Early fifteenth-century travellers such as Spanish writer Pero Tafur praised the city of Bruges because of its liveliness and economic activity: ‘Bruges was a large and wealthy city, and one of the greatest markets of the world [...] anyone who has money, and wished to spend it, will find in this town alone everything which the world produces’. Bruges had played an important role in the European network of trade already since the mid-twelfth century. In this capacity, it offered a remarkable quantity and variety of consumer and luxury goods. Not only the ducal court could happily thrive there, but local and international merchants found their way to Bruges as well, lured as by favourable business opportunities in this important northern European trade centre. Artisans were attracted by this environment of creativity as well, among them several of the most renowned painters of the age. Wealthy craftspeople and the higher middling groups in Bruges society provided an important local demand and increasingly proved to be keen consumers of luxury goods themselves.

In the middle of the fifteenth century, however, the Bruges economy became increasingly affected by unfavourable conditions. Due to shifts in international trade networks, whereby land trade regained importance, Antwerp’s location on the Scheldt river allowed it to develop into a new trade hub for both maritime and continental trade. Strong competition in the production of cheaper cloth in neighbouring centres caused the Bruges traditional wool industries to decline. Consequently, the city had to look for alternatives to keep its economy running and reconverted its industries from producing heavy woollens towards a more differentiated economy with the production of luxury goods, luxury textiles and accessories. However, some economic and political problems left a deeper impression on the city’s commercial activities. The Flemish Revolt against Archduke Maximilian of Austria caused an occupation of the Bruges outer port of Damme, which not only seriously disrupted trade but also prevented the import of raw materials and the export of finished products by local craftspeople. The economic warfare of the Habsburg duke clearly undermined the city’s attractiveness. To make things worse (and to further weaken Bruges’s trade position), the archduke ordered foreign and local merchants to leave the city and to settle in the more loyal Brabantian city of Antwerp. Large groups of local and foreign
merchants and craftspeople left the city – some only temporarily, but others were not planning to return soon and started to build a new life in the Scheldt city. Although the Bruges government made several concessions to foreign nations in terms of trade and tax privileges, it did not succeed in keeping all nations in the city permanently. So, at the dawn of the sixteenth century, international trade found a new focal point in the new metropolis of Antwerp. Vigorous attempts were made to reverse the downwards spiral and to attract (and keep) foreign trade, such as new channels and government initiatives regarding infrastructure, the construction of better roads in and to the city and up-to-date streets. In 1562 the city government asked painter and engraver Marcus Gerards to make a large city map to highlight the renewed accessibility of the city from the sea. The map was intended as a deliberate promotional stunt to promote Bruges as a reliable and easy accessible trade city. Gerards’s city map was a clear attempt by the city government to bring the infrastructure the city had to offer for trade and commerce to the attention of foreign nations. The map therefore presented an idealised image of an economically thriving city, highlighting its most important public places: the large squares and stately public buildings such as commercial halls, the city crane, churches and the city hall. However, notwithstanding these efforts, it was clear that international trade could only be revived for a short period of time.

Despite the sharp decline in international trade from the fifteenth century onwards, the Bruges economy as a whole turned out to be relatively resilient. Although Bruges gradually lost its position in international trade to Antwerp, the city continued to play a strong role in regional trade. But, of course, this transition came at a price. The negative effects were greater for people working in the supporting trades than for the large merchant families in Bruges. The latter were able to keep increasing their wealth thanks to monopolies on certain products and the spreading of their trade activities both over Bruges and Antwerp. Also textile traders, entrepreneurs and already wealthier master craftsmen could benefit from the increased production in the fustian and say industry and from an increase in scale within their companies. Other craftspeople, textile workers and shopkeepers, on the other hand, were more sensitive to declines in purchasing power and had a particularly hard time, especially in the second half of the sixteenth century, due to sky-high inflation. Nevertheless, the decline of the Bruges economy must be put into perspective: it mainly affected international trade, not regional trade, which grew in strength even beyond 1600. And the city could still thrive on its former wealth and glory during much of the sixteenth century. This is probably also the reason why travellers such as Ludovico Guicciardini praised Bruges even in the sixteenth century as a 'seer
schooner heerlijcke machtighe ende groote stadt. [...]’, specifically mentioning that ‘der menschen wooninge zijn hier meestendeels veel heerlijcker ende kostelicker dan in eenige andere stadt’. Others noticed the many stone facades of the houses and the size of these domestic dwellings as well. Even the Bruges city map made by Marcus Gerards, originally meant to promote the commercial opportunities of Bruges, meticulously described various types of houses and other dwellings. So even though the city map was intended to promote Bruges as an interesting place to work, it also recommended the city as an interesting place to live – with its wide, tidy streets, well-maintained houses and beautiful squares and markets.

All this suggests that the gradual transition of the Bruges economy (and society?) from an international metropolis to a sizeable provincial centre during the long sixteenth century, with clear economic ups and downs and many social consequences – especially for the lower social groups in the city – were not immediately visible on the streets, especially not in the first part of the sixteenth century when there were even signs of continuing prosperity. But did that also apply to the situation within the walls of citizens’ houses? Even if this process was neither sudden nor total, it must have had an effect on the daily lives of all of its citizens; on consumption practices and possibilities, on tastes and lifestyles, on the ways people organised their lives and living spaces. In most studies on the early modern Bruges economy, however, this aspect seems to be forgotten. Therefore, this book is about the material culture of these dwellings and the domestic life of its residents. It will focus predominantly on the houses of the ‘middling sort’, a group of citizens described as neither very rich nor very poor. In her new book on artisans, material culture and everyday life in Renaissance Italy, Paula Hohti describes this social group as ‘those who occupied an economic and social position between merchants, lawyers, and notaries, on the one hand, and workmen and day labourers, on the other’, though we tend also to include the merchants in our analysis. This middling section of the population is interesting to consider, because it has often been associated with the profound social and economic changes of the period. Little attention has been paid, however, to the central importance of the home and its specificities at this social level or to its role in negotiating the heterogenous nature of middling status. Scholars such as Paula Hohti have already convincingly shown that despite, or even because of, economic fluctuations, it is necessary to undertake a study of the spaces and possessions of the middling groups in urban society to allow for reasons other than social recognition that would motivate families from the artisan classes to acquire various types of material artefacts. Indeed, even for the people of the middling to lower social strata of
society, home meant more than just a building or a place. And because this population probably had to adapt the most to a new way of consumption throughout the sixteenth century, the middling groups of urban society are the subject of this book.

