Between the countryside and the city

*Rural Elites in the kingdom of Valencia in the 15th Century*

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The \textit{paysan-marchand} of the Lower Britain, the \textit{marchands-laboureurs} of the Toulouse, the \textit{fermiers-laboureurs, gros fermiers or coqs de village} of l’Île-de-France, the \textit{farmers-entrepreneurs} of Linge, the German \textit{bauern}, the Castilian \textit{caballeros villanos}, the farmers and yeomen of England and the \textit{prohoms} of the Crown of Aragon: a wide range of names to refer to the same historic reality. In relation with this, the expression “rural elites” makes possible to include in one concept the regional particularities of the wealthier peasant families of the European countryside of the medieval and early modern times. The acceptance of this expression has been almost complete in the historiography, especially since the conference of Flaran in 2005 and publication of the proceedings of the congress two years later.\footnote{F. MENANT and J.P. JESSENNE, ed., \textit{Les Élites Rurales dans l’Europe médiévale et moderne: Acte des XXVIIes Journées de Flaran} (Toulouse, Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 2007). R. LE JAN, “Historiographie des élites”, in \textit{L’historiographie des élites dans le haut Moyen Âge} \url{http://lamop.univ-paris1.fr/IMG/pdf/introduction.pdf} (15, julio, 2013). A. FURIÓ, “Las élites rurales en la Europa medieval y moderna. Una aproximación de conjunto”, in \textit{El lugar del campesino. En torno a la obra de Reyna Pastor}, ed. Ana Rodríguez, (València, PUV, 2007), p. 391-421.} During the latter middle ages, the emergence of rural elites took place throughout all Europe. Undoubtedly, it was a historic process of long run that has been detected in the high middle ages and that it went on during the early modern times. However, the difference with the previous moments was the intensity and spread that this process achieved in the autumn of the middle ages. The larger availability of evidence, both archival and archaeological, explains why this sector of population results more visible in middle ages for researchers, but this only in part. The difference with the previous moments was the society came from the transformations of mid-fourteenth century. This new scenario gave rural elites new possibilities of exchange, new spheres of action that earlier either did not exist or resulted inaccessible for local elites. In these new circumstances they got take root and perpetuate themselves at the forefront of their communities.

The present paper attempts to analyse the economic bases of the rural elites in the Midlands of the Valencian Country during the 15\textsuperscript{th} century. The evidence consists of the notarial records registered by different notaries combined with the local justice court registries and royal justice court volumes. The aim of what follows is to show de diversity of the economic activities in which Valencian rural elites took part. The first section focuses on farming and stockbreeding while the second one pays attention to trading activities, their participation in the credit market and in the leasing rents.
Rural elites, a diverse reality

The very first element for defining rural elites during the middle ages was its different social background. Indeed, the expression «rural elite» is a concept created by the historiography which does not correspond to any socioprofessional category of the middle ages. Because of that, the identification of the members of this collective is neither easy nor immediate. In general, we can say that many members of the rural elites belonged to the wealthier sectors of the peasantry. Despite that, it would be biased to establish a direct connexion between the well-to-do peasants and the rural elites. On the one hand, we should discard the rich peasants that lived in the cities or its hinterland since, although their richness was based on agricultural activities, their environment was basically urban. On the other hand, as Rodney Hilton insisted, the rural society was not only integrated by peasants. Artisans, notaries, small merchants and lesser members of clergy were part of the daily life of the countryside. All of them came from families that worked on agricultural activities and, in fact, they themselves had some plots that were worked by others. Amongst these socioprofessional groups emerged some families who became part of the local elite. This was the case of Joan Miquel, bailiff of the village of Torrent. He was barber, -responsible of small surgery- but he was also son, brother, son-in-law and brother-in-law of peasants and he had too a small holding. It is difficult, therefore, to untie him from rural society.

We have also to take in consideration the presence of the lesser nobility. They were the donzells in the kingdom of Valencia, hidalgos and caballeros villanos in Castile or the gentry in England. For all of them, the scope of action and, frequently, its residence –unless temporarily, was the village or the small town in a clear rural context. In spite of their privileged status, they shared interests with the rest of the wealthier families as some evidences prove. In 1495 Joan de Llistó, knight and inhabitant of Xàtiva, the second larger city of the kingdom of Valencia, was temporarily living in the small town of Pobla de Rugat. Here he participated in some economic operations with the local notables, rich peasants all of them, of the community such as the purchase of a flock of 915 goats with 9 dogs and 24 jennies valued at 10,165s. (11s./unit). Numerically, however, the local elite represented a very small percentage of the community, about 5-10% of the population.

