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Christelle Balouzat-Loubet

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The Court of Mahaut, Countess of Artois (1302-1329), through its Bookkeeping Practices

Christelle Balouzat-Loubet

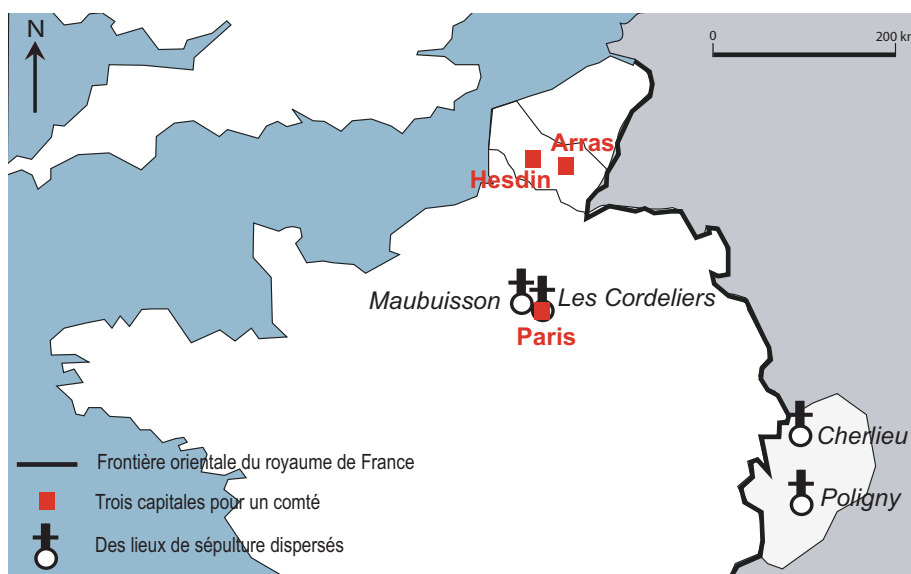
Abstract

The household accounts of Mahaut, countess of Artois, are an essential source to enable us to understand how both the Household and the court functioned. They were kept by a treasurer, each account covering a 4-month period. A fair number the many accounts thus produced are still available today: for the whole reign of Mahaut, more than a third of the 84 accounts that were supposedly produced still subsist in the archives, the last 15 years of the countess reign being best documented.

These accounts give some insight into the Household organization, its hierarchy and the tasks of the officers, but also on how the court functioned on a daily basis. This paper aims at showing how these accounts, by allowing understanding the links between the ruler and her officers, shed a better light on the institutionalization process of the Household in 14th century Artois. Another issue I intend to address is how these accounts provide and build an image of the court as a place where meetings and discussions were held, at the very heart of the county political life.