Sixteenth-century homes have received less systematic scholarly attention in the Low Countries than public spaces mostly because of trends in the research field of urban space: the study of the public sphere of the city or the (social) production of urban public spaces remain highly ranked, even when it is generally agreed that more research is needed on what urban people said and thought about urban spaces.24 Surely, these studies have provided – and will continue to provide – a valuable basis for understanding some of the ways in which individuals formed and communicated their identities in or to the public, but relatively little attention has thus far been paid to domestic space as a context for creating and shaping urban identities.25 The problem is that historians and social theorists that have accorded all the premiums to public spheres have approached city dwellers merely as members of the public urban community, thereby remaining ignorant of ‘private’ living conditions. Domestic space has received attention only in its guise as the antithesis or binary of public, commercial space and the outside world, especially for the Low Countries.26 But, as Lynne Walker has argued, ‘these binary categories often serve to diminish the significance of specifically domestic interiors, privileging instead the facade over the inside, the public building over the private home’.27 Nonetheless, homes were places of prayer and private devotion, of comfort, sociability and conviviality, work and household labour, family memories, love and marriage, children and household servants, cooking and eating, joy and mourning; contexts where particular aspects of the identity of urban citizens took shape. Therefore, we need to go back to the basic questions of how people lived, the reality they experienced and the way they interpreted what surrounded them, as well as their values and attitudes towards home and public life. The organisation of rooms and domestic spaces, the decoration of the interior of these spaces and the use of furniture or a study of the material translation of this home life offer the best ways to answer these questions.

This book, therefore, will follow Alexa Griffith Winton’s argument that aspects of the spatial theory of Henri Lefebvre and his followers, which considers space as a social construct, are also relevant to the study of the interior.28 In this view, the interior, too, ‘is never the sum of its architectural components, or the objects within it, but is rather produced by the people who inhabit it’.29 In other words, this book will argue that there are strong connections between the individual and the interior; the domestic (space) did not exist apart from the households that are productive of it.30
The Spatial Turn

In recent decades, the concept of space has managed to reach the status of a category of analysis and even of an ‘almost accepted dogma’ in many disciplines of the humanities. Historian Leif Jerram started his polemic article on the viability of this ‘spatial turn’ with the thought-provoking observation that, in historiography, ‘much fuss has been made of the “spatial turn” in recent years, across a range of disciplines. It is hard to know if the attention has been warranted’. He argues ‘that space is a primary category through which the human experience needs to be analyzed and explained,’ but that the ‘spatial turn’ itself is actually only an extension of the cultural turn, theorising about concepts and their cultural meanings, and only of little help in engaging with what he called ‘the matter and substance of human experience’.

His most important critique on the ‘spatial turn’ in historiography is formulated through a citation of historian Ralph Kingston. Kingston observed, in a recent review essay on the spatial turn in history, that ‘much of the use that historians have made of space has been, essentially, a replay of the cultural turn, where space has been viewed as a repository of cultural meaning, rather than as a physical “thing” that structures human action’. Jerram therefore strongly advocates to study space as material – the only problem he foresees is that, as Thomas Gieryn proposes, ‘there is a tipping point when infinite malleability takes on a solid form that is not immutable, but very hard to change’. It follows to some extent what Daniel Roche had suggested as well; according to him, a house was like ‘petrified time, [...] built in the past and modified by successive generations which have unified the ways things are arranged in it’. But although houses indeed tend to suggest stability and invariability, interiors were personal creations, a translation of the way people lived, whereby material goods defined the meaning of a certain room; therefore, interiors were likely to be more dynamic and fluid over time.

Key to the interpretation of spaces, therefore, is revaluing the agency of the people that constructed these spaces (and their interiors) as well as reconsidering the agency of the objects that constituted these spaces. The limits of domestic space did not restrain people, but they had to create strategies to circumvent or adapt to boundaries and spatial constraints. People were also proficient in adapting available space to their own taste, needs and desires, and they actively used the existing advantages and deficiencies of spaces to create their own environment. Just as we cannot reduce space to a barrel full of cultural significance, perceptions and representations, we must not reduce its users and creators to passive entities either, handed
over to the steering capacity of the space itself. Edward Soja understood ‘spatiality’ already in 1989 as ‘simultaneously a social product (or outcome) and a shaping force (or medium) in social life’.38

Reclaiming Domesticity

The study of the late medieval and early modern domestic interior is certainly a rapidly growing field of inquiry, although there is an increasing imbalance towards one specific geographical area: Renaissance Italy. Once scholars were convinced of the fact that the interior of the pre-modern house itself was worth studying, and not just a tool to map the house’s stylistic developments and decorative idiom like many late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century scholars did,39 attention quickly concentrated on the interiors of the large Renaissance palazzi built in the chief locations of Italian Renaissance culture such as Venice, Siena, Florence and Rome.40

It was Richard Goldthwaite who was the first to assert firmly that it was essentially the consumer mentality of Renaissance Italian urban consumers that was both the ‘creative force’ behind their identity construction and used as a means to express this identity in public (or rather to the public).41 First the facade of the house and later also its interior were considered to be crucial outward expressions of family status, wealth and cultural values.42 These houses were constructed and designed to proclaim the status and identity of their inhabitants to the wider community, as an outward expression of the moral economy that was governed by the padre di famiglia indoors.43 It was as if the house became a precious and well-preserved worldly good as well, to be treasured and safeguarded from hostility and assaults on the family honour.44 It is therefore not surprising that the casa itself was the subject of intense contemporary debates, as ‘people became acutely aware of how their status could be reflected by the rank of the dwelling they lived in’.45 In treatises on architecture (Leon Battista Alberti,46 Antonio Filarete,47 Giacomo Lanteri48) and on the vices and virtues of wealth creation and luxury consumption (Giovanni Pontano and his concept of splendour), the building and furnishing of these magnificent houses was not only discussed but also stimulated, because architectural patronage and expenditure on furnishings were seen as outright virtues rather than vices.49 Indeed, in Giovanni Pontano’s theory, ‘the splendid man was expected to surround himself with objects that reflected his aesthetic discernment, civility and cultural
standing’. Treatises on household management, on the other hand, provided readers with instructions to achieve a solid structure and good organisation of the *casa* (and so the household). Because the *casa* as representing both house and household proclaimed the status and virtue of the family, a strict and good organisation was a matter of the utmost importance.

For the southern Low Countries, however, the study of domestic culture and interiors remains confined to later periods or to some fragmented studies that each have examined only one facet of the interior or of domestic life, inspired by archaeology and building history or art history and material culture studies, without integrating all these facets of space, people and objects into one study. But perhaps this lack of research on ‘early forms’ of domestic culture in the southern Low Countries is to some extent also due to the contested validity of the use of the concept of domesticity or *huiselijkheid* in studies on societies that were not situated in seventeenth-century Holland nor in the nineteenth century.

