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Reference:

Espeel Stef.- Demesne or leasehold? Estate management in southern Flanders during the price shocks of the fourteenth century
Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire / Société pour le progrès des études philologiques et historiques [Bruxelles] - ISSN 0035-0818 - 100(2022), p. 275-304
To cite this reference: <https://hdl.handle.net/10067/2004620151162165141>

Demesne or Leasehold? Estate Management in Southern Flanders during the Price Shocks of the Fourteenth Century⁽¹⁾

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Introduction

In many respects, the price history of the fourteenth century confirms the idea of an ‘Age of Shocks’, a century characterised by a rapid succession of disruptive events. In his recent *The Great Transition*, Bruce Campbell provides a powerful argument for the existence of a period of pronounced socio-environmental instability between the ‘enabling environment’ of the Medieval Warm Period, and the more challenging Little Ice Age conditions⁽²⁾. Confronted with the ‘wrath of nature’, fourteenth-century European society might appear rather vulnerable and powerless. Nevertheless, people did not stop reacting and adapting and the diversity in reactions to the great shocks of the fourteenth century might reveal part of the causal mechanisms behind them.

This article focuses on the strategies for grain production by large landlords in times of crisis. The two main channels through which these landlords could harvest grain in late medieval Flanders were the direct exploitation of demesnes on the one hand, and leaseholds on the other.

⁽¹⁾ This article is based on a chapter of my doctoral dissertation entitled *Prices and Crises. The Grain Economy in Fourteenth-Century Flanders*, defended in August 2021 at the University of Antwerp under the supervision of Prof Dr Tim Soens and Prof Dr Alexis Wilkin (Université Libre de Bruxelles). I thank Tim Soens and Alexis Wilkin for their valuable aid and feedback and the members of the jury of my dissertation as well as the anonymous reviewers for their suggestions and expert comments on this article. The doctoral project was financially supported by the Flemish Research Foundation (FWO) Grant *Shock Cities? Food Prices and Access to Food in an Age of Crises (1280-1370)* and this article was also realised with the financial support of the UAntwerp TOPBOF Grant *Food from Somewhere*.

⁽²⁾ Bruce M.S. CAMPBELL, *The Great Transition. Climate, Disease and Society in the Late-Medieval World*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2016.

Landlords could easily manipulate or alter the way their land holdings were being employed in the agricultural organisation, and it is important to analyse this latter in an age of systemic transition. Which adaptations were carried out and in what direction landlords shifted the usage of their property with respect to cereal production is central. Were the price shocks, and the broader mid-fourteenth-century crisis, instrumental to the adaptations in the production and distribution of cereals? As major grain producers and collectors, sellers and consumers, landlords reacted to these price shocks on the grain market, and perhaps also shaped them, via their agricultural policies, market involvement, consumption and their collective power over producers. By focusing on the management of their grain income and expenditure during such price shocks, it is possible to understand the role the larger landlords played during grain crises, what they prioritised and what the impact of their actions was on the general urban population's access to food. Even though convincing evidence of speculation for the maximizing of profits is limited or absent for the fourteenth century⁽³⁾, landlords might still have adapted their agricultural policies in periods of subsistence and mortality shocks, not least to safeguard their provisioning. The accounting administration of large ecclesiastical landlords, whether hospitals, abbeys or collegiate churches, in many cases gives sufficient evidence for the scrutiny

⁽³⁾ The largest profits were not systematically realised during years characterised by extreme price levels, and the sales of the landlords were mainly focused on medium- and large-size quantities, during normal as well as high-price periods, signifying ongoing trade with grain merchants rather than directly with consumers. However, this did not change during high-price periods. Stef ESPEEL, “The Grain Market and Preferential Trade of Large Landowners in Flemish Cities during the Age of Shocks (1330-1370)”, in *Mélanges de l’Ecole Française de Rome - Moyen Âge*, vol. 131, 2019, 1, p. 29–44; ID., *Prices and Crises. The Grain Economy in Fourteenth-Century Flanders*, Unpublished PhD-thesis, Antwerp, University of Antwerp, 2021, vol. 1, p. 239-76. For the case of England, Philip Slavin argues that speculation seems to have been present during the disastrous Great Famine (1315-17), but he equally stresses that this was a highly exceptional period and not representative of other periods of crisis. Philip SLAVIN, “Market Failure during the Great Famine in England and Wales (1315-1317)”, in *Past & Present*, vol. 222, 2014, 1, p. 9–49. In contrast, Phillip Schofield interpreted the economic developments rather differently, as he argues that through these crisis years, the functioning of the market was sustained and, conceivably, was reinforced for those who were well-placed to benefit from the crisis and use the pre-existing mechanisms in order to steer a secure course through the famine. Phillip R. SCHOFIELD, “The market, economic growth and famine in the medieval English countryside in the early fourteenth century”, in *Quaestiones Medii Aevi Novae*, vol. 20, 2015, p. 270–84.

of this precarious balance. The most continuous and extensive information regarding demesne and land management is preserved for landlords in Lille (hospital Saint-Sauveur), Douai (hospital Wetz and abbey of Notre-Dame des Prés) and Cambrai (hospital Saint-Julien and collegiate church of Notre-Dame), the prince-bishopric just to the south of the county⁽⁴⁾. Most of these landlords held separate accounts for their income and expenses in cash on the one hand and for grain on the other. As they were located in the grain-producing, and -exporting, areas of southern Flanders and northern France, the income and expenses of huge amounts of grain were of central importance to each of these institutions, with sales averaging about 30 to 40 per cent of their cash income⁽⁵⁾.

The religious houses under scrutiny certainly did not all have similar economic and institutional objectives, which could prove important for differentiating between the economic strategies pursued. First of all, three types of landlords are studied here: urban hospitals, abbeys and a church. In general, the main function of a late medieval hospital included assisting poor people travelling through the city but quite soon caring for the sick became predominant. In the early fourteenth century, the hospital Saint-Sauveur in Lille had about 50 beds available for the sick, and along with staff, about 80 people on average⁽⁶⁾ had to be fed. This changed towards the end of the century, to about 40 to 50 dependants. To provide, the hospital had several estates from

⁽⁴⁾ Lille, Archives Départementales du Nord (further: ADN), Archives Hospitalières, VI E, n° 7-11 (hospital Saint-Sauveur); Douai, Archives Municipales de Douai (further: AMD), 2 NC, n° 1296-7 & 1336-8 (hospital Wetz); Lille, ADN, 30 H, n° 363 (abbey of Notre-Dame des Prés); Lille, ADN, 172 H, n° 53-63 (hospital Saint-Julien); Lille, ADN, 4 G, n° 818, 6840-6886 (*communauté des chapelains* of the collegiate church of Notre-Dame).

⁽⁵⁾ However, concerning the overall diet, the relative importance of cereals diminished throughout the late Middle Ages, and meat took a more prominent place in a generally richer diet. This evolution probably occurred mainly during the first half of the fourteenth century and again during the first half of the fifteenth century. Tim SOENS & Erik THOEN, "Vegetarians or Carnivores? Standards of Living and Diet in Late Medieval Flanders", in Simonetta CAVACIOCCHI, ed., *Le interazioni fra economia e ambiente biologico nell'Europa preindustriale, secc. XIII - XVIII - Economic and Biological Interactions in Pre-Industrial Europe from the 13th to the 18th Centuries*, Florence, Firenze University Press, 2010, p. 495–527.

⁽⁶⁾ Alain DERVILLE, *L'agriculture du Nord au Moyen Âge: Artois, Cambrésis, Flandre Wallonne*, Villeneuve-d'Ascq, Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 1999, p. 91-2.

various gifts and donations by benefactors, worked by servants and run in a similar way to the larger farms in the region. Cereals and several other crops were harvested from these farms and were (partly) meant for own use. The same is true for the hospital of Saint-Julien in Cambrai, another urban religious house caring for the poor and sick of the city. It is estimated that Saint-Julien catered for about 160 people in the early fourteenth century, but this number dropped to about 70 to 75 during the last quarter of the century⁽⁷⁾. The hospital of Wetz in Douai also had several farms and other leased-out holdings, received through gifts and donations, which were used for their provisioning. However, this hospital was a rather small landlord and the exclusively female inhabitants who lived there permanently were divided into a “higher” and “lower” section, respectively the more affluent and the poorer sick⁽⁸⁾. In contrast to these hospitals, the Cistercian abbey of Notre-Dame des Prés had a different economic and institutional organisation. As disciples of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, these Cistercian nuns were willing to work for their living and share their surplus with others, so as to be economically self-sufficient and not a burden to anyone else. To achieve this, Cistercian communities had to organise their own economy and needed sufficient land on which they developed an intensive type of agrarian economy. Even though Notre-Dame des Prés was founded relatively late (1218), it rapidly assembled a vast amount of land⁽⁹⁾. This did not involve so much the reclamation of wasteland, in contrast to popular belief, but rather the gifts of high-yielding land from the local aristocracy⁽¹⁰⁾. Moreover, rather than having to feed an inhouse population of the

⁽⁷⁾ This included about 6 to 8 sisters (who observed the rule of Saint Augustine) and 10 to 12 servants. Alain DERVILLE, “L’hôpital Saint-Julien de Cambrai au XIV^e siècle. Etude économique”, in *Revue Du Nord*, vol. 70, 1988, 277, p. 309.

⁽⁸⁾ In the third quarter of the fourteenth century, about 27 women lived here, with 8 in the “higher” hospital and 19 in the “lower”. Jean-Pierre DEREGNAUCOURT, “Les béguines de l’hôpital des Wetz de Douai de 1350 à 1372”, in *Revue du Nord*, vol. 82, 2000, 334, p. 38-41.

⁽⁹⁾ Jean-Pierre GERZAGUET, “Le nécrologe de l’abbaye de moniales cisterciennes de Notre-Dame des Prés à Douai (fin XIII^e-début XIV^e siècle): présentation et commentaire”, in *Revue du Nord*, vol. 93, 2011, 391-392, p. 818-21.

⁽¹⁰⁾ A. DERVILLE, *L’agriculture du Nord*, *op. cit.*, p. 133-6.

sick and needy, like the above-mentioned hospitals, a Cistercian abbey was focused on autarky. As only the community of monks or nuns and their lay servants, most of them employed in the exploitation of their *grangia*, had to be fed, they were able to market their surplus of produce. The third type of landlord in question, a collegiate church, had a disparate administrative organisation, similar to large abbeys, with different bodies – *offices* – each responsible for their task, accompanied by separate accounts which were afterwards bundled into general accounts. Respectively, these separate *offices* were also controlled by their respective heads and had to manage their own (landed) possessions, including farms, directly exploited or leased out. The different religious houses clearly had different organisations, socially as well as economically, which doubtlessly translated into differing objectives, both religious and institutional, as well as economically divergent strategies and trajectories.

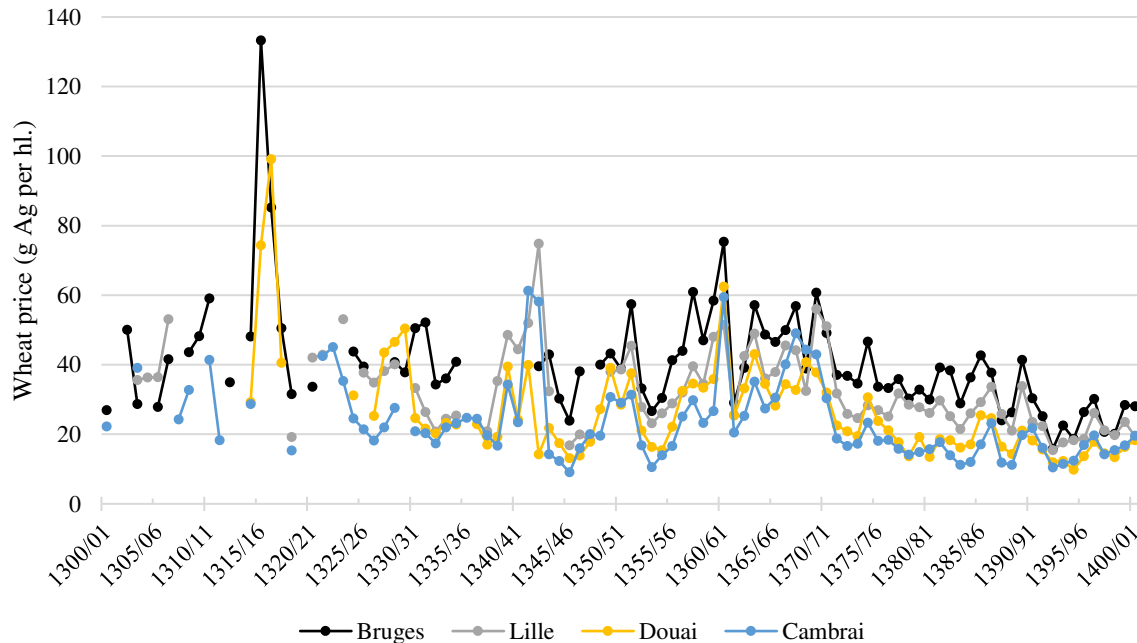
The next part of this article will briefly introduce the price evolution of wheat throughout the fourteenth century, as this evolution acts as the all-important economic background against which the grain household economy must be analysed. The third part deals with the historiography of the transition of demesne to leasehold farming, while the subsequent part carries out the analysis of the balance between these two for the landlords studied. In the last part, the focus is on the possible driver(s) behind the changes in management by combining income strategies with the expense pattern of cereals. This important analysis will clarify what mattered most for the landlords during periods of crises and why they made certain adaptations in the management of their entire estate.

