

The household inventory as urban ‘theatre’ in late medieval Burgundy

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Inventory made by Odot de Verranges clerk of the court of the *marie de Dijon* of goods found in the residence of Jehan Aubert after the death of his late wife. Present honourable men *sire* Guy Poissenier, *maistre* Dreue Mareschal, Monnin d’Eschenon, Estienne Chambellant, the said Jehan Aubert, *maistre* Josse d’Auxi and others which goods have been valued by them the Thursday the twentieth day of September 1413.¹

On Thursday the twentieth of September 1413, Jean Aubert of Dijon faced the two certainties of life: death and taxes. After the loss of his wife Guillemot, Jean Aubert and a group of his close peers met to value the worldly possessions they had amassed. The clerk of the local mayoralty composed an inventory, including the preamble translated above, comprising twelve paper folios of notes and values on rooms and their objects. It is preserved amongst the collection of the *marie de Dijon* held in the *Archives départementales de la Côte d’Or*, which includes over 400 inventories from the period 1389–1550.²

¹ ADCO, BII, Cote 6, f. 1v. All translations into English are my own. My thanks go to Frederick Buylaert, Thomas Pickles, Jeremy Goldberg, the reviewers for *Social History*, and its editors, whose insights have improved this article at each stage of its drafting. Jeremy Goldberg deserves particular gratitude for a discussion at the Centre for Medieval Studies during my time at the University of York, where the seeds of this article were sown.

² The potential of these collections was highlighted in the introduction to the volume of 1980 by A. Schuurman, ‘Probate Inventories: Research Issues, Problems and Results’ in A. Schuurman (ed), *Probate Inventories. A new source for the historical study of wealth, material culture and agricultural development* (Utrecht, 1980). F. Piponnier provides information on the collections in, ‘Inventaires Bourguignons (XIVe–XVe Siècles)’, in A. Schurman (ed), *Probate Inventories. A new source for the historical study of wealth, material culture and agricultural development* (Utrecht, 1980), 127, 128, 130. The first collection comes from the Archives Départementales du Côte d’Or, Dijon, (Subsequently ADCO) of the registers of the châtelennies and balliages of Burgundy. There are gaps in the second collection, those of the inventories of the *marie de Dijon* but they survive from the end of the fourteenth century until the eighteenth. For the tax records see: Les Archives municipales de Dijon, L171, L172, L173. For the notarial documents see: ADCO, Series B 11221 to 11387. Several are

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Within the existing historiography of the Burgundian Netherlands and its Northern European neighbours, inventories and their objects tend to be analysed from two perspectives: the Burgundian court and the ‘consumer revolution’. Applying insights from Erving Goffman and Bruno Latour, this article suggests that a third perspective should have priority: the urban ‘theatre’ within which objects were placed, the principle actors of the household performed, and an immediate audience (including local social elites) responded.³ In order to explore the ‘settings’ of the Aubert residence and the agency that objects possessed, four types of object will be examined. The first two, devotional tableaux and books, have been chosen on the grounds that they are commonly considered as reflections of the so called ‘consumer revolution’ or ‘consumer society’. They are amongst the categories that began to multiply in response to new tastes and greater purchasing power, and increasingly appeared in the households of urban elites. The second two, textiles and chests, are selected as objects which, though more common, remain under-represented in studies of the ‘consumer revolution’ or ‘consumer society’ in medieval Burgundy. The case will be made that objects listed in later medieval Burgundian urban inventories principally held and communicated their meanings within an urban ‘theatre’, so that their agency and symbolic meaning were directed towards that local audience. Certain objects also signalled wider court

published in P. Cockshaw, ‘Une source d’information codicologique: Les protocoles de notaires conservés aux archives de la côte-d’or’, *Scriptorium* (1971), 67–70. For the Burgundian accounts see : ADCO, Series B.

³ The use of ‘elite’ or ‘urban elite’ in this article refers to the definition given by Alexander Cowan, ‘A group of families of high status resident in urban centres, some of whose members held positions of local high office and all of whom sensed that their status distinguished them from other townspeople. These elite families tended to be collectively linked by common social origin, educational background, substantial wealth and widespread endogamy’, A. Cowan, ‘Urban Elites in Early Modern Europe: an Endangered Species?’, *Historical Research*, 64 (1991), 121-137.

connections and commercial contacts, but these were secondary to their role in distinguishing individuals within an urban theatre.

One strand of scholarship has envisaged elite acquisition of objects as a reflection of the growth of the Burgundian state and the integration of urban elites into that state.⁴ After Philip the Bold's (1363–1404) acquisition of Flanders in 1384, the Burgundian Netherlands became one of the most powerful dominions of Western Europe, politically, economically and culturally.⁵ The Burgundian Dukes sought to consolidate their authority and power through the integration of local political elites into their central administration, offering social and financial advancement through ducal service. Jean Aubert was one of these individuals, acting as clerk to the treasurer of Duke Philip the Bold in the *chambre des comptes* in 1393 and *maire de la chambre aux deniers* to Margaret of Flanders in 1400.⁶

Using a case study of members of the Burgundian elite, Peter Bladelin and William Hugonet, Wim de Clercq, Jan Dumolyn and Jelle Haemers have argued through their reconstruction of the town, castle residence and material culture of Middleburg that these

4 P. Cockshaw, *Prosopographie des secretaries de la cour de Bourgogne (1384–1477)*, 25 (Ostfildern, 2006).

5 R. Vaughan, *Philip the Bold. The Formation of the Burgundian State* (Woodbridge, 2002), W. Prevenier, 'Officials in Town and Countryside in the Low Countries. Social and Professional Developments from the Fourteenth to the Sixteenth Century', *Acta Historica Neerlandicae, Studies on the History of the Netherlands*, 7 (1974), 1–17, J. Dumolyn, 'Nobles, Patricians and Officers. The Making of a Regional Political Elite in Late Medieval Flanders', *Journal of Social History* 40 (2006), 431–452, J. Dumolyn, 'Les conseillers flamands au XVème siècle: rentiers du pouvoir, courtiers du pouvoir', in R. Stein (eds), *Powerbrokers in the late Middle Ages. The Burgundian Low Countries in a European context* (Turnhout, 2001), 67–85 and R. Stein, 'The Burgundian bureaucracy as a model for the Low Countries? The "chambres des comptes" and the creation of an administrative unity', in R. Stein (ed), *Powerbrokers in the late Middle Ages. The Burgundian Low Countries in a European context* (Turnhout, 2001), 3–26.

6 Cockshaw, *op.cit.*, 280.

individuals in ducal service crafted a Burgundian identity, a ‘self image that stressed their recently gained power and authority’, expressing ties with the Burgundian household through the spatial organisation, placement of residences and uses of material culture to imitate other nobles at the Burgundian court.⁷ Their study is an important one for understanding Burgundian elite acquisition of material culture. However, as the authors themselves acknowledge, the case of Bladelin and Hugonet is a special one.⁸ Middleburg was a town designed and founded by these men during their lifetime, with tapestry weaving and metal working industries imported into the town, rather than evolving organically.⁹ Therefore it cannot necessarily be assumed that the Burgundian court was the force behind the acquisition of material culture in other urban centres by a wider range of consumers.

A further strand of scholarship envisages elite acquisition of objects as a function of a so called ‘consumer revolution’ producing a ‘consumer society’.¹⁰ Using that body of work developed over the past twenty years we now understand individuals like Jean and Guillemot Aubert as potential ‘consumers’ and their household objects as potential ‘commodities’.¹¹ The

⁷ W. De Clercq, J. Dumolyn and J. Haemers, “‘Vivre Noblement’: Material Culture and Elite Identity in Late Medieval Flanders”, *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 38, 1 (Summer. 2007), 2, 1–32. Also F. Buylaert, W. De Clercq and J. Dumolyn, ‘Sumptuary legislation, material culture and the semiotics of ‘vivre noblement’ in the county of Flanders (14th–16th centuries)’, *Social History*, 36, 4 (Nov. 2011), 416.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 29–30.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 2, 9–12.

¹⁰ M. Kowaleski, ‘A consumer economy’, in R. Horrox and W.M. Ormrod (eds), *A social history of England: 1200–1500* (Cambridge, 2006), 239.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 238. C. Dyer, ‘The consumer and the market in the later Middle Ages’, *The Economic History Review*, 42, 3 (Aug. 1989), 305. For the ‘consumer revolution’ in the eighteenth century see, M. Berg, ‘In Pursuit of Luxury: Global History and

Auberts were part of a Northern European world where shifting consumer habits were expressed architecturally through urban and rural residences and through the accumulation of objects to furnish their interiors.¹² Consumers began to take some belongings for granted, but still used accumulation of goods to craft distinctive identities and reinforce their social status.¹³ Concentrating on Italy, both Richard Goldthwaite and Samuel Cohn have suggested that greater access to goods changed the way in which people interacted with objects, resulting in a greater personal attachment to possessions.¹⁴

Household inventories have played an important part in helping to set up and explore these larger historical shifts identified in material culture and the possessions of individuals. Inventories like Jean Aubert's have featured more predominantly for the early modern period than the later middle ages, given the better survival of inventories from the sixteenth century onwards.¹⁵ Over the past twenty years attempts have been made to compare and assess the material culture in urban and rural centres across Northern Europe through the compilation of

British Consumer Goods in the Eighteenth Century', *Past and Present* 182, 1 (2004), 85–142.