On the one hand, a strand of scholars, including Witold Rybczynski and Philippe Ariès, believe that the concept of domesticity, which they see as devotion to internal family values and to the home itself, originated only in the seventeenth-century northern Low Countries or in the Dutch Golden Age. This assumption was based on seventeenth-century genre paintings of idyllic domestic interiors, like the many everyday scenes of the paintings of Pieter de Hooch. In Rybczynski’s words, ‘it was the atmosphere of domesticity that permeated de Witte’s and Vermeer’s paintings’. Other scholars, however, believe that our present-day notions of ‘home’ and ‘domesticity’ have to be understood as the inheritance of the nineteenth century’s cult of the home. According to them, the true meaning of ‘home’, ‘domesticity’, ‘home culture’ and notions associated with the home such as ‘privacy’ and ‘comfort’ originated in nineteenth-century debates and thus is specific to this bourgeois ideal. Following this theory, scholars working on earlier periods could not study the creation of homes in societies prior the Industrial Revolution without being accused of thinking anachronistically.

However, rooted as they were in the long-standing tradition of studies on vernacular architecture and the archaeology of everyday life, it was mostly British scholars who stepped into this debate to attest to the assumption that domesticity would have been a concept known of only in the modern world. In the introduction to their volume on medieval domesticity, Goldberg and Kowaleski assert that, even for people living in the medieval period, ‘home’ was ‘an evocative word that meant rather more than just a building or a place’. According to them, the concept
of domesticity, as well as the concept of, for example, comfort, is indeed flexible in meaning, and its content depends heavily on the geographical and historical context.\textsuperscript{61} In fact, it is historically contingent.\textsuperscript{62} Moreover, Felicity Riddy has convincingly shown that this ‘set of values associated with a particular mode of living’ was already apparent in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England.\textsuperscript{63} Indeed, even in medieval times, people ‘occupied physical structures that constituted homes, which were built, organized and furnished in ways that are consciously or unconsciously reflective of their particular cultural values’.\textsuperscript{64} And in their most recent book, Catherine Richardson and Tara Hamling have proven that these values were not confined to the homes of the elite either, but were also present in the houses of the urban middling classes.\textsuperscript{65} Jeanne Nuechterlein, in turn, provides further evidence in a visual iconography that rapidly gained popularity in the fifteenth-century Netherlands – that of the Virgin in a fully developed domestic interior. This type of iconography was especially attuned to the lives of the (more well-off) urban citizens, using a recognisable domestic interior as its setting.\textsuperscript{66} So the idea of having or creating a home was, therefore, not new in the sixteenth century.

So the problem does not necessarily lie in the actual use of the concept of domesticity for pre-modern societies; the real issue at stake here is that historians studying the pre-modern period have to be careful not to use the nineteenth-century interpretation of domesticity to study other past realities, because this ideology of home is specific to the era of industrialisation, of factories and factory workers, of male breadwinners and of growing population and urbanisation.\textsuperscript{67} But the experience of being at home and the need to create a home is not historically and culturally specific: it is as old as humankind itself. In every era, ‘homes promise security, retreat, rest, warmth, food and the basis for both a family life and for full participation in social life’.\textsuperscript{68} Every society (and even each social layer in society) has its own interpretation and translation of what home entails. And domesticity was translated differently in every period and in every culture.

\section*{At Home in Renaissance Bruges}

The material culture in sixteenth-century Antwerp is well represented in historiography,\textsuperscript{69} but, as far as Bruges is concerned, it seems that historians have followed a similar shift from Bruges to Antwerp as many contemporary artisans and merchants did.
Perhaps scholars have found it counter-intuitive to study the consumption of (luxury) goods in a city that had an unstable economy throughout the sixteenth century? A minimum of resources is indeed indispensable for the consumption of everyday goods, let alone of luxuries, such as objects to furnish the domestic interior.

The growing presence of wealthy local and international merchants in Antwerp has long been seen as one of the explanatory factors for the success of, among others, the booming art market in the Scheldt city. But the question arises whether we have to see the Antwerp art market as a benchmark for other urban centres. Robert Lopez claimed in the 1950s that the ‘crust of preconceived impressions’ on the interconnection between economic wealth and cultural investment is still not easily pierced. Even ‘the [Italian] Renaissance was neither an economic golden age nor a smooth transition from moderate medieval well-being to modern prosperity’, because it was also grounded in a period of economic stagnation. ‘Culture’, according to Lopez, ‘was a new way for the Italians to gain prestige when economic wealth, which had given them status before, was declining’. What mattered most for Raymond Van Uytven, who discussed whether economic prosperity was the essential condition for the consumption and production of luxuries, is that, even during a depression, ‘the rich may grow in number and in wealth while the poor get poorer and more numerous’. Looking at the social and demographic data Heidi Deneweth provides for Bruges, this social-gap scenario fitted sixteenth-century Bruges well.

In 1544, it was estimated that no less than 25 per cent or a quarter of the Bruges population lived below the poverty line, caused by high levels of unemployment and inflation. The city government hoped to recover from economic stagnation and to improve Bruges’s competitive position by freezing wages at the 1500 level. However, due to a sharp rise in prices during the sixteenth century, the purchasing power of especially the middling groups was severely affected. In the 1580s, the purchasing power was only one-fourth of the level of around 1500, again causing people to look for better opportunities elsewhere. Moreover, religious and political troubles during most of the second part of the sixteenth century triggered major migration as well. From the late 1560s onwards, the city acted as a safe haven for poor Anabaptists who had fled the Bruges hinterland and Artesia out of fear of prosecution, for Calvinists and for people from the impoverished surrounding countryside. At the end of the sixteenth century, however, groups of Calvinists were forced to migrate out of the city to better places because of the intolerance of the Spanish Catholic regime in Bruges. And because Calvinism was popular mainly among the higher income groups like merchant-entrepreneurs and wealthy craftspeople,
it was especially the more wealthy Bruges residents who migrated out of the city once again. However, because the population dropped by as much as 34 per cent at the end of the sixteenth century, and because the total number of Calvinists in the city was relatively low especially when compared to Antwerp, both Deneweth and Vandamme have argued that not only Calvinists but also other citizens, like skilled craftspeople, left the city to search for happiness elsewhere. So due to these religious and political troubles and also because of economic shifts (e.g. towards the manufacture of cheaper textiles), the majority of Bruges’s population in the 1590s was comprised mainly of unskilled and proletarianised wage labourers with a smaller group of middle-class shopkeepers and artisans and international and local merchants. So the social composition of the city was clearly subject to change, and it seems that the gap between the lower social groups of society and the more wealthy skilled craftspeople, entrepreneurs and merchants grew increasingly larger. In short, while Bruges merchants and entrepreneurs and some of the middle groups still enjoyed the relative economic growth that characterised especially the first half of the sixteenth century in Bruges (mainly because of a strong position in the regional market and a relatively good position in parts of the international trade), this was by no means the case for the lower social groups. This variety of income groups was undoubtedly also visible in the city’s housing stock. The city plan by Marcus Gerards makes it clear that the city of Bruges was an amalgam of various types of houses. Whereas poorer people were obliged to rent a room or cellar, the more prosperous households were able to own a house with several rooms and outbuildings.