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3 R. Hilton, Bond men made free

The wealth, the basis of the difference

The leadership of the local elites at the top of the community was based on its richness, which was featured by the diversity of sectors and economic activities that included. We can affirm that their specialization was the diversification of their incomes, it was «sa capacité à entreprendre dans tous les secteurs de l’économie». Therefore, we should talk about «agricultural entrepreneurs» rather than peasants, merchants or artisans. Indeed, the wealthier sectors of the rural world did not base their pre-eminence in only one source of wealth but they took part in a wide range of economic activities, each one of them in a different degree of importance in the whole of the family economy. These investments consisted on farming activities but also on trading –basically products derived from those activities–, leasing municipal taxes and ecclesiastical and seigniorial rents, and different kinds of mills. They also invested in credit both public and private, lending money to other members of the community or the lord. All in all, their economy was result of a pluri-activité.6

The holding

From all the economic activities in which they took part, farming played an essential role. In other words, wealth was measured, basically, in hectares. After all, in the medieval society everything was related to land: from the poorest peasant to the richest lord, all of them considered land as a source of incomes and social prestige. For rural elites, the concentration of land in their hands, either as their own or leased land, was the basis upon which they designed their strategies of social promotion. The process of configuration of large holdings was different in every region of the Medieval West, with its own rhythms and particularities. In relation with this, it must be said that the kingdom of Valencia was a young country, incorporated to the feudal Europe after the Christian Conquest of the mid-thirteenth century.

Then, in this context of feudal colonization, peasants received holdings with an extension around 9 ha. Notwithstanding, the fragmentation of the heritages and the processes of accumulation were evident from the right moment of the conquest. This was result of a dynamic land market derived from a high mobility of economic activities, each one of them a source of incomes and social prestige. The leadership of the local elites at the top of the community was based on its richness, which was featured by the diversity of sectors and economic activities that included. We can affirm that their specialization was the diversification of their incomes, it was «sa capacité à entreprendre dans tous les secteurs de l’économie». Therefore, we should talk about «agricultural entrepreneurs» rather than peasants, merchants or artisans. Indeed, the wealthier sectors of the rural world did not base their pre-eminence in only one source of wealth but they took part in a wide range of economic activities, each one of them in a different degree of importance in the whole of the family economy. These investments consisted on farming activities but also on trading –basically products derived from those activities–, leasing municipal taxes and ecclesiastical and seigniorial rents, and different kinds of mills. They also invested in credit both public and private, lending money to other members of the community or the lord. All in all, their economy was result of a pluri-activité.6

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7 In fact, the unit of measurement was different in every region. In the Valencian Country this unit was the fanecada (0.08ha).
8 J. TORRÓ, El naixement d’una colònia. Dominació i resistència a la frontera valenciana, 1238-1276, (València, 2006)
population, the war context and the divisible inheritance system.\textsuperscript{9} This tendency to the atomization became more intensive throughout the following centuries. In the fifteenth century, different studies in the North and centre of the country show that around the 70% of the holding did not exceed the 5 ha. integrated by small and dispersed plots. At the far end there were the largest holdings that represented between 5 and 10% of the total. These holdings of the local elite tripled the average extension in a given community, surpassing easily the 10 ha.\textsuperscript{10} Let’s see some cases.

In 1430 Arnau Salelles, a prohom from the small town of Oliva, gave his son Arnau more than 76 fanecades (6.3ha.) because of his marriage. However, this was not the whole holding since there were plots that the extension was not specified. Furthermore, Arnau had unless one brother and, since Valencian inheritance system equalised male sons, we can suppose that, before this donation, the holding of Arnau Salelles, senior, surpassed 15 ha. Proof of his economic capacity is in the same year, 1430, his daughter Antònia got married with the bailiff of this small town, Pere Ribes, giving him a dowry of 2,500s.

