'manifestations of city unity under the protection of the city saint'. This summation echoes Andrea Löther's fundamental study: analyzing the processions of Nuremberg, Erfurt, Braunschweig and other late-medieval German cities, she sees the production of unity as the most important effect of the procession.

Prima facie, this seems to be perfectly true, according to a description of the processions found in the Ordinarius of 1408. During the procession on the 20th of August, all city-dwellers went to the monastery of St Egidius, where Auctor's relics were kept. Then, accompanied by singing and prayers, the reliquary was carried around the cloister. Five huge candles, each weighing a hundred pounds, were offered to the saint on this day by the citizens. During the other procession, on the 24th of July, the saint's holy remains were carried around the city walls, and in the four corners of the city the four gospels were read out. Again, the whole population participated. Clearly, the city is displayed here as a sacred community (Sakralgemeinschaft), and the purpose of these processions appears to match both of the theoretical models outlined above.

But were these effective tools to foster unity? A closer look will raise doubts. First, it is striking that the council of the whole city does not play an important role during these rituals - perhaps no role at all. With respect to both processions, the sources emphasize that this common council was not allowed to ask the religious institutions of Braunschweig to take part; that right was reserved for the five councils of the five divisions of the city, as the statutes underline. As for the procession held on the 24th of June, it was the council of the Altwiek district that was supposed to ask St Egidius for the loan of the coffin used to convey the saint's remains around the city walls. In contrast, the men who were allowed to carry Saint Auctor's relics were exclusively members of the Altstadt city council, the most powerful of the five city quarters. What is more, when all the citizens marched to St Egidius on August 20th, or around the city walls on June 24th, they did not mingle; rather, all the different groups who lived within the city walls, especially the clergy and the guilds, were divided according to the five subsections of the city. The common city council of Braunschweig, moreover,

43 Löther, Prozessionen, pp. 333ff.
44 The Ordinarius is printed in Urkundenbuch der Stadt Braunschweig, vol. 1: Statute und Rechtebriefe 1227-1671, ed. Ludwig Hän sel mann (Braunschweig, 1873), No. 63. See p. 143 for a short introduction to this source, hereinafter cited as Ordinarius.
was not to be found marching as a group in that procession. And the five huge candles that were offered to Saint Auctor in August were donated by each of the five city districts.

How should we read these processions? If their main purpose had been to bring about 'unity', the important task of the processions ought to have been carried out by the council of the whole city. In reality, it seems to have been more important for the city-dwellers of the time to highlight the autonomy and individuality of the different quarters and to reveal the hierarchies that governed them. In this effort, the council of the whole city played - at best - a secondary role. Nor is Braunschweig an exception. Richard Trexler, analysing the feast of Saint John in Florence, noted the commune's struggles to gain a prominent position in the rituals, which they were traditionally dominated by private brotherhoods and religious orders. That said, it is obvious that the whole population of Braunschweig was on the streets to celebrate on these occasions. Walking around the city walls together and listening to the reading of the four gospels in each corner of the city surely could foster a degree of shared identity. What conclusion is to be drawn from this mixed and somewhat puzzling picture? To state my first thesis: religious processions are not designed to, and do not per se, create a sense of urban unity. They cannot be seen as a kind of didactic tool to establish togetherness. Rather, the importance of these performative acts is to be seen in their power to combine two potentially opposing phenomena typically found in European cities: on the one hand, to display the autonomy of groups and quarters and, on the other, to foster a certain cohesion among these groups.

**The Performance of Secular Rituals**

The capacity of ritualized acts to communicate and create both the autonomy of the groups that take part in them while at the same time fostering togetherness may be attributed to the power of performance as such. But if performance itself is so powerful, what is the role of religion, specifically the Christianity that Weber so influentially considered to be the crucial force for the creation of urban unity? Is it irrelevant that relics were carried in procession, and that a saint was being honoured? We all know that, during the middle ages, performances were not only part of religious communication but occurred in many other contexts. It may thus be useful to compare religious rituals with other performative acts that can be found in legal and administrative contexts in medieval Braunschweig. Do these secular rituals function like religious ones, to promote the mixture of autonomy and cohesion noted above?

