

PETER SPUFFORD

Peter Spufford

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elected Fellow of the British Academy 1994

by

WIM BLOCKMANS

Fellow of the Academy

Peter Spufford was an eminent specialist in monetary, trade and financial history and numismatics of the European Middle Ages. He taught at the Universities of Keele and Cambridge. He was a widely learned, wise, enthusiastic and empathising person.



PETER SPUFFORD

Finding his own way

As a schoolboy, Peter Spufford was one of the founding members of the Bath & Bristol Numismatic Society.¹ No wonder that as a student in Cambridge he got in touch with the famous numismatist Philip Grierson, whose inspiration would play a crucial role throughout Peter's career. In the late 1930s Grierson had worked in Ghent, where he may have been sent thanks to the friendship between Zachary N. Brooke, the medieval historian who was his tutor in Cambridge, and François-Louis Ganshof, who was the leading medievalist in Ghent and the successor of Henri Pirenne. Grierson lived in the city for three years and became well acquainted with the dynamic school carrying on Pirenne's heritage. He published a number of articles, first on religious history but gradually he shifted his interest towards the formation of territorial principalities in northern France. In this domain, he connected with the somewhat younger Ghent medievalist Jan Dhondt. Their intention was to write together a history of Flanders up to 1070, but the Second World War interrupted the plan.² Dhondt eventually published several articles on the topic, which finally resulted in his PhD thesis.³ The war directed both of them to different fields, but Peter would in his turn become inspired by Dhondt, albeit on a different topic.

In the mid-1950s it was Grierson who sent Peter as a young graduate student to the Low Countries to study the fifteenth-century coinage. Peter was in Jesus College, Cambridge, from 1953 to 1960. First as an undergraduate, he took his BA in History with First Class Honours in 1956. He then became a research student and in 1958 was awarded a two-year Royal Historical Society research fellowship. Bursaries from the French, Belgian and Dutch governments enabled him to carry on archival research on monetary policies in the Burgundian Low Countries from their monetary union in 1433. In each of these countries, several of the most prominent specialists advised him in this field. They may have brought him to the insight that his subject entailed economic, political as well as institutional aspects. He had been deeply impressed when the Professor of Medieval Economic History in Ghent, Hans van Werveke, aged nearly 60, had personally come to welcome him at the train station. Van Werveke acted as his temporary supervisor abroad, while Grierson was his supervisor in Cambridge. The two shared an interest in medieval currency. Peter took his MA in 1959 and finished the manuscript of his PhD thesis at Michaelmas 1962. In 1963 he received the degree

¹ Jan Lucassen and Bert van Beek, *Jaarboek voor Munt- en Penningkunde*, 104 (2017), 166–8.

² Christopher Brooke and Lord Stewartby, 'Philip Grierson, 1910–2006', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 150 (2007), pp. 79–104, esp. pp. 87–8.

³ Jan Dhondt, *Etudes sur la naissance des principautés territoriales en France (IX^e-X^e siècle)* (Bruges: De Tempel, 1948); *Hommes et Pouvoirs: Les principales études de Jan Dhondt sur l'histoire du 19^e et du 20^e siècles* (Ghent: Fondation Jan Dhondt, 1976), pp. 3–9.

of doctor in philosophy from the University of Cambridge. In 1962 he married Margaret Clark, who took on his family name, and who was also an eminent historian specialising in literacy in the early modern period.⁴ It is worth quoting Peter's last remark in the Preamble dated 1962 in the thesis's book version, published in 1970: 'without my wife, this work would never have been brought to conclusion'.⁵ In the Preface to *Origins of the English Parliament* published in August 1966 Peter thanked Margaret 'for radically improving the volume by her perceptive historical comments'.⁶ Her own volumes would contain similar acknowledgements of Peter's assistance. It was the beginning of a highly productive intellectual partnership in which, though their specialisms did not overlap very much, they always acted as each other's first reader and most helpful critic.