Estevé Ribera’s holding, other member of the local elite, seems to be larger. Before 1430 Estevé had died, appointing his eldest son, Bernat, as a tutor of the rest of his sons: Jaumeta, Francesca, Joan and Estevé –these extensive offspring were, undoubtedly, other of the behaviours of the wealthier families. So Bernat was who negotiated the Jaumeta’s marriage with the Ferràndez, other family of the rural elites –we will mentioned later, in 1431. Jaumeta contributed with a dowry of 11,000 s. of which were valued at quadam alquaream sive aliquibus hedificiis vel domibus vel quadam hereditatem regui contigua in the area Malicarig. One year later Bernat, as a tutor of the rest of the brothers, sold 40 fanecades (3.3ha.) in the same area for 700s. Therefore, using this transaction as reference, we can estimate that the Riberas lands in this area were around 30 ha.\textsuperscript{11} In 1433, again Bernat leased his mother’s lands to Pere Ortís, a peasant of the town: six «possessions» in different areas of the shire and one fanecada (0.08ha.) near to lord’s orchard. All in all, therefore, the Estevé Ribera’s holding had to surpass, necessarily, 30 ha.

The area of the holding, however, cannot be taken as the unique variable to assess the agricultural richness of the local elite. We should consider other variables such as the crops or the quality of the soil. In relation with this, the extension of the networks of the irrigation made possible to increase the productivity of the soil. In


\textsuperscript{11} I have calculated this extensión applying the ratio of 700s./3.3ha to the 6,000s. of the farm. It must be said that in the price is valued also the building.
the plots where the hydric contributions were constant, the production was higher than the dried land plots. Because of this high productivity, the feudal society introduced rainfed crops such as cereals, particularly wheat, and vineyard in the irrigated areas. In different degrees, most of the holdings combined both kinds of soil, as we have seen in the aforementioned cases. Furthermore, these irrigated plots were nearer to the village than dried lands so it saved time journeys. Moreover, peasantry tried to face this fragmentation with the purchase of the plots close to ones. They did not unify them in one larger plot but they looked for maximising resources.

In reference to the crops, the agricultural landscape was dominated by the cereals, particularly the wheat, both in the dry and irrigated lands. Thanks to the regular contributions of water, in this irrigated plots, the productivity of wheat reached one cafis (201 litres)/fanecada (0.08ha.) or 24.12 hl./ha. Other grains, such as barley, oat and millet were also present in the Valencian countryside. They were used as for feeding the animals but they were well considered by poor peasants because they do not exhaust the soil as much as wheat does and, in situations of scarcity and high prices of wheat, they could be use for making bread for human consumption.

Without questioning the predominance of the cereal, the other crop that dominated the agricultural landscape was the vineyard. The Joan Miquel’s holding showed this predominant duality: when he died in 1479 he possessed four plots of vineyard and other four of wheat that all together reach 3.5ha. of irrigated land. In fact, the presence of the vineyard in the irrigated areas was not strange. In these plots adult vineyard gave about 30hl./ha. The more common varieties were the monestrell and muscatel with wich they elaborated red wine and a sweet wine. Amongst wealthier families of the community, in addition to those mentioned, they introduced other delicate varieties such as the malvasia and “montonec” that produced wines demanded by nobles and urban patricians like the malmsey. So it is not strange that Guillem Abelló, member of the local elite of Gandia, kept the plots of wheat, barley and «the malmsey vineyard and the Greek vineyards and the large vineyard» in 1432 when he leased his farm of Sàhara to the Muslims Iaie Bengalip and Iaie Xuaip.

Despite all this, it seems that the presence of vineyard experimented a decline in favour of the olive tree during the 15th century. The transactions of plots dedicated to this crop and the market of oil mills (almasseres) suggest this development. Muslim rural elites were particularly active in this specialization. So in 1484 Asmet Usmen, a peasant from the hamlet of Catamaruc, bought a plot of olive trees paying 490s. The participation of these Musulm elites was not only in production but also in commercialization sphere.

Although wheat and vineyard were the main crops, this did no exclude the introduction of what has been called commercial agriculture with crops such as
sugarcane and mulberry trees, which offered substantial benefits. The development of this commercial agriculture was pushed, undoubtedly, by the incentives of the market. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the response of the wealthier peasantry, and the whole rural elites, was just a reflex. Their choice was result of a reconsidered strategy in order to diversify their incomes but with the supply of wheat guaranteed.

