Did inequality produce medieval revolt? The material position and political agency of textile workers during the Flemish Revolt of 1379–1385

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Abstract

Over the past few decades there has been a tendency to focus on the political nature and cultural aspects of medieval collective action, rather than on poverty, inequality and other socio-economic causalities. Based on a detailed re-interpretation of the economic, political, social, and material position of the textile workers who revolted in fourteenth-century Bruges, in the highly urbanized and economically developed county of Flanders, we propose to revaluate inequality and relative deprivation as important driving forces of political upheaval in the medieval city. After the Black Death of 1349, social tensions rose in the main industrial sectors of the urban economy in Flanders. Evidence from the confiscation records drawn up during the repression of a major series of revolts in Flemish towns during the years 1379–1385 shows that while the rebels could hardly be characterized as destitute, the material living conditions of

textile workers did not match their contemporaries' standards. Contrary to the hypothesis of the 'golden age of labour', and at odds with the dominant interpretation of late medieval revolt as being primarily 'political', we argue that the revolt was more closely tied to economic and social changes during the post-Plague period.

Keywords Inequality; textile industry; material culture; revolt; medieval

In discussions about the growing inequality in many areas of the world today, attention is often drawn to the risk of political instability and the violent uprisings it could cause.[1] The danger of popular protest against globalization or capitalism resulting from growing social disparities is frequently invoked by economists, institutions such as the IMF, and even billionaire activists as being one of the prime reasons for acting against growing inequality.[2] While inequality is indeed increasing in many countries, so is the share of GDP dedicated to security and protection against violence.[3] These trends resurrect a debate that has received little attention since the 1980s: does inequality produce political violence?[4] Given the contemporary context, it is surprising that the relation between inequality and political turmoil has received barely any attention in recent historical research on medieval political revolts. The dominant paradigm through which medieval revolts are understood has shifted from a focus on poverty and absolute deprivation in the 1960s and 1970s to an emphasis on political action and its cultural forms since the 1990s. We argue that despite the value of such political and cultural approaches, socio-economic relations should be reintroduced as one of the explanatory models of pre-industrial collective action. Based on a detailed re-interpretation of the economic, political, social and material position of revolting textile workers in fourteenth-century Bruges in the highly urbanized and economically developed county of Flanders, we propose to re-evaluate

inequality and relative deprivation as fundamental driving forces behind political upheaval in the medieval city.

Explaining medieval collective action

Twentieth-century European medievalists, often inspired by classical liberal or Marxist paradigms, considered political conflict in pre-industrial cities both as crucial steps in the emergence of more 'democratic' political institutions as well as the manifestation of socio-economic contradictions, in terms of economic oppression, misery or poverty.[5] The *Annales* historians famously studied wages and prices in order to determine standards of living, searching for connections between dearth, famine, disease, poverty or unemployment on the one hand, and social unrest on the other.[6] Historical materialists explained popular collective action in the context of class contradictions,[7] while in the neo-Malthusian framework revolts were primarily seen as a cyclical phenomenon, determined by medium-term shifts in the balance between population and resources. The limits to growth were never far off, and a temporary imbalance could cause social and political tensions leading to medieval uprisings *liés à la conjuncture*.[8]

Around the same period, the US-based political science school of 'relative deprivation' also considered patterns of growth and crisis as well as how social groups reacted to them. Theorists of relative deprivation reacted primarily against simple schemes they attributed either to Marx ('men will revolt in times of crisis') or Tocqueville ('men will revolt in times of growth'). According to James C. Davies, revolutions 'were most likely to occur when a prolonged period of objective economic and social development is followed by a short period of sharp reversal' while the 'actual state of socioeconomic development is less significant than the expectation that past progress, now blocked, can and must continue in the future'.[9] In a similar manner, T.R. Gurr defined relative deprivation as 'a perceived discrepancy between

men's value expectations and their value capacities', whereby 'value expectations are the goods and conditions of life to which people believe they are rightfully entitled' and value capacities are 'the goods and conditions they think they are capable of attaining or maintaining'. When the intensity of these expectations rises, so does the intensity of discontent.[10]

From the 1980s onwards, however, pre-industrial collective action has increasingly been understood in political rather than social or economic terms. Historical sociologist Charles Tilly and historian Wim Blockmans considered later medieval revolts primarily as forms of resistance against state formation, and this became the dominant paradigm in the 1990s.[11] Even if state formation has now become a less prominent *explanans*, the collective action by insurgent craftsmen and other burghers is still often explained by reference to their political ambitions.[12] According to Samuel K. Cohn Jr, medieval revolts with a primarily economic aim were rare. Generally, urban rebels fundamentally aimed at gaining political rights, Cohn states, and it is hard to link their actions to economic cycles. Even revolts against monetary policies, taxes or government measures dealing with the import or export of grain and other foodstuffs, which at first sight appear to be 'economic' in nature, were in fact primarily formulated as 'political' demands addressed to local governments.[13] In another chiefly political approach to the question, Patrick Lantschner has emphasized the necessity for urban rebels to form inter-class coalitions and to bargain within a polycentric political order if they were to be successful.[14] Accession to political power itself and not, for example, maintaining living standards or creating favourable economic conditions, is therefore considered the central concern of medieval popular politics. Moreover, under the influence of both the 'linguistic' and 'performative turns', historians have also increasingly shifted their focus towards the rebels' ideological utterances and the forms of verbal and ritual communication they deployed. The circulation of gossip and news, the formation of popular ideologies, as well as the rituals,

speech acts and other performances of medieval collective action make up a growing number of studies.[15]

While it is true that any collective action 'from below' is clearly political in nature by definition, and even if the distinction between 'the economic' and 'the political' was arguably less clear-cut in pre-capitalist societies than in the modern industrial world, we feel that the field is out of balance.[16] Causalities of a socio-economic nature should be reintroduced in the debate on medieval rebellion. The present article will analyze both the social and economic circumstances of a well-documented Flemish Revolt in order to argue that the primary causes of collective action during this period should be reconsidered. In the first section we present the political context in which the revolt took place, especially that of Bruges, followed by an overview of the economic circumstances. The paper then examines who the rebels were and assesses their occupational as well as financial status. In the final section, the domestic material culture of textile workers who revolted is examined in order to argue that the revolt was motivated by relative deprivation or inequality.

The Flemish Revolt of 1379–1385

From the eleventh century onwards, cities in Flanders such as Ghent, Ypres, Douai, Arras and Bruges produced woollen cloth that was destined for European-wide export on a large scale. It was during the thirteenth century that the exportation of cloth from Flanders reached its pinnacle. During the fourteenth century, rising transaction costs that resulted from a general climate of insecurity and war led to a gradual reconversion process of the cloth industry of the largest Flemish towns. In Ghent, Bruges and Ypres, production for export was increasingly reoriented towards expensive quality cloth that had a greater added value. This strategy proved successful in the long run although it did not prevent the Flemish textile industry from experiencing cyclical crises and stress. Increased competition with other European regions, as

well as between both large and smaller towns and rural production centres within Flanders itself, led to insecurity in the markets and several reconversion crises in the various Flemish production centres.[17]

Despite these setbacks, Flemish textile industries remained tremendously important throughout the fourteenth century. Weavers, fullers, shearers and other cloth workers, who made up about one-third of the population in Bruges (with a total population of some 40,000 to 50,000 before the Black Death) and more than half in Ghent (60,000 to 70,000) and Ypres (20,000 to 30,000), were organized into powerful craft guilds. Unsurprisingly they often occupied the main stage in the popular struggles that characterized urban politics during this period. Cloth workers often formed coalitions with other groups in urban society, retailers and other small commodity-producing artisans, for instance, but also with some parts of the elite. Middle-class artisans would usually also lead unskilled workers in their struggles, many of whom were female labourers.[18]

Outbreaks of popular collective action that struck Flemish cities were sometimes part of larger waves that swept across great swathes of north-western Europe. Perhaps the most extensive wave of popular collective action in medieval Europe took place around 1378–1383 – a period often denoted as *les années révolutionnaires*.[19] This cycle encompassed the 1378 *Ciompi* uprising in Florence and the 1381 Peasants' Revolt in England, but also the movement of the *Tuchins* in Languedoc, the *Harelle* in Rouen, the rebellion of the *Maillotins* in Paris, as well as collective action by craft guilds and other burghers in German cities such as Braunschweig, Hamburg, Danzig and Lübeck.[20] The most protracted rebellion during these revolutionary years took place in Flanders and is sometimes called the 'Ghent War' because the city openly rose up against Count Louis de Male in 1379. Riots soon spread to Bruges and Ypres and also affected smaller towns and the countryside, although Ghent would remain the epicentre. The revolt united various social groups, each with their own reasons for rebelling,

but it was textile workers who formed the vanguard everywhere. Ghent submitted to comital power in 1385 and was subsequently spared punishment for participating – an indication of the weakness of the new count, Duke Philip of Burgundy. Scholarly consensus has been that the reasons for the revolt in Ghent were political first and foremost; the primary cause has been understood as resistance to princely centralization, a cause shared by the merchant elite and the corporatist elites.[21]