The fourteenth-century price shocks in the grain market

A short history of grain prices is mandatory and fundamentally important for the analysis of the grain economy of the various landlords. Recent research has constructed new wheat price series for Flanders and Cambrai based on price data found in the accounts of large ecclesiastical

landlords: urban hospitals, abbeys and collegiate churches⁽¹¹⁾. Figure 1 gathers the annual price data of wheat for the cities of Lille, Douai and Cambrai, where the studied landlords are located, and for Bruges as a reference price series.

Figure 1. Annual wheat prices in Flemish cities and Cambrai in the fourteenth century.



Source: S. ESPEEL, *Prices and Crises, op. cit.*, vol. 2.

For the earlier decades of the century, data concerning grain prices remain scarce, especially before 1320. Nonetheless, wheat prices for Bruges and Douai do give evidence of the staggering price rises during the Great Famine (1315-17). Apart from that truly disastrous and exceptional episode of hunger, several other periods of extreme prices on the grain market have been identified. These short-term price peaks are calculated against a ‘normal’ price of the decade before the year in question, and when this value exceeds a 100 per cent difference, that year is considered as one with an extreme price increase⁽¹²⁾. In this respect, the early years of the 1320s

⁽¹¹⁾ Stef ESPEEL, *Prices and Crises. The Grain Economy in Fourteenth-Century Flanders*, Unpublished PhD-Thesis, Antwerp, University of Antwerp, 2021, 2 vols.

⁽¹²⁾ The ‘normal’ price level is defined as the average price over the ninth to second year prior to a given year, excluding the highest and lowest value (maximum of six data points). The methodology

are characterized by only slight rises in prices, especially in Lille and Cambrai. Between 1339 and 1343, another price extreme occurred in these cities, much greater than in Bruges for instance. Around the time when the Black Death hit Flanders and northwestern Europe, prices reached a problematic height again, just as they did about a decade later in 1360 when an echo epidemic broke out. The last price shock on the grain market in that century occurred at the end of the 1360s, again complementary to an outbreak of plague. The least we can say is that the price evolution confirms the idea of an extraordinary succession of crises between 1340 and 1370, as argued by Campbell⁽¹³⁾.

From demesne to leasehold farming

During the Middle Ages, different types of leasehold existed and varied from the (very) long term, spanning several lives or generations of the same family at customary rents, to (very) short leases of only one year. The most important type of lease, in the sense of its distribution across the Low Countries, was the short-term lease, which can be labelled as the commercial or modern type of lease. Bas van Bavel described this type of lease as land given out for a quickly adjustable, economic rent in cash and/or in kind, which more or less reflected the value of the piece of land on the lease market, but left the tenant without a more permanent claim on the land. After their contract expired, the tenants would lose their right to use the land because they did not hold permanent property rights. Nonetheless, the tenant did have the right to be compensated for all the improvements he made during the period of the leasehold⁽¹⁴⁾. The

of only employing prices prior to a given year is used because the severity of a price peak in terms of food crises can only be assessed through comparing the value with its previous period. This methodology is adopted from Jessica DIJKMAN *et al.*, “Low Countries”, in Guido ALFANI & Cormac Ó GRÁDA, eds., *Famine in European History*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017, p. 123–25.

⁽¹³⁾ B.M.S. CAMPBELL, *The Great Transition*, *op. cit.*

⁽¹⁴⁾ Bas J.P. VAN BAVEL, “The Emergence and Growth of Short-Term Leasing in the Netherlands and Other Parts of Northwestern Europe (Eleventh-Seventeenth Centuries). A Chronology and a Tentative Investigation into Its Causes”, in Bas J.P. VAN BAVEL and P.R. SCHOFIELD, eds., *The Development of Leasehold in Northwestern Europe, c. 1200-1600*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2009, p. 180.

birthplace of the short-term leasehold can be traced back to a long belt in northwestern Europe. It stretched from upper Normandy to Picardy, Artois, the Flemish coast, across Brabant and the Hesbaye region towards the southern part of the Niederrhein area in modern-day Germany.

Erik Thoen and Tim Soens have focussed on the origins of the leasehold of small plots of land, parcels and farmsteads in the county of Flanders⁽¹⁵⁾. They confirmed the timing of its origin to at least the year 1227, after which it became very common, in the second half of the thirteenth century, albeit with a different chronology for inland Flanders and coastal Flanders⁽¹⁶⁾. In inland Flanders, leasehold was mainly used for the exploitation of former demesne centres, while in coastal Flanders, mostly individual plots of lands were leased out. Moreover, both regions experienced a different evolution in the spread of leasehold. By the sixteenth century, about 40 to 50 per cent of the land in inland Flanders was leased out, against over 90 per cent in the coastal region⁽¹⁷⁾.

These differences date back to differences in land reclamation and to the power structures of the High Middle Ages. In coastal Flanders, free peasants were very important, but the count of Flanders also acquired massive amounts of land, due to the reclamation of coastal and estuarine wetlands in the eleventh and twelfth centuries⁽¹⁸⁾. Classic ‘feudal’ structures were absent in the coastal plain, which initially favoured peasant landownership and led to a very dynamic and

⁽¹⁵⁾ T. SOENS & E. THOEN, “The Origins of Leasehold in the Former County of Flanders”, in B.J.P. VAN BAVEL & P.R. SCHOFIELD, eds., *The Development of Leasehold*, *op. cit.*, p. 31–55.

⁽¹⁶⁾ The oldest date for a short-term lease was found in a document which describes the leasing out of parcels by the abbey St Bavo of Ghent in the coastal plain of Flanders (in the villages of Oostburg and Ijzendijke). See Adriaan VERHULST, *De Sint-Baafsabdij te Gent en haar grondbezit (VIIe-XIVe Eeuw). Bijdrage tot de kennis van de structuur en de uitbating van het grootgrondbezit in Vlaanderen tijdens de middeleeuwen*, Brussels, Paleis der Academiën, 1958 (Verhandelingen van de Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren En Schone Kunsten van België. Klasse der Letteren, vol. 30), p. 471; A. VERHULST & Maurits GYSSELING, *Het oudste goederenregister van de Sint-Baafsabdij te Gent: eerste helft XIIIe eeuw*, Bruges, De Tempel, 1964 (RUG. Werken uitgegeven door de Faculteit van de Letteren en Wijsbegeerte, vol. 132), p. 169.

⁽¹⁷⁾ T. SOENS & E. THOEN, “The Origins of Leasehold”, *op. cit.*, p. 36–39.

⁽¹⁸⁾ Anton C.F. KOCH, *De rechterlijke organisatie van het graafschap Vlaanderen tot in de 13e Eeuw*, Antwerp, Standaard Boekhandel, 1952.

‘open’ land market. From the fourteenth century onwards, this would allow a rapid accumulation of land in the coastal area by absentee landlords, while peasant smallholders were facing increasing political and economic difficulties⁽¹⁹⁾. In inland Flanders, there was a greater presence of ‘confrontational’ power structures, opposing the count of Flanders, local lords and (bourgeois) landowners. These power structures helped peasants to maintain their property rights over their (smaller) farmsteads. Besides these power structures, different elements collaborated and played a certain role in stimulating the gradual increase of leasehold or the lack thereof. It includes the lordly crisis of feudalism, the conversion from direct exploitation to leasehold, peasant poverty, expropriation processes due to risk factors and farming costs, the collaboration or confrontation with overlords, the role of the urban bourgeoisie, leases between peasants and lastly the cumulative effects and internal dynamics of the spread of leasehold⁽²⁰⁾.

Why did landlords opt to lease out their demesne land, either as entire farms or in parcels? Traditionally, this has been seen as part of the efforts of landlords to maintain or increase their income from land, profiting from the rising demand for it and the high prices offered by peasants in the thirteenth century, and reacting to rising labour costs and diminishing returns in the aftermath of the Black Death in the fourteenth century⁽²¹⁾. However, as Erik Thoen has argued for the region around Oudenaarde in inland Flanders, a reduction of the acreage should be framed in the context of a more flexible reorganisation of the arable land. Certain pieces of its acreage were given in leasehold in smaller parcels, which generated relatively greater profits⁽²²⁾.

⁽¹⁹⁾ T. SOENS & E. THOEN, “The Origins of Leasehold”, *op. cit.*, p. 39 & 49.

⁽²⁰⁾ All these elements have been thoroughly discussed in relation to the divergent social agrosystem in the county of Flanders in T. SOENS & E. THOEN, “The Origins of Leasehold”, *op. cit.*, p. 39–48.

⁽²¹⁾ Christopher DYER, *Lords and Peasants in a Changing Society: The Estates of the Bishopric of Worcester, 680-1540*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1980, p. 122; Richard A. LOMAS, “The Priory of Durham and Its Demesnes in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries”, in *The Economic History Review*, vol. 31, 1978, 3, p. 343.

⁽²²⁾ E. THOEN, *Landbouweconomie en bevolking in Vlaanderen gedurende de Late Middeleeuwen en het begin van de Moderne Tijden. Testregio: de kasselrijen van Oudenaarde en Aalst (eind 13^e eeuw-eerste helft 16^e eeuw)*, Ghent, Belgisch Centrum voor Landelijke Geschiedenis, 1988, p. 314–21.

In this view, the evolution of prices and wages throughout the fourteenth century was detrimental to larger agricultural farms. Rising wages made the exploitation costs untenable while decreasing prices caused a diminishing income from the cultivated products. However, such conditions would have applied to leaseholders as well and cannot therefore be the sole explanatory factor for the transition towards leasehold. At the Sint-Jans hospital in Bruges, the direct reason for that transition is found in the several periods of crisis during the fourteenth century. In such periods of crisis, the hospital was unable to exploit its demesnes with its personnel, which is why there had been a change towards leasehold shortly after the Peasant's Revolt (1328), the Black Death (1349-50) and its echo-epidemics (especially 1368)⁽²³⁾. Tenants could fully focus on the exploitation of the farm rather than the hospital, which had a dual responsibility as a charitable institution and an agricultural company. Despite this, throughout the fourteenth century, higher yields and profits were barely achieved.

In comparison to England, large landowners – both lay or ecclesiastical – in the fourteenth-century Low Countries were, in general, less active in demesne farming. Well before 1300, most of the land was held in either customary tenure or as leasehold by the peasant population. Nevertheless, several ecclesiastical landlords – especially urban hospitals, but also abbeys – still retained a considerable acreage reserved for their direct exploitation. One could speculate that these demesnes were important in the strategy of own food provisioning, especially in times of crisis. For instance, during the Civil War of the late fifteenth century, the Sint-Jans hospital in Bruges relied for about 80 per cent of its needs on its demesnes⁽²⁴⁾. This hospital held on to a part of its holdings for direct exploitation up to the middle of the sixteenth century, and hence circumvented a total dependency on the market for its food provisioning, as well as maintaining

⁽²³⁾ Lies VERVAET, *Goederenbeheer in een veranderende samenleving. Het Sint-Janshospitaal van Brugge ca. 1275 - ca. 1575*, Unpublished PhD-Thesis, Ghent, Ghent University, 2015, p. 123–24.

⁽²⁴⁾ L. VERVAET, *Goederenbeheer, op. cit.*, p. 107.

a buffer during periods of (extremely) high market prices. However, in their article on the origins of leasehold in late medieval Flanders, Tim Soens and Erik Thoen pointed out the strategy of profit-maximization as a possible motivation for the conversion of farmland under the direct management of larger landlords to leased-out property. By converting demesne centres into leased-out parcels, these lords are supposed to have abandoned the countryside, simplified and rationalised the exploitation of their demesnes, and turned themselves into rent collectors⁽²⁵⁾.

David Stone has studied adaptations of direct management for the English manor of Wisbech, which was the property of the Bishop of Ely. The general profitability of direct management in the last quarter of the fourteenth and first decades of the fifteenth century was severely reduced. He attributed this to falling agricultural prices from 1370 onwards – also visible for Flanders – as well as the problem of high cultivation costs. The recurrent plague episodes from the Black Death onwards eliminated a significant portion of the agricultural workforce. Declining productivity was the inevitable consequence of tight and efficient management by the larger landlords. Falling labour inputs in arable farming appear to have been the main cause of lower crop yields. In contrast to a general decline in direct management, the bishop of Ely did keep the size of his demesne at a constant level, thereby extracting the necessary amount of labour from his tenantry. To do so, he could rely on the services of the highly skilled and capable reeves, who acted as overseers of the serfs and peasants on the estate and were responsible for the finances of the manor. These reeves were extremely responsive to changing economic conditions and used sophisticated methods to assess which crops were best suited to the production of a marketable surplus⁽²⁶⁾. From the early 1420s onwards, the desire of the bishop of Ely to manage this farm directly waned more and more due to difficult economic conditions.

⁽²⁵⁾ T. SOENS & E. THOEN, “The Origins of Leasehold”, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

⁽²⁶⁾ D. STONE, *Decision-Making*, *op. cit.*, p. 121–55.

This was mainly due to the reduction of agricultural profitability when a large proportion of customary labour services were relaxed, local trade shrunk and the prices for grain, wool and dairy produce wavered. The decision to transform the demesne of Wisbech manor in its entirety to leasehold was made around 1425. An underlying factor was a significant deterioration in managerial efficiency, testified to by the quick turnover of reeves⁽²⁷⁾.