**Sources and Challenges**

In this book, we have chosen for a broader view and not for a method focused on case studies dealing in specific detail with the individual houses, households and categories of things. This choice was made possible thanks to the series of sources preserved in the archives of Bruges. There is a lot to be said for studying case studies using clusters of source materials, but this will be further explored in separate publications. At first sight, it seems difficult to recover (let alone reconstruct) late medieval and early modern interiors from two-dimensional historical documents. But, in the absence of descriptions of how spaces were used and experienced in the past, we needed to adopt a pragmatic approach; in other words, we situated ourselves imaginatively
and phenomenologically in the spaces we wish to understand.\textsuperscript{82} Floor plans are rarely available for the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries,\textsuperscript{83} and even those floor plans that have been reconstructed from archaeological research do not fully allow to assess the whole three-dimensional picture.\textsuperscript{84} The various techniques used to analyse the use and meaning of the (formerly) built environment, including planning analysis and access analysis,\textsuperscript{85} could be instrumental in showing potential interactions between the users of the different compartments of a dwelling, but they do not do justice to the actual experienced reality, because they were mostly based on ground plans and archaeological evidence only.\textsuperscript{86} Architectural history, in turn, had already turned away from churches and large public buildings starting in the 1970s. Architectural historian Luc Devliegher was a pioneer in ‘architecture mineure’, with a focus on the ordinary house. He delivered groundbreaking and internationally followed research on the facades of ordinary houses, but his book \textit{The Houses of Bruges} also contains a few floor plans with interior layouts and photos and drawings of decorative elements.\textsuperscript{87} The Bruges examples in \textit{Building through the Ages} also have several photos of interiors, and on a local level, Bruges’s interiors have been widely discussed in the brochures for Open Monuments Day in Bruges.\textsuperscript{88} But in general, this discipline has been mostly concerned with the exteriors of buildings and with architects, rather than with the interior of houses and their actual users.\textsuperscript{89} The most promising way to enter the domestic sphere of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century houses and to grasp the lived reality of domestic spaces, therefore, is a close study of the (materiality of the) domestic interior using post-mortem and confiscation inventories.\textsuperscript{90}

\section*{Inventories}

Giorgio Riello commented that ‘put in a very simplistic way, the drawback of inventories has never been deemed to be their particular nature, but their complex and demanding processing.’\textsuperscript{91} Indeed, ‘the archival work of transcription, compilation, standardisation, and – with the beginning of the information age – database design has been central to the use of inventories.’\textsuperscript{92} My colleagues Inneke Baatsen and Isis Sturtewagen, with whom I created the database, and me were lucky to be able to construct a relational database based on an impressive corpus of inventories for one city, allowing for both a longitudinal research and an in-depth analysis. For this study, no less than 502 Bruges inventories were analysed, from five different archival series divided over six sample periods. To achieve more or less representative
samples for both the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, we had to draw sources from several series of different types of both post-mortem and confiscation inventories. Well-chosen samples of inventories were closely studied, balancing between thick-description and quantitative analysis. Table 1 illustrates the different types of inventories I used for this study and the numbers of sources per sample period that were recovered.

Inventories are lists of all the household movables and/or stock goods people owned; these inventories were drawn up for a variety of legal and administrative procedures. The most common event in which an inventory was produced was the death of a citizen and property owner. But inventories were also necessary in other situations. Indeed, another important occasion on which the household chattels were inventoried was in the case of debt collection. When the creditor was not immediately compensated by the debtor, the debtor’s assets were to be taxed and, if necessary, confiscated and publicly sold by representatives of the city government to reimburse the creditor. This means that such an arrest or confiscation inventory could be drafted at any moment in a person’s life, whereas post-mortem inventories were only drafted when a person (who was a poorter or burgher of the city) had died. Both types of inventories were therefore constructed in a particular legal and administrative context whereby different concerns, intentions and actions,
as well as several different stakeholders, were involved. A confiscation inventory was ordered by the city government to meet the interests of the creditor, whereas a post-mortem inventory first and foremost concerned a legal distribution of the estate among the heirs. It follows that the main aim of any kind of inventory was not to literally represent the material or domestic culture of a household; the only task of the appraiser was ‘to assess goods and chattels and value them’. The fact that inventories ‘are [...] forms of representation that are influenced by social and legal conventions [...]’ and that ‘the taking of an inventory was not simply an act of accounting. It was something more akin to an act of translation’ has urged scholars to warn against a straightforward use of these sources. Lena Orlin even labels them ‘works of fiction’, simply because they do not exactly mirror the daily lives of people, because some goods were often missing (especially objects of low value) and sometimes entire rooms were not included either. Nevertheless, although we must indeed be aware of the fact that inventories are not exhaustive records of the contents of domestic space, we are still inclined to follow Riello in revaluing the document as a source by reminding scholars that inventories were somehow still linked with the lives of the people involved, so ‘appraisers connected inventories to social and cultural attitudes and values’. As Adrian Evans has formulated it, these sources ‘contain information about past domestic objects and spaces, which also bear the traces of embodied existence’. Especially when they are taken together in large numbers and simultaneously scrutinised for the micro details that they contain (e.g. object descriptions, object classifications, object groupings, object locations, room descriptions), ‘they can help us to paint a reasonably detailed picture of domestic spaces and domestic objects’. Inventories are mostly considered the best foundation for a quantitative understanding of interiors with a focus on the relative levels of expenditure on goods in each part of the house. The reason for this is that ‘many things found in late medieval registers – an item of dress, a bed set, a dozen trenchers, an old boot found in a rented room – are nearly mute, no more than a word or two [...]’. But we have (re)valued inventories especially for their qualitative values considering, for example, the practical and aesthetic relationships between goods in the same room. Like the French historian and archaeologist Françoise Piponnier insisted, every object, regardless of its value, has something to say.