The celebrated economic historian Herman van der Wee remembered his discussions with Peter during his visits to Belgium in the late 1950s, as they had a common interest in the monetary history of the fifteenth-century Low Countries. A lasting friendship developed between them. Van der Wee was then preparing his dissertation on the rise of the Antwerp market, for which he needed to get a grasp of the monetary values of the wages and prices he analysed. In his recollection, it was Professor Charles Wilson, Peter's supervisor for his fellowship at Jesus College, who had recommended Peter to seek contact, and in 2020 even Van der Wee thought that the idea of studying Burgundian monetary policy may have been suggested by Wilson.⁷ Peter was not explicit himself in the preamble to his thesis and did not attribute the idea to his formal PhD supervisor, Grierson. The topic may have emerged from various inspirations, including his own experience with the sources and the advice he got from by various specialists of the Burgundian period. Looking back in 2010, he wrote:

In the Spring of 1960, as a 25-year-old research fellow at Jesus College, Cambridge, I was invited to become the secretary of the British Numismatic Society, editor of the quarterly *Genealogists' Magazine* and secretary of the British Record Society. In retrospect it seems very presumptuous that I should have said 'yes' to all three, even though I was still trying to finish my PhD ... I had not finished it because I had moved my focus of interest to lecture and write on the parliaments of medieval Europe!⁸

⁴ Ann Hughes, 'Margaret Spufford, 1935–2014', *Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the British Academy*, XVII (2019), pp. 365–85.

⁵ *Monetary Problems and Policies in the Burgundian Netherlands 1433–1496* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), p. viii.

⁶ *Origins of the English Parliament* (London: Longman, 1967), p. xiii.

⁷ Mail to the author, 10 January 2020. H. van der Wee, *The Growth of the Antwerp Market and the European Economy (Fourteenth–Sixteenth Centuries)*, 3 vols (Leuven and The Hague: Nijhoff, 1963).

⁸ 'The British Record Society 1960–2010: a personal view', *Local Historian*, 43 (2013), 232–9.

In his speech in Lisbon in 2016, to which we will return, Peter again mentioned his pondering over the latter idea. Additional motives for the delay in presenting and publishing the thesis might have been Peter's immensely broad spectrum of fields of interests, his need to look for a more substantial position than a research fellowship because he wanted to get married, as well as his great empathy that made him the exceptionally sociable person who was liked by everybody. So, after marriage in 1962, the couple moved to Keele, where Peter was appointed as an assistant lecturer and had to teach various subjects.

The PhD thesis, finished in 1962, was published in 1970 as *Monetary Problems and Policies in the Burgundian Netherlands 1433–1496*. It presented a much broader vision than that of the purely numismatic description of coins: it widened the scope to include all forms of money and monetary policy. In 1966, Peter had already published the important article 'Coinage, taxation and the States General of the Burgundian Netherlands', which was 'a greatly revised and somewhat expanded version of this chapter [6]'.⁹ He was the first to highlight the role of the representative institutions in monetary policy. The influence of merchants in these assemblies led to a strong focus on the availability of stable and trusted currencies. As the merchants refused to pay for the monarchic wars of Maximilian of Habsburg, they were financed by a combination of debasement and revaluation, which disturbed economic activity. Peter explained that this was the effect of the ruler's exploitation of coinage as a means to increase his revenues at times when the States General insisted on peace and stability.

Peter's thesis rested on the analysis of the typological catalogue of the coins that happened to be published precisely during the period of his research; this included details about coin-hoards and monetary ordinances.¹⁰ Peter's most important sources were, however, the accounts of the production of coins for the whole of the Burgundian Netherlands, which data he contributed himself to the aforementioned catalogue.¹¹ He noted, not without irony, that national historians had failed to see the Low Countries in the fifteenth century as an economic entity, a need which he, as an Englishman, might satisfy more easily. One-quarter of the book consists of tables and graphs showing, with great precision, the huge variation in the production of coins of the various types and the predominance of monetary stability under Duke Philip the Good (1433–66). That was in sharp contrast to the period under Maximilian (1477–94) during which the value of gold and silver tripled while it remained stable in other

⁹ *Monetary Problems*, p. 147, n1; 'Coinage, taxation and the Estates General of the Burgundian Netherlands', *Standen en Landen*, 40 (1966), 61–87.

¹⁰ H. Enno van Gelder and Marcel Hoc, *Les monnaies des Pays Bas bourguignons et espagnols 1434–1713* (Amsterdam: J. Schulman, 1960).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 18–19, 24–5, 33–4; *Monetary Problems*, p. 175.

countries. Self-evidently, Maximilian's policy provoked disruptions in the international markets as well as in the purchasing power of ordinary people.

Peter's data demonstrated in detail how the production of coins was heavily concentrated in the years directly following the issue of monetary ordinances, how the activity was spread among the mints, one in each of the 'four lands', and how the monetary types were differentiated. He showed how incisive the monetary reform of 1433 really was, unifying the coinage in all the principalities of the Low Countries, most of which the duke had acquired recently. During the period from 1433 to 1447, great efforts must have been made to produce a huge quantity of coins in just the three years immediately after the issue of the ordinance. The greatest part of the precious metals came from recoinage: Peter calculated the amounts—1.6 million gold coins, 38.7 million white silver coins and 2.6 million pieces of 'black money' (with very low silver alloy).¹² Over 31 million of these new coins were *patards* (French) or *stuivers* (Dutch), the emblematic symbol of the unification, worth two Flemish groats.