The exploitation of the domain of large ecclesiastical landlords in fourteenth-century southern Flanders

In England, large demesnes generally transitioned to leasehold between around 1360 and 1430, although there was substantial regional and institutional variation in the chronology of the transition⁽²⁸⁾. In most regions of France, the most important transitioning period towards leasehold happened around 1300 and over the following century, almost all of the holdings of large landowners were leased out⁽²⁹⁾. In the nearby county of Namur, the conversion from direct exploitation to leasehold by the ecclesiastical landlords only took place at the very end of the fourteenth century⁽³⁰⁾. In present-day eastern Belgium this occurred much earlier, from about 1250 onwards for the cathedral Saint-Lambert in Liège, but in other, more rural parts, this shift happened rather later, over the course of the fourteenth century⁽³¹⁾. In Flanders, the urban

⁽²⁷⁾ D. STONE, *Decision-Making*, *op. cit.*, p. 184–85.

⁽²⁸⁾ C. DYER, *Lords and Peasants*, *op. cit.*, p. 113; John HARE, “The Monks as Landlords: The Leasing of Monastic Demesnes in Southern England”, in Caroline M. BARRON & Christopher HARPER-BILL, eds., *The Church in Pre-Reformation Society. Essays in Honour of F.R.H. Du Boulay*, Woodbridge, Boydell Press, 1985, p. 84.

⁽²⁹⁾ Georges DUBY, “Le grand domaine de la fin du Moyen Âge en France”, in *First International Conference on Economic History. Stockholm*, Paris, 1960, p. 337.

⁽³⁰⁾ Léopold GENICOT, *L'économie rurale Namuroise au bas Moyen Âge (1191-1429)*, Louvain, Centre belge d'histoire rurale, 1975, vol. 2, p. 109–10.

⁽³¹⁾ For the cathedral of Saint-Lambert, see Alexis WILKIN, “The Role of the Secular Canons in the Introduction of Leaseholding in the Thirteenth Century. Case-Study: The Liège-Area”, in B.J.P. VAN BAVEL & P.R. SCHOFIELD, eds., *The Development of Leasehold*, *op. cit.*, p. 57–80. The more rural parts of this region have been studied in Nicolas SCHROEDER, *Les hommes et la terre de saint Remacle. Histoire sociale et économique de l'abbaye de Stavelot-Malmedy, VIIe-XIVe siècle* (Brussels : Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2012), p. 277–82.

hospitals tended to keep (a part of) their demesnes under their direct management. Only around 1400 were the last demesnes of the hospital of Geraardsbergen leased out⁽³²⁾. At the Onze-Lieve-Vrouwe hospital in Oudenaarde, direct exploitation ended in the first decades of the fifteenth century⁽³³⁾. In Antwerp, the Elisabethgasthuis also kept cultivating its own wheat and rye up to the sixteenth century⁽³⁴⁾. The Bruges' hospital of Potterie kept its demesne in direct exploitation up to 1406⁽³⁵⁾. At the Sint-Jans hospital, demesne land was being leased out from about 1330 onwards. It tried to lease out its entire property around 1400, but a few years later it reversed its decision and kept on directly managing a part of its property up to the middle of the sixteenth century, 200 years after most of the Flemish landlords had converted their demesnes to leasehold⁽³⁶⁾. Alain Derville has shown that the hospital of Saint-Sauveur in Lille cultivated wheat through direct exploitation up to at least 1540, even though the acreage of the direct exploitation was significantly smaller than in the fourteenth century⁽³⁷⁾. How did the other Flemish landlords adapt their direct exploitation while also managing their leased-out land throughout the multiple crises of the fourteenth century? Was there any change in their agricultural organisation throughout these decades? To understand if and how the grain price crises precipitated the conversion from demesne to leasehold, one must first analyse the direct exploitation of the farms of these large landlords.

Direct exploitation of demesnes

⁽³²⁾ Paul VANDEWALLE, *Het Onze-Lieve-Vrouwhospitaal van Geraardsbergen: een mikro-economische studie (1413-1500) met een inleiding over zijn ontstaan en inrichting*, Unpublished MA-Thesis, Ghent, Ghent University, 1964, p. 102–5.

⁽³³⁾ Bart VAN MAELZAEKE, *De domaniale organisatie van het Onze-Lieve-Vrouwehospitaal van Oudenaarde (1202-1572). Goederenverwerving, goederenbeheer en pachtpolitiek*, Unpublished MA-Thesis, Ghent, Ghent University, 2000, p. 17–18.

⁽³⁴⁾ Etienne SCHOLLIERS, *Loonarbeid en honger. De levensstandaard in de XVe en XVIe eeuw te Antwerpen*, Antwerp, De Sikkel, 1960, p. 19.

⁽³⁵⁾ Griet MARÉCHAL, *Geschiedenis van het hospitaal van Onze-Lieve-Vrouw van de Potterie te Brugge in de middeleeuwen*, Unpublished MA-Thesis, Ghent, Ghent University, 1965, p. 210.

⁽³⁶⁾ L. VERVAET, *Goederenbeheer*, *op. cit.*, p. 123–24.

⁽³⁷⁾ A. DERVILLE, *L'agriculture du Nord*, *op. cit.*, p. 281–89.

In general, demesne farming was relatively limited in southern Flanders. As a result, the organisation of the management of the demesnes of landlords studied is not necessarily representative of the regional organisation of agricultural production. However, they did use the labour and production methods that were regionally available⁽³⁸⁾. Demesne land invariably served both the provisioning of the direct household of the ecclesiastical landlords in question and was a generator of cash. The primary focus of cultivation was wheat, and to a much lesser degree oats, of which large amounts or surpluses were sold. For many landlords, the sale of wheat was the most important generator of cash, while other crops were merely additional and primarily meant for consumption. Adaptations in the direct exploitation of demesne farms would mainly revolve around the acreage designated for the cultivation of certain crops, or the labour input in the harvest⁽³⁹⁾. One could also respond to market demand by cultivating more crops in high demand, and hence at higher prices and margins. These were mainly short-term adaptations, which stemmed from conscious choices and rational decisions made by the managers or reeves of the farms. More structurally, the landlords could choose to sell their property, or – the preferred option – lease it out to tenants. As I have explained above, this might have helped reduce costs but would also have been more final in the longer term. Possible triggers for these adaptations – both short- and long-term – could include a change in physical productivity, the market conditions or the availability of labour. Epidemics or warfare, for instance, could cause social unrest and severely diminish the pool of seasonal labourers needed to bring in the harvest.

⁽³⁸⁾ About the physical productivity levels in the long run in the north-western European region, several authors have demonstrated (exceptionally) high yields per surface area of land in the Low Countries, although regional variation could be pronounced. This amounted to around 15-20 hl./ha. in several parts of the Low Countries. On the manors of the hospital of Saint-Sauveur, the productivity of more than 20 hl./ha. was even attested by Alain Derville. B.J.P. VAN BAVEL, *Manors and Markets: Economy and Society in the Low Countries, 500-1600*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 330; A. DERVILLE, “Le rendement du blé dans la région lilloise (1285-1541)”, in *Bulletin de la Commission historique du Département du Nord*, vol. 40, 1978, p. 23–39.

⁽³⁹⁾ Or in the intensity of weed removal, although this might be less visible.

The data on the direct exploitation of wheat and oats from the estates of the landlords studied here show diverse results (figure 2). Sufficient data on direct exploitation only exists for the hospitals of Saint-Sauveur (Lille) and Wetz (Douai) and the abbey of Notre-Dame des Prés (Douai). There are traces that the hospital of Saint-Julien in Cambrai also cultivated a part of its domain, but the production of both granaries of the hospital, one located in Cambrai and the other in La Neuville, was unfortunately registered together with the income from tithes from other communities⁽⁴⁰⁾. The accounts of the two hospitals Saint-Sauveur and Wetz mention the exact surfaces on which wheat and oats were cultivated. These illustrate a three-course rotation, implying a sequence of winter grains to summer grains to fallow land, after which the cycle started over again. Erik Thoen suggested that even though this cultural succession was generally present in Flanders, many farmers in inland Flanders frequently deviated from it, especially on smaller farms, at least from the last quarter of the fourteenth century onwards⁽⁴¹⁾. Nonetheless, based on the same data used in the present article, Alain Derville has already argued that such a sequence was continuously in place in the fourteenth century⁽⁴²⁾. The presence of this rotation sequence in our studied region is equally supported by leasehold payments (see below). Even though Thoen labels the three-course rotation as an ‘older’ agricultural practice that was gradually replaced by the sowing of fallow, it is clear that it was still widely in place in southern Flanders in the fourteenth century, although not necessarily as a ‘topographical’ three-field system, with the central field of a parish divided into three neatly distinguished fields each committed to following the same crop rotation. Nevertheless, the persistence of the three-course

⁽⁴⁰⁾ A. DERVILLE, “L’hôpital Saint-Julien de Cambrai”, *op. cit.*, p. 290.

⁽⁴¹⁾ E. THOEN, *Landbouweconomie en bevolking*, *op. cit.*, p. 734–47.

⁽⁴²⁾ A. DERVILLE, *L’agriculture du Nord*, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

rotation, and hence, fallow land, remains important to explain the high wheat yields of this region, as these yields were only recorded once every three years for a certain plot of land⁽⁴³⁾.

From 1331 to 1337, the wheat output dropped at the hospital Saint-Sauveur, but the surface which was used for the cultivation of that crop did not change drastically. Both of these years (1331 and 1337) were in the same rotation, so it could not have been due to crop rotation⁽⁴⁴⁾.

During the rest of the period before the mid-1350s, the output of wheat remained almost stable.

The main change with respect to demesne farming –a structural one – initiated by this hospital came in 1358. From a total of 105-110 ha. of arable grounds only about 30 to 40 ha. remained in the hands of the hospital itself from at least 1358 onwards while the rest was transformed into leasehold, which I will discuss below. Interestingly, this structural change was not made based on a change in the productivity of the most important cereal, as it remained stable at around 20 hl. per ha. and even rose slightly after the conversion.

Information on harvested oats was less frequently registered in these accounts. One reason for this lack of information could have been that those crops were mainly intended to be used as animal fodder. Other summer crops such as peas and beans were a complementary food source for the hospital staff and patients and barley was used for the production of beer. This made the rigorous bookkeeping of the costs for the cultivation and the corresponding output number of oats (and peas, beans and barley) less urgent in comparison to wheat⁽⁴⁵⁾. Nonetheless, there are traces of oats being harvested by the hospital on about 21 to 27 ha. in the late 1330s and early

⁽⁴³⁾ For the English case, where fallow fields were also sown from the second half of the thirteenth century onwards, see B.M.S. CAMPBELL, “Agricultural Progress in Medieval England: Some Evidence from Eastern Norfolk”, in *The Economic History Review*, New Series, vol. 36, 1983, 1, p. 26–46.

⁽⁴⁴⁾ On the estates of this hospital (up to the mid-1350s), one rotation was done with about 40 ha. (for instance the harvest of 1339/40 and 1351/52), a second with around 30 ha. (i.e. 1331/32, 1337/38, 1349/50, 1352/53) and a third with 35-38 ha. (i.e. 1341/42, 1350/51, 1353/54). This adds up to a total of 105-110 ha. of arable acreage under control of the hospital.

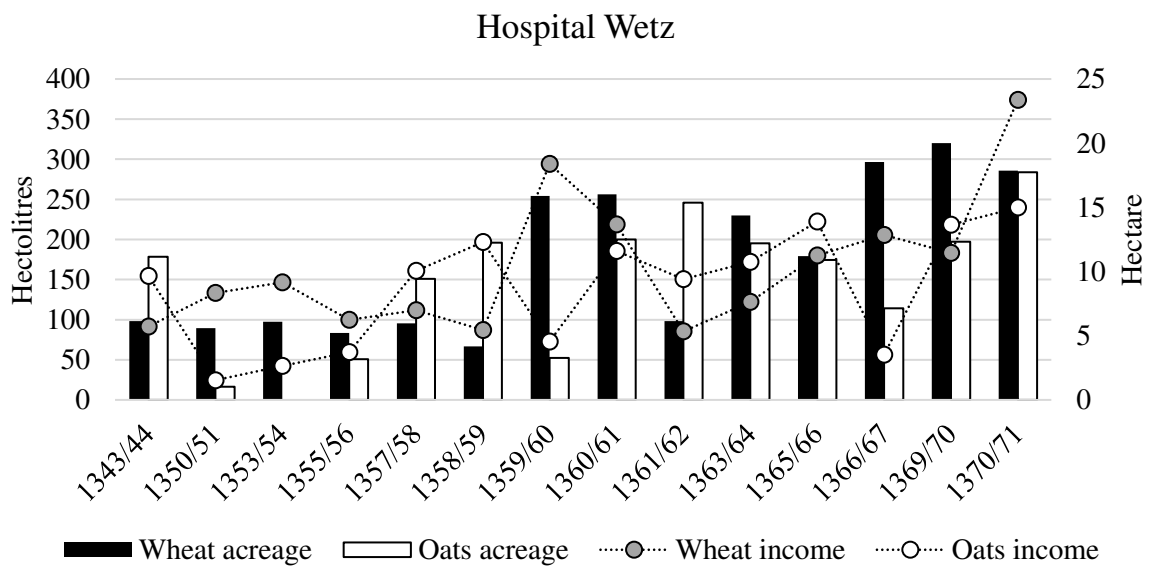
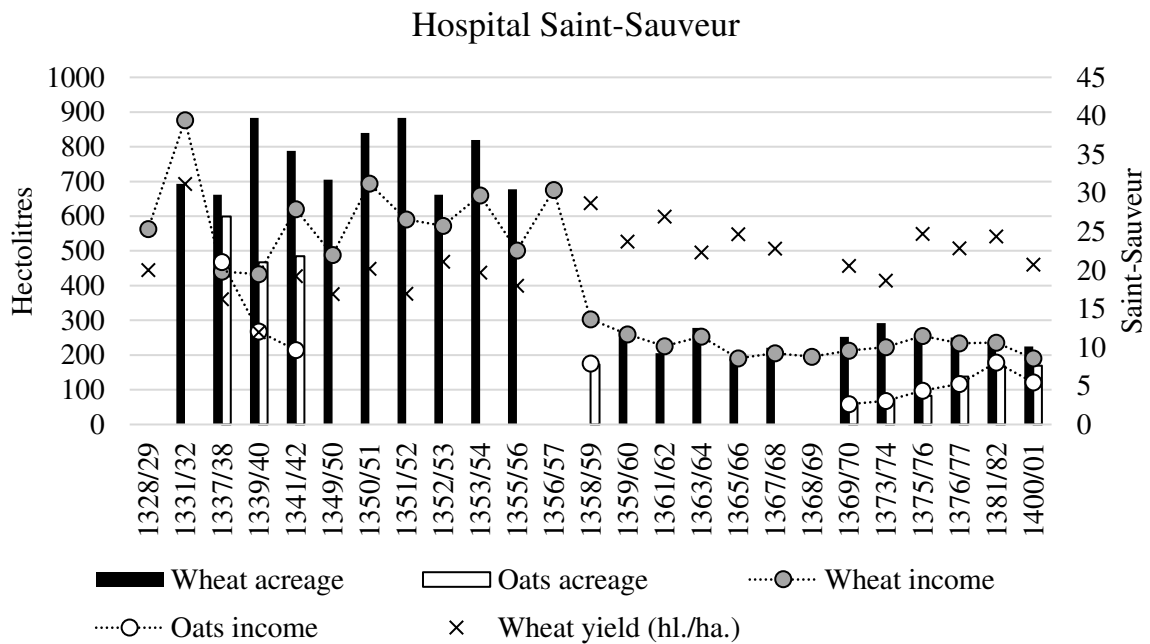
⁽⁴⁵⁾ On average 70 per cent of the cash income from this hospital came from wheat sales. Lille, ADN, Archives Hospitalières, VI E 7-11.

