

11.4. This land is not quite your land: tenancy and leaseholding in the pre-industrial period. Part II

Panel organiser: **González Agudo, David**, Complutense University of Madrid, Spain // **Vervae, Lies**, Ghent University, Belgium



During the late Middle Ages and the 16th century, the exploitation of landownership underwent drastic changes in various parts of Europe. These changes had long-range effects on the rural economy and on society, since they influenced the use rights to what was by far the most important production factor. Throughout this process, the emergence and spread of lease holding plays a pivotal role. According to the influential work by R. Brenner, lease holding played a key element in the emergence of agrarian capitalism. It implied that farmers no longer had direct access to the land, but instead were forced to compete permanently with each other for leases on the land. As a result of the fierce competition, farmers were forced to reduce costs, to increase market orientation and to specialize. In the longer run this led to a significant concentration of land and to the rise of large tenant farms, operated in a proto-capitalist way, increasingly using wage labor instead of family labor. Recently, B. van Bavel and Ph. Schofield modified the thesis of Brenner, stating that the impact of lease holding depended on the exact arrangement of the system and the social and economic context in which it emerged. This could lead to differential regional impacts. According to these historians, lease prices must also be understood within the regionally divergent outcomes. While most historians recognize the importance of lease holding, the bulk of attention is still going to the “capitalistic” form of lease holding, which first emerged in Northwest Europe. Consequently, other forms of lease holding need more attention, as do

other regions inside and outside of Europe. While landlords applied the system of leasehold to manage their land all around the world, the outcomes could be radically different from region to region. With these insights, historians can no longer consider lease prices simply as the outcome of supply and demand. Several socio-economic and institutional factors influenced price-making. Above all, the importance of lease prices should not be underestimated because they substantially determined the income of peasants, farmers and large landowners in the pre-industrial time.

Chair: **van Bavel, Bas J.P.**, Utrecht University, Netherlands

Thursday, 22 August 2013 // 1430 – 1630 // Session 11 – Room A 201

11.4.1. Property, exploitation and land-rent prices in Western Andalusia, 1500-1700

González Mariscal, Manuel, Universidad de Sevilla, Spain

This paper aims to expand and improve our knowledge about the evolution of land-rent prices in modern Spain. It focuses on the city of Seville and its province and investigates the trends in the land-rent prices of the rural lands owned by the Seville Cathedral during the 16th and 17th centuries. Moreover, I will analyze the changes that took place in the land property of the Cathedral, as well as the strategies they used to exploit it.

11.4.2. Leasehold in Sweden 1500-1800, the intersection between Nordic user rights and property rights inherited from Roman law

Wästfelt, Anders, Swedish University of Agricultural Science, Sweden

This paper focuses on leasehold in Sweden from 1500-1800. Historians frequently tell the story about how Sweden in this period is different from other European countries because it never had a feudal order and always had a large amount of freeholders. Even if this interpretation is correct, Sweden also developed a very strong state and became a Baltic “superpower” during this period. The king gave away rights to noblemen to receive the lease on freehold farms to noblemen as payment for their assistance even if the farm was a so called freeholders estate. Freeholders were not allowed to sell a farm without giving the relatives the possibility to buy, which had as a consequence that farms could not be used as security for loans. This principle can be traced back to the early medieval times. It was also important to manage land properly as there was still an element of the so called Nordic user rights in legal practice until the new law was established in 1734. This meant that full property rights were adopted relatively late in Sweden and, as a consequence, market based leases also developed relatively late. At the same time a large amount of cottages based on the payment by the crofter’s day labour was established. In summary this paper will present how old user rights were intersecting with property rights inherited from Roman law during a relatively long period.

11.4.3. Every little bit helps? The leasehold of small parcels of land in late medieval Flanders

Vervae, Lies, Ghent University, Belgium

Recently, historians have emphasized the regionally divergent impact of lease holding in Northwestern Europe. Not in every region did the introduction of leasehold produce the emergence of agrarian capitalism, as has been stated for England by R. Brenner. Most studies in this respect still focus on the farming out of large, complex holdings which usually influenced only a small proportion of the rural society. However, the leasing out of numerous small plots of land was often more significant for rural dwellers. Those small parcels could complete a small freeholding or be merged to build up a holding. Hence, I will analyze in this paper the leasing out of approximately 200 small plots of land by one of the largest institutional landowners of Flanders, the Saint John’s hospital of Bruges between c. 1280 and c. 1580. Those parcels lay dispersed in the two socio-economic regions of Flanders: coastal Flanders and inland Flanders. During the late Middle Ages, coastal Flanders evolved from a traditional peasant society to a society dominated by large leasehold farms, increasingly focusing on commercialization and specialization. In inland Flanders, on the contrary, a majority of smallholdings, focusing on survival, dominated until the 19th century. By studying the rents (1), the acreage per tenant (2) and the mobility of the tenants (3), I examine to what extent the divergent socio-economic evolution of both Flemish regions is reflected in leasehold. The characteristics of the leased-out parcels diverged indeed considerably; however, the influence of the landowner, supervised by powerful urban dwellers, should not be underestimated.

Participants

González Agudo, David

Ph.D. student. Topics of interest: Land rents, agricultural contracts, Early Modern Castile. Presentations: “Land rent and lease markets in Central Spain, 1500-1600” (poster), Economic History Association 72nd Annual Meeting, Vancouver, Canada, September 2012. “What price a roof? Housing and the cost of living in 16th-century Toledo” (with Mauricio Drelichman), Economic History Society Annual Conference, University of Oxford, 2012. Visiting positions: Department of History and Art History, Utrecht University, April-July 2012. Department of Economics, University of British Columbia, February-May 2011.

González Mariscal, Manuel

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van Bavel, Bas J.P.

Bas van Bavel is professor of Economic and Social History of the Middle Ages and

head of the section of Economic and Social History at Utrecht University. His main research interests include long-run changes and divergences in economic and social development and long-run institutional change, mainly in a comparative perspective.

Vervae, Lies

Lies Vervae is research assistant at the Department of History at Ghent University, Belgium. In her PhD, she investigates the estate management of the Saint John’s Hospital of Bruges, one of the major landowners of Flanders (supervisor Erik Thoen). She focuses on the organisation of the leasehold system and on the organisation of rural labour in late medieval Flanders.

Wästfelt, Anders

Anders Wästfelt is associate professor in Human Geography and has studied the transformations of agricultural landscapes. He has been working in the section of Agrarian history at the Swedish University of agricultural science in a project about Leasehold in Swedish history. He has also done research on future agriculture with a global perspective and developed methods for the use of remote sensing in agrarian history and landscape analysis.