Said all this, regarding sugarcane farming, its development was only possible in the Gandia irrigated area (Horta) due to only here social conditions (the presence of Muslim peasantry) and hydric resources that the crop required were common. Although obviously they were not the only players involved, the wealthier sectors of the rural society took part decisively. They dedicated their own plots or leased ones to companies that were look for lands for farming: in 1430 the peasant from Gandia Berenguer Noguera leased 6 fanecades (0.5ha.) of irrigated land to the sugarcane company integrated by their merchants Pere Martí and Bartomeu Ramon and the sugarcane master Andreu de Benda. The contract was signed for three years for 133 s. 8 d. although in the last year the payment would not be made in cash but in kind. So Noguera achieved part of production and could sell it. Despite that, the presence of these well-to-do peasants in this market was subsidiary since the transactions and the price of the product were controlled by these sugarcane companies, which many times they had also leased the sugarcane mills (trapig or enginy). With all that, the lawsuits that the development of this crop brought about complement the evidences offered by the notarial records. So, in the lawsuit for the tithes belonging to the Church, the ecclesiastical attorney reported some rich peasants that did not pay this rent for their sugarcane harvest such as Leonard Ferràndez, mentioned before, and Ribelles, members of the local elite of Oliva.

The development of the mulberry tree, whose leaves were used to feed the silkworm, was more widespread, with regard to extension and participation. In the 15th century only the wealthier peasants were in conditions of, with the main products guaranteed, dedicated some whole plots to this crops while the rest of the community could only plant some trees. So, in 1430 Bartomeu Vila leased a plot planted exclusively of mulberry trees, to Bernat Rausell, both from Gandia, during two years for 60s. annually.

We have also to mention the role of other crops of rainfed lands that, in spite of being less present in the landscape, they were farmed also with a commercial orientation such as almond and fig trees, or provided fodder for work animals such as carob trees. So Pere Porcar, a rich peasant from Torrent, held in 1477, sex cificiaturas (3 ha.) terre erme sive amellaral e garroferali, in addition to other plots with vineyard and cereals that we do not know the extension.

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In addition to these plots the local elite holding was complemented by the orchards, closed plots with regular contributions of water, near or sometimes close to the house. There, vegetables and fruits were farmed. The production was for family consumption and, therefore, its importance was not economic but from the point of view of nutrition they diversified the diet of these families. Thanks to the Justice registers we know that in these orchards were farmed pomegranate, plum, cherry and other fruit trees. In the borough (royal town) of Alcoi, from 75 cases of robberies that were reported to the local court, fruit represented the 55% of the stolen products.

The livestock activities
The role of the rural elites in the development of agriculture, to some extent market oriented, did not hinder their active participation in the stockbreeding. It must be said that a medium peasant could have no more than 30 between sheeps and goats, one or two workhorses or mules, pigs and, in some cases, a pair of ox for the agricultural work, and in some cases, a cow. However, the village elite flocks were far from this numbers. The stockbreeding activities were bound to the demand of raw materials, basically meat and wool. Indeed, since the last third of the 14th century, the growth of a wool industry and the increase of population consolidated the stockbreeding market oriented in the Midlands, particularly in the inner Midlands. In this case they were flocks about 700-1000 heads or even more. The size of the flocks and the need of feeding them forced the owners to transhumance between the grazing of the mountains and the marshlands of the coast, or to look for pastures in the bordering kingdoms, basically Murcia. Precisely thanks to these long-distance transhumances we know the size of the village elite’s flocks due to the transaction registered by notaries referred to smaller flocks. In 1379 Ramon Cardona, well-to-do peasant from Relleu and leaser of the some grazing areas in the inner Midlands, sent a flock of 1000 heads to Murcia. However, on the registers of the notary Guillem Peris, in 79 transactions where the size of the flock is specified, 43 cases involved flocks with less that 100 heads and only in four cases they surpass 300 heads but never achieved the 400 heads.