1340s⁽⁴⁶⁾. Widening this to a distinction between winter grains and summer grains, the hospital did write down the cost it had to pay for the fields to be sown, most of the time mentioning the surface area as well. Even though this refers to the surface used for a certain rotation for the next harvest, it shows the constant character of summer grains being sown on about 30 to 40 ha. before 1357 and about 12 to 13 ha. afterwards.

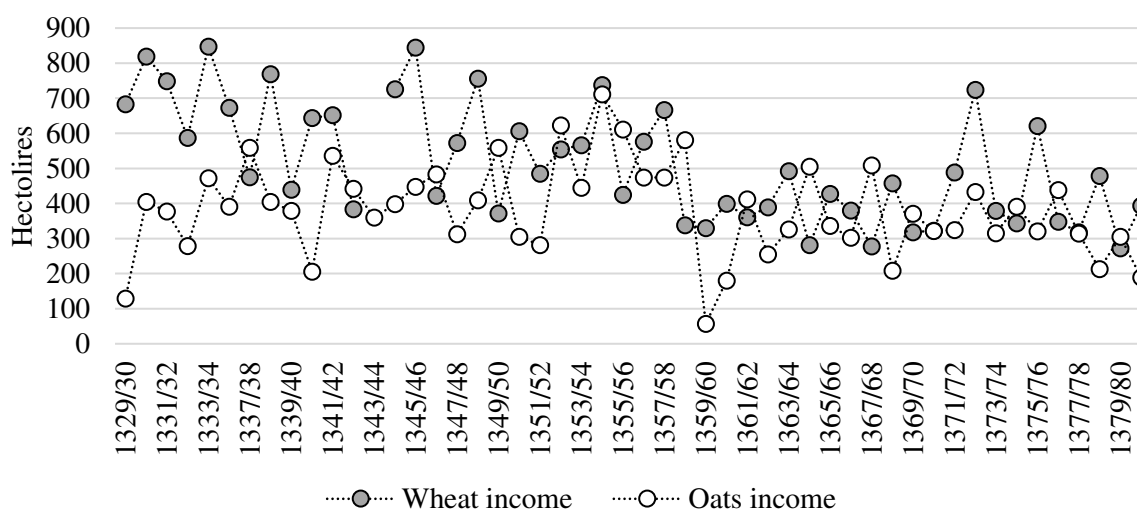
The lack of data regarding the actual harvested surface for oats is in other cases provided by the sown surface. The accounts indicate that the crops sown were the so-called '*mars*', which acts as an overarching term for all summer grains. Figure 2 shows that less farmland was devoted to the direct exploitation of oats as well after 1358, which is not surprising due to the presence of the three-course rotation. The acreage for oats dropped to an average of about 5 ha., but from the sown acreage it is clear that the acreage devoted to summer crops is as high and constant as that of wheat. However, there could be increased importance of peas, beans, barley and other summer grains. Due to the lack of sufficient data for these other grains, I am unable to analyse this in detail.

⁽⁴⁶⁾ Only about 60 per cent of the farmland was thus used for oats when summer grains were sown. Other crops such as peas, beans and barley probably made up the other 40 per cent.

Figure 2. Total income from direct exploitation (in wheat and oats) for selected southern-Flemish landlords in the fourteenth century.



Abbey Notre-Dame des Prés



Note: The income from direct exploitation is shown by the line with markings plotted on the primary Y-axis (left). The surface which was used for the direct exploitation of wheat and oats is plotted with columns on the secondary Y-axis (right). For the abbey Notre-Dame des Prés in Douai, the acreage devoted to the cultivation of crops is not known.

Sources: Lille, ADN, Archives Hospitalières, VI E, n° 7-11; Douai, AMD, 2 NC, n° 1296-7 & 1336-8; Lille, ADN, 30 H, n° 363.

The hospital Wetz (Douai) is the only other landlord which mentions the output and acreage of its cultivation of wheat and oats in its preserved accounts. First of all, this hospital was more diverse in its strategy for gathering grain than Saint-Sauveur: a combination of direct exploitation, leasehold and customary rents. Secondly, the income from direct exploitation was more volatile than that of Saint-Sauveur. This was partly due to the changing arable surface devoted to direct exploitation. For Wetz, this surface increased significantly around the end of the 1350s from about 5 or 6 ha. to 15 ha., which resulted in a peak of wheat income from direct exploitation for the harvest of 1359/60, a year during which the quality of the harvest could be labelled as average⁽⁴⁷⁾. Additionally, it seems that the hospital made a significant short-term adaptation in the wheat sown in the summer of 1361 and harvested in 1361/62. The price crisis of 1361 prompted the hospital to devote less acreage (and thus less of the high-priced sowing

⁽⁴⁷⁾ A. DERVILLE, *L'agriculture du Nord, op. cit.*, p. 281–82; S. ESPEEL, *Prices and Crises, op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 227–28.

seed) to the cultivation of wheat. Such a short-term adaptation is otherwise absent for the other landlords, but this example shows that they also reacted to the short-term price evolution.

The acreage devoted to the cultivation of wheat by this hospital was stable in the period before 1358, but not for oats and other summer crops. The acreage for oats dropped from 11 ha. in 1343 to a mere 1 ha. in 1350. It increased again during the 1350s, rising up to 11 ha. This had nothing to do with variable surfaces in the three-field system because they fluctuated on the same rotation. Other summer crops (peas, beans, barley etc.), sown together with oats, occupied a stable area of about 4.5 ha. before 1358. These crops did not take up any surface of what was supposed to be sown with oats. The increase of the area for direct exploitation at the expense of the leased area, as we have explained for wheat, is also visible for oats after 1358. Perhaps the irregular number of registered parcel surfaces could be ascribed to the lesser importance of the crop with respect to the income of the hospital and instead as one for its own consumption (as animal fodder), just like for the hospital Saint-Sauveur. Unfortunately, no detailed data on sowing costs were included in the accounts of Wetz.

The abbey of Notre-Dame des Prés located in Douai is the third landlord for which data on direct management is available. Unfortunately, its grain account (the only account of the abbey preserved for the fourteenth century) did not mention the surface of the areas on which it cultivated its crops. Nonetheless, we can venture an informed guess using the yields of the hospital of Wetz, also located in Douai. Based on those yields, as well as bearing in mind that in these regions the three-field system was in place, the abbey had on average about 80 ha. in demesne farming. If we generalise the median yield of Wetz for the scattered data between 1343 and 1370 (17.31 hl./ha.) for the output of the abbey for the entire period of 1329-1381, we arrive at a result of about 90 ha. of farmland. We can thus assume that this abbey used about

80 to 90 ha. of its property for the cultivation of crops under its management⁽⁴⁸⁾. This is an average number over the entire century, without taking into account the possibility of adaptations similar to the hospitals Saint-Sauveur and Wetz. However, based on the income of wheat and oats, a structural rupture is visible, again around the year 1358/59. The average wheat and oats income before that year was respectively 600 hl. and 430 hl. and changed to an average of 400 hl. (-33 per cent) and 320 hl. (-25 per cent) after 1358. Recalculating the surfaces with a break in 1358 shows that before that year, about 100 ha. was used as farmland under its management. If there was a structural change in the use of its land, the acreage devoted to its direct exploitation after 1358 would have totalled around 70 ha. This signifies a diminishment of 30 ha. of farmland under direct management, an estimate that remains speculative.

Based on the examples of these three landlords, a change seems to occur in the amount of acreage managed directly around 1357-58. At the hospital Saint-Sauveur, the arable surface directly exploited by the hospital decreased by about two-thirds. The accounts for the abbey of Notre-Dame des Prés do not mention any surfaces, but an estimation renders it plausible that a similar decrease occurred, but with only about one-third of the lands under its direct control. At Wetz, a change in the opposite direction occurred. It is tempting to link these changes in demesne management to the grain crisis of the late 1350s and the early 1360s, parallel with the

⁽⁴⁸⁾ Alain Derville estimated the land cultivated by this abbey and arrived at about 114 ha. He based his (rather unclear) calculations on a yield of 27.22 hl./ha. for wheat and 6.63 hl./ha. for oats for the year 1329/30 from the land of Jean Le Menut. How Derville subsequently arrived at a total of 38 ha. for one rotation (and 114 ha. for its total exploitation) is confusing and not clearly stated. It seems that he used the revenue from the direct exploitation of the year 1330/31, added 10 per cent of tithes and 10 per cent of so-called '*terrage*', levies which would have been gathered from the grain in the field before it got to the granary to end up with a revenue of 1011.7 hl. from direct exploitation which translates to roughly 37 ha. of arable surface. Derville only used one year (note, an outlier) and one yield ratio (a very high one) to calculate the size of the exploitation of the abbey. With the – in my opinion – more robust methodology used above, using multiple years of revenue and yield ratios, I believe I am closer to the actual surface used for the direct exploitation of farms sown by the abbey. See A. DERVILLE, *L'agriculture du Nord, op. cit.*, p. 136.

resurgence of plague. However, it should be noticed that the reduction took place in 1358, at a moment when the prices had not yet peaked, and when mortality was still limited.

Leasehold practices

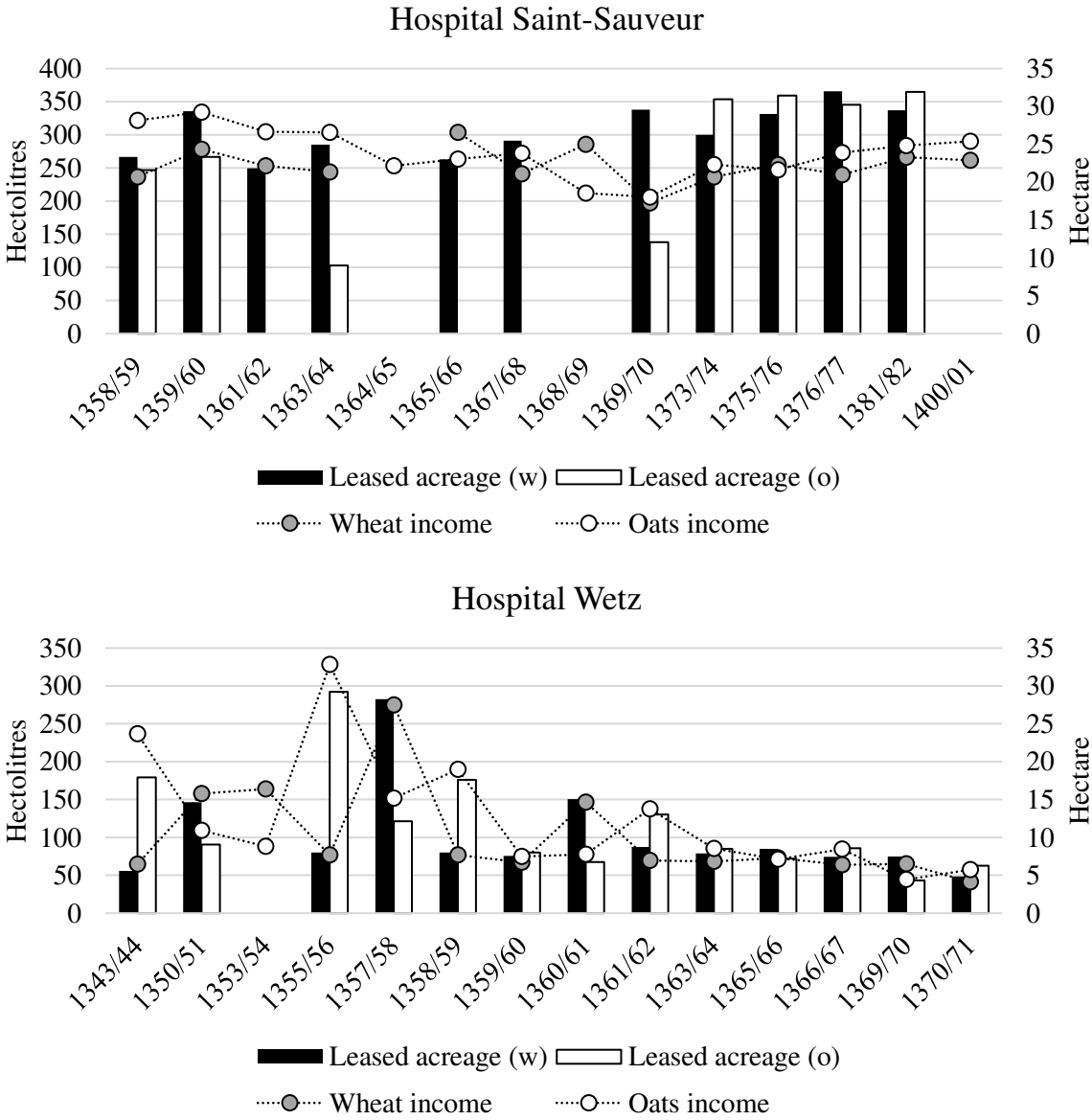
The importance of (short-term) leaseholds in Flanders and its southern region cannot be understated, as shown above. The subsequent question of how leasehold and the conditions of leasehold fitted the economic strategies of the ecclesiastical landlords during the grain crises is therefore certainly pertinent. First of all, and in contrast to the northern part of Flanders, it should be noticed that leases in cash were rather rare in southern Flanders and the *Cambrésis* in this period. They were mentioned in the accounts of the studied landlords on only a few occasions and invariably related to farmsteads (*'courtil'*) or the rent of houses (*'domus'*). The large majority of lease contracts, concerning larger and smaller plots of land, were expressed in kind.