Peter's detailed tables were the result of his precise analysis of the accounts of the ducal receivers-general. They make it understandable that 'black money' was constantly in great demand, while its production did not entail any profit for the mint masters or for the duke. They also show how much the county of Flanders dominated monetary policy in these years, as 72.48 per cent of the value of coins was struck there, 16.88 per cent in Brabant (including Mechelen), 8.41 per cent in Holland and 2.23 per cent in Hainaut. Later in the century, for the years 1489–96, during which Ghent and Sluis remained in revolt until 1492, the value of Flemish coin production dropped to less than a quarter of the total value in the Low Countries. Brabant struck 39.53 per cent, Holland 21, including most of the gold coins, Guelders 14.48, only in silver; the workshop in Hainaut had ceased its activity in 1466.¹³ Peter's minute scrutiny of the accounts and archival sources in the various lands provided impressive quantitative data and highly valuable insights into the organisation of the monetary circulation. It shed new light on the momentous political and economic shifts going on in the fifteenth-century Low Countries.

After three short numismatic articles published in 1962–4, Peter contributed an important chapter on coinage and currency to the *Cambridge Economic History*.¹⁴ The Low Countries and money would remain focal areas for Peter's work and to his lasting relations with Dutch numismatists. In their midst Peter delivered the Van Gelder lecture in 2006.

¹² *Monetary Problems*, pp. 191–3, my calculations.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 187–9, my calculation.

¹⁴ 'Coinage and currency', in M. M. Postan, E. E. Rich and E. Miller (eds.), *Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), pp. 576–602.

In Leuven Peter had met the specialist of the study of representative institutions, Emile Lousse, who published two of his articles and who tried to convince him that parliaments are a far more interesting topic than money. He had some success indeed, as shown in two articles published in 1966 and Peter's first published book, that dealt with origins of the English parliament (1967).¹⁵ This is a textbook collection of comments and, when required, translated fragments from documents and essential scholarly works resulting from his teaching on this subject. It presented the English experience in its European context. The introduction opens with a significant statement: referring to the celebration, in 1965, of the 'nominal seven hundredth anniversary of parliament', Peter makes it very clear that

the notion that the English parliament began in 1265 must, of course, be dismissed at once as a publicist's fiction. It is as false as the idea which found currency for many years in textbooks that parliament began with the so-called 'Model Parliament' of 1295. ... no single occasion can be pinpointed as the first parliament.¹⁶

The seventeen pages of introduction, in my view, still offer the brightest and most encompassing interpretation of the origins of parliamentary representation in Europe as a whole. Unfortunately, what he wrote has not received the attention deserved, probably because researchers neglected the textbook, while Peter did not pursue his work in this domain. He sets out to explain the representation of the shires as it emerged intermittently in the late thirteenth century. The fighting-men, the knights, had developed into a sort of nobility.

In any group of men there will be some who eagerly seek after office and power, and others who as eagerly avoid it. So it was with the county gentry of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. An inner group chose itself from amongst those adequately qualified to perform the functions of local government, [the weighty by virtue of the wealth or their personality]. It was the same men who were in turn coroners and sheriffs, assessors and collectors of taxes. It was naturally from this inner group of the more powerful and politically experienced gentry that knights of the shire were chosen to represent the shire in parliament. Such men were able to represent their constituents in a much more real and personal sense than their modern counterparts, for their constituencies were not mere geographical expressions devised by the electoral arithmetic of boundary commissioners, but real, organic communities in which they were accustomed to play a significant role. ... This in its turn may be linked with social and economic change over the same period. ... Intermittently in the thirteenth century, and increasingly regularly in the fourteenth century, burgesses were present in

¹⁵'Assemblies of Estates, taxation and control of coinage in medieval Europe', *Studies Presented to the International Commission for the History of Representative and Parliamentary Institutions*, 31 (1966), 113–30; and the article quoted in note 9.

¹⁶*Origins of the English Parliament*, p. 1.

parliament. The crown thought it worthwhile to summon them. Why? The answer must be sought in terms of wealth and privileged immunity.¹⁷

So, Peter went on to explain that direct taxation of the people in the countryside depended on the consent and active participation of the gentry. Edward I and Edward III introduced tolls on the export, mainly of wool, after negotiation with assemblies of merchants.