The increase of stockbreeding activities implied the development of a market of corrals and pens and some natural refugees like caves and ravines that were used to close the flocks at night. The importance of these buildings and natural areas is that made possible to collect the manure, impossible to keep the productivity of the soils. Furthermore, in this manner the problems originated by animals at least were prevented. So in towns and small towns such as Cocentaina, Penagüila or Castalla new neighbourhoods were built outside the walls, where these corrals were located, as the toponymy shows even today. With regard to prices, they were in relation with size and the water supply. In Cocentaina they cost between the 95s. the cheapest
and the most expensive 440s., although the most cases they appeared in the notarial records around 260s. The tax evidences show the unequal distribution of these building in the small town of Castalla with 110 families only 39 of them held all the 58 registered corrals. However, even then the distribution was unequal since only 5% of these 39 families held a quarter of the corrals. The notary Andreu Bernat, in addition to 4 corrals, had the cave of Benacia for which he had to pay. In 1426, the Duke of Gandia established the Cova Oberta –Open Cave– to Bernat Matamala, member of local oligarchy of Palma, next to Gandia, paying an annual rent of 5 s. and with right to keeping all the carobs. Despite this active presence of village elite, stockbreeding was just one more activity in their economies. For families that their heritage was valued at more than 4,000 s. stockbreeding buildings became about 4% of their wealth while for those families with a heritage less to 1,000s. these infrastructures represented between 7 and 10% of the value of real estate and, in some cases, 15%.

Let’s go to the market
In general, the bulk of the commercial activities in which the rural elites took part had to do with the agricultural surpluses obtained from their holdings. In relation with this, the inventories post-mortem (ipm) show this ability of the local notables to hold amounts of agricultural products waiting for the best moment for put them on the market. In the case of Joan Miquel, the bailiff of Torrent aforementioned, were found in the porch of his house different large earthenware jars that all together add up to 8,497.5 litres of wine. Given a daily consumption for adult person of litre and a half per day and the half for children, the Miquel’s family –integrated by the couple and three nephews living with them- consumed about 1,916.25 litres per year. The rest, 6,581.25 litres, logically went to the market.13 These local productions had to compete with wines that came from out of not only the shire but also the kingdom. In relation with this, local Councils –controlled village elites themselves– tried to protect their production with dispositions that limited its commercialization. With this policy, they obtained an easier market for their production.

In addition to these wine jars, other three jars of olive oil were registered in Joan Miquel’s ipm. In total 36.42 litres of oil that presumably were used for household needs. Nothing to do with the 1,620.5 litres that Guillem Estruc, notable from Palma, sold to the service of the Duke of Gandia for 726 s. In fact, the sold production sometimes did not come from own production, showing its commercial and speculative nature: the justice officer of the town of Gandia asked his colleague in the village of Palma “for us confiscate Berenguer Vidal and Minyana’s personal

13 For estimations about wine consumption see F. GARCIA-OLIVER. Elits camperoles a l’ombra de la ciutat de València: els Castrellenes, en prensa.
properties valued at 37 s. 8 d. as tax for 150 arroves (1,821 litres) of olive oil that they bought to Joan Ros and reselling them”. So, Vidal and Minyana seems to be more merchants than peasants, they were simple members of the local elite of Palma.

At Joan Miquel’s house the notary also registered five empty jars for cereals and, in addition, one taleca with red sorghum (83 litres) that could be used for feeding the animals of work and the poultry. In any case, the main cereal in the transactions was the wheat. The cafís (201 litres) fluctuated between 30 and 40s., but bad years it reached high prices with the consequent disorder on the fragile balance of medium and modest economies. In 1439 Francesc Bono (whose holding was valued at more than 4,000s.) sold 13 cafissos (2,613s.) to six families from Vilallonga per 682s. 6d., paying for each cafís 52s., really prohibitive price.

Without playing these products down, the local notables also sold their production of the speculative crops. After all, this was the reason for what they had been introduced in the farm, although some part of production could be consumed at home. Amongst these products we find sugar, dried fruits and some varieties of wine. So, Sanxa, Arnau Carbó’s widow obtained from only one plot (we do not know the extension) 440s. for selling all the production of sugarcane.