12 S. Cohn, 'The Renaissance attachment to things: material culture in last wills and testaments', *The Economic History Review*, 65, 3 (Aug. 2012), 28, R. Van Uytven, 'Splendour or Wealth: Art and Economy in the Burgundian Netherlands', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, 10, 2 (1992), 101–124.

13 R. Goldthwaite, *Wealth and the demand for art in Italy: 1300–1600* (Baltimore, 1994), 212–255.

14 Cohn, *op.cit.*, 28.

15 For a later fifteenth century case study, see, G. L. Watson, 'Roger Machado: A Life in Objects', in R. F. W. Smith and G. L. Watson (eds), *Writing the Lives of People and Things, AD 500-1700: A multi-disciplinary Future for Biography* (Farnham, forthcoming), J. de Vries, 'Between purchasing power and the world of goods: understanding the household economy in early modern Europe', in J. Brewer and R. Porter (eds), *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London, 1993), 85–132.

statistics on rooms or object typologies and by analysing particular objects to explain wider changes in purchasing patterns. Florentine inventories used by Richard Goldthwaite added to his thesis that there was a difference between the medieval and the early modern material world. For him the sparsely furnished, generalised spaces of the medieval period, gave way to the richly decorated and highly specialised later Renaissance interiors.¹⁶ By examining paintings listed in probate inventories from Antwerp and Hertogenbosch during the period 1630–1780, Bruno Blondé and Veerle de Laet sought to contextualise changing choices made by consumers for paintings in a period when they became more popular.¹⁷ In comparing goods and rooms listed in Bruges inventories for the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, with Dijon as a comparator, Peter Stabel and Julie de Groot have reminded us that material culture can differ from one region to another.¹⁸ Jeremy Goldberg’s work on a selection of English inventories from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries used examples of cushions, spoons, beds and bedding to demonstrate different consumption patterns in urban and rural societies, a diversification of accommodation spaces and a developing notion of privacy.¹⁹ Likewise,

¹⁶ Goldthwaite, *op.cit.*, 225–227. For a peasant inventory see, C. Dyer, ‘The inventory of William Akclum and its context’, in S. Wrathmell (ed), *A History of Wharham Percy and its Neighbours* (York, 2012), 342–347.

¹⁷ B. Blondé and I. Van Damme, ‘Retail growth and consumer changes in a declining urban economy: Antwerp (1650–1750)’, *The Economic History Review* 63 (2010), 638–663, B. Blondé, N. Coquery, J. Stobart and I. Van Damme (eds), *Fashioning old and new: changing consumer preferences in Europe (seventeenth–nineteenth centuries)* (Turnhout, 2009) and B. Blondé and V. de Laet, ‘Owning paintings and changes in consumer preferences in the Low Countries, seventeenth–eighteenth centuries’, in N. de Marchi and H. J. van Miegroet (eds), *Mapping markets for paintings in Europe 1450–1750* (Turnhout, 2006), 69–84.

¹⁸ J. De Groot and P. Stabel, ‘The domestic interior in mid–15th–century Bruges. Between representation and material reality’. My thanks to the authors Peter Stabel and Julie de Groot for giving me access to their unpublished paper.

¹⁹ P. J. P. Goldberg, ‘The fashioning of bourgeois domesticity in later medieval England: a material culture perspective’, in P. J. P. Goldberg and M. Kowaleski (eds), *Medieval domesticity: home, housing and household in Medieval England*

Françoise Piponnier focused on charting a specific room, object or object type from the Dijon inventories in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, including cloths, silks and ceramics.²⁰ Her work on cloths illustrated the success of Dijon cloth merchants and their commercial networks beyond Burgundy.²¹

However, it is important to recognise inventory taking as a performative act, or in the words of Daniel Smail, a ‘snapshot’ of a scene or set of scenes recorded on paper, rather than a comprehensive and systematic act of categorisation always resulting in a standardised, bureaucratic document.²² The clerk and the witnesses made subjective judgements about what was worthy of record and what value it possessed. It is questionable how far they can provide the basis for a statistical approach. Moreover, while statistical approaches can usefully reveal broad trends in objects, they tend to produce observations rather than explanations of change: thus an alternative approach is necessary to explore *who* purchased objects and *why* they did

(Cambridge, 2008), 124–144.

20 F. Piponnier, ‘Linge de maison et linge de corps au Moyen Age d’après les inventaires Bourguignons’, *Ethnologie française* 16 (1986), 239–248, Piponnier, ‘Vivre noblement en Bourgogne au XIVe siècle’, *Mélanges d’archéologie et d’histoire médiévales en l’honneur de Michel de Bouïard* (Genevè–Paris, 1982), 309–317. Piponnier, ‘Dénominations et fonctions des espaces dans l’habitation dijonnaise XIVe–XVe siècle’, in D. Alexandre–Bidon, F. Piponnier, J. M. Poisson (eds), *Cadres de vie et manières d’habiter XIIe–XVIe siècle (VIIIe Congrès international de la Société d’archéologie médiévale)* (Caen, 2001), 109–116.

21 Piponnier, ‘Cloth Merchants Inventories in Dijon in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries’, in N.B Harte and K.G. Ponting (eds), *Cloth and Clothing in Medieval Europe: Essays in Memory of Professor E.M. Carus–Wilson* (London, 1983), 230.

22 D. Smail, *Imaginary Cartographies: Possession and Identity in Late Medieval Marseille* (Cornell, 1999), 23, 24.

so.²³ These problems underlie the current turn to an ‘object centred’ approach.²⁴ Focusing on the leather shoes of Hans Fugger of Augsburg (1531–98), Ulinka Rublack demonstrated that the material of objects mattered and that a consideration of objects overlooked as products of the ‘Renaissance’ provides new insights into the perception of objects and their significance for individual consumers.²⁵ This article pursues a new methodology to enhance our understanding of the role of objects and inventories in late medieval Burgundy, reconstructing an urban theatre within which objects were placed, and the actors and the immediate audience viewed and made use of items as a framework for examining the performativity of those objects.

The methodology is derived from the insights of social theorists.²⁶ Erving Goffman’s conception of everyday life as theatrical performance considers individuals as actors who present themselves to others in ways designed to guide and control impressions formed of them.²⁷ Individual performances are made to audiences whose members seek to glean information about the actors.²⁸ These performances have a ‘front’ and ‘back’ aspect. In the

23 Blonde and de Laet, acknowledge the difficulty in establishing the who and the why, *op.cit.*, 81, 82, 86 and U. Rublack, ‘Matter in the material Renaissance’, *Past and Present*, 219, 1 (2013), 42.

24 Rublack, *op.cit.*, 41–85.

25 *Ibid.*, 42–47.

26 E. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (London, 1990) and A. Branaman, ‘Goffman’s Social Theory’, in C. Lemert and A. Branaman (eds), *The Goffman Reader* (Oxford, 1994), xlv–lxxiii.

27 *Ibid.*, 13.

28 *Ibid.*, 32.

‘back’ props are stored, costumes can be adjusted, and an actor can come out of character.²⁹ In the ‘front’ is the ‘setting’, which contains furniture, decoration and objects to be used as ‘props for the space of human action played out before, within or upon it’.³⁰ Nevertheless within Goffman’s interpretation there is the danger that objects are mere ‘props’ to facilitate human actions. It is necessary to recognise Bruno Latour’s point that objects possess agency and function as ‘full-blown actors’.³¹ Justifying Actor Network Theory, Latour makes clear that it is ‘not the empty claim that objects do things ‘instead’ of human actors: it simply says that no science of the social can even begin if the question *of who and what* participates in the action is not first of all thoroughly explored, even though it might mean letting elements in which, for a lack of a better term, we would call non-humans’.³² Recognising that certain objects can function as important actors, their wider social context can be brought to light.³³ The objects listed in the Aubert inventory are envisaged not merely as a backdrop for, or product of, human actions and relations. It will be suggested that the theatre and the objects used in that theatre had an agency of their own, were themselves performers able to control and manifest relations in their own right, even at times when no human actors were present.

An urban theatre: The Aubert residence.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 114–116. L. Weatherill, *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in Britain 1660–1760* (Oxon, 1996), 9.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

³¹ B. Latour, *Reassembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor–Network–Theory* (Oxford, 2007), 70–74.

³² *Ibid.*, 72.

³³ *Ibid.*, 72.