In figure 3, the income of wheat and oats from leases have been collected for each landlord in question. Apart from the hospital Saint-Sauveur, the hospital Wetz and the abbey of Notre-Dame des Prés, for which direct exploitation was analysed above, the data for the hospital of Saint-Julien and the collegiate church of Notre-Dame, both located in Cambrai, are included here as well⁽⁴⁹⁾. For the hospital Saint-Sauveur in Lille, I have mentioned the conversion of farmland cultivated under its direct management to short-term leases around 1358. Before 1358, any grain income from leases was not mentioned in the accounts. The fact that no cash income was gathered from these lands suggests the fact that the conversion towards leasehold was not

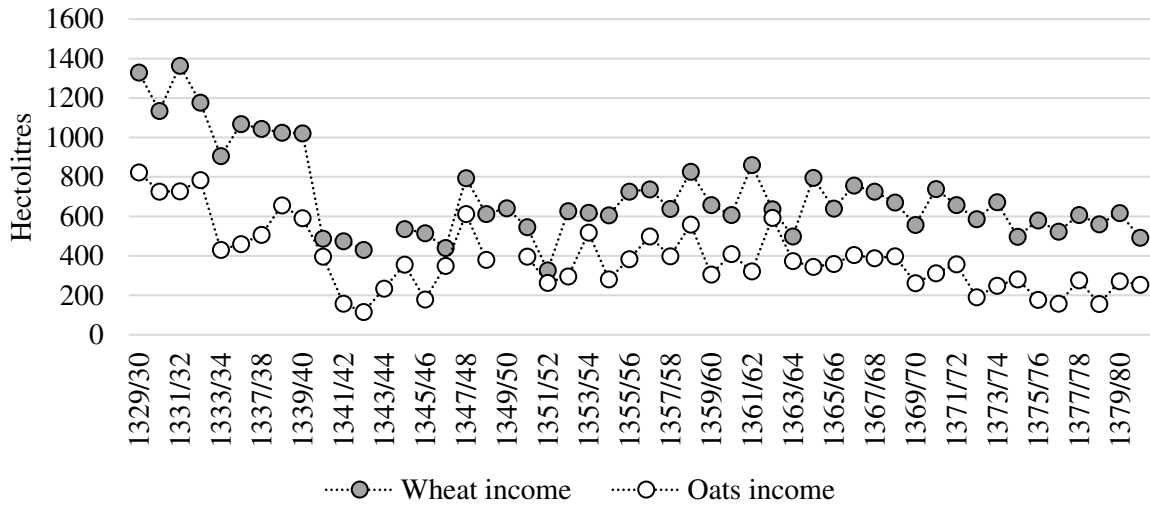
⁽⁴⁹⁾ Even though more accounts for several offices of the church of Notre-Dame are preserved in the archives, I will only look at the office of the *communauté des chapelains* because of the number of preserved accounts and the continuity throughout the fourteenth century. These accounts can be found in Lille, ADN, 4 G, n° 818, 6840-6886 and have been briefly studied in A. DERVILLE, “La conjoncture cambrésienne au XIV^e siècle”, in Jean-Marie DUVOSQUEL & E. THOEN, eds., *Peasants and Townsmen in Medieval Europe. Studia in Honorem Adriaan Verhulst*, Ghent, Snoeck-Ducaju & Zoon, 1996, p. 561–72.

perceived as setting up a *cash cow*, but rather as an additional *grain generator*, with the same potential for household provisioning and marketing as agricultural surpluses from the domain exploited directly by the hospital.

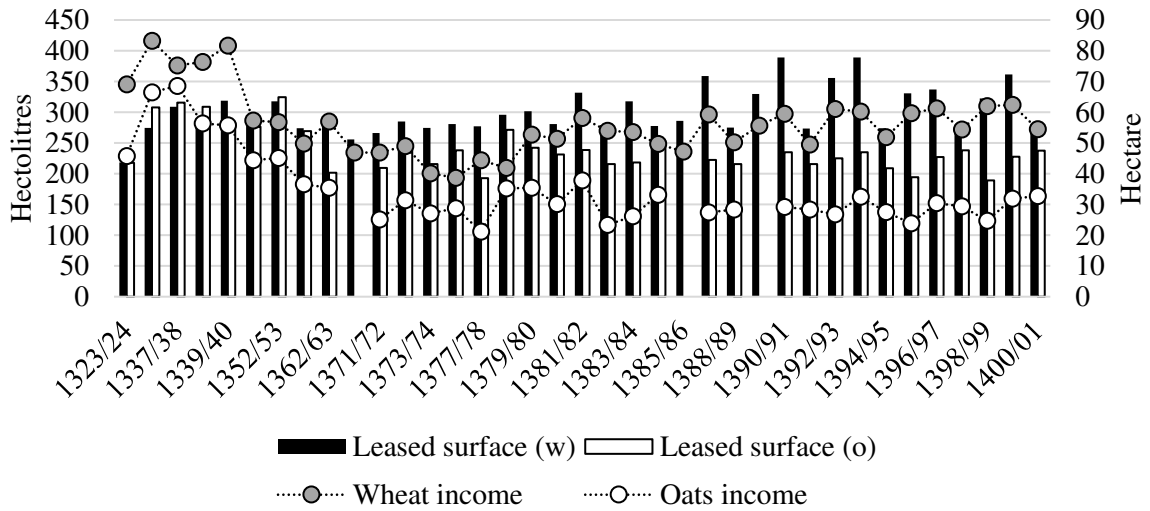
Figure 3. Total income from leasehold (in wheat and oats) for selected southern Flemish landlords in the fourteenth century.



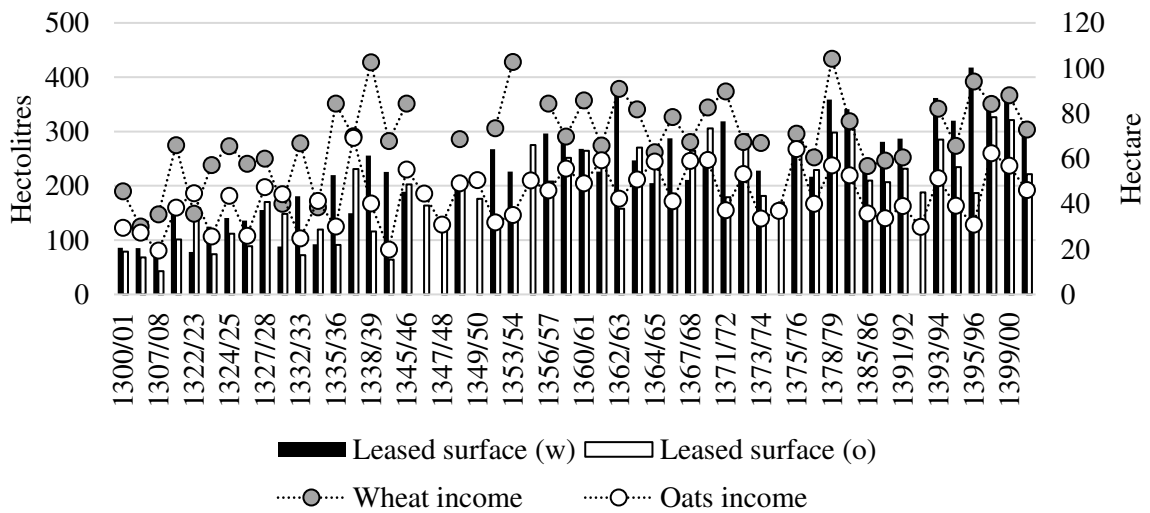
Abbey Notre-Dame des Prés



Hospital Saint-Julien



Collegiate church Notre-Dame (*communauté des chapelains*)



Note: The income through leasehold is shown by the line with markings plotted on the primary Y-axis (left). The surface which was used for the leasehold for which wheat and oats were received as payment is plotted with columns on the secondary Y-axis (right). For the abbey of Notre-Dame des Prés in Douai, the acreage devoted to leasehold is not known.

Sources: Lille, ADN, Archives Hospitalières, VI E, n° 7-11; Douai, AMD, 2 NC, n° 1296-7 & 1336-8; Lille, ADN, 30 H, n° 363; Lille, ADN, 172 H, n° 53-63; Lille, ADN, 4 G, n° 818, 6840-6886.

At Saint-Sauveur, about 60 to 70 ha. was converted into leased-out farms, and the payments in kind for these leases followed the same three-field system pattern as was in place on the land farmed directly ⁽⁵⁰⁾. A silent witness thereto is the annual income of wheat and oats per individual plot, which followed more or less the same pattern. However, the surface of leased-out plots for which oats were received was not always equal, which could either be caused by the lack of information regarding the surface of plots for which oats needed to be paid or because of corrupt and incomplete accounts. The income level shows a quite stable evolution for the second half of the century implying the absence of any short-term adjustment to plots of land being leased out for grain in kind. The opposite was done at the hospital of Wetz,. Around 1358, it chose to convert a part of its leasehold (at least that used in the previous two years) into demesne land, as we have seen the enlargement of it in figure 2.

The granary accounts of the abbey of Notre-Dame des Prés mention an impressive volume of both wheat and oats gathered through leasehold, exceeding the already considerable volume from direct exploitation. During the 1330s, the abbey collected on average over 1,100 hl. of wheat and over 600 hl. of oats per year. This decreased dramatically from the start of the 1340s onwards. One reason for this radical drop, put forward by Alain Derville, is that some villages stopped sending their entire rent to the granary because more leases (and customary rents) began to be paid in cash rather than in kind. According to Derville, the decreasing income of the granary from the 1330s and 1340s was never a sign of a dropping crop yield or a (partial)

⁽⁵⁰⁾ This is rather unusual for a short-term leasehold, but the leaseholds of the hospital Saint-Sauveur rather resemble some sort of sharecropping, and as has been said above, both direct exploitation and the leasehold/sharecropping might have primarily served the provisioning needs of the hospital. See S. ESPEEL, *Prices and Crises, op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 277-308.

collapse of the grain economy, but rather of the poor market conditions for selling wheat thanks to the price shocks. The abbey would instead have collected its dues in cash and gotten rid of its incoming grain stock through its tenants, thus avoiding the additional burden of selling the grain on the market⁽⁵¹⁾. As has been mentioned before, this source does not mention any surfaces, neither for direct exploitation nor for leaseholds, making further analyses impossible. Any shift in the income of grain from leaseholds around 1358 is absent.

Both large landowners from Cambrai, the hospital Saint-Julien and the church of Notre-Dame, did not clearly record any production on areas under their direct management but they recorded their leased-out holdings meticulously. The hospital Saint-Julien received grain through leasehold for about 100 ha. of land. A slight drop occurred in the income from these leases around the end of the 1340s. For wheat, about 400 hl. was gathered each year in the 1330s, and this dropped to 200 to 300 hl. for the rest of the century. In the case of oats, a similar drop occurred, albeit less severe: from about 300 hl. on an annual basis to 200 hl. A second remarkable evolution can be discerned from the acreage from which wheat was received. From the 1360s, and especially the 1380s, onwards, this consistently increased, while the lease price decreased⁽⁵²⁾. At the same time, those for which oats were received did not increase.

The office of the *communauté des chapelains* of the cathedral church of Notre-Dame received wheat and oats annually for a leased-out surface that increased gradually, from around 40 to 60 ha. in the first quarter of the century to about 120 to 160 ha. per year in the last quarter. The accompanying income from leasehold rose with it, from about 150 to 300 hl. of wheat and 100 to 200 hl. of oats to respectively 250 to 400 hl. and 150 to 250 hl. The data from both landowners from Cambrai is in line with land acquisition by the larger landlords from the second half of the

⁽⁵¹⁾ A. DERVILLE, *L'agriculture du Nord*, *op. cit.*, p. 137–39. Even though this is not verifiable due to the absence of the general accounts of the abbey.