As the sugarcane, the commercialization of raisins was controlled by international merchants who acquired the production directly from Muslim communities, aljames, settled in the inner Midlands and other mountainous regions of the country. Despite that, the members of the local elite tried to take part with their own production. On 2 October 1469 a group of thirty-five people from Vila Joiosa named Tomàs Calbó as an attorney for selling 700 quintars (more than 30,000 kilos) of raisins “from own harvest of Polop variety –the most valued by merchants”. If we apply a price of 12s./quintar (the price in those years) they should sell the production for, more or less, 8,400s. But who were the sellers? What comes out is the different social background of those who took part in the transaction: one member of the lesser nobility, the priest of the parish, a widow –we suppose well-to-do since the treatment for his deceased husband-, a tailor, a miller and the rest, peasants. What they had in common was not their profession but they shared some economic interests. In fact, these interests were not only economic: twenty-five

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14 The poultry was composed by 5 chicken and one cock and, furthermore, one pig. Regarding animals for work, Joan Miquel had one workhorse and one horse for riding. Finally, one white mule for carrying products since in Valencian countryside carts were not used. Moreover, it is important to point out that all these animals provided Joan Miquel with mature that he used in his lands.

15 Exactly they were: Lluís Rotlà, donzell (lesser nobility), mossèn Bernat Avellà, priest of Vila Joiosa, Francesc Giner, Simó dels Orts, Joan dels Orts, Pere Lloret, senior, Joan Soriano, iunior, Jaume Beneito, Tomáš Ribelles, Antoni Lloret, major, Violant, widow of the honourable Jaume Cellers, Antoni Fira, Pere Ribelles, Jaume Llnares, Jaume Julià, Miquel Mayor alias Calafat, Jaume Giner, Antoni Escornell, Nicolau de Lorca, Jaume de Xeres, Mateu Verdú, Francesc Rostoll, Joan Librella, Jaume Llopis, Guillem Ivanys, Miqel Company, Domingo Urriós, Pere Sentonga, Nicolau Ivanys, iunior, Joan Llopis, moliner, Jaume Lloret, Joan Fira, Pere Ferrandis, tailor, and Joan Urriós, all of them from Vila Joiosa.
years later, this is, one generation after, the linages who controlled the local govern were the same than those who took part in the transaction: Orts, Beneito, Llorca, Lloret. The protagonists of the transaction were members of the village elite of La Vila Joiosa. Indeed, some of them such as the lesser noble Lluís Rotlà and the priest Bernat Avellà belonged to these lineages with a strong presence in the Midlands. This example proofs that, all in all, were economic and political strategies what defined rural elites and not, or not only, their socioprofessional background.

Amongst the most appreciate wines were the malmsey and the called “montonec”. These productions were not necessary for market but, in one more act of distinction, they reserved for their dining table, imitating the urban and noble behaviour. So Pasqual Navarro held a plot of young vineyard of greek wine and at home 86 litres of “montonec” wine.

Important was also the activities related to textile sector. In the aforementioned ipm of Joan Miquel, 9 skeins of tow and other two of linen were registered next to some weights to weight large linens. Furthermore, we have to mention some pieces of clothes that were prepared for tailoring: there were seven pieces of linen, that we cannot measure; and different pieces that all together measured 15,4 m. length and other pieces that measured 10,9 x 0,68 m. And in addition, two pieces of linen (3,6 m.) All in all, more than 30 m. of clothes that was about to be sold to some tailor.

Regarding silk, it was commercialized in any given moment of the productive process, except of the worms, the most delicate stage of the cycle. In 1547 the tailor Pere Bartomeu and Pere Aragonés, two notable of the village of Canals, bought for 800 s. all the harvest of leaves of mulberry trees that Agusti Barberà, a citizen of Xativa, had in his plot of 10 fanecades (near to 1ha.) in an irrigated area. Also could be bought in the very initial moment, called seeds. At Ausias Sancho’s house 90 gr. of white and yellow seeds were registered. However, the most usual kind for transactions was the silk cocoon: Joan Miquel held in different rooms of his house 38 reeds for feeding silk worms with mulberry leaves, obtaining around 279 pounds of cocoons (around 100 kilos). Furthermore, the farming of mulberry tree implied the first transformation of the raw material and the spinning of the silk as the presence of spinning wheels revealed.