The making of the inventory in 1413 was a performative act and a collective agreement. The majority of the inventories of the *mairie de Dijon* were taken at the death of an individual, more rarely when heritors were unknown or absent.³⁴ The preambles to the inventories established the circumstances of the performative acts. They tend to record that a clerk of the mayoralty took the inventories at the order of the mayor of Dijon.³⁵ At times the preambles record the person who requested the inventory, especially if it was the guardian of a minor. They sometimes also include a note that the clerk was assisted by expert appraisers, supported by witnesses (often named) and other family members.³⁶ Inventories as a ‘snapshot’, represent verbal descriptions of the theatres within which the principal actors deployed their objects and the movement of some of those actors with audiences through those theatres making subjective assessments of the objects. Inventories are, in essence, verbal, rather than visual, maps derived from performative acts.³⁷

Mapped by the inventory, the Aubert residence emerges as a large rectangular block, arranged over three levels. From the basement level upwards there is a cellar, stable and galleries, which probably provided access to the upper levels. The first floor had the most complicated spatial layout, subdivided into eight rooms. While some of their functions seem clear, others are ambiguous. On the ground level there was room for sleeping, living and

³⁴ Piponnier, ‘Inventaires Bourguignons (XIVe–XVe Siècles)’, 130, 131.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 131.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 131

³⁷ Smail, *op.cit.*, 6, 7, 23, 24.

cooking space. Smaller adjoining rooms, a *chas* and *coque sale* flanked the kitchen, while an accounting space was provided by a *compteur*.³⁸ Another gallery provided access between the basement and floor above, but also functioned as a space for seating and entertaining. The upper level had the simplest layout, of only three rooms. At the front of the upper floor we find a garde robe flanking a chamber with a further chamber towards the rear of the residence.

Compared with other residences in Dijon, the Aubert dwelling fits between homes of one to three rooms and far larger residences arranged round courtyards. A close comparison is the residence of Demoingin Grasbieuf wine grower, and his wife Osannote in the *rue au Saichot*, with eight rooms over three levels.³⁹ At the larger end of the scale, the residence of Regnault Chevalier, tailor to the duke of Burgundy, comprised some 24 rooms arranged around a central courtyard.⁴⁰ Studies of the development of urban architecture across Western Europe have emphasised the ways in which elite town residences were a physical manifestation of their power in the town and an integral way that ruling town elites built claims to status.⁴¹ Dijon was no different in this respect. Many of the largest houses were constructed of stone and were clustered in the wealthiest parish of Notre Dame, a stone's throw from the major marketplace, the *halles* and the Burgundian ducal palace, as illustrated

³⁸ A *compteur* was a room with a counter or where payments/accounts were made. A *chas* suggested multiple functions for a room such as part of the kitchen for the preparation of food, an office, store or annex of a workroom. A *coque sale* was a general name for a room.

³⁹ Esquieu and Pesez, *op.cit.*, 320–322.

⁴⁰ Esquieu and Pesez, *op.cit.*, 324–326.

⁴¹ Rees Jones, *op.cit.*, 80, Goldthwaite, *op.cit.*, 191–192, Viaux, *op.cit.*, 79.

by Edouard Bredin's 1574 map of Dijon.⁴² (See Fig 1) Although this study explores one theatre, and its actors and audience, it may be considered typical of the theatres within which many notable members of European late medieval urban societies performed.

Insert Figure 1: Map of Dijon 1574. Edouard Bredin. Archives municipales de Dijon, cote 4, Fi 956.

However, it is the objects listed for each space in the Aubert residence that take centre stage in our inventory. In the majority of the Dijon inventories, each list or group of objects is preceded by the room name. Objects could be listed and valued as a single item or a group, or according to their weight, either singly or as an ensemble. Those in the upstairs rooms match our current understanding of garde robes and chambers as some of the most richly furnished spaces of urban residences, with garde robes reserved for wealthy households, used to store valuables.⁴³ In the garde robe we find a chest of oak, a bench cover of tapestry of Arras with the images of knights and ladies, three bench covers of *vert brun*, one with roses of vermeil another of white roses and one worked with a G and the arms of the late Jehan d'Aulxi, a *tapis* of *vert brun* with flowers for making 6 squares, a serge of Caen, two cushions of taffeta and two of silk baudequin, a blanket of white woollen cloth, a pair of black curtains, a small bed for sleeping with cushions and cover, five small chests covered in leather, a small wooden box, a small piece of old sendal, a tableau with the image of our lady, two chests for robes, a pair of spurs, a chest of oak, a small chest of oak without a lock, a wooden panel, a hallebarde with inscription, a chest of iron, two pairs of shoes and a chest bearing the

⁴² *Ibid.*, 79.

⁴³ Frédéric Godefroy, *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française et de tous ses dialectes du IXe au XVe siècle* (Paris, 1880–1902). Vol 4, 225.

inscription of my lady of Burgundy. The ‘upstairs chamber beside the garde robe’ and its contents underline the point made by Richard Goldthwaite that, during the fifteenth century chambers became, ‘...an elaborative decorative ensemble of furnishings, including some of the first secular art forms in a domestic setting’.⁴⁴ Here is a large bed with ceiling, backing, curtains and hangings of tapestry, pillows and ornaments for the bed, stool, chest, a donor portrait of Jean Aubert with an image of my lady, two rosaries of crystal, armour, chests of oak and walnut, cushions, and a bench. In the ‘chamber upstairs at the back’, we find a bed, a couch with bedcover, a bench with backing, a chest, a small table and two stools and finally 15 volumes and two manuscripts. The chambers of the lower floor of the Aubert residence are less richly appointed than the spaces upstairs, but contain beds with associated furnishings and chests. The galleries of the house contained hangings, tapestry of Arras with white and red roses, benches with backings and chests. The kitchen contained a variety of cooking and eating utensils, which included basins, cauldrons, pots, mortar and pestle, and spoons, while the cellar was a store for barrels. To understand the significance of the list and the objects as possessing an agency of their own, it is necessary to establish the principal actors within the Aubert theatre, to investigate their social position as a symbolic context for the objects and the settings that were constructed.

Jean Aubert and Guillemot Aubert as ‘actors’.

The principal actor of the theatre was Jean Aubert. Jean Aubert was an incomer to Dijon. Pierre Cockshaw suggested that he was probably of Flemish origin, possibly born in Lille, where he returned in 1419.⁴⁵ At some point he must have married, given that the inventory is

⁴⁴ Goldthwaite, *op.cit.*, 225

⁴⁵ Cockshaw, ‘A propos de l’origine de la famille Aubert’, *op.cit.*, 275.

taken on the death of his wife. However, we have limited information regarding Guillemot. Her name is only revealed in the inventory when mention is made of a payment to a servant named Guillot for the service she had made during the sickness of Guillemot, and her presence in the household is signalled through the blue and brown benchcovers worked with her initials and the ‘arms of the late Jehan d’Auxi’, in the garde robe. She may well have been heavily involved in the acquisition of objects and the organisation of spaces in the Aubert theatre but, as Sarah Rees Jones notes, it can be difficult to identify gender specific spaces in later medieval residences.⁴⁶ The presence of the servant Guillot, and the extra beds in the lower chambers of the Aubert residence, suggests several other, yet more elusive ‘actors’ of the Aubert theatre: household staff. Later medieval homes frequently doubled as workspaces, and apprentices were commonly housed in their master’s residences, as were domestic servants. Throughout many of the Dijon inventories, we are implicitly reminded of the presence of these individuals, but we can only speculate on their role as actors and audience members for the objects that furnished these theatres. In the residence of Regnault Chevalier, tailor to Philip the Bold, duke of Burgundy inventoried in 1395, the presence of 8 beds between 6 chambers suggests a substantial staff.⁴⁷ A bed in the kitchen of Guiot Droyn allows Françoise Piponnier to speculate on servants in his residence recorded in 1403.⁴⁸ Room names give clearer evidence for their presence: in the inventory of Jean Delacroix, *patissier* a

⁴⁶ S. Rees Jones, ‘Women’s Influence on the Design of Urban Homes’ in M. Carpenter Eler and M. Kowaleski (eds), *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages* (Cornell, 2003), 191.

⁴⁷ Esquieu and Pesez, *op.cit.*, 322.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 322.

chamber was noted as housing the ‘varlets of the said hotel’, and in others Piponnier notes rooms for wet–nurses.⁴⁹

Jean Aubert, however, is better documented. Recorded in 1393 as a clerk to the treasurer of the duke in the *chambre des comptes* in Dijon, his Burgundian career was to span some 40 years and three Burgundian dukes.⁵⁰ Positions within the Burgundian household could be lucrative fiscally for an individual, but were also important for the continued stability of rule of the dukes over their dominions: such individuals were required to take an oath to the duke when taking up their position.⁵¹ Individuals employed in official positions expected an annual position or salary and expenses when undertaking ducal business.⁵² These were not insubstantial remunerations; a master of account might get 200 to 250 francs salary per year and expenses of around 3 francs a day.⁵³ There were extra bonuses in the form of ducal gifts, usually textiles or wine as well as exemption from taxation.⁵⁴ Jean Aubert received many of these perks and his career almost perfectly encompassed the ‘legal’, ‘illegal’ and ‘social’ means which Jan Dumolyn argued that Flemish ducal officers built their

49 ADCO, BII 356, Cote 13, pièce VI.

50 P. Cockshaw, ‘La famille du copiste David Aubert’, *Scriptorium*, 22, 2 (1968), 280 and Vaughan, *op.cit.*, 217. See also ADCO, B1526, f.55, B1532, ff. 8–75–76.