Despite the great value of inventories in this regard, historiography constantly reveals that inventories are not without flaws. First, they do not record perishable items (or not all perishable items – some did include large pieces of cheese, meat and wine) and sometimes lump together items of low(er) value (such as crockery,
household textiles, prints and cheap books). Second, they tend to neglect fixed furnishings such as nailed benches and bedsteads.\textsuperscript{108} But some items such as bed curtains and sheets could hint at the presence of a fixed bedstead, already partially solving this issue. Third, they present values that the goods would obtain if sold and not original purchase prices. Furthermore, post-mortem inventories tend to show the resale value of the listed goods rather frequently and consistently, but confiscation inventories, on the other hand, only rarely provide this information, notwithstanding the fact that the document was drafted to repay a debt. Fourth, inventories provide only a ‘snapshot’ of ownership, neglecting the dynamics of purchasing patterns.\textsuperscript{109} Indeed, we have to be aware that household chattels of all kinds were not only bought on the commodity market, but that they could also enter the house in other ways – as a gift from family members or friends, by inheritance, bought on the second-hand market or brought into marriage by one of the two partners.\textsuperscript{110} Some items were therefore very personal, such as jewellery or a family picture, whereas other items bought on the second-hand market were mostly practical in nature. Fifth, both post-mortem and confiscation inventories cannot shed light on the relationship between consumptive practices and the life stage of consumers.

Both types of sources were compiled at a particular moment in time. This means that both sources are rather static in nature, presenting only one situation or household configuration. However, this does not have to mean that we know nothing about the social background of the person in question, especially not in the case of post-mortem inventories, because we are often informed about the owner’s social and family background at the time the post-mortem inventory was drafted. The preamble of such a document clearly states the marital status of the deceased person, the name of the spouse (and potential former spouses), sometimes also the names of family members (mother, father, brothers and sisters), the names of any children and whether these children were still minors and needed legal guardians. Sometimes, we also know the circumstances of death (e.g. plague or disease) and the place where the person died. The text also mentions the occupation of the deceased citizen and if not, this information could often easily be inferred from other data in the inventory (e.g. in the part on debts). The post-mortem inventory was, in a sense, also a realistic document, especially because it also recorded the outstanding debts of the household. So during life, people could keep up appearances of well-being by wearing expensive and high-quality robes, but when they died, it became clear how deep in debt they were.\textsuperscript{111} Therefore, although the inventory still presents the situation at one particular moment in time, it does not necessarily mean that the people
who left such a document were nameless, abstract figures. In the case of arresten, there is often a lot less information about the individuals involved, though we often know the name of the debtor, the debtor’s marital state, the name of the spouse and the debtor’s occupation. Finally, inventories tend to be socially discriminating, because they systematically under-represent the lowest status groups, such as poor people and unskilled labourers. The poor did not leave inventories behind, because household goods had to be valuable enough to be listed, and one had to pay the scribe or appraiser who listed the goods as well. That means that the more wealthy middle groups of society are particularly well represented in these written sources.

In short, inventories as historical sources pose some interpretational problems and each type of inventory has its own set of possibilities and difficulties. As we have already discussed, we will use two different types of inventory: post-mortem inventories, which are, in general, more complete; and records of debt collection. The latter are usually detailed in their description of objects, but they do not always mention each and every room in the house, making it difficult to map the entire domestic geography of these dwellings. Moreover, these sources do not mention any form of real estate or immovable property, nor do they enlist other debts and credits. The majority of the guildsmen in the sample and whose inventory was detailed enough to discuss the particularities and distinguishing features of retail and/or production space(s), for example, left behind a more confined confiscation inventory. This means that we cannot be a hundred per cent sure of the fact that all the objects in that room were included in the inventory by the appraiser (because his task was only to inventory and value goods to pay off a certain debt) and that all the other rooms of the house were added to the list as well. But even though the details in these confiscation records could be compromised by their very nature and genesis, these sources are useful to analyse; for example, the location of retail and/or production at home and these spaces’ (most important) contents should be analysed especially because they were compiled more ‘spontaneously’ and often more unexpectedly than their post-mortem counterparts. People often had less time to change or hide things than the surviving relatives of deceased citizens. Moreover, to contextualise the contents of shop interiors, we tend to supplement the data from confiscation inventories with regulations concerning retail space and display of goods found in guild statutes and court records. And because transactions outside the normal market circuit (i.e. in artisan’s shops) were looked at with greater suspicion and were therefore strictly regulated (with risk of a penalty if the rules were not followed), we assume that these regulations were, in general, complied
with. These confiscation records are supplemented with a couple of inventories of confiscated goods that were made in the context of the religious persecutions under the rule of the Duke of Alva around the year 1567 (infra).

The layout of inventories also differed depending on the origin of the document. The most common layout of confiscation inventories or arresten presented a room-by-room division, whereas post-mortem inventories usually presented the house’s content in groups of goods (e.g. all the metal goods, linen, household textiles, woodwork, clothing), often, but not always, because goods were clustered into one room, decontextualising the objects and disarranging the spatial layout of the entire dwelling. Consequently, it complicated the study of domestic space enormously. The part on domestic space is therefore predominantly based on confiscation inventories.

In what follows, we will discuss each archival series of inventories separately to fully grasp the original context wherein the documents originated.

Inventories of Burghers of Illegitimate Birth

A remarkable collection of sixty-nine inventories of Bruges burghers of illegitimate birth or bastaardgoederen could be identified from the bailiff’s accounts from the period between 1438 and 1444. As determined by customary law, the so-called bastard’s privilege, or bastaardijrecht, enabled the count to confiscate the estates of the bastaarden who died childless and left no direct legitimate heirs. If there was a spouse and no children, the count had to be satisfied with only half the estate. In other cases, the entire estate was confiscated, valued and publicly sold. In 1289, Count Guy de Dampierre gave his right to the estates of bastaarden to the city, but after the city revolted against Duke Philip the Good in 1436, the duke took the privilege away from the city and he put the city bailiff, his main local representative, in charge of receiving this taxation. During 1438–1444, the level of detail and the amount of information on rooms, material culture and social status are exceptional, especially for this early period in time. Before this period (in the city’s accounts) and afterwards (in the accounts of the special receiver of Flanders), the entries in the accounts were summary, and they only gave the name of the deceased, the buyer of the estate and its total value. Most inventories were concentrated in the period when the bastard’s privilege had just returned to the duke. And these inventories were also most detailed. Undoubtedly, the phenomenon can be linked to an operation
of catching up with the arrears in the previous period of political turmoil.\textsuperscript{119} The higher numbers of inventories in both 1438 and 1439 can also likely be ascribed to the general mortality crisis in these plague years. For the interpretation of the inventories, this is a lucky coincidence, because people were probably less prone to have anticipated confiscation after death and had little opportunity to refashion their estates and hide the best parts from confiscation by the bailiff.\textsuperscript{120}

**Post-Mortem and Confiscation Inventories from the Deanery of Saint Donatian**

*(Proosdij van Sint-Donaas)*

Some enclaves enclosed within the city walls still fell under the authority of the provost and canons of the ecclesial seigniory of Saint Donatian. The seigniory was a fully-fledged domain with its own statutes and laws, jurisprudence and administrators.\textsuperscript{121} It therefore operated outside the urban jurisdiction. Within the city, the deanery consisted of two separate quarters: the Proosse and the Kanunnikse. Information and documents about the houses and their inhabitants who fell under the Proosse and the Kanunnikse was therefore generated and preserved by a separate administration.\textsuperscript{122} Today, these documents, including the post-mortem and confiscation inventories, can be found in the series of *Wettelijke Passeringen*, or *Legal Proceedings*, kept in the State Archives of Bruges. Forty-three confiscation inventories have been recovered from the ledgers of the Legal Proceedings. Most of these inventories are situated in the fifteenth century as well, enlarging the source base for this part of the research period. The earliest arrest dates from 1457, and the latest in our sample from 1511.