Regarding the stockbreeding, the wool was the main product in the transactions due to the development of the textile in the inner Midlands with Cocentaina as principal centre. The local notables -most of them well-to-do cloth shearer- took part in this market providing the raw material to other cloth shearer and weaver, responsible of preparing the wool and warping and wearing the cloths. The wool came from own flocks: the cloth shearer from Alcoi Joan Eiximen got into debt with Joan Margarit, notary, for buying him 85s. of “certain wool”. Giving an usual price of 15s./arrova, the notary Margarit sold around 5,5 arroves of wool (70.8 kilos). Since the date of the transaction, in October, the wool had to come from the last
season, so this could not be all the Margarit's wool. Nevertheless, these transactions after the sheared of sheeps, in June, were not usual. Indeed, the high demand of wool stimulated in advance purchases in order to secure the supply and the quality of wool. So, in 1497 the lord of the hamlet of Benifallim, Benat Domèneç, sold 772.8 kilos of wool to the cloth shearer-draper Joan Pérez Requena for 1,140s. He had to provide it in st. John's day 1498.

Along with wool, the other main product derived from stockbreeding that rural elites traded was meat. On 29 April 1398 Berenguer Noguera, the well-to-do peasant from Gandia, and the butcher of the town, Francesc Bonet, got into debt with Pons Mascarell for 64 sheeps valued at 640s. The good reputation of paying was also part of the heritage of these rural elites. In less than four months before the deadline arrived, Noguera and Bonet had satisfied the debt with Mascarell. Noguera’s participation in livestock trade should be more frequent than documents show. Indeed, again in 1401 we find him playing as consignature of two Muslim peasants who bought 192 goats for 2,240s. Moreover, these transactions show the economic power of the Muslim rural elites in spite of their conditions of defeated society and the synergies they shared with the Christian colleagues: in 1440 Saat Alhannat, the most influential man in the hamlet of Alfahuir, and other local notables bought 1,262 sheeps valued at 13,251s to Antoni Marti, a flocksman from Valencia. The consignatures of the transaction were Ausias de Cabrera, lord of the hamlet of Ròtova, in front of Alfahuir, Miquel Ros, bailiff of the shire, and Antoni Belsa, one of the oldest lineages in the shire of Palma. They required Muslim peasants the commitment of not selling the livestock *aliquo tempore sine licentia vestra usque quo per quemlibet nostrum totum dictum debitum sit solutum dictum Anthonio Marti*.

It is more difficult to perceive transactions with non-agricultural products with the exception, obviously, of those who had craft activities as their main economic activity. Regarding the Muslim peasantry, the need of a safe-conduct for travelling the kingdom can confirm the existence of strong trade links amongst the different Muslim communities in the centre and south of the kingdom. The same documents explaining the reason for the trip through repeated formulas "to collect some debts due to him," "some matters he has to make," "to carrier products", "go for merchandising", "to trade and negotiate" or "for sale".

**The credit market**

The credit activities should represent a considerable part of the family economy of the local notables. We have to remember that from 11,000s. of the Jaumeta’s dowry, Bernat Ribera’s sister aforementioned, 6,000s. were valued at the farm but the remaining 5,000s. would be valued at jewels, cash and given loans. Indeed, the main instrument for credit operations was these loans (censals), which it acquired the
shape of a transaction: somebody sells someone else the right to obtain an annual pension in return for the capital. So, in October 1392, Berenguer Noguera, aforementioned, on behalf of his mother Francesca, received 150s. for delayed pensions. One year later he received 220s. from a fisherman of Gandia. As in the livestock transactions, also for the loans consignatures were required. Playing as joint signature, therefore, showed the wealth of the individual but also his social reputation and the network of dependencies that he created around him. On 30 August 1390, Berenguer Noguera played as consignature in the loan of 100s. that Pere Busquet and his wife Saurina, Guillemona, mother of her, took on from Iucef Alabu, the creditor more active of the Jewish community in Gandia.

In addition to these credit transaction, again, the ipm seem to be the best tool to know the amount of the money invested in credit market although the feature of the sources required to proceed cautiously. Indeed, in spite of his ipm did not include any list of debtors, it is difficult to admit that Joan Miquel had not invested in the credit market, both public and private. In fact, we know that Joan Miquel gave loans because amongst the registered objects we find some clothes that had been pledged.