In September 1379, Bruges weavers and fullers joined the Ghent rebels and managed to seize power in their own city. In the commercial metropolis of Bruges, where a smaller percentage of the population consisted of textile workers, the rebellion had a more restricted social base than was the case in Ghent. In May 1380, the count's partisans, who included richer craft guilds like the butchers, fishmongers and furriers, managed once again to gain the upper hand. A new attempt by the weavers and their allies to return to power failed and they lost the right to elect their own guild leadership. However, in May 1382, the Ghent rebels defeated the Bruges loyalists and Ghent subsequently occupied its rival city, supported by many Bruges artisans. The weavers regained all the privileges they had lost two years earlier.[22] Victory did not last long, however, and in November 1382, combined French and comital forces defeated the united Flemish rebels at the battle of Westrozebeke. Repression in Bruges was harsh: in 1383 and 1384, 224 rebels were executed. Duke Philip's punishments included stripping the crafts of their political and military powers.[23] In 1387 and 1391, smaller attempts at popular revolt took place in Bruges in which the textile workers again played a central role, but they failed utterly. For the next 25 years, Bruges would be run by an oligarchic regime comprised mostly of members of rich commercial families but with the support of some wealthier guildsmen.[24]

The backdrop to the Flemish Revolt was to a large degree determined by the Black Death. Historians have long held the view that Flanders had been conspicuously spared from

the deadly impact of the plague although recent research has challenged this view, pointing to severe demographic and economic disruptions throughout the second half of the fourteenth century.[25] The plague, which raged fiercely in 1360–1361 and 1368–1369, was responsible for excess mortality in the Netherlands and elsewhere. If the demographic impact of the disease in Flanders is now undisputed – particularly in the Flemish cities of Bruges, Ghent and Ypres – the social and economic consequences of it remain a matter of debate. One historiographical tradition has tended to emphasize the beneficial effect of the Black Death on living standards and inequality, certainly between 1375 and 1475, while another tradition has argued that inflation and stricter labour legislation created precisely the opposite effect. This controversy is highly significant for the debate about late medieval urban revolts. If the period after the Black Death, and particularly the fifteenth century according to Thorold Rogers and Karl Marx, was a 'golden age for labour', late medieval revolts can easily be categorized as attempts to seize political power by an upwardly mobile group.[26] If, in contrast, the position of labouring classes during this period is considered in a less positive light, inequality or impoverishment emerge as the more likely causes for revolt.

The optimistic perspective on living standards in the post-Black Death period largely relies on a neo-Malthusian framework in which the scarcity of labour is seen as a driver of higher wages and social mobility, especially in the countryside.[27] For late medieval England, Mark Bailey has convincingly argued that despite landlords' reactionary inclinations, the social and economic condition of unfree agricultural labourers improved almost immediately after the Black Death.[28] The pessimistic argument, on the other hand, rests on the observation that the disruption of the rural economy and the increased supply of coinage per capita resulted in a sudden increase in prices. For instance, after the 1360–1361 and 1368–1369 plagues, the price of rye in Flanders doubled in the short term.[29] This was accompanied by severe inflation in the medium term. Between 1337 and 1364, Count Louis de Male had reduced the bullion

content of the Flemish *groat* by half across some 19 different coin issues, while gold coinage was beset by similar chaos. In a context where wages were often inflexible or 'sticky'', the effect of the demographic shocks of the fourteenth century on social and economic conditions did not automatically yield a 'golden age' for all labouring classes. Only in the final decade of the fourteenth century did a drastic coin debasement usher in a period of deflation and an increase in real wages for the majority of the urban wage workers in Flanders.[30]

A social profile of the revolt

While the 1379–1385 revolt in Ghent, supported by a broader coalition of forces, has been deemed 'political' by previous historians, the contemporary Bruges and Ypres risings have been labelled as more 'social' or 'socio-economic' revolts.[31] What is meant by this distinction, either implicitly or explicitly, is that the objective causes or 'triggers' of collective action, or the subjective motives for people to participate in it, were grounded either in the conquest of, or participation in, public power (for instance, guild elites demanding a seat on the city council), or in more structural socio-economic contradictions or trends (for instance, artisans demanding higher piece wages). Was the Bruges uprising indeed a 'social' revolt? In order to assess this interpretation it is necessary to gain a better view of the social profile of the actual people taking part in revolts. The main sources for doing this are the confiscation records that have been preserved for Bruges.[32] After November 1382, when the comital party had won in Bruges, confiscations were implemented as a means of repression and punishment. Everyone who had compromised themselves by having taken up arms against the count during the revolt, by having fled the city after the comital victory, or by having been banished, was considered a rebel and was liable to confiscation. In total, the belongings of 286 rebels were confiscated.[33] In six different accounts, drawn up between 1 December 1383 and 22 October 22 1384, the princely officers recorded the values of properties seized by them. In order to determine these

values they visited the houses and the survivors subject to confiscation.[34] These confiscation records form the basis of our analysis here.

The most common cause for confiscation was for having taken up arms against the count and having subsequently died on the battlefield (44% of confiscated households).[1] Others had been captured or executed (8%). A significant portion of the individuals whose properties were confiscated had also fled (20%) or been banished (4%) – in which case we can presume they might have taken some of their belongings with them. Most confiscated households (61%) belonged to married couples, meaning that in those cases where the head of household was deceased, the widow and children were allowed to inherit half of the property's value which was exempt from confiscation.[35] In those cases, the values recorded in the confiscation rolls were doubled in order to estimate the household's total wealth. Given the difficult circumstances in which household possessions were identified, enumerated and appraised, it is likely that omissions and guesswork were not uncommon. Nevertheless, for a group of 286 Bruges residents who belonged to the party of revolters (the 'wicked ones' or '*de quaden*'), it is possible to gain a unique insight into their social profile, their financial means and possessions. In 107 cases, no occupational title was given in the sources, however, it is possible to identify the occupation of a further 28 rebels through the objects and tools mentioned in the confiscation inventories when cross-referenced with complementary sources such as municipal accounts.[36] It is thus possible to determine the occupations of a total of 207 insurgents (Figure 1 and Appendix).

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

[1] For 77% of the confiscations the circumstances or cause for confiscation has been recorded.

Of all the insurgents whose occupation is known, 31% were involved in the textile industry – by far the largest group in the sample. By comparing the occupational distribution of the confiscation records with the urban militia repartitions of 1338–1340 and 1436, a rough indication can be gained of the relative over- or under-representation of specific occupational groups in the rebelling population. Compared to the situation in 1338–1340, the textile sector seems to have been roughly proportionally represented among the punished rebels, but when compared to the situation in 1436 – when the textile guilds contributed a smaller share to the urban militia – the sector was significantly over-represented. It is important to note that the representation *within* the textile sector was not uniform. The majority of textile producers involved in the revolt were cloth weavers: 47 or 16% of the total sample. Since we have lists of all 342 able-bodied cloth weavers present in Bruges in December 1380 and March 1381 (when they were forced to take an oath never to take up arms again), a comparison of the names in the confiscation records indicates that no less than 14% of all able-bodied weavers participated in the revolt (see Figure 2).[37]

[INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE]

Compared to their share in the urban militias in 1338 and 1436, craftsmen specialized in the production of furniture and utensils, such as blacksmiths and other types of metalworkers, are also strongly over-represented among confiscated households. The active involvement of metallurgists in the rebellion was indeed attested to by several fifteenth-century chronicles. In fact, one of the leaders of the rebellion in Bruges was a blacksmith; Simon Cokermoes was reported to have almost killed Count Louis de Male when he fled the city after the Ghent militia had crushed the loyalist army at the Beverhoutsveld.[38] While we cannot prove why they were eager to join the rebel ranks, de Meyer and Sosson have shown that in 1394–1396 the majority of metalworking artisans identified in tax lists belonged to the lowest fiscal

class. Studies on metalworkers in late medieval Europe have indicated strong levels of polarization in metalworking guilds, with a small minority monopolizing leading positions and a large majority living in poverty.[39] Similar oligarchic and polarizing tendencies might have spurred the cordwainers and tailors (included in the 'Confection, leather and furs' sector) to join the rebellion. The strong growth of the confection sector during the fourteenth century did not benefit all artisans equally. Of the 26 tailors identified in the 1394–1396 tax lists, 73% belonged to the lowest fiscal class and 27% to the middle class, with none being found in the higher fiscal strata. A similar pattern holds for the cordwainers, although the sample for this group is small.[40]

