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 lead to a significant concentration of land and to the rise of large tenant farms, operated in a proto-corporate 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 period.

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

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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 if the farm was so a 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 property as there was still an element of the so called Nordic user rights in legal practiced up 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 owner’s day labour was established. In summary this paper will present how did user rights were interacting 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

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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 land and the 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 the largest institutional landowners of Flanders, the Saint John’s hospital of Bruges by studying small plots 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 household 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 landowners, supervised by powerful urban dwellers, should not be underestimated.