The «customers» of the local notables were not only peasants but also members of the lesser nobility. The lord of the hamlet of Beniarjó, the poet Ausias Marc, took on loans from the village elite of Palma: in 1444 Miquel Ros, from the village of Ador and representative of the bailiff of Ròtova, gave him a loan of 2,082s. for an annual pension of 166 s. 8d. Years later, in 1453 Marc asked Pere Minyana, from Palma, for a loan of 2,000s. for an annual pension of 183s. 4d. Finally, in 1455, four years before dying, the aforementioned Miquel Ros gave him a loan of 3,385s. for an annual pension of 270s. 10d. All these cases show that the credit market was essentially local or, in any case, regional, confined to the Midlands. This investment strategy was complemented by the purchase of public debt. Since at least 1445, Jaume Estruc, also from Ador, received from the Council of Gandia 200s. each year as a pension for a capital of 4,000s.

Besides, these loans show that wealthier members of the community kept some cash at home. This is important in a society where the circulation of coins was limited. This cash was a monetary reserve for attending any urgency or paying part of a dowry (as we saw in the Jaumeta’s dowry). At Joan Miquel’s home, the notary registered a pine box where were found different coins of silver and gold which were valued at 250s.

**Leasing rents and monopolies and other investments**

The market of rents, regardless its nature secular or ecclesiastical, and taxes complemented the investments of the village elites. Different evidences show that there were not isolated transactions but they became part of consolidated strategies.
In the context of a lawsuit in the Royal Court of Justice [Governació] in 1430 it was said about Berenguer Tosca, well-to-do peasant of Gandia, that he had been «many times lessee of the tithes, third tithes and first-fruits rents [primícias] of the present town and its shire». However, despite this reference, it was more common to associate with other notables of the community for leasing those rents that because of the covered territory or of the taxed product they could be interested. In 1415 Jaume d’Ares, Joan Vidal and Bernat Matamala, all member of the local elite of the village of Palma, leased «all the rents belonging to the Duke in the shire of Palma» valued at 7,800s.

Leasing manorial monopolies belonged also to the economic strategies of the Valencian rural elites. The most profitable operations consisted of obtaining a dealership of the manorial monopoly and after to lease it to someone else who would use paying a larger amount. In 1390 Pere Estruc, local notable from Palma, obtained the manorial dealership of the flourmill with two grinds and a contiguous plot of olive trees for which he paid the duke Alfons d’Aragó 16 s. in 1392 he leased all this to Saat Xixoni by 350 s. during one year with the condition of working the land with the plough three times. Obviously, Xixoni hoped to obtain more benefits but he had to work. Conversely, Estruc had his investment fully guaranteed.

The aforementioned notary of Castalla, Andreu Bernat, maybe the richest prohom of the village, had the manorial dealership of two ovens. Obviously, for operating he leased them, although the importance of this business in his whole economy had to be quite modest. And this due to Andreu Bernat did not work directly in agricultural activities. In his case, he work as notary, what offered him not only certain and substantial incomes but also news, references to economic opportunities. All this is difficult to asses but, in any case, reaffirmed him as a centre of the social relations in the aforementioned village.

**Conclusions**

As Andreu Bernat, Joan Miquel was not peasant either, although both of them lived surrounded by peasants. As him, Miquel leased rents, monopolies and taxes: before he was designated bailiff of Torrent, we know he leased the manorial mill and the butcher’s from the lord. Furthermore, unless between 1465 and 1475, he leased – individually or collectively– the tithes of bread and wine of Torrent, paying each year 575 s. Nonetheless, Joan Miquel could read and write. In the desk registered by the notary he should review accounts, make lists of debtors and, possibly, here he wrote his will himself. The ipm of their goods includes the tools for a barber, confirming this occupation. However, it seems that he did not work during the last years of his life, due to the many front he had to deal. Between 1475 and 1479, when he died, he was designated bailiff by the lord and it is probably he occupied other
local post as juror before, with the economic rewards. All in all, his incomes went beyond his income.

The case of Joan Miquel illustrates this diversity of the economic activities in which the rural elites took part. Far from being limited to the agricultural sector, the economy of the wealthier members of the rural community was featured by the heterogeneity. Thanks to that, they could face the unexpected circumstances with more guarantees than the rest of the community.