While households active in textile production, metallurgy and confection industries were over-represented among insurgents, those active in commercial or mercantile activities were strongly under-represented. They account for only 10% of the identified rebels while at that time this sector probably made up as much as a quarter of the entire urban population. From the beginning of the fourteenth century, the commercial classes (comprised of rich burghers, brokers, hostellers and international merchants) often worked together with affluent members of the craft guilds to oppose the craftsmen and artisans of lesser economic and political status.[41] For many of them, the disruptions caused by the civil war were not only harmful to their business interests but also to their position in the social and political hierarchy of the city. The fact that some working in luxury crafts, as well as members of the commercial class, did nevertheless join the ranks of the rebels is probably partly due to the allure of the pro-English politics of Philip of Artevelde, rebel leader of Ghent, but the same also often happened during other medieval revolts.[42] England was a crucial trading partner for Bruges and this must have appealed to the economic interests of some members of the upper classes. Pro-English sentiments probably also moved Jacob de Scutelare to join the rebels. Although he himself was a brewer and spice monger, Jacob was a member of a well-known family of

merchants, brokers and hostellers specialized in English wool and the accommodation of merchants from across the Channel. Others might have seen the uprising as a unique opportunity for upward social mobility or as a chance to participate in urban politics. Perhaps this was also the case for Pieter Huerel, a hosteller who ran a successful business for foreign traders on the expensive *Vlamingstraat*, near the central market square. Since he was a bastard and therefore not eligible for public office, the prospect of reversing the existing social and moral structures might have spurred him to join the rebellion.[43]

In terms of social composition, the rebels who had their possessions confiscated clearly did not form a homogeneous group. According to Van Oost, the lower-status groups most likely rebelled for economic reasons, whereas the upper-status groups presumably had political motivations to do so.[44] If that were indeed the case, the Bruges revolt appears to have been both political and economic, depending on which layers of the rebelling group one looks at. This finding is also borne out by the extreme inequality in confiscated wealth among the rebelling households (Tables 1 and 2). In the full sample of confiscated households, the range between the highest confiscated value and the lowest was extreme, with a highly positively skewed distribution: a long tail on the upper side of the mode. Most households were concentrated in a relatively narrow band of 40 lb parisis (hereafter par.) and lower, whereas a small but significant group held wealth estimated at more than 100 lb par.

[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]

[INSERT TABLE 2 HERE]

This highly unequal distribution of wealth can also be expressed in terms of more conventional measures of wealth inequality. The Gini coefficient for confiscated wealth was 0.70 – a very high level of inequality by all standards (0 denotes perfect equality, 1 denotes

perfect inequality where 1 person has everything and all the others have nothing).[45] Although only few opportunities for comparison are available for this period, most indicate lower levels of wealth inequality based on tax lists. In the early fifteenth century the cities of Verona and Bergamo had estimated Gini coefficients for wealth inequality at 0.57 and 0.67 respectively.[46] Tuscan cities in the last quarter of the fourteenth century also showed smaller inequalities in their wealth distribution than the confiscated households in Bruges: the Gini coefficient was 0.59 in Prato (1375), 0.66 in San Gimignano (1375) and 0.48 in Arezzo (1390).[47]

[INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE]

This inequality was predominantly the result of the extreme disparity between households in lower-status occupations in the bottom half of the distribution, and a few very rich households of hostellers, brokers, merchants and rentiers at the bottom of the distribution (See Figure 3). A decomposition of the Gini coefficient over 11 different occupational groups shows that most of the total inequality in the wealth distribution results from the differences between occupational groups (0.40), whereas only a small share is generated by within-group inequality (0.09). In terms of wealth, the groups in the textile, transport, and day-labouring sectors clearly belonged to a different world compared to the other occupational groups of confiscated households (Figure 4). For those groups, and in particular for the well-represented textile sector, it is not unlikely that economic difficulties and financial stress were part of their everyday experience. Van Oost has indicated that, although the average wealth per occupational group included in the confiscation rolls was slightly higher than the average wealth of these groups in the 1394–1396 tax registers, the rebelling group as a whole was still poorer than the Bruges population in general.[48] This was primarily due to the over-representation of the textile workers, whose economic profile diverged from that of the other

groups – both in the confiscation sample and in the wider working population of Bruges. The kernel density plot (a technique for visualizing the distribution of a continuous variable) in Figure 5 highlights the disparity between confiscated values within the textile workers group and the other occupational groups in the confiscation rolls. It shows an estimate of the underlying wealth distribution of the textile sector compared to the wealth distribution for all confiscated households, estimated from the available samples. The group of textile workers shows a stronger concentration in the bottom regions of the distribution and was absent from much of the upper tail compared to the rest of the confiscation sample (See Figure 6).

[INSERT FIGURE 4 HERE]

[INSERT TABLE 3 HERE]

[INSERT TABLE 4 HERE]

[INSERT FIGURE 5 HERE]

[INSERT FIGURE 6 HERE]

Based on this analysis of the wealth confiscated from rebelling households, the Bruges revolt appears not to have been a single 'political' or 'economic' uprising, but rather a combination of both. The rebelling party of the '*quaden*' was composed of a small upper tail, which might have revolted for political reasons, and a strong concentration of artisans working in an industrial context of high polarization and minimal financial reserves. Those people working in the textile sector in particular, the most over-represented group in the rebelling party, appear to have had different wealth profiles compared to most of the other groups of confiscated households.

The material basis of revolt

For a subset of the confiscation records discussed above, it is possible to go beyond basic information about occupations and approximate wealth to study household possessions. The material world of household possessions – whether based on archaeological or historical data – can offer a unique insight into the everyday luxuries and living conditions of subaltern groups of the past.[49] In development economics, where reliable data on household budgets is not always easy to come by, it is not uncommon to measure living standards by counting the presence or absence of specific household goods in an index of (basic) comfort.[50] The comparison of levels of domestic material comfort over time, across space, or between subgroups can also be a compelling alternative to wage- and price-based approaches to living standards for historical research.[51] Especially when dealing with groups for whom wages or budgets are almost entirely missing, such as medieval textile workers, the confiscated goods of the 1383–1384 rebels in Bruges offers a providential source.

The level of comfort generated by material possessions is, to a large extent, dependent on context. Whether amenities were seen as a necessity or luxury largely depends on societal perceptions and comparisons. In order to infer social positions from the presence or absence of material possessions thus depends on comparison to societal benchmarks. There are two ways in which the confiscation rolls from Bruges in 1383–1384 allow us to do this. First, the wording used by the clerks recording the inventories sometimes offers implicit comparisons to expected standards of material comfort. The use of diminutive terms (in Middle Dutch generally indicated by the suffix *–kin*), references to the shoddiness of items, and remarks about their appearance or age implicitly compares the items listed in a confiscation to the mental frame of reference of the administrators recording the inventories. Secondly, it is also possible to compare presence/absence matrices of household goods between different groups. To this end, we exploit the diversity within the sample of confiscation records (see above) to mimic a comparative research design. First, we limit the group under scrutiny to only those confiscation

records pertaining to the textile workers – the occupational group which we know was not only the organizational backbone of the revolt, but also the most strongly over-represented group among the insurgents. Secondly, we compare the level of material comfort present among this group of textile workers to a control group of rebels from occupational groups that were relatively under-represented among the insurgent party and which can be assumed to have belonged to the broad middling groups of Bruges in the 1380s.

Table 5 shows the breakdown of a sample of 26 confiscation inventories that can be studied in detail. Of the 11 weavers, 2 fullers, 1 comber and 1 bleacher, the confiscated possessions are listed in sufficient detail to allow their material living conditions to be studied. We will examine these 15 inventories in detail. We compiled a sample of 11 inventories of people unrelated to the textile industry to serve as a control group, selecting them in a stratified way so as to reflect the full diversity of occupations and wealth among confiscated households.