⁽⁵²⁾ Alain Derville already noticed this evolution and dated the start of it at around 1360-1362. A. DERVILLE, “L’hôpital Saint-Julien de Cambrai”, *op. cit.*, p. 304–5.

fourteenth century onwards⁽⁵³⁾. This land acquisition came into play during the same time that an ongoing decrease in the lease price occurred⁽⁵⁴⁾. It seems that especially the church of Notre-Dame sought to expand its total leased-out acreage as compensation for the decreasing grain income per hectare, while Saint-Julien settled for letting total income from grain decrease year on year.

What is clear from the graphs in figures 2 and 3 is that the entire politics of grain production by the studied landlords over the century was primarily focused on a stable income, even though changes occurred regarding the mode of exploitation of their property (from direct management to leasehold or *vice versa*). In Cambrai, this is illustrated by the expansion of own and leased-out possessions when the price of the leasehold gradually decreased. The hospital Saint-Sauveur in Lille structurally transformed land which was cultivated under its direct management to leased-out property. It decreased labour costs as well as investments in sowing seed, manure and hardware for the actual harvesting⁽⁵⁵⁾. At the same time, it maintained a share of part of the production. It was the other way around for the hospital Wetz. In the late 1350s, it invested in more farmland under its direct control and diminished the acreage which was being leased out to farmers. Additionally, the sowed acreage and wheat output for the year 1361/62 is a witness to the smaller investment in wheat cultivation during the price crisis of 1361, a conscious short-term adaptation made by the hospital.

⁽⁵³⁾ A. DERVILLE, *L'agriculture du Nord, op. cit.*, p. 237; H. NEVEUX, *Vie et déclin d'une structure économique, op. cit.*, p. 232–35; Georges LEFEBVRE, *Les paysans du Nord pendant la Révolution française*, Lille, C. Robbe, 1924, p. 10; Christophe DIEUDONNE, *Statistique du Département du Nord*, Douai, Marlier, 1804, vol. 1, p. 487. Just before the French Revolution, this resulted in farms with a size of 600 to 700 *mencaudées*, equivalent to 213 to 248 ha.

⁽⁵⁴⁾ S. ESPEEL, *Prices and Crises, op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 298–304.

⁽⁵⁵⁾ The costs for the harvest noted as 'costs for August' occupied a separate paragraph in the accounts. The total amount dropped from a median of 2600 g of silver in the period before 1358 to a median of 1500 g of silver for the years after 1358. Lille, ADN, Archives Hospitalières, VI E 7-11.

Remarkably, even though the total amount of wheat and oats the landlords received did not alter much, due to the adaptations in both directions, both hospitals did come to a different decision with respect to their arable acreage, showing the importance of decision-making on a structural level – but also over the shorter term – by the landlords in the late medieval agriculture in this region. Rather than passive bystanders, the landlords acted and reacted to changing economic realities by adapting their cereal production strategies between direct exploitation and leasehold.

Finding the balance: the ratio between consumption and commercialisation of grain

As regards food provisioning it was not only demesne farming that was important since leaseholds involved in-kind supplies to the landowner and were part and parcel of a provisioning strategy rather than simply a tool for profit-maximisation. This strategy of a reciprocal economic relationship between tenants and landlords with mutual benefits was already signalled by Lies Vervaet for the Sint-Jans hospital in Bruges in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and by Philip Slavin for Norwich Cathedral Priory⁽⁵⁶⁾. The process of the conversion from direct exploitation on old domain holdings towards leasehold has already been discussed by Thoen and Soens for Flanders. At the heart of this evolution, they saw income maximisation as a more important driver than any food-provisioning strategies. This income maximisation was possible due to the shared investments between them and the (wealthy) farmer-tenants, who had a more commercial attitude while still being in an inferior position to the landowner because of the

⁽⁵⁶⁾ L. VERVAET, “Het Brugse Sint-Janshospitaal en zijn grote hoevepachters in de 15^e en 16^e eeuw: wederkerigheid en continuïteit in functie van voedselzekerheid”, in *Revue Belge de Philologie et d’Histoire*, vol. 90, 2012, 4, p. 1121–54; P. SLAVIN, *Bread and Ale for the Brethren. The Provisioning of Norwich Cathedral Priory, c.1260-1536*, Hertfordshire, University of Hertfordshire Press, 2012, p. 188.

latter's much greater investments⁽⁵⁷⁾. In the case of the hospital Saint-Sauveur, the costs for the harvest dropped, but the general income, instead of rising actually dropped slightly after 1358 in comparison with the period before⁽⁵⁸⁾. For the hospital of Wetz, this income also dropped, but there the surface for direct exploitation increased, which would have led to additional costs⁽⁵⁹⁾. Whereas Thoen and Soens focussed on the conversion of direct exploitation to leasehold on larger *curtes* or demesne holdings, where the income strategy was the main trigger, the hospitals in this study did not follow that reasoning. In this section, I will look at which factor was crucial for choosing to focus on one mode of exploitation rather than the other. Was the choice for a certain form of exploitation – demesne farming or leasehold – made in function of the household strategy of either secure food provisioning or profit maximisation through commercialisation? As I have explained above, the years between 1357 and 1359 experienced no significant price spikes, so any adaptations were not the consequence of sudden increases in grain prices. Therefore, the main analysis has to centre on the annual expenses associated with cereals for these landlords, with consumption and sales as the most important markers, to see whether and when either consumption or marketing strategies dictated a change in management.

A self-sufficient food supply

Securing a stable chain of food supply for the members of the landlords in question is the first point of analysis. This has recently been investigated for the Sint-Jans hospital by Lies Vervaet⁽⁶⁰⁾. Because the hospital had to feed more than a hundred patients at the start of the

⁽⁵⁷⁾ T. SOENS & E. THOEN, "The Origins of Leasehold", *op. cit.*, p. 40–41.

⁽⁵⁸⁾ The median of the general income of cash (expressed in grams of silver) in the pre-1358 period was about 13.4 per cent higher (20,915 g Ag) than the one for the post-1358 period (18,438 g Ag). Of course, in the entire bookkeeping of a landowner of this size, a lot of factors determine the eventual balance of income and expenses. Nonetheless, the absence of a rise in general income after the conversion of agricultural acreage from direct exploitation to leasehold is certainly indicative.

⁽⁵⁹⁾ A median of 17,452 g Ag for the years before 1358, against a median of 15,038 g Ag for the period after 1358. This amounted to a drop of 14 per cent.

⁽⁶⁰⁾ L. VERVAET, *Goederenbeheer*, *op. cit.*, p. 121–27.

thirteenth century, it needed a constant influx of large quantities of foodstuffs and its direct exploitation remained vital for this purpose. A commitment to the farmsteads under its direct management is also demonstrated by the fact that just before the short-lived conversion to leasehold, the surface area of the farmsteads remained stable or even expanded. In the same way, Philip Slavin has shown that the priory of Norwich in East Anglia held on to direct exploitation, despite its extensive commercial network, as a form of risk aversion. The dual supply strategy (combination of direct exploitation and leasehold) made sure it was in some way more protected against harvest failures and highly fluctuating grain prices⁽⁶¹⁾. In the castellany of Bresse (eastern France), such an own-supply mechanism was also employed during the years after the Great Famine (1315-17), and its stewards showed further caution by selling off their stocks during years in which production slacked for the benefit of securing enough grain for their consumption⁽⁶²⁾.

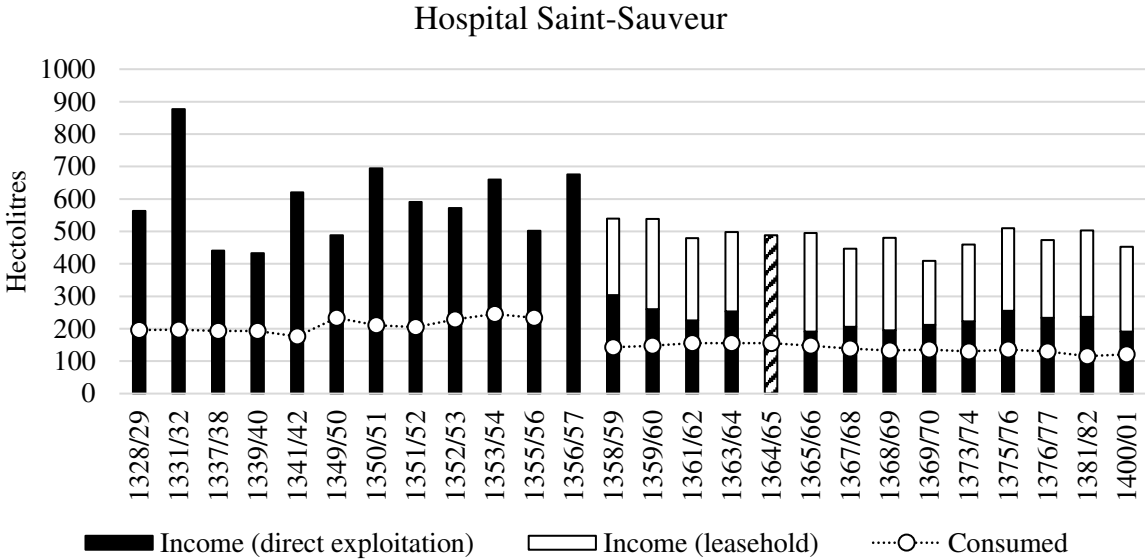
In the case of Saint-Sauveur, one would think that the lack of (cheap) seasonal labour to harvest the demesne land due to the demographic disaster of the Black Death could have played into its decision of converting a part of its farmland to leased-out land; however, the same motivation did not apply at the hospital of Wetz, which focussed more of its land on direct exploitation. More viable was the strategy of securing its food supply through direct exploitation rather than being reliant on the income of wheat through leasehold. Figure 4 shows the amount of grain that entered the granaries of the hospital through its direct exploitation and the amount of grain it needed for its consumption. The average consumption per year before 1358 in the hospital Saint-Sauveur amounted to about 200 hl., while the income from direct exploitation yielded on average about 600 hl. After 1358, the average level of consumption dropped to 140 hl. per year,

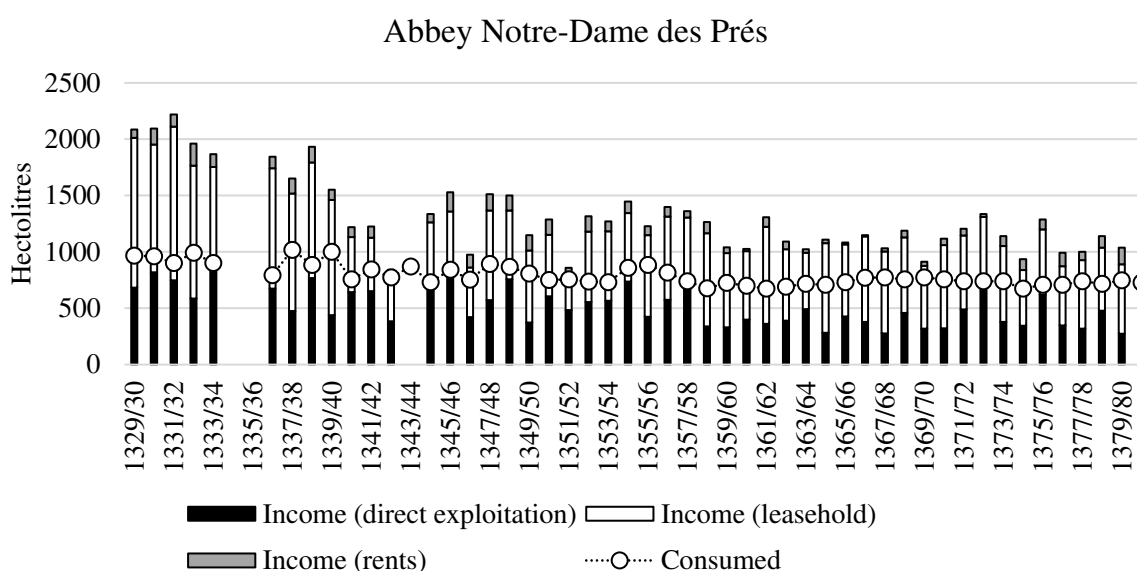
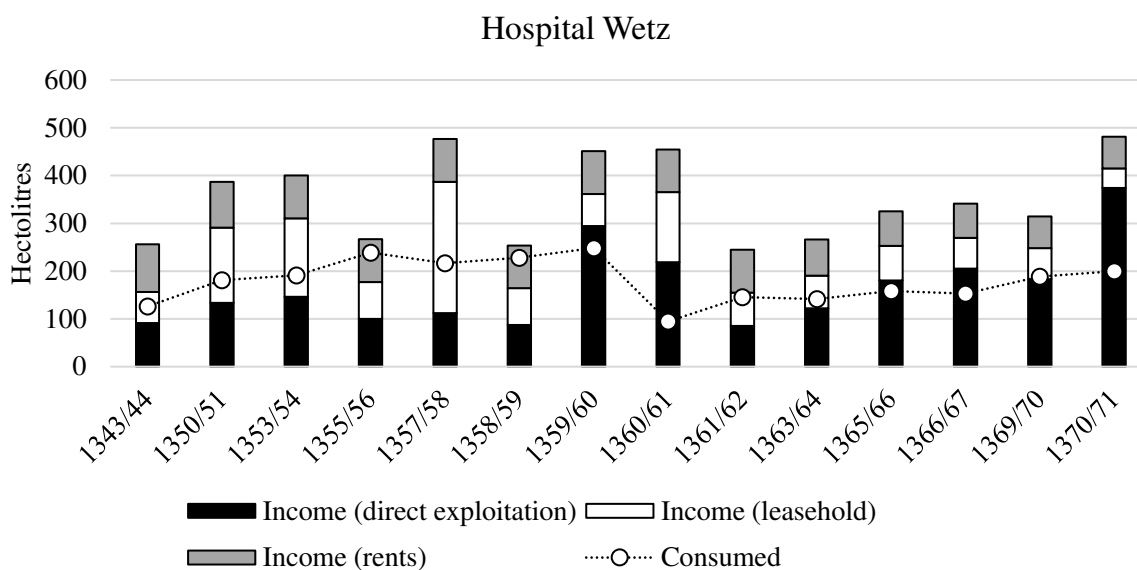
⁽⁶¹⁾ P. SLAVIN, *Bread and Ale for the Brethren*, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

⁽⁶²⁾ Thomas LABBE, “Climat et économie au début du XIVe siècle: la crise agraire de 1314-1322 en Bresse d’après les comptes de châellenie”, in *Revue Historique*, vol. 696, 2020, 4, p. 23–60.

while during that same period the income from direct exploitation dropped to about 230 hl., still more than enough each year to secure its consumption. The peak of grain income for the year 1356/57 combined with a decreasing level of consumption could have triggered the decision to outsource the management of two-thirds of its farmland by leasing it out. However, the hospital still received payment of these leases in kind, in the form of grain, rather than ‘reselling’ those payments to the tenants or stipulating a cash payment in the leasing contract. This way, the hospital still received more than sufficient amounts of grain. This speaks of a cautious strategy of retaining a comfortable quantity of grain, ensuring self-sufficiency with respect to provisions before selling its surplus on the market.