51 Vaughan, *op.cit.*, 221.

52 Vaughan, *op.cit.*, 221.

53 Vaughan, *op.cit.*, 221.

54 Vaughan, *op.cit.*, 221.

career and reaped financial rewards.⁵⁵ He maintained a steady rise through the ducal administration, being promoted to the position of *maitre de la chambre aux deniers* to Margaret of Flanders, wife of the duke of Burgundy in 1400.⁵⁶ Although in 1404 Aubert was suspended for fraud, a not uncommon occurrence among Burgundian officials, it did not hinder his progress. He became an alderman of Dijon in 1412 the year before the compilation of the inventory, and after paying back the gains of his fraud, the not inconsiderable sum of 1,500 *livres*, he was still employed in ducal service in 1419, being awarded the clergy of the *chambre des comptes* of Lille with an annual wage of 50 francs.⁵⁷ In 1420–1 he received a gift from Philip the Good in recognition of 40 years of service, with gifts also made in 1402, 1427–8 and 1437.⁵⁸ Aubert finally ended his career as auditor to the *chambre des comptes* in Lille (a role in which he had served since 1433).⁵⁹ Yet, in the nepotistic tradition of ducal administration, his sons went on to carve out successful careers in the Burgundian court. Jean became receiver general in 1443–4, and David was *the* renowned copyist of manuscripts for Philip the Good.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Dumolyn, ‘Nobles, Patricians and Officers’, *op.cit.*, 437.

⁵⁶ Vaughan, *op.cit.*, 217.

⁵⁷ Dutour, *op.cit.*, 420 and Cockshaw, ‘La Famille du Copiste David Aubert’, *op.cit.*, 280.

⁵⁸ Cockshaw, ‘La Famille du Copiste David Aubert’, *op.cit.*, 280–281. ADCO, B1532, f. 187. In 1427–28 he received money for house repair and in 1437 a New Year’s gift.

⁵⁹ Cockshaw, ‘La Famille du Copiste David Aubert’, *op.cit.*, 281, Cockshaw, ‘A propos de l’origine de la famille Aubert’, *op.cit.*, 275.

⁶⁰ R. E. F. Straub, *David Aubert, écrivain et clerc* (Amsterdam, 1995) and D. Quérueil, *Les Manuscrits de David Aubert: “escripvain bourguignon”* (Paris, 1999). He was known for copies of Charles Martel and Perceforest and compilations of

The theatre and objects of our actor Jean Aubert are all the more interesting in that they are a ‘snapshot’ of a Burgundian official, not at the zenith of his career from 1419 onwards, but mid-career. The social networks and wealth needed to maintain the upward trajectory of such a career, both within the Burgundian household and within the town should not be underestimated, nor should we take it for granted that it was an assured social rise. Dijon was a centre for elites involved in careers within the Burgundian administration: Thierry Dutour has identified at least 74 Dijonnais engaged in the running of the ducal dominions whose families also appeared in high level positions in town government. Yet, it was not an open elite, a fact which makes Aubert’s ascent all the more remarkable.⁶¹ While it is tempting to read the objects of Jean Aubert’s household as a reflection of his Burgundian career, we must resist that temptation. It is the second set of individuals preserved by the inventory, the witnesses, who were the key audience for the Aubert possessions and for whom the objects ‘performed’.

A local audience: The urban elites of Dijon.

The local audience assembled in the Aubert theatre in September 1413 included several other elites of Dijon, named as witnesses to the inventory. They were *sire* Guy Poissenier, *maistre* Dreue Mareschal, Monnin d’Eschenon, Estienne Chambellant, Jean Aubert, *maistre* Josse

the *Croniques et conquests de Charlemaine* and *Chronique des empereurs*.

⁶¹ Dutour, *op.cit.*, 178.

d'Auxi and 'others'.⁶² These individuals were not a static audience in the compilation of the inventory. They moved through the Aubert residence, room by room, beginning with the top floor, progressing down to a second and finishing with the basement. The witnesses oversaw the listing of the contents of each room, the opening of every chest and confirmed the value of the goods listed in the inventory.⁶³

The primary focus for these individuals was the local urban and commercial society of Dijon and its hinterlands. A secondary concern was their Burgundian rulers. Four of the six witnesses, which included Aubert himself, held prominent positions in the town government of Dijon and in Burgundian administration, mirroring the positions held by Jean Aubert at the moment the inventory was compiled. The first witness, 'Sire Guy Poissenier', was *épicier* and *valet de chambre* to the duke of Burgundy in 1409.⁶⁴ Estienne or Etienne Chambellant was a representative of one of the foremost families of Dijon who made their fortune as merchants and by working for the Burgundian state: he was *drapier receveur* and *receveur du balliage* of Dijon, mayor of the town in 1422 and alderman on several occasions.⁶⁵ 'Maistre Dreue Mareschal' or Dréve Maréchal, was another who had a career in Burgundian and in French administration: he was ennobled in 1405 and acted for duke John the Fearless (1404–1419) numerous times.⁶⁶ In 1403 he was clerk of account to the *chambre des comptes* in

62 ADCO, BII, Cote 6, f. 1v.

63 Piponnier, 131.

64 Dutour, *op.cit.*, 134, 351, 396. He was mayor of Dijon in 1410 to 1413, 1414.

65 Dutour, *op.cit.*, 350, 352, Viaux, *op.cit.*, 66.

66 U. Plancher, *Histoire générale et particulière de Bourgogne, avec des notes, des dissertations et les preuves justificatives* (Dijon, 1739), 232, 364, 432.

Dijon, rising to secretary and auditor of accounts in 1407 and councillor and master of accounts in Dijon by 1409.⁶⁷ The French queen Isabeau named him president of the chamber of accounts in Troyes and councillor of accounts in Paris in 1418.⁶⁸ Moinin d'Eschenon was another alderman of Dijon, a year before Jean Aubert in 1411. Pierre Cockshaw suggests he may have been related to Droyn d'Eschenon who became *receveur de l'Épargne* in 1456 and *garde de la monnaie* of Dijon in 1461.⁶⁹ It is probable that Josse d'Auxi held similar positions.⁷⁰ He may have been a member of Jean Aubert's late wife Guillemot's kin given the presence of the benchcover worked with a G and the arms of the 'late Jehan d'Aulxi' and two squares of red leather emblazoned with the arms of the 'late Jehan d'Auxi' recorded in the Aubert garde robe and the upstairs back chamber. The financial activities and positions in town government held by these witnesses demonstrates that Dijon was a hub of commercial activity situated between two major trade routes. To the North lay Paris, the Low Countries and Germany, accessible via the Rhône and then the Rhine; to the South was the land route to Italy, approached by the Great St Bernard pass. Producers and retailers were able to tap into a populous town and hinterland: Dijon was one of the largest towns in the Southern territories of the dukes of Burgundy, with an estimated population of c.11,000 in 1390, increasing to

⁶⁷ Cockshaw, *Prosopographie des secretaries*, *op.cit.*, 123.

⁶⁸ Cockshaw, *Prosopographie des secretaries*, *op.cit.*, 123.

⁶⁹ Cockshaw, *Prosopographie des secretaries*, *op.cit.*, 118.