[INSERT TABLE 5 HERE]

How did the insurgent textile producers live in late medieval Bruges? With only two exceptions, every textile producer's place of residence mentioned (9 households, or 82%) was explicitly described as being small or was expressed in the diminutive form.[52] In the majority of cases (55%) references were made to the bad quality or miserable state of the house ('*quaed*', '*odelijc*', '*stroyen*'). By contrast, only one of the five identified homes in the control group, of a poor baker, was described as small (20%), and none was referred to as being in a bad state. Most of the textile workers seem to have been relatively concentrated in an area on the north-western side of Bruges known as Cattevoorde, stretching southwards from the Ezelstraat to Rozendal (Figure 7). The weaver Clais van den Boomgaerde had a miserable ('*odelijc*') little house ('*huusekin*') on the Ezelstraat. The linen weaver Willem Roegiers also lived in the

Cattevoorde neighbourhood, in a small straw house (‘*stroyen huussekin*’) in front of the wooden frames on which the woollen cloths were hung after fulling. Another weaver, Pauwels Storm, owned a small place (‘*stedekin*’) next to the city ramparts (‘*al an de veste*’). Although some weavers lived elsewhere in the town (Gheeraerd de Buc in the Oude Gentweg in the south-east, and Jan van de Walle in the Sint-Jansstraat, presumably to the west), almost all locations were peripheral in a spatial sense. In six out of the nine identified houses, a location next to or behind the moat (‘*vesten*’, ‘*walle*’) was explicitly indicated.[53]

[INSERT FIGURE 7 HERE]

The material culture of non-aristocratic households in medieval Europe has traditionally been considered to have been sparse and unsophisticated. Few collections of probate inventories of non-elite populations have been preserved from the medieval period with even fewer having been studied or published.[54] Compared to inventories from the sixteenth century and later, most surviving medieval inventories indicate fewer rooms, items, decoration and less diverse materials than in the early modern period. Nevertheless, in recent years several historians have emphasized the early roots of consumerism, domesticity, and the coming about of a more sophisticated domestic material culture in the medieval city.[55] In this context it is striking to note that in the sample of inventories from the reference group in Bruges (Table 3), a level of domestic comfort can be found that generally surpassed that of most other published sets of medieval inventories. For instance, compared to the inventories of inhabitants of Winchester whose goods were forfeited to the crown in 1381, the urban households described in the Bruges inventories owned increasingly diverse possessions.[56]

Late medieval Genovese inventories show that these households appear to have been materially somewhat better off, at least with regard to the ownership of clothes, bedding and

jewellery, than the average household in our Bruges confiscation sample.[57] The inventories of some of the rich households included in the confiscation sample indicate that in late medieval Bruges comparable domestic luxuries were not unheard of. The cloth merchant Willem Koucke owned traditional markers of prestige such as a full set of armour, including a sword and a double-sided axe, and also possessed more domestic markers of comfort and sociability. He owned two tables, a silver serving plate, two chandeliers and 18 individual dining plates, as well as four bench cloths, three chairs and 16 sitting cushions – all in all making for a more than respectable environment in which to dine comfortably and receive guests. The wife of Jan van Biervliet, a Bruges skipper of considerable means, owned a mantle of expensive white cloth lined with silver buttons while Jan himself had a cape with silver buttons and a knife with a heft made out of ivory. The aforementioned hosteller Pieter Huerel not only possessed 'Parisian' chandeliers, and a 'Prussian' table, elaborate furniture and dining equipment, but also owned expensive clothes, weaponry, and supplies of various beers and fine spices.

By contrast, the textile producers of the late fourteenth century do not seem to have shared much of this material sophistication, a medieval 'consumer revolution' or an emergent culture of 'domesticity'.[58] Compared to the control group, a typical inventory of a textile worker in the confiscation sample was decidedly slight. Table 6 shows the 'essential' or 'typical' inventory of each group, defined by those items owned by at least half of all households in the group.

[INSERT TABLE 6 HERE]

As can be discerned from Table 6, the median inventory of a textile-producing household in fourteenth-century Bruges contained only a few possessions. Most households possessed a *bedde*, which probably referred to both the wooden box and the straw mattress that was placed on it, but no bedsheets, pillows or blankets. It contained a chest that could double as a sitting

bench (*lijs*), but no sheet to cover it (*banccleet*), nor a table, stools or chairs. There was the essential cauldron to hang over the fire, and a few pieces of tinwork to serve meals from, but no other vessels for cooking, drinking or eating were typically present. Apart from the clothes of the surviving widows and children, and the clothes of the deceased husband, there was usually only one piece of overclothing and a cape (*caproen*). This cape was the only item commonly found in the textile-producing inventories, but only rarely so in the inventories of the control group (22%). However, a wide range of other goods was much more commonly found in the inventories of the reference group than in those of the textile producers. Similar discrepancies between the textile inventories and the control group can be observed when looking at the aggregate numbers of objects recorded per household (Table 7).

[INSERT TABLE 7 HERE]

The sparsity of the confiscated inventories does not, of course, necessarily reflect fully fledged material destitution. Archaeological research has shown that simple items made out of cheap materials (such as stoneware or wood) were often left unrecorded in archival sources even though they are prevalent in archaeological deposits.[59] This is particularly the case when the historical sources were drawn up explicitly for the purpose of gauging financial value as in the case of confiscations. It is likely that only the more valuable items – such as silver spoons or tin saucers – were recorded consistently, whereas cheaper and less valuable equivalents – wooden spoons or stone cups – were not. However, since very minor items such as a single towel (*dwale*) or stone jug (*stoop*) were also mentioned in the Bruges records, it seems unlikely that this under-representation was extreme.

In a romanticized story, the fifteenth-century Middle Dutch translation of Jean Froissart's famous chronicle describes how the Count of Flanders found himself trapped in

Bruges when the rebel army from Ghent had seized the town in 1380. Alone and in despair, the count fled from alley to alley and by midnight entered a small open house in a dirty back street. The house – occupied by a poor woman and her children – did not contain a *camerkijn* (a *camere*), meaning that it consisted only of a main hall where the fireplace was located and a 'bad' half-attic that was reached via a ladder. Since there was no separate *camere*, and the (probably centrally located) hearth needed ventilation, the ceiling was 'full of holes', and a worn, old bedsheet was used in an attempt to keep out the wind. The count managed to escape the Ghent search parties who were looking for him by hiding under the straw bed in the attic where the children slept. This bed seems to have been one of the only pieces of furniture in the otherwise sparse room and it was the only hiding place the old woman could think of. Unlike the majority of the textile producers who left a confiscated inventory, she apparently did not possess a *lijs* (chest). This paucity led the woman to exclaim to the Ghent rebels that they could easily see all that she had: her own bed downstairs and the bed for her children upstairs.[60] This stereotypical image of poverty in late fourteenth-century Bruges portrayed by Froissart was worse than anything the textile workers studied here experienced, even if not by much.

Confiscated items such as the embroidered cape (*caproen*) owned by the (otherwise poor) weaver Jan Gaweloos, the black veil (*faelge*) and two padded (*gevoedert*) gowns possessed by the linen weaver Willem Roegiers's wife, or the large silver plate owned by the draper Pieter de Grave indicate that most of these households were probably not absolutely destitute. A similar conclusion is suggested by the outstanding debts recorded for these households. The fact that almost all of the weaving, fulling and shearing households included in our sample (81%) had both in- and outgoing debts points to their widespread access to, and involvement in, the late medieval market economy.[61] Some of this debt was short-term, as in the case of consumptive credit or accumulated arrears in payments, but most households also participated in the market for long-term debt. Eight of the textile producers in the sample

inhabited a house that they (or previous owners) had used as collateral for selling non-redeemable annuities – only two lived in a self-owned home free of debt.[62] The median value of redeemable debt per house was 60 d. Flemish groats (hereafter gr.) per year – which is relatively low. To provide some perspective: this amount represents approximately 6% of a contemporary labourer's yearly wage[63] – which is at the lower end of the estimated burden of long-term debt calculated for Bruges during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.[64]

The value of the annuities collateralized on the homes was also relatively modest compared to the median of house rent paid by weavers around this time. In the Saint James district, the quarter of Bruges that included the Cattevoorde area, the median house rent for weavers was 267 d. gr. per year in 1392–1394.[65] This suggests that either rental values were high compared to house (sale) prices or that only a small portion of house values were collateralized. Either way, the modest level of indebtedness and the large prevalence of home ownership suggest that textile producers who revolted enjoyed relative security in the provision of their housing and access to financial markets – even if this was only at a low level.

Although the weavers, shearers and fullers in the confiscation sample did not live in abject destitution, their living conditions were certainly poor in relative terms. From the perspective of receiver Willem Slijp, who recorded the confiscated goods, Pauwels Storm's bed was in a bad condition (*quaet*), while his pillow case was old and useless (*ijdel oude*). Weaver Jan Clarroud's cupboard was also in bad condition, and so were Gheeraerd de Buc's cauldron, Coppin van Stookevelt's *lijs*, Willem Roegiers's bed, Jan van de Walle's chairs, and many more (*quaet*, *quaede*). Lisebette Raes, the wife of a wool comber who died on the battlefield, owned only two dresses (*vrouwenfrox*), both of which were in bad condition (*quade*). The bed of the weaver Jan Vlugaerd was not only in similarly bad condition (*quaet*), it was also described as miserly (*oodelik*).

Even if the textile producers of late fourteenth-century Bruges had most of the basic amenities needed to live a life above the absolute poverty line, their goods were clearly regarded as being deficient relative to an implicit standard of expected comfort and quality. Based upon the material possessions found in the homes of textile workers who revolted in the 1380s, it would be hard to argue that they joined the rebelling party because of hunger or economic misery. However, what emerges from the confiscation records is the degree to which their material living conditions were judged to be lacking and sparse compared to not only the standards of the inventory takers but also their richer counterparts.