Figure 4. *Wheat income from direct exploitation, leasehold and customary rents and the consumption level for selected southern-Flemish landlords in the fourteenth century.*





Sources: Lille, ADN, Archives Hospitalières, VI E, n° 7-11; Douai, AMD, 2 NC, n° 1296-7 & 1336-8; Lille, ADN, 30 H, n° 363.

For the hospital of Wetz the situation was reversed. Before 1358, the income from the direct exploitation of its farms hardly covered the needs of its own consumption (average income of 110 hl. versus 200 hl. of consumption) and the deficit became even more serious in the 1350s. Through the conversion of some of its leased-out farms to cultivating them under its direct management around 1358, it adopted a more food-secure strategy. An average consumption level of 166 hl. was sufficiently met by an average income of direct exploitation of 210 hl. From 1355 to 1358 there is a noticeable increase in its consumption levels, while the income from its

direct exploitation was anything but sufficient to meet that demand. The changing level in the hospital population thus seems to have provoked the decision of expanding its farmland under direct cultivation at the expense of its leased-out acreage.

Following the demographic shocks of the mid-fourteenth century, these hospitals chose to focus on securing their access to food. However, to reach this scenario of secure access to food through direct exploitation, the hospitals employed opposing strategies. The hospital Saint-Sauveur experienced a decline in its population from about 100 patients in 1280 to c. 70 around the middle of the fourteenth century⁽⁶³⁾. This decrease in number of mouths to feed probably prompted the decision of the hospital to focus on leasing out about two-thirds of its arable holdings. In contrast, the hospital of Wetz decided to revert a part of its leased-out property to farms that were managed under its direct supervision for more direct control. A possible reason could be the recovery in population levels of the hospital, as argued by Jean-Pierre Deregneaucourt, but a hefty decline in consumption levels in 1360/61 and the decrease in income a year afterwards show that it is a more complex matter⁽⁶⁴⁾. However, after the early 1360s, it is clear that direct exploitation gathered sufficient wheat to meet its consumption needs. The need for a secure way of provisioning was dominant, but the triggers prompting these adaptations did not occur in the same direction nor in the same years.

The combination of securing their food supply paired with cost-minimisation of the above hospitals can also be verified for the abbey of Notre-Dame des Prés. The average consumption

⁽⁶³⁾ With the addition of the 6 sisters and one brother as well as the twelve ‘*maisnies*’ or helpers, on average 80 mouths had to be fed at the hospital throughout the first half of the fourteenth century. Based on the consumption levels of the hospital and a base consumption of 2.75 hl. of wheat per person per year, the number of rations at the hospital drops another 60 per cent from 1353 to 1467. A. DERVILLE, *L’agriculture du Nord*, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

⁽⁶⁴⁾ Jean-Pierre Deregneaucourt mentions an increasing number of patients and staff that needed to be fed at the hospital at the end of the 1350s, after which its population seems to be hit hard by the plague waves of 1360/61 and 1369. J.-P. DEREGNAUCOURT, “Les béguines de l’hôpital des Wetz”, *op. cit.*, p. 40–41.

level of wheat amounted to 790 hl. throughout the entire period, and this remained stable throughout the period 1329-1381. As the average income from the demesne farmland was about 600 hl. before 1358 and 400 hl. after that year, the income from the leasehold remained crucial for the provisioning of the abbey. Rather than being able to rely solely on demesne farming, it had to make use of the cereal income generated by leasehold for its provisioning. Perhaps the size and the functions of the abbey in comparison to the hospitals were important here (a large expense being feeding the poor through alms). Securing almost 800 hl. from direct exploitation could perhaps be too costly in comparison with a diversification towards leasehold. But given the lack of general accounts for the abbey, a clear answer to this question is not possible. The need to secure a stable chain of food supply, as the Sint-Jans hospital and other landlords experienced, remains most plausible in this case as well.

In the case of the landlords in southern Flanders and Cambrai, leasing out a part of their property was also a much needed (and probably the main) method of collecting grain. This differs from the situation of Sint-Jan in Bruges, which collected its leases in cash. However, a part of the leases of the grain that had to be paid to the landlord was frequently converted to cash (using the so-called 'rent prices'), leaving the crop with the tenants and the cash directly with the landlord⁽⁶⁵⁾. This also reduced the effort of those landlords of marketing larger amounts of grain but shows that the strategy of the landlords in southern Flanders and the *Cambrésis* remained focused on generating grain. In essence, the shift from direct exploitation to leasehold (or *vice versa*) was certainly not triggered by a sudden 'shock' or crisis, but rather by gradual evolutions, and given the demographic decline of the middle of the fourteenth century, the main driver seems to have been the population level of the hospital, and hence its grain consumption.

⁽⁶⁵⁾ More information on these rent prices and the ratio between these 'rent prices' and the pure selling prices can be found in S. ESPEEL, *Prices and Crises, op. cit.*, vol. 1, 69–90.

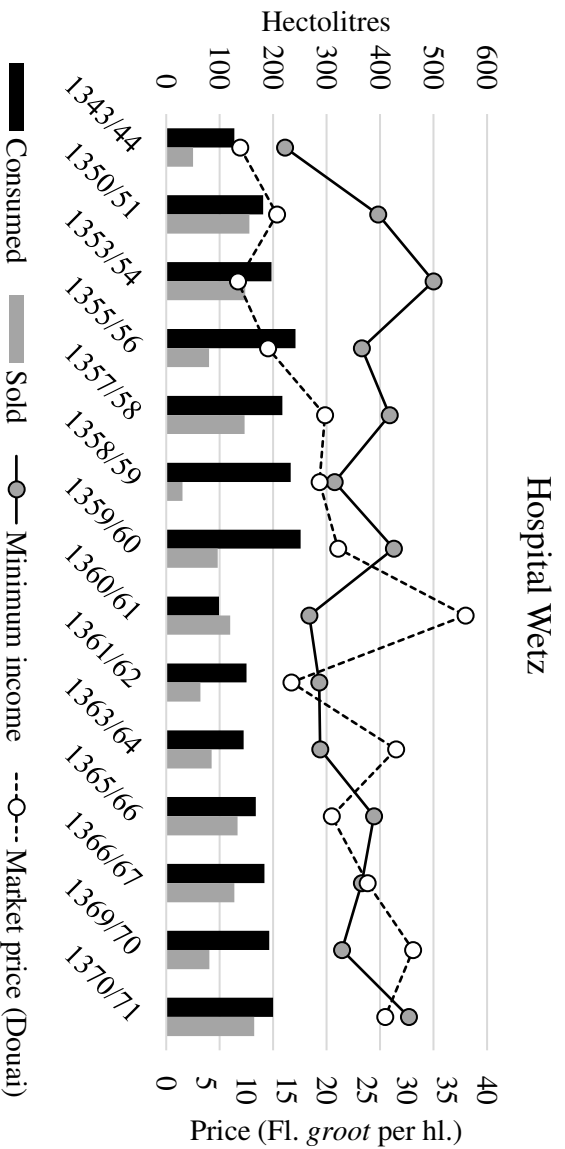
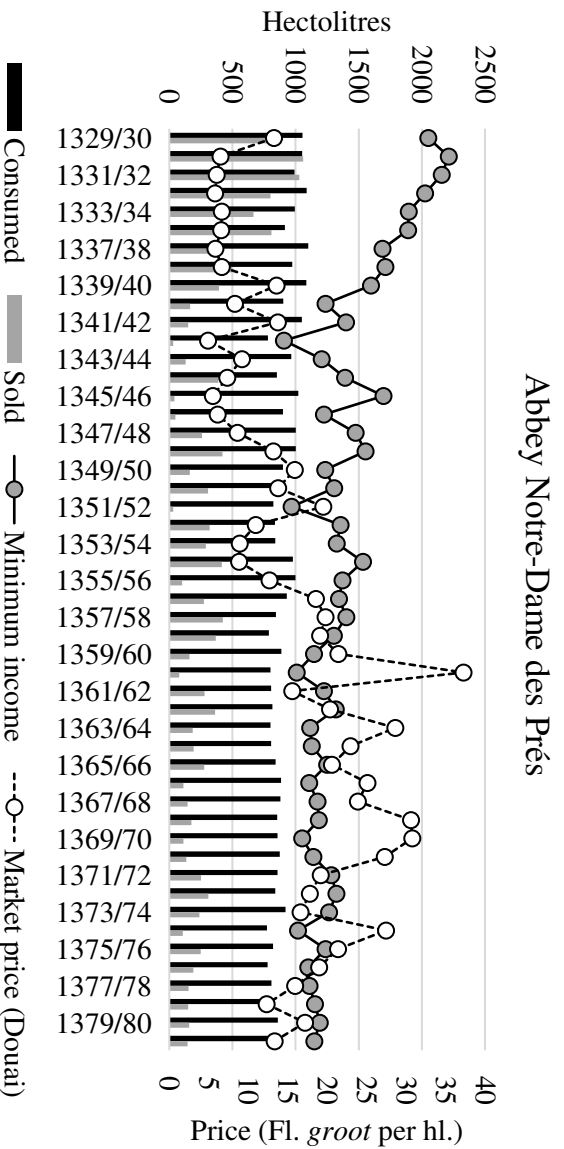
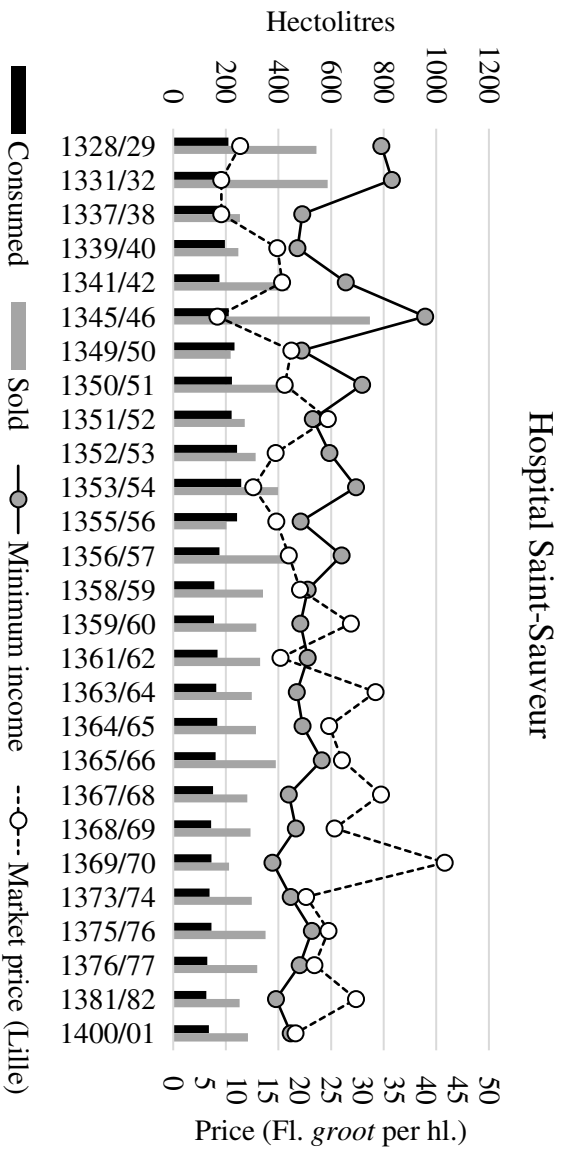
Landlords moved towards securing their access to food with cost-minimisation always in mind also.