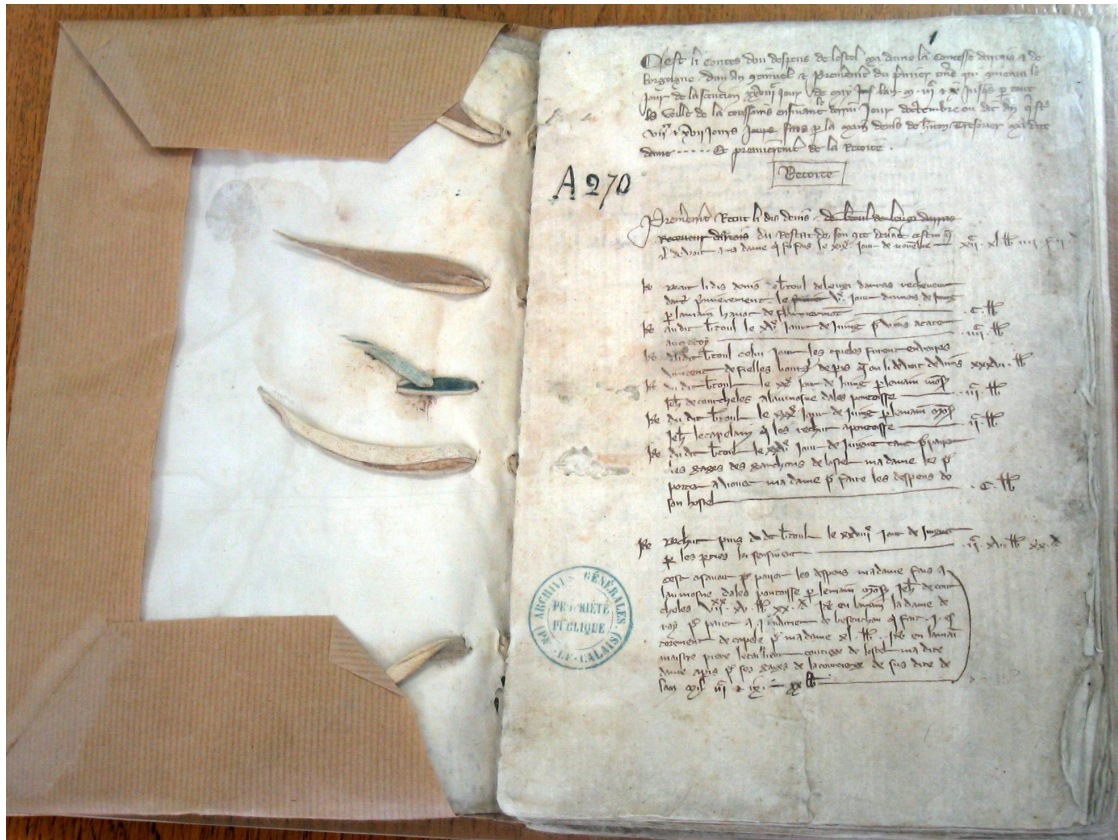
Mahaut d'Artois, daughter of Robert II, Count of Artois (1250-1302), was a Capetian princess who ruled the county of Artois between 1302 and 1329. She inherited the county with her husband Otto IV, Count of Burgundy, when her father died. Widow a few months later, she found herself alone at the head of the Artesian principality for 26 years.

As a reminder: the County of Artois is located north of the kingdom of France, at the crossroads between Flanders and England.



Due to this heritage, Mahaut became one of the most powerful figures in the kingdom of France. To govern her legacy, she could rely on administrative institutions established by her predecessors, such as bailiwicks (locally) and the Household (centrally). Today, I'd like to focus on the Household, its organization and functions.

By the early fourteenth century, the Artesian's Household was not completely institutionalized yet: servants were paid from a particular budget, but no decree fixed the Household's organization. We must therefore guess at its structure using clues provided by the accounts.



AD Pas-de-Calais, A270 (1310, All Saints' Day)

These accounts were kept on paper registers, written in French.

They are divided in two parts:

- the receipts
- the expenses

This second part is the most useful for my work, specially because of

1. the lists of wages, which give information on the Household's organisation
2. the indications about the court location, which I used to reconstruct the Household's itinerary

They were presented three times a year (with a few exceptions), on Candlemas, at Ascension Day and on All Saints' Day. Today, 31 accounts remain of the 81 which were

theoretically written between 1302 and 1329. They are kept in the Treasury of the Charters of the Departmental Archives of the Pas-de-Calais (Arras, France).

Preserved household accounts (1302-1329)			
1304, March 1 st - June 30 th	A 199	1320, Candlemas	A 378
1307, February 2 nd -May 3 rd	A 222	1320, August 7th- November 1st	A 386
1310, Candlemas	A 261	1321, All Saints' Day	A 396
1310, Ascension Day	A 263	1322, Ascension Day	A 403
1310, All Saints' Day	A 270	1322, All Saints' Day	A 1003
1311, Ascension Day	A 280	1323, Ascension Day	A 412
1312, Ascension Day	A 293	1323, All Saints' Day	A 416
1312, All Saints' Day	A 298	1324, Ascension Day	A 428
1314, Candlemas	A 316	1325, Ascension Day	A 439
1315, Candlemas	A 329	1326, Candlemas	A 448
1315, All Saints' Day	A 334	1327, Ascension Day	A 458
1317, Candlemas	A 351	1327, All Saints' Day	A 461
1318, Ascension Day	A 361	1328, Candlemas	A 470
1319, Candlemas	A 368	1328, Ascension Day	A 474
1319, All Saints' Day	A 374	1328, All Saints' Day	A 480
		1329, December	A 494

I would like to show now how, using these accounts, we are able to reconstruct the Household's hierarchy, to demonstrate how composite this world is. Secondly, I will show that these sources suggest that the Household is a place for exchanges and meetings essential to the political life of the county.