Those without power and influence remained without representation, not only in the Middle Ages, but until recent times. ... Disregarding Burkean notions of virtual representation, there was no one in parliament to represent the peasant, the rural labourer, or the urban craftsman in late medieval England. ... On a European scale the varying composition of assemblies in different territories and at different times can be related in a similar way to the varying political, and at root, socio-economic balance in society.¹⁸

I cannot agree more with this last sentence, which elaborates on ideas expounded by Jan Dhondt in a famous article in 1950,¹⁹ but which remained disregarded in most of the specialised literature, also because few scholars dared to venture into systematic comparison.

Peter Spufford was appointed Assistant Lecturer at the University College of North Staffordshire, later Keele University, in 1960, where he became Senior Lecturer in 1968, and Reader, in 1979. His teaching and supervision covered a broad range of topics, especially in economic history of the early modern period. The early industrialisation and the pottery industries of Staffordshire self-evidently attracted his and his students' interest. Together with Margaret, Peter committed himself in the study of a market town in the region, a topic they had presented in an extramural course of adult education.²⁰ This type of studies of cultural patterns in local communities became the main frame of Margaret's research, leading her to her PhD and influential book *Contrasting Communities*.²¹

This brings me to a better understanding of the choice Peter had to make after his appointment in Keele and his marriage, between the three societies of which he had 'presumptuously' accepted to act as their honorary secretary or editor. With two of his contemporaries as undergraduates, Peter had founded the Cambridge Heraldic

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 7–8, 11.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 45–6.

²⁰ Peter Spufford and Margaret Spufford, *Eccleshall: the Story of a Staffordshire Market Town and Its Dependiant Villages*, prepared in a class organised by the Joint Committee for Adult Education of the University of Keele, 1964.

²¹ Hughes, 'Margaret Spufford', p. 369.

and Genealogical Society in 1955, of which he served as president in 1959–60.²² Friendships might explain why he remained a member of the Society of Genealogists, and, though he gave up its editorship in 1963, he became a fellow in 1969, published an article titled ‘Population mobility in pre-industrial England’ in the *Genealogists’ Magazine* 17 (1973–4) and accepted the role of vice-president from 1997 to 2012.²³ While he remained internationally renowned among numismatists, who celebrated him in a conference in 2010, he did not take up again any office in their British Society. But he remained active during fifty years in the British Record Society, though that did not provide him direct links to his main research fields. When he joined that Society in 1960, it was ‘dominated by its chairman’, a wealthy businessman convening ‘a group of friends’ and who ‘used his own private money to pay slip writers to go through the probate records’ in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, which would finally lead to the publication of index volumes. Peter served as secretary to the Editorial Committee, but in the chairman’s ‘prolonged absences overseas, the committee met less and less often and eventually not at all, so that to all intents and purposes I [Peter] gradually became the editorial committee’. In 1985, he handed over the general editorship, to become chairman of the Council, an office he held for another twenty-five years.

Peter’s ‘Personal View’ on fifty years of executive service for the British Record Society is a juicy tale of all the successes and mischiefs a typically British combination of amateurs-with-a-mission and academics might get through. During those years, they had to deal with successive dramatic innovations in the techniques of data processing. They had to switch from outsized volumes bound in maroon cloth hard covers to paperback and back, to microfilm, microfiche, camera-ready copies produced by Peter himself on the university’s mainframe computer, and from hand-written, corrected and rewritten index cards, to electronic sorting on laptops. Why did Peter spend much of his precious time in managing this rather unsystematic and fragmented set of research instruments in an over-ambitious endeavour? He managed to get a grasp of the huge mass of archival material of interest for demography, social, economic and cultural history, local as well as regional. Under Peter’s guidance, it became clear that it was an impossible mission to index the millions of wills and probate inventories. Instead, thanks to research grants and a decade of work, four researchers could list the tens of thousands surviving early modern probate accounts in England as a whole, to be consulted in a database and two volumes of indexes.²⁴ All these

²² ‘The British Record Society 1960–2010: a personal view’, 235.

²³ The complete list of publications is to be found in Martin Allen and Nicholas Mayhew (eds.), *Money and Its Use in Medieval Europe: Three Decades on. Essays in Honour of Professor Peter Spufford*, Special Publication 52 (London: Royal Numismatic Society, 2017), pp. 153–7.