⁷⁰ It is possible that the Odot de Verranges who makes the inventory was related to 'Me Jean de Verranges, avocet and conseller' to Philip the Bold in 1386, in 1391 *gouverneur de la chancellerie* and councillor, *bailli du Dijonnais* in 1394, 1397, 1398 and 1400 and alderman in 1384–1385. From Dutour, *op.cit.*, 419.

c.12,000 by 1450.⁷¹ In the bailiwick of Dijon, a large area outside the town, some 32,000 people resided.⁷² Additional commercial opportunities for the inhabitants of the town presented themselves at local and regional markets. Locally produced goods were sold and bought in markets around the town, at the Bourg, Proudhon road, the square of Saint-Jean and close to its religious centres, the churches of Notre Dame, Saint-Michel and the cemetery of Saint-Etienne.⁷³ Dijon hosted bi-annual three day winter and summer fairs.⁷⁴ Retailing and purchasing opportunities were pursued at the larger fair of Chalon-sur-Saône some 60 km away which attracted regional and international merchants from France, the Low Countries and Italy.⁷⁵

That the audience for the Aubert possessions were commercial elites embedded in town government has implications for the values assigned by them to the objects in the inventory. Such valuations were not simply reflective of the potential commercial value of that object; they rested on the witnesses' combined commercial expertise and resulted from their competitive social expectations and perspectives. Several key issues present in the Aubert biography allow an exploration of these perspectives. First came the matter of social

71 Vaughan, *op.cit.*, 239.

72 Vaughan, *op.cit.*, 239.

73 E. Collette, *Les foires et marchés à Dijon* (Dijon, 1905), 38.

74 Collette, *Ibid.*, 46.

75 Dubois, *op.cit.*, 63–79, Geoffroy, *op.cit.*, 161–181. P. Toussaint, *Les foires de Chalon-sur-Saône des origines au XVI siècle* (Dijon, 1910), H. Dubois, *Les foires de Chalon et le commerce dans la vallée de la Saône à la fin du Moyen Age (vers 1280-vers 1430)* (Paris, 1976).

expectations. Jean Aubert was an incomer to the elite networks of Dijon and had achieved the position of alderman only a year before the inventory was compiled. Thus, witnesses of the inventory had certain expectations that the objects which filled his household setting reflected and reinforced his credentials to be part of that ruling elite. These were objects that alluded to his positions within the ducal household and demonstrated the wealth one could acquire by working for the duke. The second issue was the competitive perspectives that existed between these elites and were manifested through lifestyle, political positions and possessions. Here the idea of a 'local audience' for possessions listed in urban inventories is key. Objects were acquired primarily in response to a local Dijon audience, rather than a 'Burgundian courtly' one.⁷⁶ Such objects could demonstrate connections with that court or nobility, but these were of secondary importance. The first implication of taking the local seriously is that the later medieval increase in objects and possessions, the 'consumer revolution' or 'consumer society', may well have been driven by the desire of urban individuals to act and perform in urban theatres. The second implication is that the local audience is crucial to understanding why objects were acquired and how they performed as actors in their own right.

Object as actors: chests.

Although chests are ubiquitous in later medieval inventories across Northern Europe they are often taken for granted and it is the decorative examples that tend to be prioritised.⁷⁷ As a

⁷⁶ P. Allerton, 'Clothing and Early Modern Venetian Society', *Continuity and Change*, 15, 3 (Dec. 2000), 367–390 and Dyer, *op.cit.*, 305–327.

⁷⁷ E. Danbury, 'Security and safeguard. Signs and symbols on boxes and chests', in J. F. Cherry (ed), *Signs and symbols: proceedings of the 2006 Harlaxton Symposium* (Donnington, 2009), 29–41, C. Campbell, *Love and Marriage in Renaissance Florence. The Courtald Wedding Chests* (London, 2009), C. Paolini, 'Chests', in M. Ajmar-Wollheim and F. Dennis (eds), *At home in Renaissance Italy* (London, 2006) and D. Sherlock, *Suffolk Church Chests* (Suffolk, 2008) .

result, surviving pieces like the Italian and English chests in the collection of the Victoria and Albert museum rarely attract the attention they deserve. (See Fig. 2 and 3)

Insert Figure 2: Italian chest. Engraved and carved cedar wood boards. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Museum Number 80–1864. c. 1430.

Insert Figure 3. English chest. Oak, carved with an iron lock. Victoria and Albert Museum. London. Museum Number W.428–1922. c.1500.

In the Aubert inventory alone there are almost 30 chests ranging from small to large, with a variety of decorations. The majority of the chests were oak with one in walnut, some with metal straps, or covered in leather, with and without locks. Taking a sample of Dijon inventories from the period 1398–1450, their omnipresence is confirmed as chests are found in almost every room. Chests are fundamental to the idea that there were active choices being made by individuals in setting scenes for audiences and that settings in the later medieval theatre were flexible. In a society where possessing a greater number of goods was increasingly becoming the norm, new choices had to be made regarding which objects were to be used to set scenes for the everyday, and which objects were to be reserved for certain occasions or certain audiences. Household chests facilitated these choices and created distinctions between objects in an urban theatre. These choices and distinctions are reflected in contemporary literature, where chests act as repositories for highly prized objects. In the tale of ‘The Husband in the Clothes Chest’, from the *Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles* a suspicious husband asks his wife why one of her clothes chests is standing at the foot of the bed, rather than being taken into the garde robe.⁷⁸ She replied that ‘I’ve had it left here on purpose

⁷⁸ *Les Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles*, 112–133.

because there are still some of my gowns inside it...'.⁷⁹ Rather predictably, the husband eventually finds himself locked in the chest. In another tale, from the *Decameron*, when Ambrogiuolo is smuggled into his lover's room in a chest, he steals some of her possessions: going '...to her chest [he] abstracted a purse, a tunic, a ring or two and the odd belt'.⁸⁰ When Andrerlo finds the body of her husband whom she has secretly married, she decides to wrap him in cloth and so sends, 'her maid straight off to fetch a length of silk she kept in a chest.'⁸¹

In the urban theatre distinctions between objects and choices in using certain objects to set scenes appear in the inventories. Chests are the only furnishings listed in the upstairs chamber of Jean Martin and his wife in an inventory of 1434.⁸² In their chests, objects we might associate with dressing individual actors of the household or as props for furnishing scenes were listed. The chests included purses, one in the fashion of Holland, one in red leather, another embroidered, cushions of black and red silk, pillows of red and black satin, a quantity of silk thread and a small tableau, cloths of Langres and Chenove, chains of silver, a rosary with several figures in coral.⁸³ In other chests present in the room clothing and furnishings were stored. In a 'large chest' there are hangings of Chenove, textile chambers, ceilings and backings of old serge, curtains of toile, cushions, black hoods, houppelandes,

79 *Ibid.*, 112–133.

80 Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron* (London, 2003), 150–151.

81 *Ibid.*, 290.

82 ADCO, BII 356, Cote 17, pièce XI and XII.

83 ADCO, BII 356, Cote 17, pièce XI and XII.

mantels, robes, pourpoints, jackets and sleeves and two books. Objects in the 1397 inventory of Jean Sauvegrain suggest chests may have facilitated similar choices for the setting of domestic scenes; in one chest we find textiles for furnishing beds or benches, ceilings, backings, curtains of serge and silk and seat covers embellished with silk.⁸⁴ In three other chests a range of clothes, cushions and covers are stored, including houppelands, jackets, mantels and hoods in silks, embellished with silk and marten fur.

By keeping some objects separate from others, choices had to be made in terms of which textile chambers were to be used to furnish beds, or which cushions were to be placed where and on what types of furniture, options reflected by the Sauvegrain inventory.⁸⁵ Here the furnishings recorded were restricted to the ‘essentials’, beds and benches, as in the upstairs ‘chamber of the said Jean Sauvegrain’ with its small bed and cushion of striped serge, large bench and andrions.⁸⁶ The storage of objects in chests, given their ability to protect and preserve facilitates an exploration of certain possessions that signalled moments of life.

Among the objects listed in the chest of the upstairs chamber of Jean Martin and his wife in 1434, we find a piece of white silk for baptism wrapped in another piece of green silk.⁸⁷ In another chest in an upstairs chamber, a piece of linen for baptising children, together with a piece of silk is described in the residence of Pierre Sancenot in 1421.⁸⁸ In the case of

⁸⁴ ADCO, BII 356, Cote 2, pièce XIII.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pièce XIII.

⁸⁶ Horizontal iron bars for burning logs, used in a pair for cooking.

⁸⁷ ADCO BII 356, Cote 17, pièce XI, XII.

⁸⁸ ADCO BII 356, Cote 11, pièce XVII.

the first example, it appears as if care has been taken in the storage of this textile, wrapped to preserve not only the textile, but its association with a moment of life. It is stored with other items of silk, including an old purse and a pillow of satin, half black and half red in colour. Moments of life, careers and lineages are embodied and performed by the form and decoration of later medieval chests and viewed through the eyes of an audience. Chests such as like that of Richard de Bury from 1340, today in the Burrell Collection, Glasgow, could carry familial arms, but in the Dijon inventories from 1387–1450 the majority are described without armorial emblems or decoration, although this does not necessarily mean they did not display these visual emblems.