The Household of Mahaut: a composite world

As I said before, no decree fixed the Household organisation, that's why I had to reconstruct the Households hierarchy. To do that, I first used the lists of wages, which mentioned the Household's officers. Also, that operation allowed me to count the Household's members. Secondly, I put together all the clues I found in the accounts to reconstruct theirs tasks and functions. That led me to some conclusions I will now present you.

Directors and officers of the Household

In the Middle Ages, most Households, princely or royal, were placed under the authority of one or more "Household masters" (e.g. France, Britain). In Artois, traces of the presence of this officer are few. We can just speculate and suppose that there was primarily a "Household master" who ensured the proper functioning of the domestic service of the prince by controlling the other servants.

The Treasurer was in charge of the “Chamber”, i.e. the financial department of the Household. As its name suggests, the treasurer was first and foremost a money handler. To perform this task, the Countess chose men in whom she had confidence, whom she recruited by herself, and who had already proven themselves at her service. Except for one, all Mahaut’s treasurers were University graduates.

The chaplain also belonged to the intimate circle of the Countess. Besides the management of the princely chapel, the chaplain was also an almoner and a confessor, at least until the 1320s, when the three offices were separated.

It is among the other Household’s officers that changes are the most significant in relation to the preceding period: there was no more an “Household’s Marshal” and the two “Chamberlains” of Robert II disappeared after 1310; regarding the title of “Seneschal”, it became honorific. It rewarded the faithful knights of Mahaut’s father, and fell into disuse after their death.

The valets

The valets were essential for the daily running of the six Household’s offices plus the Chamber, the Chapel and the Chaplaincy. Three of these services — the “Paneterie”, the “Bouteillerie” and “Kitchen” — gathered all the food trades. The “Stable” managed horses, “Fruiterie” handled lighting and “Pound” bedding and transport. This organization was the same as of most royal or princely Households of the time (eg Savoy, Burgundy, Brittany, France).

The number of servants paid by the Treasurer was very inconstant: between 1314 and 1319, this number oscillated between 21 and 54. The group of servants was thus divided into a core of permanent servants, who followed the Countess in all her movements, and another group composed of personnel engaged occasionally to lend a hand when needed.

All these servants were fed and housed by the Countess, who provided them two liveries a year, one at Easter and the other at All Saints’ Day. She also paid for their care when they were sick. She could also give them gifts as a reward for services.

All those people, men and women, were from very different backgrounds. Most of them came from modest social background, but they interacted with other people from high society, like the knights and damsels.

Knights and damsels

The knights, dressed in the countal livery, remained in the Household for a variable duration. Fed and housed by the Countess, they were also paid to maintain their equipment and their horses but also to secure the services of one or more squires. There was usually one or two knights, but sometimes five or six, simultaneously present at court.

The Countess was also surrounded by some women, her damsels, who were not paid but rewarded by gifts in kind or in money. It seems they were always two or three of

them with Mahaut at the same time, playing the role of maids in attendance as well as companions of the countess. Most of them came from good families and had at least one male relative in the service of the Countess.

Ultimately, the knights and damsels occupied a special place within the Household and cannot be regarded as mere servants. Because they belonged to both the Household and the court, they helped the countess to expand and consolidate her network of loyalty through a form of patronage.