A socio-economic interpretation of the revolt

The analysis of the Bruges confiscation rolls from 1382–1384 indicates that the organizational and numerical backbone of the Flemish Revolt in Bruges was comprised of workers in industrial sectors, such as the textile sector, characterized by a significant degree of inequality and relative impoverishment compared to the urban economy at large. It is possible that the medium-term impact of the Black Death had contributed to the lowering of living standards for these labouring classes. Reconstructions of construction labourers' real wages in the countryside near Bruges have painted a cautiously optimistic image of post-Black Death living standards, indicating a slight increase from the 1360s onwards.[66] The standard of living of construction workers in late medieval Bruges as calculated by Sosson also suggest an upward trend between 1362 and 1399, even though the debate about the quality and diversity of both the wage and price series underpinning this is ongoing. More recent reconstructions by John Munro have, in fact, shown quite the opposite; real wages for builders in England and the Southern Low Countries initially plunged before recovering again by the end of the century.[67]

It would be a mistake, however, to take the daily wage rate of labourers in the building trade as being representative of the experience of the masses of labouring people in pre-

industrial times. Varying employment opportunities and labour inputs, the difference between piece rates and daily rates, the contrast between petty commodity producers and wage labourers, and the diverging experience of different economic sectors can all produce substantial differences between the commonly used real wage series and the social and economic experience of the majority of working people in the past.[68] Reconstructions of meat and fish consumption in late medieval hospitals in Flanders indeed support a more pessimistic take on living standards in the second half of the fourteenth century as they only suggest an increase from the fifteenth century onwards.[69] Although relying on different sources over a longer time period, a preliminary analysis of the wealth declared in orphan inventories from the city of Ghent between 1350 and 1400 has suggested no reduction in wealth inequality across the city as a whole until the very end of the fourteenth century.[70]

The export-oriented industrial base of Flemish cities was more vulnerable during the post-Plague period than the construction sector, for instance. The price of finished textile products rose less rapidly than the prices of agricultural products and demand for textile goods might have taken a hit during this period. The huge demographic shock throughout Mediterranean Europe – perhaps the primary export region for Flemish cloth – and a prolonged commercial crisis as a result of rising transaction costs likewise affected the profitability of the industry.[71] Cloth merchants and producers were thus confronted with a looming profit squeeze. Within this context of an export industry under pressure, the often-opposing interests of artisan-entrepreneurs (the *drapiers* or 'clothiers'), merchants and different groups of labourers concerning the regulating of the production process appeared increasingly at odds. Contrary to the situation in the Italian city-states or England, there is very little trace of central legislation that dealt with artisan industrial relations in the post-Plague period.[72] However, this does not mean that Flemish labour conditions were unregulated and dependent solely on market mechanisms. The corporative institutions and urban political bodies, which were already in

place in the Flemish cities well before the Black Death, were the main channels through which labour and production were regulated.

Many of the political struggles that took place during the second half of the fourteenth century involved a struggle over the control of labour regulation. As labourers tried to use their relative scarcity as leverage for better working conditions, others reacted to the profit squeeze they faced by trying to keep labour costs low. Sometimes urban magistrates interfered by attempting to keep the mobility of weavers in check so as to keep labour supply sufficiently high after the Black Death, for instance.[73] In other cases, the struggle over setting wages and the organization of production took the shape of conflicts between guilds who each organized different stages of the production process. In 1355, the fullers of Dendermonde complained about the poverty they experienced and which was caused by low piece rates and growing inflation. The Count of Flanders intervened and henceforth imposed a higher piece rate to be paid for fulling cloth in the city.[74] In 1361, the fullers in Ghent were demoted to a subservient political and economic position as virtually powerless wage earners and they continued to suffer declining real wages throughout the second half of the fourteenth century as their stable nominal wages were gradually eroded by growing price inflation. In 1373, this led to an *uutganck*, in which the fullers collectively left the city to protest against their low wages.[75] Furthermore, in July 1366, the Ghent skinners had also gone on strike demanding higher wages from the furriers who employed them.[76] It is also no coincidence that a series of more generalized collective action took place in Bruges, Ghent and Ypres in the years between 1359 and 1361 that resulted in a reconfiguration of urban political powers. The resulting political order was a corporatist model in which some craft guilds – and their leaders – were ensured political participation, while others – such as the fullers of Ghent – were excluded.[77]

The Flemish Revolt of 1379–1385 should be seen in the same context. In those craft guilds where oligarchizing tendencies and economic polarization were most extreme, such as

in textiles and metallurgy, labour legislation was controlled by a small group of very wealthy and politically powerful artisan-entrepreneurs.[78] It is not surprising that in those sectors the living standards of labouring classes were affected quite differently by the aftermath of the Black Death to other economic sectors for which wage series are available. Revolts such as those of the Bruges textile weavers were not just a political arena in which rivalling networks battled; they were part of a struggle to control the social conditions of production in the late medieval city. It was political control of the guilds and control within the urban body politic that formed the focus of the social and economic aims of the revolting groups because they were the site where the regulation of wages and labour conditions was determined.

Maintaining a proper standard of living was also an explicit ideological concern. Rebel demands, slogans and cries have been studied elsewhere and we know that economic demands generally feature quite prominently in the discourse of Flemish urban rebels.[79] While such documents exist for a number of other later medieval rebellions in Ghent, Bruges, Ypres and smaller towns, no explicit demands formulated by working people themselves have come down to us for the 1379–1385 period of protest. We do, however, have a number of charters that are the result of workers' petitions from the preceding period which clearly contained the demand 'to improve wages' (*om te beterne den loon*, *beteringhe van onsen loone*). In 1365, for instance, the sheriff and aldermen of the small textile town of Deinze in Flanders decreed a new byelaw in which 'reasonable' salaries for the fullers were established after a comparative inquiry had taken place with regard to wage levels in various other towns and villages. In addition, in 1374 the 'modest people' of the Ghent *huutslaghers* ('tenterers'), a guild working in the finishing stage of the cloth production process, asked for higher wages 'to maintain themselves, their wives and their children'. As a result, they received a 25% pay rise.[80]

Conclusions

It is certainly true that the Bruges rebels in the Flemish Revolt of 1379 were engaged in 'politics'. They were motivated by a century-and-a-half-old tradition of collective action by artisans and other town dwellers that consisted of almost ritualized armed gatherings, recognizable slogans and guild banners.[81] They mobilized themselves with the help of social and political networks that vied for control over the urban magistrate, often primarily serving the self-interest of the upper middle classes within the craft guilds. Such an interpretation of the Flemish Revolt fits with a wider shift in the historiography of medieval urban conflicts which moves from an emphasis on hunger-induced rebellion to an almost complete focus on politics, culture and discourse as the main determinants. However, despite the growing interest in social inequality and economic disparities in history, there has as yet been no reconsideration of the relationship between political upheaval and economic inequality in the medieval city. By and large, economic historians considering inequality in the long term have tended to argue that prior to the nineteenth century, political factors could contribute to the growth of inequality, but rarely – if ever – to its reduction.[82] Both historiographical tendencies have thus far neglected to examine whether social inequality contributed to civil unrest and revolt in the late medieval city.

A notable exception is a recent attempt by Cohn to consider relations between demographic and economic changes after the Black Death on the one hand, and socio-political power of the lower social groups on the other in a comparative way. The outcomes seem to vary: in English and Italian towns artisans definitely lost power at the end of the fourteenth and during the fifteenth centuries. Furthermore, when standards of living of the popular classes clearly improved this did not prevent a growing tendency towards oligarchic rule, although this observation should be nuanced as at the same time a 'middle class' as well as broader institutions for popular political participation also developed.[83] In other regions, however, notably in Flanders (but also in the cities of Brabant and various other towns in the Holy Roman

Empire), artisans continued to strive for political power with varying success until well into the sixteenth century.[84]

Cohn's tentative comparative approach certainly needs further elaboration and, above all, new statistical material for other regions which would allow the 'economic' and 'political' motivations for rebelling to be evaluated. At first sight the Bruges revolt of 1379–1385 seems an unlikely candidate on which to base an argument for a strong association between social polarization and revolt. The context of a post-Plague urban society, and especially the period after 1375 which has traditionally been interpreted as 'the golden age of the artisan', is not typically understood to have produced the sort of glaring social injustices that could spark widespread waves or revolt. However, this changes when we place a sharper focus on those economic sectors most heavily involved in the revolt: textiles, metallurgy and confection. Earlier research has indicated that these sectors were characterized by a strong disparity in living standards, with a small elite with oligopolistic and oligarchic tendencies on the one hand, and a large group of labourers and artisans about whose living standards we are ill-informed, on the other. With the help of a detailed set of confiscation accounts compiled in 1383–1384, we were able to establish the significant gap in material living conditions between workers in the textile industry and those of the middling groups of urban society in Bruges at the time.