The chest listed as one of the contents of the garde robe of the Aubert household deserves further consideration. It is described in the inventory as bearing the inscription of ‘my lady of Burgundy’ and is given the value of 10 francs, the highest valuation of all the objects in the garde robe. Knowing that Jean Aubert was in the service of Margaret of Flanders during the period 1400 to 1404, it is possible that the chest was connected to this career moment. Ducal remunerations in the form of textiles, vessels and wine are well documented.⁸⁹ As with the silks and tapestry, only a few other inventories in Dijon are able to boast possessions which advertise links with the Burgundian household; we find a tapestry

⁸⁹ For Burgundian Court gift giving see: M. Damen, ‘Gift exchange at the court of Charles the Bold’, in M. Boone and M. Howell, (eds), *In but not of the market: moveable goods in late medieval and early modern urban society* (Brussels, 2006) and M. Damen ‘Princely entries and gift-exchange in the Low Countries, 14th–16th centuries’, *Journal of Medieval History* (2006). For urban gifts see: A. Derville, ‘Pots-de-vin, cadeaux, rackets, patronage. Essai sur les mécanismes de décisions dans l’État bourguignon’, *Revue du Nord*, 56 (1976), 341–364 and ‘Les pots-de-vin dans le dernier tiers du XVe siècle (d’après les *Comptes* de Lille et de Saint-Omer)’ in, W. P. Blockmans (ed.), *Le privilège général et les privilèges régionaux de Marie de Bourgogne pour les Pays-Bas* (Kortrijk-Heule 1985), 449–471, M. Boone, ‘Dons et pots-de-vin, aspects de la sociabilité urbaine au bas Moyen Age. Le cas gantois pendant la période bourguignonne’, *Revue du Nord*, 70 (1988), 471–487.

decorated with the arms of *madame la duchesse* in the residence of a Jean Lacier in 1430 and a cloth of gold embroidered with the device of duke Philip the Bold, 'I am waiting', in the chapel of Regnauld Chevalier in 1395.⁹⁰ The monetary value assigned by the witnesses and assessor to the Aubert chest may have reflected a combined recognition of its commercial and symbolic value through its connection with the career of Jean Aubert and the Burgundian court.⁹¹ As so few individuals in Dijon owned objects that demonstrated Burgundian courtly connections, we would be wise to remember their acquisition and display was less about emulation of the dukes, and more a mark of how important the urban theatre and its actors were to the dukes and their rule. By loaning or giving objects that carried the ducal emblems or mottos, the Burgundian dukes marked certain urban individuals out from others and allowed these objects to act as ambassadors and reminders of their overlordship.

Objects as actors: textiles.

Another commonly overlooked object in later medieval Burgundian inventories, although an essential part of the urban theatre, were textiles for furnishings and clothing. A particular characteristic of textiles lay in their ability to set a scene even when there were no performers or audience members to witness their effects.⁹² As contemporary miniatures of domestic

⁹⁰ ADCO, 356, Cote 15 and Cote 2. 'y me tarde'.

⁹¹ Howell, *op.cit.*, 181.

⁹² Goffman, *op.cit.*, 126.

settings such as the ‘mother in bed with seven children’ and the ‘blinding of Tobit’ depict, heavy weavings or textiles for walls or bed constructions had to be fixed to walls with hooks or tied to the roof of a room with ropes to secure ceilings and backings. (See Fig. 4 and 5)

Insert Figure 4: Detail of a miniature of a mother in bed with seven children in a cradle. France, N. (Rouen). Talbot Master. © British Library Board, Royal, 15 EVI, f.273.

Insert Figure 5: The blinding of Tobit. Bible Historiale of Edward IV. c.1479. © British Library Board, Royal, MS 15 D I, f.18.

These logistics of display meant textiles could be either taken down and stored away, used only on certain occasions, as more or less permanent fixtures in a chamber. In her study of the sixteenth century choir tapestry of the ‘Life of Saint Remigius’ Laura Weigert is clear that the tapestry was itself a performer, in its function and reception.⁹³ Textiles in an urban theatre could remain as performers in that setting, retaining the tone of a chamber as a meeting place, workspace or a space associated with a particular member of the household.⁹⁴ We see these characteristics in the brown and blue benchovers worked with the initials and arms of Guillemote, wife to Jean Aubert, which were kept on display in the upstairs chamber of their house, after her death. The silk chasuble of Regnault Chevalier kept under the altar of his chapel, similarly retained the tone of the room as a space where mass and prayer took

⁹³ L. Weigert, ‘Between Mass and ‘Mystère’: The *Life of Saint Remigius* and the Ceremonial Function of Choir Tapestries’, in B. Lambert and K. A. Wilson, (eds), *The Consumption, Commercialisation and Production of Luxury Textiles in Italy and the Low Countries. (Fourteenth–Sixteenth Centuries)*, (Aldershot, 2016). Also her monograph, L. Weigert, *Weaving Sacred Stories: French Choir Tapestries and the Performance of Clerical Identity* (Cornell, 2004).

⁹⁴ Goffman, *op.cit.*, 126.

place.⁹⁵ In the 1397 Sauvegrain, 1425 de la Croix, and 1439 Alerdot inventories, rooms were given personal associations, such as the ‘chamber of Jehan Sauvegrain’, ‘chamber of the late Jehan’ or the ‘chamber of the late Alerdot’.⁹⁶ The toiles and serges which furnished these rooms as bed hangings, covers, cushions and bench covers, even the ‘old half length houpelande of silk’ in the ‘chamber of Raoul Sauvegrain’, all retained the associations of that particular member of the household. For wealthy urban individuals frequently away on commercial or courtly business, it was important to have objects that performed their presence while absent, so that even in their absence there was a continual reminder of the principal actors. It confirms that the inventory, though a ‘snapshot’ was also a ‘complement to memory’.⁹⁷ The witnesses who were integral to the construction of the document must have pointed out to the ducal clerk the individual associations of a room and requested its insertion.

In addition, the ability of textiles to display a family’s lineage or commercial connections to an urban audience was especially valuable to the individual actors of that residence whose social position was recent and precarious in the urban theatre. For the Aubert household this was true of the silks and tapestry recorded in the garde robe of the chamber, in the chamber beside the garde robe and in the lower galleries. Although ownership of silks and tapestries was becoming accessible to a wider range of consumers than ever before in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, possession of these types of textiles still distinguished the

⁹⁵ ADCO, BII, 356, Cote 2 pièce III.

⁹⁶ ADCO, BII, 356 Cote 2, pièce XIII, Cote 13, pièce VI and X.

⁹⁷ Smail, *op.cit.*, 24.

Aubert family from the other 10,000 or so inhabitants of Dijon in 1412.⁹⁸ References to silks and tapestry are only found in some 80 inventories of the *marie de Dijon* for the period 1389–1550 and they are rarely of the same quality of the Aubert textiles.⁹⁹ ‘Old’ was a common descriptor attached to other references to tapestry throughout the fifteenth and into the early sixteenth centuries in the Dijon inventories. The silks recorded in the Dijon inventories for the same period tend to be found as cushion covers, or to accessorise belts or purses, most commonly of sandal, but also of satin, damask, taffetas and velvets.¹⁰⁰ References to ‘cloth of silk badequin’ found in the Aubert inventory are far more rare as are references to ‘Arras’ tapestries in the inventories from 1389–1550. The use of the terms ‘Arras’ in connection with a textile reflected the perceived quality of the textile in the eyes of the audience in the Aubert theatre and the corresponding ability of an object to convey to an audience that the Aubert family could access quality consumer goods.¹⁰¹ For a newly established family, whose social position was still precarious, these textiles reinforced their claim to a place within the Dijon urban elites.

⁹⁸ Vaughan, *Philip the Good*, 241.

⁹⁹ Françoise Piponnier, ‘Usages et diffusion de la soie en France à la fin du Moyen Âge,’ in S. Cavaciocchi (ed), *La seta in Europa sec. XIII–XX. Atti della ‘Ventiquattresima Settimana di Studi’, 4–9 maggio 1992* (Firenze, 1993), 785–800.

¹⁰⁰ Piponnier, *op.cit.*, 788.

¹⁰¹ K. Wilson, ‘Paris, Arras et la Cour: Les tapissiers de Philippe le Hardi et Jean sans Peur, Ducs de Bourgogne’, *Revue du Nord*, 93 (2011), 11–31.

Objects as actors: devotional tableaux.

The third object under consideration in the Aubert theatre is much more commonly studied than chests or textiles, yet is paradoxically a far rarer find in later medieval inventories. Here devotional tableaux will be used to explore how developments in domestic devotional culture during the later middle ages served several purposes in the settings of an urban theatre. The demand for devotional tableaux and their symbolic meanings were primarily driven by an urban context and must be understood in this context. In the Aubert inventory three devotional tableaux were listed among the household possessions, two with images, one with the image of Our Lady and another with the image of Our Lady and Jean Aubert. The first context for these tableaux was the domestic theatre, for use in spaces rarely attended by outsiders as objects of personal devotion or reflection. The Aubert tableaux fit into a larger pattern of consumption of such objects for devotional use in domestic spaces during the fifteenth century. Jeanne Nuechterlin describes the composition of the Virgin as a ‘popular stock image requested by many buyers’ in the later middle ages.¹⁰² Such images reflected advice made to individuals during this period to consider the humanity of Christ and the Virgin and to take responsibility for their own devotions.¹⁰³ In the 1395 inventory of the tailor Regnault Chevalier, several tableaux were recorded, one in the galleries with an image of

¹⁰² J. Nuechterlein, ‘The Domesticity of Sacred Space in Fifteenth century Netherlands’, in S. M. Hamilton (ed), *Defining the holy: sacred space in medieval and early modern Europe* (Aldershot, 2005), 57.