**Confiscation Inventories in the Protocollen of the Vierschaar in Bruges**

The twelve aldermen of the city of Bruges that resided in the local court of justice, the Vierschaar, were assisted by city officials or clerks who were authorised to draft and ratify acts between citizens of Bruges, such as agreements on property taxation and rents, donations, estate divisions and bailouts.\textsuperscript{123} Of these acts, the *minuten* (or the original draft texts) were written in special registers or *protocollen*. The clerks were obliged to keep these registers and submit them to the city council when they wanted to end their duties. Most of these registers (for the period between
1520–1786) are now preserved in the City Archives of Bruges. In practice, the protocols of the clerks are completely similar to, for example, the Antwerp aldermen’s registers. Schouteet mentions that several clerks were also notaries. The difference lies in the fact that, from a legal point of view, all transactions relating to real estate (e.g. sales, name and plot changes of real estate, mortgages, judgements) had to be passed by the aldermen. Even if someone had executed an initial contract before a notary, the deed still had to be entered in the protocols of the clerks and executed before notaries. People quickly saved themselves the trouble and time of registering and paying a deed twice. Matters that were still done before civil law notaries for privacy reasons were marriage contracts, business contracts, inheritances and inventories. However, hardly any of those old notaries have been preserved in Bruges.

Some of the protocollen contained arresten. When someone could not or would not repay a debt, the creditor could appeal to the city magistrate, after which the bailiff and two aldermen, accompanied by one clerk, could confiscate the debtor’s goods. When, after a public reading of the confiscation, no rejections or oppositions against the arrest were expressed, the bailiff could confiscate the goods within a period of twenty-one days. After the period had passed, the creditor could demand that the confiscated goods be publicly sold by one of the four ghesworen stockhouders of the city. For small debts, the procedure was less complicated and the goods could be confiscated impromptu, at only a day’s notice to the debtor and with permission of the aldermen. Consequently, when nothing changed, the goods were publicly sold by the stockhouder in the town hall within a mere eight days.

For our research, we consulted all the ledgers or protocollen of the clerks that were active during the period under study. The ledgers of fifteen clerks were examined, and we managed to recover no less than 257 of such confiscations or arrests.

Staten van Goed and Post-Mortem Inventories

Post-mortem inventories are the most well-known and most comprehensive group of documents arising from the orphans chamber or wezenkamer, of Bruges. One of the duties of the guardians was to accurately record the orphan’s share in the legacy. To determine this share, full inventory of all movable and immovable property of the mortgaged house, including debts and funds or credits, needed to be made. An important element in this was drafting an inventory of goods. The orphans’ registers were already in use from 1398 to 1410, and continued to be used until the
beginning of the eighteenth century. Estates were also listed here, but according to medievalists, this only contains that part of the inheritance that actually belongs to the minor orphans. Some of those estates in the orphans’ registers are also extensive. But for this research, we chose to use the so-called *Staten van Goed*, which are more coherent. These post-mortem inventories have been preserved for Bruges only from the first half of the sixteenth century onwards.\(^{129}\) The earliest post-mortem inventory is from 1528, but a more systematic registration took off from the 1540s. After a citizen of Bruges died, an inventory of the estate was required to be composed within six weeks.\(^{130}\) Two guardians were appointed to assist the surviving spouse (or other relative) during registration. In the end, the inventory had to be agreed on by all beneficiaries and settled the actual partitioning of the estate.

In general, some sort of sequence seems to have been followed in the compilation of inventories. After the aforementioned preamble – introducing the deceased person(s), the legal heirs and their guardians – sometimes a short reference is made to parts of a premarital contract. As customary law decreed that upon marriage all the goods accompanying the spouses became shared and joint possession, it entailed that all the household goods were to be appraised and divided among the heirs upon the death of one of the spouses. But as some goods were deemed either personal or necessary for living or working, some goods that were often specified in the contract were exempt from appraisal. On most occasions, these goods entailed clothing, a bed, bedding, jewellery, money and professional tools. For our research, this means that these goods were not part of the inventory itself, so caution is due when considering the ‘completeness’ of the inventory. The same goes for goods that were to be bequeathed in a last will or testament. Especially silverware, linen and pieces of the wardrobe of the deceased, but sometimes also beds and paintings, were promised to a particular person and therefore not included in the post-mortem inventory either.\(^{131}\)

After the premarital contract, the landholdings, farmland and other immovable property that was (partially) owned, leased or burdened with rents were appraised. In some cases, the available cash in the house (‘t ghereede ghelt) was counted as well, but this amount was mostly limited, because most households still greatly relied on credit.\(^{132}\) Having counted the money and inventoried the immovable wealth of the household (when available), the appraisers moved on to the more complex and detailed part of the estate, the inventory of goods (*boedelinventaris*). Subsequently, the household’s debts and credits were summarised, often together with the costs for the funeral and the administration.
The inventories are certainly not evenly distributed across the different sample periods. As can be gleaned from table 1, there are only five post-mortem inventories for the first sample period of the sixteenth century, complemented by fifty-two confiscation inventories. For the third sample period, the situation is even more worrying: only ten confiscation inventories have survived the test of time. For the majority of calculations, sample periods two and three were therefore merged.

Confiscations of the Council of Troubles

The large sample period 1559–1574 not only includes post-mortem inventories and confiscation inventories that were drafted due to economic debt but also inventories of confiscated estates because of political and religious defiance. During the religious troubles in the Low Countries, lots of estates were seized after their owners were executed or outlawed by the Spanish rulers. The Council of Troubles (Bloeddraad) was one of the councils, issued by the ferocious Duke of Alva, who prosecuted heretics or people suspected of heresy. When found guilty, all the household chattels of those involved were confiscated. If the person whose property was confiscated was married, half of the property went to the ‘royal majesty’ and was publicly sold, and the other half remained the property of the spouse. However, only seven of such Bruges confiscation inventories have survived the test of time in the national state archives in Brussels.