Based on these findings, we propose a reappraisal of the importance of socio-economic conditions and developments within the more complex causality of Bruges's participation in the Flemish Revolt of 1379–1385. The group of textile workers whose material possessions we have been able to examine in the confiscation accounts demonstrate a level of material living standards clearly below what was deemed the norm by contemporaries. The relative impoverishment of these workers stands in stark contrast to the growing material sophistication of urban domesticity among the wider middling groups of the city. During the economically turbulent second half of the fourteenth century, what was most at stake for the middle and

working classes of the major towns of medieval Europe seems indeed to have been the protection of living standards.[85]

In a wave of revolts which began around 1360, textile workers initiated a new political offensive based on a sense of what might indeed be considered 'relative deprivation'. It is true that in the Flemish Revolt of 1379–1385 inter-class coalitions proved more successful in Ghent than in Bruges or Ypres, however, the necessity of alliances for political success should not lead one to think that material conditions were irrelevant in spurring rebellious action among the lower classes of medieval society.

Acknowledgments

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[INSERT APPENDIX HERE]

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[1] B. Milanovic, *Global Inequality: A new approach for the age of globalization* (Cambridge, MA, 2016).

[2] For instance, F. Bourguignon, *The Globalization of Inequality* (Princeton, 2017). See also E. Dabla-Norris et al., 'Causes and consequences of income inequality: a global perspective'*, IMF Staff Discussion Note* (2015).

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[4] F. Cowell, *Measuring Inequality* (Oxford, 2011).

[5] H. Pirenne, *Les anciennes démocraties des Pays-Bas* (Paris, 1910).

[6] E. Labrousse, *Esquisse du mouvement des prix et des revenus en France au XVIIIe Siècle* (Paris, 1933) and E. Labrousse, *La crise de l'économie française à la fin de l'Ancien Régime et au début de la Révolution* (Paris, 1944). For the Southern Netherlands this approach has been explored for the revolt of 1566: see H. Van der Wee, 'The economy as a factor in the start of the revolt in the Southern Netherlands', *Acta historiae Neerlandica*, 5 (1971), 52–67; E. Scholliers, 'Le pouvoir d'achat dans les Pays-Bas au XVIe siècle', in *Album Charles Verlinden* (Ghent, 1975), 305–30.

[7] R. Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free: Medieval peasant movements and the English Rising of 1381* (London, 1973)

[8] M. Mollat and J. Wolff, *Ongles Bleus, Jacques et Ciompi : Les révolutions populaires en Europe aux XIVe et XVe siècles* (Paris, 1970); G. Fourquin, *Les soulèvements populaires au Moyen Âge* (Paris, 1972).

[9] J.C. Davies, 'Toward a theory of revolution', *American Sociological Review*, 27, 1 (1962), 6; see also C. Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution* (New York, 1938).

[10] T.R. Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton, 1970), 13.

[11] W.P. Blockmans and C. Tilly (eds), *Cities and the Rise of States in Europe, A.D. 1000 to 1800* (Boulder, 1994).

[12] J. Firnhaber-Baker, 'Introduction: medieval revolt in context', in J. Firnhaber-Baker and D. Schoenaers (eds), *The Routledge History Handbook of Medieval Revolt* (London, 2017), 1–16, does not discuss socio-economic causality. John Watts, 'Conclusion', in *ibid*., 370, speaks of a 'political turn'.

[13] S.K. Cohn, Jr, *Lust for Liberty: The politics of social revolt in medieval Europe, 1200–1425: Italy, France, and Flanders* (Cambridge, MA, 2006).

[14] P. Lantschner, *The Logic of Political Conflict in Medieval Cities: Italy and the Southern Low Countries, 1370–1440* (Oxford, 2015).

[15] Especially since the work of N. Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France: Eight essays* (Cambridge, 1975) and R. Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (New York, 1980). For instance, P. Arnade, *Realms of Ritual: Burgundian ceremony and civic life in late medieval Ghent* (Ithaca, 1996).

[16] See our earlier reflections in J. Dumolyn, W. Ryckbosch and M. Speecke, 'Cycles of urban revolt in medieval Flanders: the economics of political conflict', in S.M. Collavini and G. Petralia (eds), *La mobilità sociale nel medioevo Italiano. 4. Cambiamento economico e dinamiche sociali (secoli XI-XV)* (Rome, 2019), 329–48.

[17] J.H.A. Munro, 'Medieval woollens: textiles, textile technology and industrial organisation, c.800–1500', in *The Cambridge History of Western Textiles* (Cambridge, 2003), vol. I, 181–227; Munro, 'Medieval woollens: the western European woollen industries and their struggles for international markets, c. 1000–1500', in *ibid*., 228–324.

[18] J. Dumolyn and J. Haemers, 'Patterns of urban rebellion in medieval Flanders', *Journal of Medieval History*, 31 (2005), 369–93; M. Boone, 'Le comté de Flandre dans le long XIVe siècle: une société urbanisée face aux crises du bas Moyen Âge', in M. Bourin, G. Cherubini and G. Pinto (eds), *Rivolte urbane e rivolte contadine nell' Europa del trecento: un confronto* (Florence, 2008), 17–47; for female labour see most recently S.H. Hutton, 'Organizing specialized production: gender in the medieval Flemish wool cloth industry (c.1250–1384)', *Urban History*, 45 (2018), 382–403.

[19] Mollat and Wolff, *op. cit.*, 139–42. See the critique formulated by Samuel Cohn Jr, who showed that 'popular insubordination and rebellion continued to boil from the mid-1350s to

the 1370s'. In Italy, the Ciompi Revolt was an outlier compared to more widespread insurrections in the 1360s and 1370s. Cohn, *op. cit.*, 225.

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[21] M. Boone, *Gent en de Bourgondische hertogen ca. 1384 – ca. 1453: een sociaal-politieke studie van een staatsvormingsproces* (Brussels, 1990), 201–02; R. Demuynck, 'De Gentse oorlog 1379–1385. Oorzaken en karakter', *Handelingen van de Maatschappij voor Geschiedenis en Oudheidkunde te Gent*, new series, 5 (1951), 304–18; M. Ryckaert and M. Vandermaesen, 'De Witte Kaproenen: de Gentse opstand (1379–1385) en de geschiedenis van de Brugse Leie', *Kultureel Jaarboek voor de Provincie Oost-Vlaanderen*, 10 (1979), 9–17; J. Haemers and D. Merlevede, 'Le commun se esmeut: een onderzoek naar het politieke optreden van het 'gemeen' in het kader van de Gentse opstand (1379–1385)', *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Filologie en Geschiedenis*, 88 (2010), 177–204

[22] G. Espinas and H. Pirenne (eds), *Recueil de documents relatifs à l'histoire de l'industrie drapière en Flandre* (Brussels, 1906), vol. I, 598–602.

[23] J. De Smet, 'De repressie te Brugge na de slag bij Westrozebeke. 1 December – 31 augustus 1384. Bijdrage tot de kennis van de sociale en de economische toestand van de Brugse bevolking', *Handelingen van het Genootschap voor Geschiedenis*, 84 (1947), 71–118; A. Van Oost, 'Sociale stratificatie van de Brugse opstandigen en van de opstandige ingezetenen van de kleinere kasselrijsteden en van de kasselrijdorpen in Vlaanderen van 1379–1385. Kritische benadering van konfiskatiedokumenten', *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Filologie en Geschiedenis*, 61 (1978), 830–77.

[24] J. Mertens, 'Twee weversopstanden te Brugge', *Handelingen van het Genootschap voor Geschiedenis*, 110 (1973), 5–20.

[25] The older view in H. Van Werveke, 'De zwarte dood in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden (1349–1351) (Brusels, 1950). Subsequently criticized by W. Blockmans, 'The social and economic effects of the plague in the Low Countries, 1349–1500', *Revue de Philologie et d'Histoire*, 58 (1980), 833–63; J. Vandeburie, 'De Zwarte Dood te Brugge: een status quaestionis en enkele nieuwe beschouwingen', *Handelingen van het Genootschap voor Geschiedenis*, 147 (2010), 269–308; and J. Vermeersch, *1349. Hoe de Zwarte Dood Vlaanderen en Europa veranderde* (Antwerp, 2020).

[26] K. Marx, *Capital*. Volume I, Chapter 25, Section 5, E speaks of "the 15th century, "the golden age of the English labourer in town and country' quoting James Edwin Thorold Rogers, *A History of Agriculture and Prices in England* (Oxford, 1866), vol. I, 690; Id., *Six Centuries of Work and Wages: The history of English labour* (London, 1884), 326 [quoted from the 1894 edition] and also later stated that 'The fifteenth century and the first quarter of the sixteenth were the golden age of the English labourer'. The notion was reinforced by two classic articles by E.H. Phelps Brown and S.V. Hopkins, 'Seven centuries of building wages', *Economica*, new series, 22 (1955), 195–206 and 'Seven centuries of the prices of consumables, compared with builders' wage-rates', *Economica*, new series, 23 (1956), 296–314. A more recent update is G. Clarke, 'Work, wages and living conditions: building workers in England from the Magna Carta to Tony Blair', in S. Cavociocchi (ed.), *L'Edilizia prima della rivoluzione industriale, secc. XIII-XVIII* (Florence, 2005), 889–932.