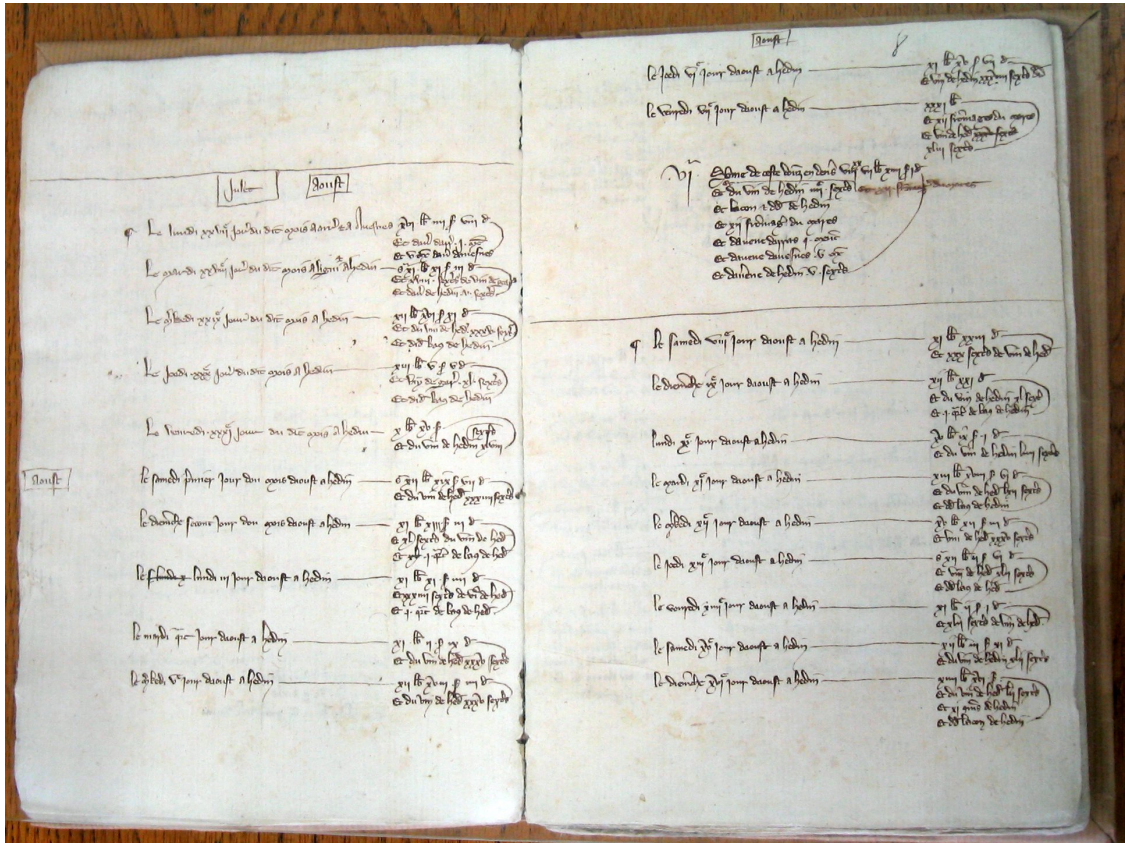
To conclude, the staff of the Household of Artois, composed of officers and servants —“Household Master”, Treasurer, Chaplain — can be evaluated through the analysis of the books of accounts to a little more than 50 people when the number of servants is at its lowest, and around 85 at most. We are thus far from the 500 people accompanying Philippe le Bel on the move, or from the large princely and royal Households of the fifteenth century (eg: the 700 servants of King Charles VI in 1389 or the 234 persons following Duke Philip the Good in 1426). However, we can compare the number of the Artesian Household to the Dukes of Orleans’ one, which comprised no more than 80 servants at the time of Charles d’Orléans (1394-1465).

At the beginning of the fourteenth century, the Household of Artois was therefore of some importance. It featured men from different backgrounds, whose roles and responsibilities varied. A hierarchy, though imperfect, emerged in the Household based on the powers of each individual and his proximity with the Countess. At the base were simple servants. At the top was the most intimate circle of the Countess, to which the Household’s administrators, the knights and the damsels belonged. It was a place where people of all social rank mixed, living on the road.