²⁴ ‘The British Record Society 1960–2010: a personal view’, 238.

initiatives were possible only thanks to the collaboration of public archives, researchers and volunteers. In that light, the celebration of the centenary of the British Record Society, and the 150th anniversary of the Public Record Office in 1988 was marked by a joint conference and the publication of a common volume co-edited by Peter and the Keeper of the Public Record Office.²⁵

On that occasion, Peter also was in a position to launch a second main publication programme of the Record Society. Its aim was the publication of the accounts of the hearth tax, levied from 1662 to 1689, the only national population survey between Domesday book and the National Census of 1801. As early as 1962, Margaret Spufford had highlighted the great potential of these sources for local history, as she would demonstrate in her PhD thesis on three villages in Cambridgeshire.²⁶ The first three volumes came out in 2000 and 2001, and in 2018 they numbered up to eleven, thanks to the collaboration of academics, local societies and dedicated volunteers.

These projects required much of Peter's time and energy, but they opened up new and inspiring material for his teaching as well as for research. After the 1973 article on population mobility quoted above, he published several articles on credit in early modern rural England, informed by evidence from probate accounts.²⁷ More importantly, probate records have been fundamental sources for Margaret's studies on popular culture, literacy, religiosity and clothing. The hearth tax project was supported by the Centre at Roehampton University, which she created and directed from 1995 to 2006. There, as before from her positions in Keele and in Cambridge, she inspired numerous PhD students to work on these abundant and rich sources, while her books and articles innovated the research agenda in English social and cultural history.²⁸ Peter's efforts for the Record Society were important by making massive and highly informative source materials accessible to all researchers, and they were particularly supportive for Margaret's academic activity. The Spufford couple developed an extremely productive programme creating essential research instruments, providing exploratory models, and motivating students and volunteers to analyse these sources for various topics. Their remarkable contribution to British and European scholarship can only be valued in their conjunction and complementarity.

²⁵ G. H. Martin and Peter Spufford (eds.), *The Records of the Nation: the Public Record Office, 1838–1988, the British Record Society, 1888–1988* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1990).

²⁶ Margaret Spufford, 'The significance of the Cambridgeshire Hearth Tax', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, 55 (1962), 53–64.

²⁷ 'Les liens du crédit au village dans l'Angleterre du XVII^e siècle', *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 6 (1994), 1359–73 (previously presented in an Italian congress, published in English in 1991); 'Long-term rural credit in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England: the evidence of Probate Accounts', in T. Arkell et al. (eds.), *When Death Do Us Part: Understanding and Interpreting Probate Records of Early Modern England* (Local Population Studies, Supplement, 2000), pp. 213–28.

²⁸ Hughes, 'Margaret Spufford', pp. 381–4.

The breakthrough

In 1969–70, Peter was granted a visiting fellowship at Clare Hall, Cambridge, where he returned during summer holidays to work in the great University Library. There he did most of his research for the first version of his *Money and Its Use* book.

Currency and monetary history, as well as the organisation of minting, remained the core of Peter's scholarly work. Gradually, however, his interest shifted toward trade, the use of fiduciary money, banking and the dynamics of financial centres. He succeeded in combining three dimensions that until then had been studied separately: the production, value and circulation of the various means of payment; the tension between the supply of good coins and the needs of trade; and the conflicting interests of rulers, merchants and consumers with regard to monetary policy.

While the vast majority of historians wrote about their own country, Peter literally followed trade routes through Europe and beyond, into Persia, the Levant and the Maghreb and its links through the Sahara to the Niger River Basin around Timbuktu, the centre of trade in salt, gold, ivory and slaves. He developed his ideas in three groundbreaking books, numerous lectures and articles. Real exchange rates between monetary units at various places and times reflected the dynamic interactions among all the relevant factors in trade, much better than ordinances do. Therefore Peter designed a collaborative research programme to collect the largest possible number of references about the values of internationally circulating coins, expressed in transactions of different kinds. His findings were first launched as an *Interim Listing of the Exchange Rates of Medieval Europe*, circulated among colleagues for correction and additions in 1977. In 1986, this resulted in the *Handbook of Medieval Exchange*,²⁹ an essential tool for researchers in international relations in medieval Europe. As coins circulated and people travelled over long distances for various purposes, this listing of exchange rates proved immensely valuable for all kinds of research topics. To quote just one example, in a field not commonly associated with international exchange, one may refer to Professor Werner Paravicini's comprehensive study of the financing of the West European crusaders to Prussia. Without Peter's *Handbook*, it would have been very hard to assess the real costs of these operations.³⁰

In 1979, Peter was elected a Fellow at Queens' College, Cambridge, and was appointed Reader in Economic History in the History Faculty. In 2000 he became Professor of European History, retiring in the following year. He was a visiting professor at the universities of Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve. During the academic year

²⁹ *Handbook of Medieval Exchange* (London: Royal Historical Society Guides and Handbooks 13, 1986).