¹⁰³ Nuechterlein, *op.cit.*, 60, and H. Willem Van Os, *The Art of Devotion in the Late Middle Ages in Europe, 1300–1500* (London, 1994).

Saint John painted in gold and ‘dassin’ and seven others in his chapel depicting John the Baptist, Saint John, the Virgin (‘my Lady’) and the Sepulchre.¹⁰⁴

However, while tableaux depicting saints or the Virgin were more common, those depicting the individual commissioner, as with the Jean Aubert example, were far more exclusive. Less than 50 devotional portrait diptychs survive from Northern Europe for the later middle ages representing donors in prayer before the Virgin and Child, predominantly depicting male donors.¹⁰⁵ Most depict armorial bearings of their owner, but the inventory of 1413 does not tell us if this was included on the tableau representing Jean Aubert. Valued at 1 *escu* as compared to 3 *gros* for the tableau with the image of Mary, the tableau with the image of Jean Aubert and the Virgin Mary was certainly perceived by the compiler of the inventory and the five witnesses as having greater commercial worth than the tableau solely depicting the Virgin Mary.

The urban theatre and urban context of Dijon are central to understanding the multiple agencies of Aubert’s tableau. Instead of simply pointing to a man who had the wealth and connections to commission such a piece, it should be considered as an object which, when on display for an audience, embodied and performed the uncertainty of Jean Aubert’s career, and his recent entrance into a closed and well-established Dijon ruling elite. Regarding the careers of Flemish officials of the Burgundian dominions, Jan Dumolyn has pointed out that if the status of such an official was still unstable, then he might well invest in strategies designed to establish him or his family in the public sphere, through chapels, tomb sculpture

104 ADCO, BII 356, Cote 2 pièce III.

105 A. G. Pearson, ‘Personal worship, gender and the devotional portrait diptych’, *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 31, 1 (Spring, 2000), 101, and in A. G. Pearson, *Envisioning Gender in Burgundian Devotional Art* (Aldershot, 2005), 6.

and art.¹⁰⁶ The symbolic ambiguity embodied by Aubert's devotional tableau in the upstairs front chamber was further complicated by its potential for purely private use, or to engage a public audience. Such possibilities for 'private' and 'public' use or audiences were accentuated by what Jeremy Goldberg and Maryanne Kowaleski have described as 'the porous and illusory boundaries between the spiritual and the secular' in medieval residences.¹⁰⁷ Medieval chambers were both public and private spaces, and the upstairs front chamber of the Aubert residence was no different, especially when the diptych depicting Aubert and the Virgin Mary is set in context of the other objects listed by the inventory for the same room.

Set among the bed, chests, cushions, bench and armour, the diptych becomes part of a bigger ensemble in which *all* these objects have potential for private use or to engage a public audience. Yet diptychs, especially those which depicted the individual commissioner, had a special ability to enable individuals to be 'private in public'.¹⁰⁸ While the conclusion drawn by Andrea Pearson is based on the miniature from the *Traité sur l'oraison dominicale*, which depicts Philip the Good, duke of Burgundy (1419–1467) taking mass with his court in front of a diptych which bears his image, it still has relevance to a diptych used in an urban chamber setting. (See Fig. 6) Domestic chambers after all, could also be advertised as 'private' by making them accessible to only a select few audience members, as they were on the day the Aubert inventory was compiled.

106 Dumolyn, 'Nobles, Patricians and Officers', 444.

107 P. J. P. Goldberg and M. Kowaleski, 'Introduction. Medieval domesticity: home, housing and household', in P.J.P. Goldberg and M. Kowaleski (eds), *Medieval Domesticity: Home, Housing and Household* (Cambridge, 2008), 10.

108 Pearson, 'Personal Worship, Gender', 121.

Insert Figure 6: Jean Le Tavernier, Philip the Good at Mass, *Traité sur l’Oraison Dominicale*. c.1457. Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique, Ms. 9092, f. 9.

Objects as actors: books and manuscripts.

That an urban theatre and audience are key to understanding the agency and symbolic meaning of later medieval urban possessions is particularly true for comprehending the books and manuscripts listed in the ‘chamber upstairs at the back’. The setting of the back chamber included a bed, with a ceiling, backing, curtains with diamond shapes and cushions, couch with another cushion, bench with a backing, iron andirons, chests, small table, two stools, a table for writing covered with a green cloth, books and two squares of leather emblazoned with the arms of the late Jean d’Auxi. This reminds us that the books existed as part of an ‘ensemble’ of objects and that the chamber itself operated both as a ‘work space’ and as ‘living space’, which could either be ‘intimate’ or ‘very public’ depending on the audience allowed into that space. We might imagine the Aubert books performing in a space akin to that depicted by the manuscript illumination of David Aubert, son of Jean Aubert, being surprised at his work by Charles the Bold. (See Fig. 7) Yet we can only speculate on the possibility of storage on shelves, in one of the several chests, or the table used for writing which is listed in the chamber and depicted by the image of Jean Aubert’s son, as the inventory does not note how the books were stored.

Insert Figure 7: Loyset Liedet, Charles the Bold surprising David Aubert. *Histoire de Charles Martel*. c.1468. Brussels, Bibliothèque royale de Belgique, Ms. 8, f. 7.

After their immediate setting in the chamber at the back, the Aubert book and manuscript collection needs to be considered in light of the urban theatre that drove their production and consumption. Studies of later medieval book ownership still tend to focus on commissioning, production and consumption by the very elite of society. More recently there has been an acknowledgement that we should start by examining the urban centres and societies from which our book producers and owners emerged, as they shed important light on issues of ownership or trends in literature.¹⁰⁹ However, Hanno Wijsman points out that studies of the book from an urban perspective are in their early stages.¹¹⁰ It appears that Dijon was a centre both for manuscript production and demand, as evidence from inventories and commercial contracts attests.¹¹¹ In 1434 the inventory of Jaquot Martin recorded a book of hours covered with black velvet, embellished with small pearls and two books, one in paper and another in parchment.¹¹² Commercial contracts between copyists and bookbinders in Dijon demonstrate thriving production and demand for texts. Several of these contracts are for books which appear in the Aubert inventory, including the *Roman de la Rose* and the *Consolation of Boethius*. In 1399, a contract was formalised between Jean de Molin, *écrivain de forme*, and Jean Denisot, clerk, for writing for Denisot one *Roman de la Rose*, which Jean promised would be completed in three months.¹¹³ Another reveals a payment for six francs

109 H. Wijsman, *Luxury Bound. Illustrated Manuscript Production and Noble and Princely Book Ownership in the Burgundian Netherlands (1400–1500)* (Turnhout, 2010), 7, 481, 482, 483.

110 Wijsman, *op.cit.*, 7.

111 Piponnier, ‘Usages et diffusion de la soie en France’, *op.cit.*, 791.

112 ADCO, BII, 356, Cote 15. Reproduced in Piponnier, ‘Usages et diffusion de la soie en France’, *op.cit.*, 791.

for a lost manuscript of the *Consolation of Boethius* made for a Jacques le Conte in 1416.¹¹⁴ That a thriving market for books and manuscripts existed in an urban centre and hinterland of some 50,000 people, with an established urban elite, comes as no surprise, given the well-attested explosion in book production across Northern Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.¹¹⁵ Indeed, it is through the prism of the urban theatre, actors and audience that we can begin to understand the agency and symbolic meaning of the 15 books and two manuscripts included in the inventory and table below.

Table 1: Books listed in the Aubert inventory in the ‘chamber upstairs at the back’.

1: A book of the Gospels/New Testament and of epistles in French: 5 francs.
2: A book of Canon Law: 3 francs.
3: One volume bound and covered in red, one of Boethius <i>Consolation of Philosophy</i> and testament of Jean de Meun: 5 francs.
4: One book of <i>Tristan</i> : 6 francs.
5: One old psalter: 6 francs.
6: One book of chronicles covered of parchment in large volume: 4 francs.
7: A bound volume <i>Cathon</i> in French and the book of <i>Echez</i> : 3 francs.
8: <i>The Roman de la Rose</i> : 3 francs.
9: One volume of the Bible in French and the psalter in French: 10 francs.
10: One small volume covered in red with sheets of silver, the psalter with prayers of the months with nine lessons of the litany, the life of Saint Bartholomew and other intercessory prayers: 4 francs.
11: One book of the nature of beasts to hunt and a small cartulary: 3 francs.

¹¹³ ADCO, B11297, f.114 r. Reproduced in Cockshaw, ‘Une source d’information codicologique: les protocoles de notaires conservés aux archives de la côte d’or,’ *Scriptorium*, 25 (1971), 67–70.

¹¹⁴ ADCO, B11330, f.72.

¹¹⁵ W. Blockmans, ‘Manuscript Acquisition by the Burgundian Court and the market for books in the fifteenth century Netherlands’, in M. North and D. Ormrod (eds), *Art Markets in Europe, 1400–1800* (Aldershot, 1998), 19.