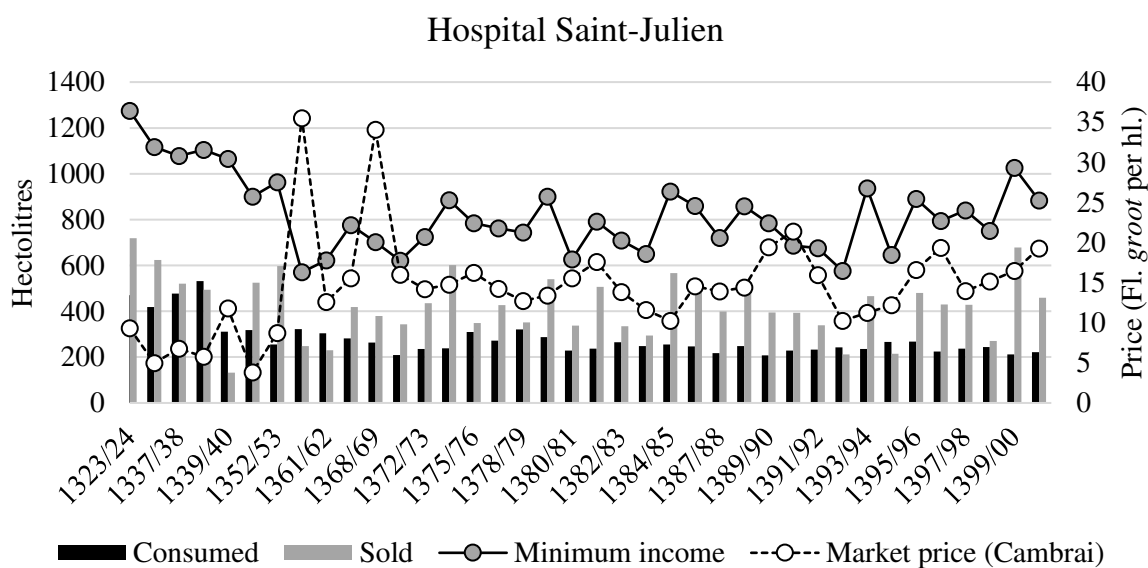
The importance of sales

Even though the previous section put the provisioning of these large ecclesiastical landlords centre stage, the grain income also provided a part of their income in cash because any surplus cereals could be sold. On average, the hospital of Saint-Sauveur received just over a staggering 60 per cent of its cash income from wheat sales. For the other landlords (except for the abbey des Prés, for which it is impossible to calculate that share), this resulted in a quarter of their cash income on average, an immensely important share of income for their household economy. Apart from the big two expenditure markers of consumption and commercialisation, other small expenses were also made in kind: sowing seed for the next harvest, rents, *gavene* (payment to the count of Flanders as ‘protector’ of the ecclesiastical principality of Cambrai), storage costs and other payments, yet all of these are of minor importance due to their relatively small contribution to the total number. As both consumption and commercialisation were in every case the most important markers of expenditure, these were highly if inversely intertwined: the higher the one, the lower the other.

In figure 5, the absolute quantities of wheat consumed and sold are shown next to the wheat price and the *minimum* income of wheat received by the concerning landlord. The *minimum* income is based on the grain which was *used* by the landlord (either consumed or sold) in a given year. This is different from the *total* grain income in the accounts, which is often a theoretical income, and of which parts were not realised.

Figure 5. *The amount of wheat consumed and sold compared with the total (minimum) income and the market price for the different landlords of southern Flanders and Cambrai, fourteenth century.*





Note: the minimum income, the consumed and the sold amount of wheat have been plotted on the primary Y-axis on the left, and the market price has been plotted on the secondary Y-axis on the right.
Sources: Lille, ADN, Archives Hospitalières, VI E, n° 7-11; Douai, AMD, 2 NC, n° 1296-7 & 1336-8; Lille, ADN, 30 H, n° 363; Lille, ADN, 172 H, n° 53-63; Lille, ADN, 4 G, n° 818, 6840-6886. For the market price of wheat, see S. ESPEEL, *Prices and Crises*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2.

For each of the landlords, the consumption level over the century remains relatively stable. Only the hospital of Wetz shows an increase in the 1350s, after which a huge drop occurred in the harvest year 1360/61, possibly caused by the plague epidemic of 1360-61. Such a drop is also visible in the data for the hospital Saint-Julien for the transition from the year 1338/39 to 1339/40. Except for these disruptions, the amount of grain consumed by these landlords hardly changed over the century. As a consequence, the amount of wheat that could be sold – the surplus after consumption – was more subject to the variations of the grain income. While speculation may not have been a deliberate strategy of the landlords, greater profits were nonetheless still realised during periods of high prices, realised through the sale of larger quantities of wheat, typically in years following a major grain crisis when the harvest was better than the previous years and the prices were still high⁽⁶⁶⁾.

⁽⁶⁶⁾ S. ESPEEL, “The Grain Market”, *op. cit.*; ID., *Prices and Crises*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 242–53.

Judging from the fluctuating price evolution and the total *minimum* income, the amount that was sold each year was much more dictated by the actual grain that landlords had at their disposal. Several examples illustrate this perfectly. At the hospital of Saint-Sauveur, the relative higher grain income of 1328/29, 1331/32, 1345/46, 1350/51, 1353/54 and 1356/57 caused spikes in the sold quantity, while in none of these years did the price peak. Throughout the 1330s, the abbey of Notre-Dame des Prés saw its grain income drop by about 1000 hl., which was paralleled by decreasing sales, while consumption remained stable, just like the price. The hospital of Wetz also followed this pattern of selling more wheat when more came in. And lastly, the hospital Saint-Julien equally saw the level of its sales peak when the *minimum* income was higher, for instance in the accounting years of 1352/53, 1362/63, 1373/74, 1384/85, 1393/94, 1399/1400. It is therefore clear that the relative amount of grain that was sold was not dictated by the annual price but instead by the total volume of grain that the landlord had at his disposal. Additionally, consumption and commercialisation were tightly intertwined: the higher the one, the lower the other. As stable consumption seems to have been the priority for most of these ecclesiastical landlords, only the surplus was commercialised.

Conclusion

In this article, the choice for either demesne or leasehold was studied for several landlords in the southern region of Flanders. As was shown for the Sint-Jans hospital in Bruges by Lies Vervaet, the large ecclesiastical landowners situated in the heartland of this grain-producing region all made structural adjustments to the mode of exploitation of their land holdings. Even though the landlords cultivated a wide range of crops, the major share of the exploitation was focused on wheat. This is of course not surprising given both its price, - the margins on this crop could generate vast profits, - and the location, right in the heart of a fertile grain-producing region stretching from southern Flanders to the *Cambrésis*, Artois and Hainaut. The structural

adaptations that these landlords made were, however, not uniform. Whereas the hospital Saint-Sauveur converted a part of its demesne to leaseholds, the hospital of Wetz enlarged its demesne at the expense of the surface that was leased out. The exceptional period of different ‘shocks’ in quick succession in the mid-fourteenth century might have triggered these changes, but we should refrain from seeing the Black Death as *the* prime mover: for the landlords in Lille and Douai, adaptations occurred only in the late 1350s, and, for Cambrai, around 1339-41, when the *Cambrésis* was devastated by war.

Declining consumption – itself provoked by declining populations at the hospitals or abbey – seems to be a possible driver of change for these landlords. At Saint-Sauveur, decreasing consumption of wheat in the second half of the 1350s followed a drop in the population. As a result, its income from the farms under direct management was double or more than what it needed. From 1358 on, it decided to lease out part of that farmland, only keeping enough under its own management to meet its consumption pattern, albeit with a small margin and while still receiving its leases in kind, after which it sold the surplus grain. In contrast, the population at the hospital of Wetz increased during the second half of the 1350s, suggested by an increasing level of grain consumption. This high consumption level was paired with a low income from direct exploitation. The hospital decided to increase the acreage under direct exploitation, securing food to meet its growing demand, even though there are clear signs of short-term adaptations in the cultivation of wheat in the high-price summer of 1361 and the corresponding levels of consumed wheat. This clearly shows the reactive capability of the landlords in the management of their estates, but also underlines the complexity of the strategy of the more structural adaptations.

It should be clear that even in those cases where a transition from demesne farming to leasehold was made, the landlords preferred leases in-kind – close to sharecropping – which still acted as a supplementary supply chain. Though these leases could be converted into monetary values,

such a payment system nevertheless illustrates the persisting importance of collecting large quantities of grain, in particular wheat, in contrast to leasehold practices in the northern part of Flanders, where cash income was preferred. At Saint-Julien and Notre-Dame in Cambrai, where leasehold was the main mode of domain exploitation, the management of it also primarily served to satisfy the subsistence needs of the institution. In times of declining rent prices (and therefore yields from leasehold), both landlords expanded their total leased-out acreage to keep their grain income as stable as possible. The collection of that grain was in the first place used to feed the population of the hospitals, abbeys and probably also the permanent residents of the churches. Such a risk-reducing strategy of securing food supplies (independent from market conditions), allowed them to buffer the impact of dearth and food crises, as has been observed for other regions as well. Nonetheless, the systematic focus on collecting grain, also in the leases, is unique. Additionally, it should be mentioned that all types of landlords – hospitals, abbeys and collegiate churches – adhered to this strategy, despite their varying population numbers and differing socio-economic orientation.

Wheat sales continued to play an essential role in collecting the money needed to fund the other activities of the landlords, albeit of secondary importance compared to consumption. Institutional differences between the landlords certainly affected the internal economic strategies. Monasteries with live-in monks and engaging in alms-giving, hospitals catering for the poor and sick and collegiate churches all had different communities to feed. Sales and profits were in no case steered by the price evolution of the crop, and landlords instead sold wheat according to the surplus left over after consumption, which might have resulted in the starvation of the grain market in years when harvest quality was unsatisfactory. The household economy remained profoundly oriented towards subsistence and household provisioning. The choice of leasing out or directly managing their estates was a part of the food supply strategy and always flexible to new realities. In conclusion, the landlords were far from passive economic actors

who just suffered the environmental changes and hazards of the fourteenth century. They rather reacted to these as active players each in their own setting, with a clear and steady focus on their own survival and well-being, perhaps at the expense of the (poorer) urban populations, who were heavily market-dependent for their food supplies.

SUMMARY

Stef ESPEEL, *Demesne or Leasehold? Estate Management in Southern Flanders during the Price Shocks of the Fourteenth Century*

Recent research has again underlined the importance of the fourteenth century as a period of shocks and systemic transition embedded in a broader context of environmental instability and societal vulnerability. Disease, warfare and harvest failure frequently caused price shocks in the grain market against which players on the grain market had to adapt and react. Based on several series of late medieval accounts I have studied the adaptations in the income and expense strategies of grain by large ecclesiastical landlords, who acted as large producers, distributors and consumers of grain. Rather than being passive bystanders in the grain market, these landlords actively reacted to the changing socioeconomic realities. With their eye on a durable and long-term food income strategy based on their demographic evolution, they adapted their balance between leasehold and direct management of their arable land, in preference to a profit-maximizing approach.

Keywords: County of Flanders – fourteenth century – estate management – leasehold – direct exploitation – urban ecclesiastical landowners – food security

SAMENVATTING

Stef ESPEEL, *Eigen bezit of verpachten? Domeinbeheer in zuidelijk Vlaanderen tijdens de prijsschokken van de veertiende eeuw*

Recent onderzoek heeft opnieuw het belang onderstreept van de veertiende eeuw als een periode van schokken en systeemovergangen, ingebed in een bredere context van instabiliteit en maatschappelijke kwetsbaarheid. Ziekte, oorlog en oogstmislukkingen veroorzaakten vaak prijsschokken op de graanmarkt waaraan verschillende spelers op deze markt zich konden aanpassen en waartegen zij konden reageren. Op basis van verschillende reeksen

laatmiddeleeuwse rekeningen heb ik de aanpassingen bestudeerd in de inkomsten- en uitgavenstrategieën voor graan van kerkelijke grootgrondbezitters, die optraden als grote producenten, distributeurs en consumenten van graan. In plaats van te ageren als passieve toeschouwers op de graanmarkt, reageerden deze grondbezitters duidelijk actief op de veranderende sociaaleconomische realiteit. Met het oog op een duurzame en op hun inwonersaantal afgestemde strategie van voedselzekerheid op langere termijn, hebben zij hun evenwicht tussen pacht en rechtstreeks beheer van hun landbouwgrond aangepast, in plaats van een op winstmaximalisatie gerichte aanpak te volgen.

Sleutelwoorden: Graafschap Vlaanderen – veertiende eeuw – domeinbeheer – pacht – eigen beheer – stedelijk-kerkelijke grootgrondbezitters – voedselveiligheid

Stef ESPEEL, Gestion directe ou fermage ? La gestion des domaines en Flandre méridionale pendant les chocs de prix du XIVe siècle

Des recherches récentes ont à nouveau souligné l'importance du XIVe siècle en tant que période systémique de chocs et de transitions s'inscrivant dans un contexte plus large d'instabilité environnementale et de vulnérabilité sociétale. Les maladies, les guerres et les mauvaises récoltes provoquaient fréquemment des « chocs de prix » sur le marché des céréales, auxquels les acteurs de ce marché devaient s'adapter et réagir. Sur la base de plusieurs séries de comptes de la fin du Moyen Âge, j'ai étudié les adaptations des stratégies de revenus et de dépenses en matière de céréales par les grands propriétaires ecclésiastiques, qui agissaient en tant que grands producteurs, distributeurs et consommateurs de céréales. Plutôt que d'être des spectateurs passifs sur le marché des céréales, ces propriétaires ont clairement réagi activement à l'évolution des réalités socio-économiques. Visant une stratégie de revenus alimentaires durable en adéquation avec la taille de leurs communautés, ils ont adapté leur équilibre entre le fermage et la gestion directe de leur terres arables, plutôt que d'adopter une approche de maximisation des profits.

Mots-clés : Comté de Flandre – XIVe siècle – administration des domaines – fermage – gestion directe – propriétaires ecclésiastiques urbains – sécurité alimentaire