³⁰ W. Paravicini, *Die Preussenreisen des europäischen Adels*, vol. 2 (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 1995), pp. 165 ff.

1992–3 Peter and Margaret were both Fellows at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study as members of a theme group; they returned for a trimester as guests of the Rector in 2005. In both cases, Peter delivered a contribution on the mobility of financial centres.³¹

In the meantime, Peter had been working on his *monumentum aere perennius*, the book that would combine the best of numismatics and monetary history on an inter-continental scale, covering more than a thousand years: *Money and Its Use in Medieval Europe*.³² The constant search for bullion and precious metals through the whole continent and far beyond, deep into Africa and Asia, triggered commercial connections to compensate for the imbalances in trade. The inverse problem arose with paying for luxury goods in the Levant, which soaked bullion from Western Europe to the East, and from north to south. Peter presented information with unparalleled precision and admirable clarity in dozens of maps, schemes, graphs and tables. Most impressive is his mapping of the principal currency regions, which connect with political borderlines but transgress them easily, and of the main flows of gold and silver.³³ Mining silver and gold, trade routes, rulers' policies and their effects on regional economies and intercontinental exchanges: all that was for the first time presented with the precise chronology and location of the available data, in a comprehensive way and in an attractive writing style. The book's scope reflects some of the visions Philip Grierson had developed in 'a myriad of articles', as Peter acknowledged. His book, however, brought all these lines of thought together in a clear and comprehensive manner.

In April 2016, Peter shared his afterthoughts with junior researchers, in a long retrospective three decades after the book's publication, as the highlight of conferences organised by Flavio Miranda in Lisbon and Porto.³⁴ Peter stressed that over previous decades, the number of coin finds had exploded as a result of the spread of metal detectors. What he had described mainly based on hoards that had been hidden intentionally, can today be reinterpreted on a significantly expanded and more representative basis. Moreover, great numbers of single finds concentrated in particular places might allow for more precise localisation of markets and routes. For similar reasons, it is now possible to date the first appearance of copper coinage half a century earlier than was done in 1988, namely in the bishopric of Liège—a region with a

³¹ 'Access to credit and capital in the commercial centres of Europe', in K. Davids and J. Lucassen (eds.), *A Miracle Mirrored: the Dutch Republic in European Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 303–37; and also the references quoted in note 38.

³² *Money and Its Use in Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988; reprint 1993). Online since 2009: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511583544>. Translations into Castilian (1991), Swedish (2003), German (2004), Italian (2005) and Hungarian (2007).

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 294, respectively 152, 154, 156 and 368.

³⁴ Available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hfisWe2TQXk> (accessed 17 August 2020).

long-standing tradition of metallurgy—under bishop-elect John of Bavaria (1390–1418). To the participants at the conference Peter's eagerness to start the updating of his classic book, as well as his *Handbook of Exchange Rates*, was palpable.

In this remarkable Lisbon speech, Peter expressed similar thoughts about his last major work, *Power and Profit: the Merchant in Medieval Europe*,³⁵ a richly illustrated book which my students in Leiden loved to read because of its concrete descriptions, original insights, captivating thoughts and lively style. As he explained at length in the Preface, Peter wanted to get the physical experience of merchants travelling with their goods. Therefore, he travelled around Europe, following most of the routes listed in the 'Itinéraire de Bruges', a late medieval list of places with their respective distances, between Bruges and Rome. It served initially for pilgrims, then also for traders. In the spring and summer of 1978, Peter spent months en route, as much as possible on the old roads, to observe the location of trading hubs, to experience the difficulties raised by the geographical and climatic conditions, and to see the cattle roads as well as the mining towns. The concessions he did make to modern comfort were that he travelled in a camper van, and part of the time with his wife and children aged 10 and 13. The result surely was an extraordinarily realistic and vivid description of the difficulties of transport, and of the obstacles raised by a great diversity of authorities, as in some respects it still was the case in 1978.³⁶ The most inspired chapters described the transformation of trade between the commercial revolution of the thirteenth century and the emerging system of international financial centres around 1500, and the imbalances in trade on the continental and intercontinental level. Groundbreaking was his estimation of the difference in the scale of commercial activity in the Mediterranean and the Baltic Seas. Combining the fragmentary quantitative material, he concluded that

between 1379 and 1384 the seaborne trade at Genoa was five or six times greater than that at Lübeck. Since Lübeck is generally conceded to have been dominant on the Baltic and to have had a very large share of Hanseatic trade, whilst Genoa was rivalled, although not yet over-shadowed by Venice, it is clear that Mediterranean trade was many times greater in scale than that on the Baltic.³⁷

The huge difference in scale implied a far greater division of labour and a much greater sophistication of commercial and financial techniques in the south. That explains the extensive use of bills of exchange south of an imaginary line between London, Bruges

³⁵ *Power and Profit: the Merchant in Medieval Europe* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002). Translations were published in Swedish, German, Italian and Hungarian. It was nominated for the British Academy Book Prize 2003.