Mahaut of Artois: a countess on the road

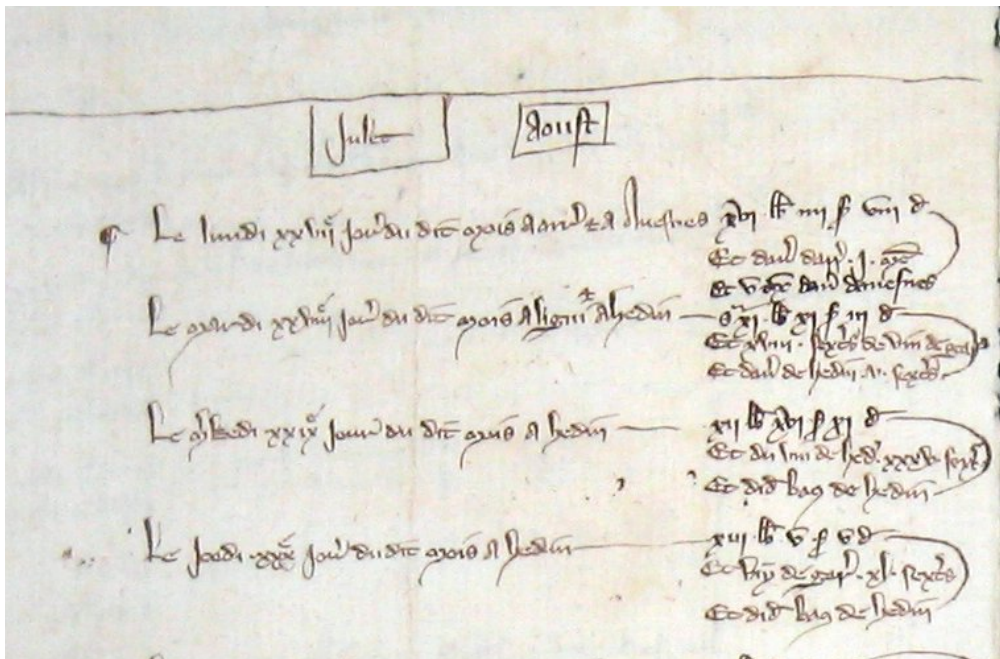
An exceptional mobility

The accounting books mention on a daily basis the place where the court was, so that we can follow Mahaut movements. We can take the example of the year 1309-1310, because the accounts series is complete for that year (i.e. the accounts are preserved for all the three terms: Candlemas, Ascension Day and All Saints’ Day).



AD Pas-de-Calais, A270 (1310, All Saints' Day)

Each day, the treasurer noted the eating expenses, and indicated where the Household was. Thanks to that, we can follow the countess from November 1st in 1309 to October 31th in 1310.



AD Pas-de-Calais, A270 (1310, All Saints' Day)

1. Mahaut was in Bapaume. She left the city for Paris, where she arrived after a six-day journey. She stayed here until November 9th and then went back in Artois by Pontoise (November 10th and 11th), Hesdin, Aire, Arras, Hesdin again for the end of the year, and Arras.
2. After that, she went to Paris and stayed about a month (January 11th to February 12th). She rested a few days in Hesdin (February 18th to March 5th) before she began to tour her county: Arras, Lens, Beuvry and Béthune, Aire, Saint-Omer, Marck, Calais and Boulogne. Back in Hesdin, she stayed from March 30th to April 12th and then went to Arras.
3. After that began the longest journey of the year, to Burgundy: she was there on May 3rd, and travelled in her territory for thirty days. She visited Gray, Dole, Arbois, Bracon, Ornans, Quingey, Dole again. Then Mahaut went back to the Artois, where she stayed alternately in Arras and Hesdin.
4. The last journey was in Paris, in October. After that, Mahaut travelled around the county until the end of the month.

The Household rarely rested: in 1309-1310, Mahaut travelled 3000 kilometers. Even if this mobility is usual at the time (eg the king of France himself, the Dukes of Burgundy at the 15th century), the distances are exceptional.

Steps, accommodation and transport

The court travelled daily 7 to 45 kilometers, depending on the destination and the predictable duration of the journey. Each day of travel was generally divided in two parts, before and after dinner, the pause occurring usually half-way. The choice of stops was determined by the accommodation. Indeed, the Countess of Artois often enjoyed the hospitality of her clients, friends, officers and parents, especially when she crossed land that did not belong to her. Monasteries were also places of hospitality. Sometimes the Countess and her court stayed in rented houses on site. This was the case each time Mahaut went to Reims, in 1317, 1322 and 1328, to attend the coronation of the new king.