Social Stratification

The middling sort clearly were not a coherent social group in the late medieval and early modern period. The phrase ‘middling sort’ is a historiographical construct, often used as a collective term for the broad mass of the working population – from artisans and tradespeople to educated professionals. So the source material is not only very diverse in its typology but also includes several different social groups. The very nature and origin of the sources determines that neither the poorest layer nor the richest segment of urban society can be studied, but it seems that even the middling groups of society were heterogeneous too. So for an in-depth analysis of the material and domestic cultures of the urban middling groups, it was imperative to devise a method to socially stratify the inventories. Only then was it possible to
make comparisons over time and to say something about the representativeness of the sample for the whole of the population at a given moment in time. However, both the complexity and diversity of the surviving inventories complicate the quest for a social stratification. In previous research, several types of parameters were already in use to establish a certain kind of social stratification; the number of rooms, a parameter for stratification that was formulated by Bruno Blondé and that was based on the strong statistical correlation between the number of rooms (and therefore house size) and wealth, was most commonly used, in addition to the total value of the estate (including capital, creditworthiness and total debt) and occupational labels. Other researchers have linked the estates with taxation records as an external classification criterion, but for Bruges, these sources are not available (or not for the whole of the city and for each sample period). The estimated value of the total household can also be valuable for a stratification of the households. The most useful inventory is the one that lists items separately and gives each item both a quantity and a value, but inventories following this pattern are rare, especially in Bruges. Moreover, the differences between post-mortem and confiscation inventories entails that such a parameter is not useful for both types of sources. Confiscation inventories only rarely give information for the value of the entire estate (supra).

To assess source-technical and chronological differences and to account for differences between post-mortem and confiscation inventories, we have developed a method for establishing social stratification. This method was inspired by research that used ‘wealth signifiers’. The first step in the process was assessing occupational labels, because they present an interesting starting point for measuring the social status of households. Approximately one-third of the inventories mention the (main) occupation of the head of the household. Singling out shopkeepers and artisans enabled us to situate the so-called ‘middling groups’ in the sampled households. Not only the inventories with occupational labels were identified as such but also the inventories with professional workspace, tools and/or shop provision were added to the list. As a result, for each sample period, at least 20 per cent of the households could be identified as belonging to the middling groups of Bruges. But to further socially differentiate this wide diversity of occupational labels categorised as middling groups, another parameter was needed.

We could have used the rental values listed in the so-called penningkohieren (the theoretical annual rental value of owner-occupied houses and the effective annual rental value of rented houses). To assess the social profiles of Protestant reformers in Bruges, Ludo Vandamme reconstructed the wealth of these individuals by
calculating the total value of their estates.\textsuperscript{145} When comparing their assets to the rental value of their houses, he observed a remarkable correlation between assets and rent. This underscores the representative function of the \textit{penningkohieren}. From the early sixteenth century onwards, the central government levied this newly introduced taxation on 5 to 10 per cent of the annual housing value.\textsuperscript{146} Heidi Deneweth has established an overview of all the housing values of the city from 1571 to 1583.\textsuperscript{147} Deneweth furthermore linked the data on housing values to the registers of the \textit{zestendelen} produced in 1569, providing the exact location of a specific house and the names of its owners and/or tenants.\textsuperscript{148} She proposed a social stratification based on rent value categories whereby households were classified into six groups, ranging from those living in the cheapest dwellings, worth less than 240 s. a year, to the wealthiest families, living in houses worth over 1440 s. a year. As the median value of all Bruges's rent values for 1583 was calculated at only 240 s., a considerable share of Bruges's inhabitants must have lived in cheap and presumably small houses. However, due to missing data, we could find a link with taxation for only ninety-seven inventories.

Graph 1. Classification of Households According to Yearly Rent Values (N=97)

Source: Database of inventories © IB, JDG & IS – Database of rent valuations of Bruges (1571/1583) © Heidi Deneweth.
Graph 2. Stratification of Post-Mortem Inventories (N=190)

Source: Database of inventories © IB, JDG & IS

Graph 3. Stratification of Confiscations (N=307)

Source: Database of inventories © IB, JDG & IS

Graph 1 compares the summarised statistical results for classification according to source type. Several things can be gleaned from this graph. First, it illustrates how every social group is represented in the sources. Second, both types of inventories almost equally represent groups I, II, III and IV. Third, confiscation inventories exhibit a surprisingly more ‘high-profile’ character than the post-mortem inventories, because a greater share of their wealthiest group was represented by group VI. The sources therefore agree with the idea that inventories are, in general, biased towards the higher echelons of society. Relatively speaking, the studied households do not belong to the poorest groups of society, although certainly not only the very high end was represented either. However, the kohieren were not available for all the sample periods and are therefore not useful as a parameter for constructing a
stratification for all the sample periods. But they do present an interesting picture of the heterogeneity of the middling groups in Bruges.

The only metric applicable to all the inventories seems to be the total count of the number of records of goods registered (hereafter, Record Unit Count or RUC). While the total value of household assets was not mentioned in all inventories (especially not in the confiscation inventories), we do have a total count of the number of records of goods registered. This counts every time a record was put in the database. This means that a record unit could comprise more than one object. While it hides high numbers of objects contained in one record, it gives a good account of the variety of material culture.149

When testing whether this parameter could serve as a valid ‘wealth signifier’, we had to conduct several statistical tests to measure correlation with other parameters already surveyed (i.e. rental value and room number). In the end, we chose to construct a two-tailed social stratification that takes into account the difference between the two source types. The results, a layering of our sources (A: lower middling groups in inventory population, B: middle groups and C: higher middling groups), which allows for comparing between different sample periods, are shown in graphs 2 and 3. All in all, we have tried to remedy the heterogeneity of the sources.

The social stratification of the confiscations mirrors the city’s economic ups and downs fairly well. In times of scarcity, less affluent households were more vulnerable to confiscation, meaning a rise in the share of group A, which explains the differences between sample period II&III and sample period IV. When looking at the second half of the sixteenth century, the group B of middling groups further shrinks, whereas group A grows. The late sixteenth-century crisis is therefore nicely reflected in this stratification. Only at the very tail end of the century, we see small signs of recovery, with an expanding group B.