³⁶ *Power and Profit*, pp. 8–10, 23–5, 148–9.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 388.

and Cologne, but not at all in Lübeck, until well into the fifteenth century.³⁸ Looking back, in April 2016, Peter criticised what he called the ‘impressionistic picture’ he had presented of merchants’ activities, as he based it largely on the so-called *Pratica della Mercatura* by Pegolotti, an agent of the Florentine Bardi company during the first half of the fourteenth century, and similar sources left by two of Pegolotti’s contemporary colleagues. Today, a dozen more of such merchants’ notebooks have been published, relating to various commercial centres, but Peter now stressed as their common weakness that their information cannot be dated precisely.³⁹

By reflecting so vividly on his own work in the light of recent research findings, Peter admirably demonstrated the humility of the truly great scholar, accepting correction through new facts, and integrating them in a revised interpretation. He also addressed the topic of his latest research, namely the regional and chronological differentiation of Europe’s financial centres, from Venice to Amsterdam to London. One of his last articles dealt with the dynamic relocation of financial centres and places of insurance. Obviously the share of fiduciary money steadily increased over the centuries, as the international market places largely escaped the control and whims of monarchical governments.⁴⁰ And he cherished more projects, such as finishing the two Low Countries volumes in the *Medieval European Coinage* series, started by his mentor Philip Grierson, who left a large quantity of notes that required a great amount of work. In his last years, Peter weekly spent a day or two in furthering this huge enterprise.⁴¹

It was on the variety of means of payment that Peter delivered a remarkable lecture in Leiden, remembering the Dutch numismatist who had guided him for his PhD research on the monetary problems in the fifteenth-century Burgundian Netherlands. The printed version covers more than fifty pages and is brilliantly illustrated by maps, schemes, archival documents and objects, but no coins at all. It was typical for Peter’s broad vision as well as for his sense of humour that, at that occasion, he raised the question ‘how rarely did medieval merchants use coin?’⁴² He pointed out that until the end of the fourteenth century, stamped ingots, silver bars of a specific format and weight, were used for large payments such as transfers in application of treaties, and

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 37–8.

³⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hfisWe2TQXk> (accessed 20 September 2020).

⁴⁰ ‘From Antwerp to London: the decline of financial centres in Europe’, Wassenaar: NIAS, 2005 (4th Ortelius Lecture), and *De Economist*, 154 (2006), 143–75; ‘From Genoa to London: the places of insurance in Europe’, in A. B. Leonard (ed.), *Marine Insurance: Origins and Institutions, 1300–1850* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 271–97.

⁴¹ From 1999, he served on the British Academy committee that oversees the *Sylloge of Coins of the British Isles* and the *Medieval European Coinage* series.

⁴² Van Gelder-lezing 5 (Utrecht: Geldmuseum, 2006).

dowries, but even for commercial transfers from Nuremberg to Venice. Imbalances in trade relations still necessitated the transport of precious metal over long distances but sending huge quantities of coins was unpractical and risky. This problem became less tricky from the mid-fourteenth century, as the production of gold coins could be increased significantly in Western Europe, thanks to the exploitation of the Kremnica mine in Slovakia and the intensified trade with Northern Africa. Silver bars, roubles, remained the principal instruments for large transactions in eastern regions. Moreover, the high density of trading relations in the West stimulated the use of fiduciary money such as credit papers, local and international transfers via bank accounts, bills of exchange and cheques. Trade profited enormously by this consequent explosion of the total monetary mass and the increased security of transfers. Peter demonstrated that in the fifteenth century merchants reduced their capital in cash as much as possible by investing it safely in bank deposits, while huge quantities of coins remained stuck in the coffers in noblemen's castles. This paper is typical of Peter's vision: he used the technical information from numismatics to understand complex monetary problems, and he linked these with financial innovations to understand major economic developments on an intercontinental scale.