[27] References to the optimistic Postan-Abel-Duby model can be found in Munro, 'Builders' wages in Southern England and the Southern Low Countries, 1346–1500: a comparative study

of trends in and levels of real incomes', in S. Cavaciocchi (ed.), *L'Edilizia prima della rivoluzione industriale, secc. XIII-XVIII* (Florence, 2005), 1032–34.

[28] M. Bailey, *The Decline of Serfdom in Late Medieval England: From bondage to freedom* (Woodbridge, 2014).

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[30] Munro, *Wool, Cloth, and Gold: The struggle for bullion in Anglo-Burgundian trade, 1340–1478*, 18–34; H. Van Werveke, 'Currency manipulation in the Middle Ages: the case of Louis de Male, Count of Flanders', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* series 4, 31 (1949), 115–27 and the references in footnote 62.

[31] Van Oost, 'Sociale stratifikatie van de Brugse rebellen', *op. cit.*, 839, 844–45.

[32] Since there are no direct confiscation records for the city of Ghent itself, calculations of the social stratification among the Ghent rebels are based on confiscations of the goods of Ghent rebels in the surrounding countryside. It is therefore likely that the more affluent burghers of the city are over-represented. The occupational identification rate for the Ghent rebels is also far smaller than for their counterparts in Bruges. Van Oost, 'Sociale strafikatie van de Gentse opstandelingen van 1379–1385. Een kritische benadering van konfiskatiedokumenten', *Handelingen der Maatschappij voor Geschiedenis en Oudheidkunde te Gent*, 29 (1975), 59–92.

[33] De Smet counted only 281 rebels liable to confiscation (*op. cit.*, 79), while Van Oost counted no less than 362 confiscated rebels ('Sociale stratifikatie van de Brugse rebellen', *op. cit.*, 876).

Unfortunately she also included rebels taking part in minor revolts in 1387, 1391 and even 1407 in her sample.

[34] Van Oost, 'Sociale stratifikatie van de Brugse rebellen', *op. cit.*, 831. The accounts can be found in Brussels, State Archives, *Chambre des Comptes, Comptes en rouleaux*, n° 2017–2020; *ibid.*, *Registers*, n° 18244; 48986.

[35] De Smet, *op. cit.*, 74.

[36] Bruges, City Archives, *323. Drapiers*, rekening 1371–1372; *114. Wetsvernieuwingen* and *216. Stadsrekeningen*, rekening 1380–81; Bruges, City Archives, *OCMW Archives*, *Armendis Sint-Salvators*, E164/2 and E168; *Nazarethpassantenhuis*, R8 and R10; *Sint-Janshospitaal*, B11; *Begijnhof Ten Wijngaerde*, F4.

[37] Espinas and Pirenne, *op. cit.*, 592–93.

[38] J.J. de Smet (ed.), *Recueil des chroniques de Flandre* (Brussels, 1856), vol. II, 240; J.J. Lambin, *Dits de cronike ende genealogie van den prinsen ende graven van den foreeste van buc, dat heet Vlaenderlant, van 863 tot 1436* (Ypres, 1839), 268.

[39] I. De Meyer, *Studiën betreffende de sociale strukturen te Brugge, Kortrijk en Gent in de 14e en 15e eeuw*, vol. I, 53; J.-P. Sosson, 'Métallurgies urbaines en Flandres et en Brabant au Moyen Âge. L'exemple des métiers du métal à Bruges, Bruxelles et Malines', in P. Benoît and D. Cailleaux (eds), *Hommes et travail du métal dans les villes médiévales* (Paris, 1988), 165–70. E. Netchine, 'Les artisans du métal à Paris, XIIIe–XVe siècle', in *ibid*., 42–46; N. Monteillard, 'Artisans et artisanat du métal à Rouen à la fin du Moyen Âge', in *ibid*., 116.

[40] De Meyer, *op. cit.*, 54.

[41] J. Dumolyn et al., 'Social groups, political power and institutions II, c.1300–c.1500', in A. Brown and J. Dumolyn (eds), *Medieval Bruges c.850–1550* (Cambridge, 2018), 268–328.

[42] M. Haegeman, *De anglofilie in het graafschap Vlaanderen tussen 1379 en 1435: politieke en economische aspecten* (Kortrijk, 1988), 99–102.

[43] J. Mertens, 'De beschuldigingen tegen Pieter Huerel, opstandig Brugs hostelier', in *Album Albert Schouteet* (Bruges, 1973), 111–16.

[44] Van Oost, 'Sociale stratifikatie van de Brugse rebellen', *op. cit.*, 839.

[45] On the statistical properties of the Gini for measuring inequality: F. Cowell, *op. cit*. The Theil index, an alternative measure of inequality in the entropy family, is 1.135 for this distribution. See Figure 3 for the Lorenz curve.

[46] G. Alfani and M. Di Tullio, *The Lion's Share: Inequality and the rise of the fiscal state in preindustrial Europe* (Cambridge, 2019), 96.

[47] G. Alfani and F. Ammannati, 'Long-term trends in economic inequality: the case of the Florentine state, c.1300–1800', *Economic History Review*, 70, 4 (2017), 1048.

[48] Van Oost, 'Sociale stratifikatie van de Brugse rebellen', *op. cit.*, 839, 842.

[49] For instance, some telling examples can be found in C. Dyer, 'Living in peasant houses in late medieval England', *Vernacular Architecture*, 44, 1 (2013), 19–27; C. Dyer, 'The material world of English peasants, 1200–1540: archaeological perspectives on rural economy and welfare', *Agricultural History Review*, 62 (2014), 1–22; B. Jervis, C. Briggs and M. Tompkins, 'Exploring text and objects: escheators' inventories and material culture in medieval English rural households', *Medieval Archaeology*, 59, 1 (2015), 168–92.

[50] See, for example, M.R. Montgomery, M. Gragnolati, K.A. Burke and E. Paredes, 'Measuring living standards with proxy values', *Demography*, 37, 2 (2000), 155–74; D.E. Sahn and D. Stifel, 'Exploring alternative measures of welfare in the absence of expenditure data', *Review of Income and Wealth*, 49, 4 (2003), 463–89.

[51] Similar approaches to the study of living standards via household inventories were popular among economic historians in the 1980s: L.G. Carr and L.S. Walsh, 'The standard of living in the colonial Chesapeake', *The William and Mary Quarterly: A Magazine of Early American History*, 45, 1 (1988), 35–159; G.L. Main and J.T. Main, 'Economic growth and the standard of living in Southern New England, 1640–1774', *The Journal of Economic History*, 48, 1 (1988), 27–46; L. Weatherill, *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in Britain, 1660–1760* (London, 1988).

[52] Six others presumably rented their houses.

[53] By the sixteenth century the linen weavers were in fact referred to as '*vestenaren*' or 'people living near the moats', see H. Pirenne, *Geschiedenis van België* (Ghent, 1909), vol. III, 233.

[54] Some collections of non-elite inventories have been published in: C. Dyer, 'The inventory of William Akclum and its context', in S. Wrathmell (ed.), *A History of Wharram and its Neighbours, Wharram, a study of settlement on the Yorkshire Wolds* (York, 2012), 342–49; P. Stell, *Probate Inventories of the York Diocese, 1350–1500, The Archaeology of York*, 2, 3 (2006); D. Keene, *Survey of Medieval Winchester* (Oxford, 1984), vol. 2, 1433–39; R. Goldthwaite, *Wealth and the Demand for Art in Italy: 1300–1600* (Baltimore, 1994); M.S. Mazzi, 'Gli inventari dei beni: storia di oggetti e storia di uomini', *Società e storia*, 7 (1980), 203–14; M.S. Mazzi and S. Raveggi, 'Masserizie contadine nella prima metà del quattrocento: alcuni esempi del territorio fiorentino e pistoiese', in *Civiltà ed economia agricola in Toscana nei secc. XIII–XV: Problemi della vita delle campagne nel tardo medioevo (Pistoia, 21–24 aprile 1977)* (Pistoia, 1981), 169–97; M.S. Mazzi and S. Raveggi, *Gli uomini e le cose nelle campagne fiorentine* (Florence, 1983) and the extensive studies by F. Piponnier, 'Inventaires bourguignons (XIVe–XVe siècle)', *Les Cahiers du Centre de Recherches Historiques*, 14–15

(1995), 23–26. Most other collections of probate inventories studied came either from elite groups or date from the sixteenth century and later.