The Structure of the Book

In two separate but related parts, this book will dig into questions about how daily life and social identity were negotiated and materialised in the dwellings of a city that was making the transition from an international trade hub to a middle-sized, regional city. By doing so, this book will reassess the crucial importance of domestic space in reproducing cultural identities, forging power relations, defining social
status and organising economic activities. This book is not a history of family life, though its findings shed interesting new light on such a concept; rather, our concern here is with the way behaviours were located within the material environment of the household. The first part of the book will focus on spatial dynamics and social and domestic practices, using the organisation of rooms, objects and different household goods as proxies to approach room use. In this part, home culture will thus be studied from a combined object- and space-based approach. Marta Ajmar-Wollheim and Flora Dennis noticed that early scholars of the domestic interior focused predominantly on domestic practices and social meanings of the house but neglected to include the artefacts. These scholars considered objects merely as props and not as items fulfilling a participatory role in daily practices. Furthermore, most attention still went to the study of valuable objects rather than everyday items, and in some cases, the study of artefacts even overshadowed the study of domestic practices, detaching objects from the domestic spatial settings in which they performed a certain function. Recent studies, however, have underscored the primacy of domestic objects in creating the social spaces of the late medieval and early modern home. Indeed, the spatial organisation of a house as well as its decoration and the movable goods it housed all represented a way of life and a way of understanding the world.

The first chapter in this book opens the door and considers how internal spaces were pragmatically and emotionally demarcated. For many people, the household was also the centre of work of various kinds, which reflects the crucial relationship between the house and the activities of labour. Indeed, the shop, the workshop and storage spaces can be seen as liminal spaces that both divide the interior from the exterior and allow for a connection between the internal life of the house and the outside world of the city. Because late medieval dwellings are often suspected of being predominantly ‘public’, harbouring little ‘private’ space, mainly due to the presence of labour activity within their walls, it is imperative to start with a study of these threshold spaces, questioning shifting levels of permeability and changing degrees of intrusions into the inner realm of the home. But the shop or the retail space on the ground level of a house was only one way (or one site) in which public life would link with the domestic practices and material culture of the household. Houses could contain different types of these transitional sites.

In the next part of this chapter, we move to allegedly one of the most private, most gendered and most formal spaces in the interior: the contoor, translated as the office or study. In historiography about Italian Renaissance interiors, the study is
seen as ‘the quintessential Renaissance space’.\textsuperscript{159} Although in Bruges, we did not come across any references to the word ‘study’ or \textit{studoor}, as was the case in sixteenth-century Mechelen and Antwerp,\textsuperscript{160} we did find rooms labelled \textit{contoor}, or ‘office’, especially in houses of Bruges and Hispano-Bruges merchants. Obviously, the latter was used more often than not in a formal, businesslike way, ideal as a shelter for preserving letters, business communications and account books, although even rooms used for business could double as places for quiet contemplation.\textsuperscript{161} The question is then what functions these Bruges \textit{contoren} had and to what extent these rooms were comparable to the Italian Renaissance studies many scholars have already written about. The design and furnishing of this type of space and its location in the domestic geography of the house could tell a lot about its use and its functional capacities.

In the second thematic chapter, the concept of ‘functional specialisation’ is further questioned. The concept was invented when researchers began to inquire when exactly rooms became specialised in use and furnishings. In this chapter, the theme of ‘running the house’ is further elaborated by focusing on several particular room types that were at the heart of the home, starting with one of the first rooms to be labelled with a functional name: the kitchen. The particularities of this room are then used to question the specificities of related spaces such as the bedroom (or sleeping room), the dining room and the ‘best room’, or the \textit{salette}.

The second part of this book places the decorative object in the spotlight. The chapters in this part consider the objects that filled the rooms discussed in the first part of the book, giving the opportunity to question the material contexts in which people moved around. We suggest in this part of the book that the visual aspects and the material characteristics of decorative objects induced different kinds of behaviour among their users. The definition of the category of ‘decorative objects’ is of course entirely arbitrary, and choices had to be made which objects were to be included, because households traditionally harboured all kinds of objects that were both functional and aesthetic.\textsuperscript{162}

In (art) history and especially in the study of Early Netherlandish art, there has been a tendency to reduce this category of ‘decorative objects’ to the story of panel painting.\textsuperscript{163} Traditionally, a division was made between the ‘major’, or ‘fine’, and ‘minor’, or ‘decorative’, arts; architecture, sculpture and painting were assigned a primary nature, whereas other arts such as ivory carving, glass working, goldsmithing, furniture making and textile work were lumped together into a secondary group.\textsuperscript{164} As early as 1568, Vasari theoretically proposed such a division, claiming that the
primary arts were the result of genius and intelligence and not merely of artisanal skill.\textsuperscript{165} Though this division was therefore initially applied only to the Italian arts, it was not long before it spread across Europe and was used even in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to give certain arts a pejorative association. Nonetheless, such a hierarchy of aesthetic values was foreign to the inhabitants of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Europe, whose inhabitants ‘valued a multiplicity of objects in diverse media,’\textsuperscript{166} and no separation existed between ‘fine arts’ and ‘crafts’ as we understand them today. Several objections to this traditional division have already been made by new generations of art historians.\textsuperscript{167}

Nonetheless, in this second part of the book, we deliberately start the discussion with a focus on paintings underlining that, despite the attention this topic has received, we actually know very little about paintings as consumables, as objects that were meant to be used in a specific context and at a specific moment in time. This is what Larry Silver has labelled a ‘new art history’, which lies close to what was called ‘art in context’,\textsuperscript{168} moving ‘into a more inclusive vision of what constitutes visual culture in its historical period’.\textsuperscript{169} One of the interesting exceptions is the work of historian Anne-Laure van Bruaene, who pays attention to this in her book on chambers of rhetoric, in which she points out that certain types of prints were popular with the middle groups of society and had the purpose to interiorise new religious and social values. Once that was done, those prints disappeared from interiors.\textsuperscript{170} But the fact remains that the focus on paintings is far more a historiographic and art historical debate than it was a historic reality. Textiles were present in many households in greater numbers than paintings and played an important role in the organisation of domestic sociability. In the second chapter, we will therefore turn to decorative textiles such as cushions, bed curtains, table rugs and tapestries. These textiles were actively used in the structuring of the house and its inner workings precisely through their connection with furniture. Though considered more stable in style, material and finish, (seating, storage and sleeping) furniture evolved throughout the sixteenth century, both in use and finish. In this chapter, we therefore aspire to look for evolutions throughout the period in the creation of domestic comfort and to reveal related social practices of creating or sustaining privacy, sociability and self-fashioning.

Instead of studying the mere ownership of paintings, household textiles and furniture, we have put these objects in their original context, a real tour de force. Approaching objects as non-textual forms of communication allowed for them to serve as ideal proxies for questioning social and cultural practices.\textsuperscript{171} After all,
'knowing about people's possessions is crucial to understanding their experience of daily life, the way they saw themselves in relation to their peers and their responses to and interactions with the social, cultural and economic structures and processes which made up the societies in which they lived.'