It is worth keeping in mind that all this fundamental work was combined with years of teaching a great variety of subjects, and with difficult personal circumstances, particularly the health problems and loss of his daughter, Bridget, at the age of 22, and the constant care for Margaret who suffered from a debilitating physical condition. She held research fellowships in Keele as well as in Cambridge, and in 1994 was appointed Professor of Social and Local History at Roehampton Institute in London, and became a Fellow of the British Academy in 1995, a year after Peter.

He thanked her in the most deeply felt words in the prefaces of each of his books. Two of these were quoted above. On the feast of Michael and All Angels, 29 September 1974, he finished the draft of his *Money and Its Use*, the publication of which was delayed by twelve years due to Bridget's health problems, commitments to newly granted research projects and revisions made necessary thanks to the wave of publications in the extremely broad field covered by this book. In 1974, Peter formulated his gratitude as follows:

My wife, by her probing historical questioning, has repeatedly made me cut out irrelevant matter, has helped repeatedly reshape the volume, and perpetually reminded me that the proper subject-matter of the historian is the past men and women and their actions, and not the artefacts that survive from them.⁴³

⁴³ *Money and Its Use*, p. xii.

Finishing his *Power and Profit* at Pentecost 2002, Peter acknowledged

We have always read and commented on everything that the other has written, but she has been so closely involved with this book, from its conception to its completion, that it is more nearly hers than anything else that I have written.⁴⁴

And he offered a final judgement on the value to him of their relationship when, on his deathbed in November 2017, he told the Dutch historian Jan Lucassen that ‘the greatest intellectual influence of my life, of course, was Margaret’.⁴⁵

In May 2017, Peter was very happy to be offered a Festschrift consisting of the papers presented to the international symposium held in 2010 in his honour. The contributions deal with all forms of payment in the Middle Ages, uncoined, coined, with mint organisation, credit instruments and banking, throughout Europe.⁴⁶ The French numismatist Marc Bompaire testified to Peter’s role during this symposium: ‘he delivered a brilliant introduction as well as the conclusion, and held pertinent interventions after almost every presentation’.⁴⁷

After Margaret’s death in 2014,⁴⁸ Peter was deeply involved in arrangements for her last book to be published and activities devoted to her commemoration.⁴⁹ Alas, he did not live long enough to put together his own Collected Papers, as he still hoped to do when writing his farewell letter, which deeply touched all his friends. But he took care to hand over his work-in-progress to enthusiastic friends who are, at this time of writing, preparing these Collected Papers.⁵⁰ Several participants in the Lisbon conference told me how friendly, energetic, sharp-minded and lively Peter was in their midst in April 2016. He commented on all the papers presented by the junior researchers, asking all the right questions with brilliant simplicity. Marc Bompaire had the same impression about Peter’s contribution to a summer school in Estella in 1999:

He left a deep impression on all participants. At the end of the week, the students gave him a true ovation. He had a very attentive mind, open to young researchers as well as

⁴⁴ *Power and Profit*, p. 11.

⁴⁵ Quoted by their son Francis in the Dedication of T. Dean, G. Parry and E. Vallance (eds.), *Faith, Place and People in Early Modern England, Essays in Honour of Margaret Spufford* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2018).

⁴⁶ Allen and Mayhew, *Money and Its Use in Medieval Europe*. A complete list of Peter’s publications is produced on pp. 153–7.

⁴⁷ *Revue numismatique*, 175 (2018).

⁴⁸ Hughes, ‘Margaret Spufford’.

⁴⁹ Margaret Spufford and Susan Mee, *The Clothing of the Common Sort 1570–1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), and the papers delivered at a commemorative conference: Dean, Parry and Vallance, *Faith, Place and People*, with Peter’s memorial ‘Margaret’, pp. 15–26.

⁵⁰ Jan Lucassen and Francis Spufford (eds.), *Money, Economy: Collected Essays of Peter Spufford*, to be published by Palgrave Studies in the History of Finance.

to the established ones. All participants will remember his scarlet waistcoat, his laugh, his warm welcoming attitude.

That is how all his students, friends and colleagues will remember his warm personality, full of enthusiasm, optimism and empathy, helpful with expert advice on a wide variety of topics. His son, Francis, pointedly described this attitude: 'He was always so interested in everything, and therefore so willing to meet the person he was talking to on the ground of *their* interests.' I particularly remember the warm reception he offered me in 1977, then a young lecturer, coming to meet me at the train station in Keele, mirroring his own arrival in Ghent two decades earlier. It was the start of a lecture tour he had organised for me with the support of the British Council. He took the time to show me around the emblematic Staffordshire potteries, Ironbridge and other impressive infrastructural achievements of the early industrial period. Nobody who met him would ever forget that abundant and infectious joviality.

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