Most often the Countess housed in her own comfortable and spacious residences in Paris, Conflans and Hesdin. During her stays in the main artesian towns, like Calais, Tournehem, Saint-Omer, Arras or Aire, the Countess resided in the Count's castle, in which she had a private dwelling.

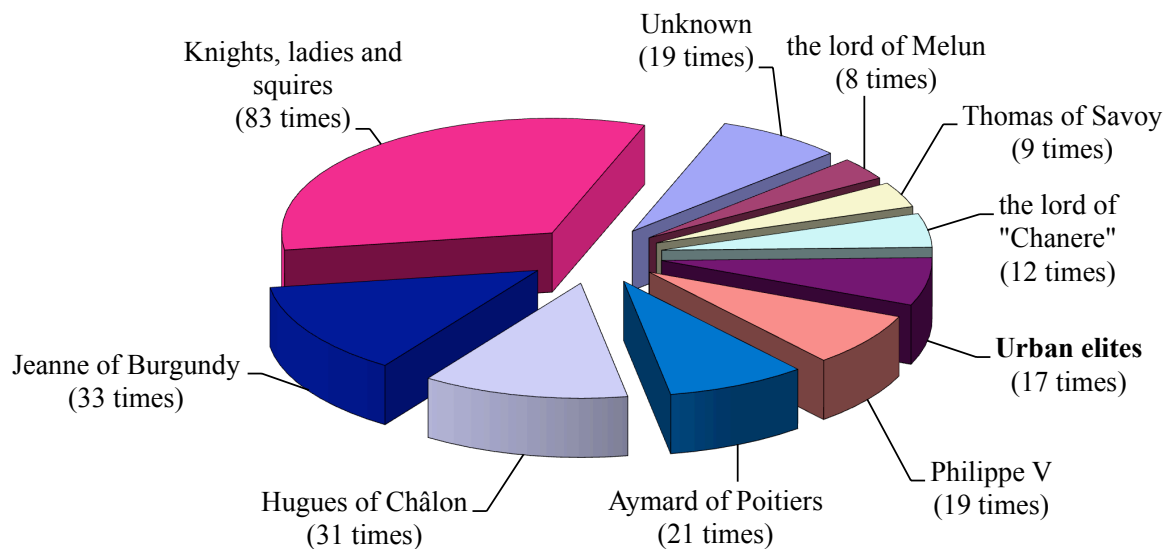
These trips were carried out exclusively by road convoy and took various routes: the topography is undemanding in the areas crossed. These journeys were a demonstration of Mahaut's power, since the procession is impressive. She had sometimes some companions (the duke of Burgundy and his wife, for example), who increased her prestige. Once again, the information is hidden in the accounts, in the eating expenses, where the treasurer used to mention the people who shared the table of Mahaut. As these people were mentioned several and successive days, we can easily imagine that

they followed the Countess on her journey during the period they figured in the accounts.

These journeys also allowed her to meet her subjects, that's why we can say that the court was a meeting space.

The court, a meeting space

The court was a centre of power and decision, a place where ideas and news circulated between servants, officers, knights, doctors, etc. It was also a meeting space: during her trips, the Countess invited to her table people who didn't belong to the court. I analysed 17 accounting books, representing 1896 days, to make a survey. In these books, I searched and listed all the people who once ate with Mahaut. This information is scattered around the accounts, but is mostly mentioned with the eating expenses. Finally, I concluded that during these 1896 days, Mahaut organized 182 receptions, to which she invited a total of just over a hundred people or groups.



As this graph shows, during her visit to a city, she received for dinner the communal elites; sometimes some townsmen and their wives joined them. These invitations were both a mark of esteem and an opportunity for the subjects to converse with their sovereign. Mahaut did not organize many feasts, suggesting she did not consider meals as tool of political propaganda, unlike the Burgundian dukes of the fifteenth century. The meal was, for her, more a time of speech than representation, a privileged moment of political dialogue.

Conclusion

Reading the Household's accounts and analysing them from a statistical perspective is instructive. They help to appreciate the running and role of the Household of Artois in the early fourteenth century. Accounting books are important and rich sources, which contain much indirect information about medieval Households.