Medieval legal proceedings are firmly acknowledged to be highly ritualized acts, closely interwoven with the fabric of both political and religious life, but in their purpose and content different in many ways from religious rituals. The so-called *echte Ding* (day of judgment) performed twice a year in Braunschweig took place two weeks after Easter in the spring and the week after Michaelmas in the autumn. The Braunschweig city council had to announce it, but it was the task of each of the five different councils of the city's quarters to execute justice within those five quarters, respectively. And they did so not on a single day, but on five different days in a row: Monday was judgment day in the Altstadt, Tuesday in the Hagen, Wednesday in the Neustadt, and so forth. It was the responsibility of the five councils to call all inhabitants of the quarter on that given day to the square in front of the quarter's town hall. Furthermore, these councils were responsible for summoning * liedt* each court's jury.

When it came to taxation, quite similar procedures were followed. Taxes had to be paid during the week after Saint Martin's day (Martinstag, November 11), starting with the Altstadt on Monday, the Hagen on Tuesday, and so on. For our purposes, the important event in that context occurs four weeks before taxation, when all councils and all citizens had to swear an oath confirming the information they gave with respect to their property and possessions. The protocols determining how the oaths were taken were carefully articulated: two councillors from the Hagen were to hear the oaths of the Altstadt council, and then two councillors of the Altstadt were delegated to hear the oaths of the councillors from the other quarters. Then the councillors of the different quarters received the oaths of their fellow citizens, and it will come as no

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50 The relevant passage in the Ordinarius points to the procession held on the feast of Corpus Christi, which is described in detail: § CXXI, p. 177. See Ebbrecht, 'Die Stadt und ihre Heiligen', p. 231.

51 'Darto se hefft de rad ghelouet to offerenelle alle iuar viff erlike waslechte to sunt Ylien vor demm hillighedome sunt Auctoris to bernende in demm hochhesten festen, de me dar in eyner processen alle iar brinchen schal, alsen et tolkelken wykkelke eyn recht', Ordinarius, § CXXVII, p. 179.

52 'Wen governement did appear in the St John's events, it did so as one of many other groups offering to the patron', Richard C. Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (New York, 1980), p. 257.
surprise that the Altstadt citizens took their oaths on Monday, the Hagen on Tuesday and so on.\footnote{An exception in this case: residents of Altewiek and Sack both swear their oaths on Thursday, but not together (of course): \textquoteleft Wan me to dem schote sweret:
}\footnote{\textquoteleft Des morghens schal me vorboden vp dat radius rad vnde radsworen des wykbeldes \cite[\textquoteleft quarter\textquoteright]{} dar me sweren schal, vnde senden to twene vt orem rade, de schallen dar by wesen wen denne sweren vp dem wykbeldel de dar in deme rade syn. Vnde we dar kumpt van des rades weghen imme Hagen, de schal den ruderhen in der Oldenstad den eyd stauen, vnde we dar kumpt van des rades weghen in der Oldenstad in de anderen vier wykbeldel de schal den ruderhen in de wykbelden den eyd stauen. \ldots \textquoteleft Ween de radhieren vp eenem wykbeldel aldus ghesworen hebben, des sulen morghens schal de rad des wykbeldes dede ghesworen hefft den sulen eyd vort stauen alse se vor ghesworen hedden. Dorna des sulen dagshe na middaghe schal de rad des wykbeldes vorboden de lüde de schotbar syn in dem wykbeldel vp middaghe\textquoteleft{} [of the given quarter] myt der klocken vnde myt boden, vnde staven me den sulen eyd\textquoteleft{}; Ordnarius, \cite[p. 180]{Dürre}\textapos{}s. On the taxation system of Braunschweig, see Dürre, Braunschweig, pp. 326ff.}

There is no need to elaborate on the fact that rituals performed while doing justice or levying taxes have the potential – and are often designed – to display the identity of a community. And it is clear that in these acts, as during religious processes, themes of both diversity and unity can be seen to play important roles. But there are striking differences. In contrast to the religious performances analyzed above, we see that it is not the whole population that gathers to take part in a single act, but rather five different segments of the population that perform five rituals on five different days. Also in contrast to the processes, it was not the space of the whole city that was involved, but rather that of each separate district, centred on its town hall. Hence, rituals performed in the context of urban administration and justice emphasized the autonomy of the different quarters, rather than the unity of the whole city.

Why these differences between civic and religious acts? Is it Weber's Christianity, the power of religion, that is placing the greater emphasis on unity? This is hard to believe, because swearing an oath is also a sacred act and, as we have seen, it was this ritual that underlined the autonomy of the quarters, rather than their unity. At this point, it seems useful to differentiate between the religious aspects of a ritual and religion as the central subject of a discourse. This leads me to my second thesis: when examining the structure of a given communication, it is important to notice whether religion as such, or political administration as such, is at the centre of a performative act. In Braunschweig, politics and administration were directly linked to the quarters' autonomy within the city as a whole. When 'religion' was at the centre of the performance, the constitutional structure of the city and its constituent parts did not disappear, but they did recede into the background. This gave some leeway, or permission, to the whole population to participate in a single performative act – something that was actually avoided in other performative contexts.