[55] M. Kowaleski, 'A consumer economy', in R. Horrox and W.M. Ormrod (eds), *A Social History of England: 1200–1500* (Cambridge, 2006), 238–59; K. Wilson, 'The household inventory as urban "theatre" in late medieval Burgundy', *Social History*, 40, 3 (2015), 335–59; P. Hohti, '"Conspicuous" consumption and popular consumers: material culture and social status in sixteenth-century Siena', *Renaissance Studies*, 24, 5 (2010), 654–70. A critical review of this literature appears in B. Blondé and W. Ryckbosch, 'In "splendid isolation": a comparative perspective on the historiographies of the "material renaissance" and the "consumer revolution"', *History of Retailing and Consumption*, 1, 2 (2015), 105–24.

[56] Keene, *op. cit.*, 176–77; R.K. Field, 'Worcestershire peasant buildings, household goods and farming equipments', *Medieval Archaeology*, 9 (1965), 105–45.

[57] S. Cavallo, 'The artisan's casa', in M. Ajmar-Wollheim, F. Dennis and E. Miller (eds), *At Home in Renaissance Italy* (London, 2006), 66–75.

[58] P. Goldberg, 'The fashioning of bourgeois domesticity in later medieval England: a material culture perspective', in M. Kowaleski and P. Goldberg (eds), *Medieval Domesticity: Home, housing and household in Medieval England* (Cambridge, 2008), 124–44.

[59] See, for instance, R. Grassby, 'Material culture and cultural history', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 35, 4 (2005), 591–603; Ajmar-Wollheim, Dennis and Miller, *op. cit*.

[60] N. De Pauw (ed.), *Jehan Froissart's Cronyke van Vlaenderen getranslateert uuten Franssoyse in Duytscher tale bij Gerijt Potter van der Loo in de XVe eeuw* (Ghent, 1898), vol. I, 182–84.

[61] Such an interpretation fits with the revisionist take on medieval and early modern debt that stresses the potential of credit for commercialization and economic emancipation rather than as a signal of impoverishment. C. Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: The culture of credit and social relations in early modern England* (London, 1998); L. Fontaine, 'Antonio and Shylock: credit and trust in France, c.1680–c.1780', *Economic History Review*, 54, 1 (2001), 39–57.

[62] In the case of the weaver Heinric Danins, there was also a small *landcijns* (burgage rent) due to the owner of the land on which the house stood. The *landcijnzen* in Bruges had been fixed since 1302 and in most cases had lost their significance by the end of the fourteenth century due to inflation (H. Deneweth, 'Huizen en mensen. Wonen, verbouwen, investeren en lenen in drie Brugse wijken van de late middeleeuwen tot de negentiende eeuw' (Unpublished PhD thesis, Brussels, 2008), vol. II, 795).

[63] Estimate is based on a daily wage of 4 d. Flemish groats for an unskilled rural labourer in 1383 (Soens, Spade in de Dijk, 150–51), and 6 d. or 4 d. for a mason labourer in Antwerp in 1381 (H. Van Der Wee, *The Growth of the Antwerp Market* (The Hague, 1963)). Both were converted to a yearly wage on the assumption of 240 working days.

[64] H. Deneweth, 'Huizen en mensen. Wonen, verbouwen, investeren en lenen in drie Brugse wijken van de late middeleeuwen tot de negentiende eeuw' (D.Phil, Brussels, 2008), 810–31.

[65] *ibid.*, 810–31.

[66] T. Soens, *De spade in de dijk?: waterbeheer en rurale samenleving in de Vlaamse kustvlakte (1280–1580)* (Ghent, 2009), Annex 1.

[67] J.H.A. Munro, 'Wage stickiness, monetary changes, and real incomes in Late-Medieval England and the Low Countries, 1300–1500: did money matter?', *Research in Economic*

History, 21 (2003), 185–297; Munro, 'Builder's wages', *op. cit.*; Older series in J.P. Sosson, *Les travaux publics de la ville de Bruges, XIVe-XVe siècles* (Brussels, 1977), 228–30, Annex 43, Figure 47. It should be noted that the different interpretations of Sosson and Munro are due to a different denominator, i.e., a different choice of consumer price index. Preference should be given to Munro's, which is more diverse.

[68] J. Hatcher, 'Unreal wages: long-run living standards and the "golden age" of the fifteenth century', in J. Hatcher and J. Z. Stephenson (eds), *Seven Centuries of Unreal Wages: The unreliable data, sources and methods that have been used for measuring standards of living in the past* (London, 2018); B. Blondé and J. Hanus, 'Beyond building craftsmen: economic growth and living standards in the sixteenth-century Low Countries: the case of 's-Hertogenbosch (1500–1560)', *European Review of Economic History*, 14 (2009), 179–207. See also the cautions formulated by G. Vigo, 'Real wages of the working class in Italy: building workers' wages (14th to 18th Century)', *The Journal of European Economic History*, 3 (1972), 385–386 and R.A. Goldthwaite, *The Building of Renaissance Florence: An economic and social history* (Baltimore, 1980), 287–311.

[69] T. Soens and E. Thoen, 'Vegetarians or carnivores?: standards of living and diet in late medieval Flanders', in S. Cavaciocchi (ed.), *Le interazioni fra economia e ambiente biologico nell'Europa preindustriale: secc. XIII-XVIII* (Prato, 2010), 483–515.

[70] S. Geens and W. Ryckbosch, 'Social mobility and the Black Death in Flanders (1349–1400): a preliminary exploration of the case of Ghent', paper presented at the European Social Science History Conference (2018).

[71] B. Campbell, *The Great Transition: Climate, disease and society in the late-medieval world* (Cambridge, 2016).

[72] S.K. Cohn, 'After the Black Death: labour legislation and attitudes towards labour in late-medieval western Europe', *The Economic History Review*, 60 (2007), 457–85.

[73] For Ghent in 1349, see Victor Fris, *Histoire de Gand: depuis les origines jusqu'en 1913* (Ghent, 1930), 70–81; H. Lis and C. Soly, 'Labour laws in Western Europe, 13th–16th centuries: patterns of political and socio-economic rationality', in M. van der Linden (ed.), *Working on Labor: Essays in honor of Jan Lucassen* (Leiden, 2012), 299–321.

[74] Vermeersch, *op. cit.*, 71.

[75] Munro, 'Wage-stickiness', *op. cit.* For similar examples, see R. De Roover, *Money, Banking and Credit in Mediaeval Bruges: Italian merchant-bankers, Lombards and money-changers: A study in the origins of banking* (Cambridge, MA, 1948), 226–27.

[76] R. Verbruggen, *Geweld in Vlaanderen: macht en onderdrukking in de Vlaamse steden tijdens de veertiende eeuw* (Bruges, 2005), 20, 26, 146, 169; D. Nicholas, *The Metamorphosis of a Medieval City: Ghent in de the Ages of the Arteveldes, 1302–1390* (Lincoln, 1987), 130.

[77] J. Mertens, 'Woelingen te Brugge tussen 1359 en 1361', in *Album Carlos Wyffels* (Brussels, 1987), 326–27. And for a broader geographical scope of these revolts and the political reforms they gave rise to see M. Boone and J. Haemers, '"The common good": governance, discipline and political culture', in B. Blondé, M. Boone and A.-L. Van Bruaene (eds), *City and Society in the Low Countries, 1100–1600*, Cambridge, 2018, 93–127.

[78] J. Vermaut, *De textielnijverheid in Brugge en op het platteland, Westelijk Vlaanderen voor 1800: konjunktuurverloop, organisatie en sociale verhoudingen* (P.Phil, Ghent, 1974), 435–37.

[79] See in general J. Dumolyn, '"Our land is only founded on trade and industry": economic discourses in fifteenth-century Bruges', *Journal of Medieval History*, 36 (2010), 374–89.

[80] Espinas and Pirenne, *Recueil*, vol. II, 2–3, 495–97, 539.

[81] J. Dumolyn and J. Haemers, 'A bad chicken was brooding: subversive speech in late medieval Flanders', *Past and Present*, 214 (2012), 45–86.

[82] Milanovic, *op. cit.*; G. Alfani and W. Ryckbosch, 'Growing apart in early modern Europe? A comparison of inequality trends in Italy and the Low Countries, 1500–1800', *Explorations in Economic History*, 62 (2016), 143–53.

[83] S.K. Cohn, 'Rich and poor in Western Europe, c.1375–1475: the political paradox of material well-being', in S. Farmer (ed.), *Approaches to Poverty in Medieval Europe: Complexities, contradictions, transformations, c.1100–1500* (Turnhout, 2016), 145–73.

[84] For Flanders this period is studied from a comparative perspective by J. Dumolyn, 'Guild politics and political guilds in fourteenth-century Flanders', in V. Challet, J. Dumolyn, J. Haemers and H.R.O. Herrer, *The Voices of the People in Late Medieval Europe: Communication and popular politics* (Turnhout, 2014), 15–48.

[85] Compare with the older insights offered in W. Blockmans, 'Revolutionaire mechanismen in Vlaanderen van de 13de tot de 16de eeuw', *Tijdschrift voor Sociale Wetenschappen*, 19 (1974), 123–40.