12: One book of Matthew: 3 francs.
13: One book of Mandevie covered in red: 4 francs. ¹¹⁶
14: One book of Mapemonde: 1 escu. ¹¹⁷
15: Ten sheets of parchment of the Golden Legend.
16: One Golden Legend written in the hand of the said J.Aubert: 40 francs.
17: One book of the government of princes: 6 gros.

Our principal actor of the inventory, Jean Aubert, was not only a collector or reader of books, he was a copyist of manuscripts. The collection mapped by the moment of the inventory's compilation, is both evidence of the personal Aubert collection and a snapshot of a medieval copyist at work. Clearly such a collection went beyond the purchasing ability of most urban individuals to commission or produce their own works, and advertised to the local audience Jehan Aubert's skill as a copyist of manuscripts. It might be tempting to assume that this list fitted the aspirational career trajectory of the Aubert family and that the books were simply owned, read and displayed as a 'prop' for emulating noble or ducal book ownership, given that several of the texts noted were also present in book collections of similar Burgundian officials from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.¹¹⁸ Yet Hanno Wijsman counsels against any such assumptions, noting that many non-noble or even noble collections do not reflect a 'Burgundian' influence or an emulation of the collections of the dukes or their nobility.¹¹⁹ Summarising the work of Celine Van Hoorebeeck, Graeme Small adds another

¹¹⁶ Mandeville's Travels.

¹¹⁷ A world map.

¹¹⁸ Wijsman, *op.cit.*, 481–499 and A. Paravicini and W. Paravicini, 'L'arsenal intellectuel d'un homme de pouvoir: les livres de Guillaume Hugonet, chancelier de Bourgogne', in *Penser le pouvoir au Moyen Âge (VIIIe–XVe siècle). Études d'histoire et de la littérature offertes à Françoise Autrand* (Paris, 2000), 261–325.

¹¹⁹ Wijsman, *op.cit.*, 497–498.

warning. According to Small, Van Hoorebeeck has cautioned against the idea that book lists should be ‘read’ as evidence of the beliefs of an individual or as evidence of a ‘Burgundian’ ideology.¹²⁰

In addition, we should make no assumption that the list of books and manuscripts in the Aubert inventory was reflective of Jean Aubert’s intellectual, social or commercial interests alone. Women took a keen and active interest in the commissioning and reading of books, especially those of private devotion, liturgical manuscripts and moral didactic works, all of which were represented in the Aubert collection, and we cannot rule out Aubert’s wife Guillemot as an influence in the compilation of such a collection.¹²¹ Of course there is a danger in assuming that all medieval owners read and understood their books, but given that Jean Aubert was a copyist, and given the existence of the manuscript of the Golden Legend ‘written in the hand of the said Jean Aubert’ in the inventory, it is likely that he had both read and understood many of the books listed in the inventory. Familiarity with the content of the works is further attested by his and his son’s career as a copyist to the Burgundian household. In 1441–2 Jean Aubert was recorded in the ducal accounts as having made and written two Psalters for Philip the Good.¹²² A surviving manuscript preserved in the *Bibliothèque Royale*

120 G. Small, ‘For a long “Century of Burgundy”,’ *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 26 (2011), 54–69, citing C. Van Hoorebeeck, ‘Les bibliothèques de Philippe de Clèves (1456-1528), Thomas de Plaine (ca. 1444-1507) et Philippe Wielant (1441-1520): Essai de mise en perspective’ in J. Haemers, C. Van Hoorebeeck and H. Wijsman (eds), *Entre la ville, la noblesse et l’état: Philippe de Clèves (1456-1528), home politique et bibliophile* (Turnhout: 2007), 223-243.

121 Wijsman, *op.cit.*, 8. J. Jenkins, ‘The Circulation and Compilation of Devotional Books: Assessing the Material Evidence of Women’s Reading’ in R. Demaria, H. Chang and S. Zacher (eds), *A Companion to British Literature Volume I Medieval Literature 700-1450* (Chichester, 2014), 337–354.

122 L. Laborde, *Les Ducs de Bourgogne études sur les lettres, les arts et l’industrie pendant le XV^e siècle* (Paris, 1849) Vol. 1, 382.

de Belgique on the subject of the *Vita Christi* notes it was translated from Latin to French by Jean Aubert, and that the text was then copied by David Aubert at the request of Philip the Good.¹²³ His son David Aubert carved out a spectacular career as author and scribe at Philip the Good's court, renowned for many of the surviving works associated from that period, and seen as formative in the development of the Burgundian library to the most extensive in Europe.¹²⁴ Given the collection in his father's household and commissions for the Burgundian court, it is not too great a leap of faith to suggest that the foundations of his career were set in the Aubert urban theatre of Dijon.

The content of one of Jean Aubert's collection, Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, serves as an important concluding point for the issues raised by this article. First, the narrative of Boethius's own career served as a lesson for any individual involved in Burgundian administration or who aspired to be further involved with the Burgundian court and household. After a spectacular career at the court of Theoderic, which included his acquisition of positions such as *Magister Officiourum*, head of the civil administration, with sons who were created joint consuls, Boethius's downfall was as rapid as his rise; and it was from prison that his manuscript, 'The *Consolation of Philosophy*' was written.¹²⁵ The *Consolation of Philosophy* served as a salutary reminder to individuals like Jean Aubert that,

123 B. Bousemanne and C. Van Hoorebeecke (eds), *La Librairie des ducs de Bourgogne. Manuscrits conservé à la Bibliothèque royale de Belgique* vol. 1 (Turnhout, 2000), 314.

124 G. Small, 'Clio à la cour de Bourgogne au XVème siècle', in B. Bousmanne, T. Van Hemelryck and C. Van Hoorebeeck (eds), *La Librairie des Ducs de Bourgogne. Manuscrits conservé à la Bibliothèque royale de Belgique* vol. 4 (Turnhout, 2010), 11–13.

125 Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, ed. D. C. Langston Tester (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), vii–viii, M. Kempshall, *Rhetoric and the writing of history* (Manchester, 2011), 80.

as life was uncertain, a career in city or court, even the Burgundian court, was never to be taken for granted and success was not guaranteed. Philosophy's message regarding personal possessions and wealth was similarly cautionary.¹²⁶ Possessions did not bring happiness; riches only brought anxiety and trouble. Accumulation and possession for possession's sake were to be avoided.¹²⁷ Thus, while applying the term 'consumer', 'consumer revolution' or 'consumer society' is an attractive explanation for the growth in possessions during the period, the actions of individuals need to be interpreted in relation to the ideas about wealth, goods and possessions that circulated at the time. A final relevant message from Philosophy to Boethius, was that bad fortune gave the gift of true friendship.¹²⁸ It was after all, as this article has sought to demonstrate, the urban theatre and its local audience that mattered most and which are key to understanding the agency of later medieval possessions.

Conclusion.

This close study of a single inventory and a selection of its objects has important implications for our approach to inventories and the material culture they contain, as well as for the historiography of the Burgundian court and the 'consumer revolution'. Inventory taking was a performative act, resulting in a 'snapshot' of a scene or set of scenes. Medieval inventories are subjective records, which need to be analysed through careful reconstruction of the immediate social context surrounding their creation. Once this is recognised, they are ideal

126 Boethius, *op.cit.*, x, 24–25.

127 Boethius, *op.cit.*, 24–25.

128 Boethius, *op.cit.*, 32.

tools for exploring Goffman's conception of everyday life as theatrical performance and Latour's insight that objects are performers in their own right with their own agency. Taken as whole, an inventory provides a mental map of the theatre within which our actors – humans and objects – performed. Thanks to its preamble, it supplies a cast of some of the human actors and one particular audience for the performances. Within the record for each room, it offers up information about the settings created and re-created for those performances, including the objects, which played their own parts. By putting the biographies of the actors and audience together with the particularities of the objects themselves, it is possible to consider the role that those objects played in the efforts of the actors to guide and control audience impressions. These are approaches that might be applied to any inventory to understand the social functions of the objects that they contain. In this particular case, the inventory of Jean Aubert of Dijon reveals that an urban theatre – the Aubert residence – was the immediate social context for performances, that urban elites comprised the immediate audience for those performances, and that the Aubert objects with their particular characteristics were selected to perform on behalf of an incomer whose position amongst those Dijon urban elites and career within the Burgundian administration was not assured. Accepting the primacy of this urban theatre to the selection of objects as performers requires us to recognise two final things. Firstly, that Dijon urban elites were crucial to the Burgundian dukes, who achieved authority and power partly by plugging themselves into those elites through the giving of occasional gifts of material culture, which performed to distinguish some of those elites in their competitive urban theatres and acted as independent ambassadors for the dukes in those theatres. Secondly, that purchasing trends and patterns of the 'consumer revolution' were driven by the desire of urban individuals to act and perform in an urban theatre and by the ambiguities and uncertainties of their everyday lives and careers.