A very interesting exception to this rule, or so it seems at first, is provided by the sessions of a special court convened in Braunschweig in the fourteenth century, the \textit{Femegericht} (Vehmgericht, or secret tribunal) so precisely analyzed by Frank Rexroth.\footnote{Frank Rexroth, \textquoteleft Die Stadt Braunschweig und ihr Femegericht im 14. Jahrhundert\textquoteright{}, in Klaus Schreiner and Gabriela Signori (eds), \textit{Bilder, Texte, Rituale. Wirklichkeitsbezug und Wirklichkeitskonstruktion politisch-rechtlicher Kommunikationsmedien in Stadt- und Adelsgesellschaften des späten Mittelalters} (Berlin, 2000), pp. 87--109. This Femegericht of Braunschweig is similar in name only to the imperial law courts that became famous in Germany during the fifteenth century.} To prepare for the court session, the city council met the night before in the graveyard. The next day, all city-dwellers were called together and led outside the city walls. The proceedings took place there, with the citizens sitting on the earthworks while the \textit{Femegraff}, about whom the sources give no details, acted as judge at the foot of the wall. All kinds of conflicts and crimes, most of them petty, were brought before this court. In the evening, when the proceedings were finished, everyone re-entered the city. The conduct of this court indicates that it was more of a ritual intended to cleanse the city from sins and sinners, in order to re-establish internal peace, than a \textquoteleft{}real\textquoteright{} legal proceeding.\footnote{So kann man das Geschehen ohne weiteres als Inversionsritual begreifen, das eines erwünschten, in der Vergangenheit liegenden Zustand wiederherstellt. Dem Dreierschritt: gemeinsamer Auszug aus der Stadt-Gericht-Wiedereintritt in die Stadt entspricht die Beseitigung derjenigen innerstädtischen Konflikte, die durch Diebstahlsdelikte schweien\textquoteright{}; Rexroth, \textquoteleft Die Stadt Braunschweig\textquoteright{}, p. 94.} As such, it may have contributed directly to fostering cohesion within the city.\footnote{Rexroth rightly discusses the operations of the \textit{Femegericht} within the perspective of a Braunschweig's five subdivisions: \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 87ff.}

The reason for mentioning this phenomenon here is that it seems to challenge my second thesis, since during this apparently judicial performance, as during religious processions, the autonomy of the quarters seems to be of lesser importance. Yet it is important to note that this Femegericht was held only very irregularly between 1312 and 1337, with a short revival between 1345 and 1362.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 94ff.} So despite the fact that, in the light of modern theories, it seems an almost ideal tool for producing unity – a population of sinners moves out of the city in the morning and, after a ritualized cleansing, re-enters purified through the city gates – in the eyes of contemporaries, and in competition with other religious and secular rituals, it proved to be unsuitable and not strong enough to establish itself as long-held tradition.

\textbf{CONCLUSION}

Processions, we can conclude, do not foster unity simply because everybody is participating in a festive show that results at the end of the day in a ready-made urban identity. The reality is far more complex. First, performative acts
make it possible to communicate and create two conflicting elements: diversity and unity. Second, when religion is the central subject of ritual discourse, the city's constitutional structure is allowed to recede into the background. The combination of these two things opens up a certain space that, more so than in other performative acts, allows for cohesion and 'togetherness'. But although it is clear that processions could foster a sense of unity, it remains, in my opinion, very doubtful whether this temporary unity was enough to prevent dissociation and separation. It seems necessary to re-formulate the question of what essentially contributes to urban unity, something that cannot be done here.⁶²

For now, let us return to the questions raised at the beginning of this article. The unity of the medieval city can be seen as a central tenet of urban history. It contributes to the alleged differences between the structure of the occidental city and urban centres in other parts of the world. Weber attributed this to the content of a Christian religion that favoured community over family. According to this interpretation, the otherness of occidental citizenship is therefore rooted in Christianity. In contrast, the evidence considered in this essay indicates that it was not the content of the Christian religion but the specific forms of religious communication implemented during the high and late middle ages that contributed to the unity of the medieval city. If Christianity itself is not decisive, then the question is: can analogous rituals performed in other urban contexts be found to function in similar ways – and if not, why?