**Word count: 9,802**

**Notes: 4,004**

**Credit networks and political actors in thirteenth-century Ypres\***

ABSTRACT:

This article analyzes approximately 6,000 debt contracts surviving from late medieval Ypres, then a leading producer of wool cloth for international markets, to reveal the links between the urban uprisings that first erupted in the region during that period and the city’s socioeconomic structure. The city’s small and medium-sized producers, although involved in the luxury wool industry, were not confined to that market or dependent on the city’s elite to finance their production of less expensive cloth or other goods, as historians once argued; rather, they regularly dealt directly with creditors and merchants throughout northern Europe and were themselves active lenders both to fellow Yprois and to small producers in the region. The shape, size, and strength of their credit network both evidences their entrepreneurial independence and helps explain why they sought and how they were able to win political rights from the city’s governing class, which had long dominated the trade in English wool.

Historians have recently returned to the popular revolts that erupted in late medieval and early modern Europe, searching for explanations less indebted to scholarship concerning the industrial period on which earlier scholars had tended to rely. Focusing in particular on urban uprisings and the factionalism among elites that produced alliances with popular classes and on the relationship between intra-urban revolts and state-building in the early modern period, they have eroded the once prevailing idea that the uprisings were precursors to the class wars of the capitalist age.[[1]](#footnote-1) This research has not, however, yielded rich evidence that would reveal the motivations and capacities of the ordinary men who participated in these revolts, whether or not they did so under the leadership of disaffected elites.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Much of the literature on these revolts has inevitably featured cities in the Low Countries – ‘le paradis des luttes sociales’ as a nineteenth-century historian once put it.[[3]](#footnote-3) While scholars agree that the uprisings in this region, above all in Flanders, were born both of discontent with elite rule and of economic hardship that began in the thirteenth century, we have very little information about the people who actually rose up. As one historian recently put it, ‘the scholar who searches for a work on the identity of these people rapidly becomes disappointed’.[[4]](#footnote-4) Indeed, although historians have recently often described the protestors as ‘self-conscious’ and as a ‘middle class’ of small producers (textile artisans in particular) or even guildsmen, we have had only a few names of these men and usually only general references to ‘fullers and weavers’ in sources condemning the uprisings or listing the punishments handed down. In fact, we have had little specific evidence about their trades or their economic status and no concrete information that would explain their ability to organize and arm themselves.

Ypres, then at its economic apogee, has left several thousand debt contracts from the second half of the thirteenth-century that yield precisely the data needed to place these protestors socially, economically and politically. In itself much richer than any collection of credit records surviving from commercial cities in northwestern Europe until well into the fifteenth, even the sixteenth, century, this body of evidence allows a close look not just at the creditors and debtors themselves but also at the credit networks in which they operated.[[5]](#footnote-5) Although long known to historians, the records have not been systematically studied for their socioeconomic content because, as we shall see, they resist easy analysis. Using a database that enabled close study both of individual borrowers and lenders and of the credit networks that linked them, I have examined the contracts to expose the extent of the city’s economic and social diversity and relate it to the charged politics of the day. Dating from 1249 to 1291, the contracts total 5,598, which surely represents only a fraction of those actually written during the period; nevertheless, they name approximately 30 per cent of all adult males who would have lived in Ypres between 1266 and 1291.[[6]](#footnote-6) About two-thirds of them were not members of the city’s elite, but small producers, ranging from artisans to retailers and simple householders, even including some merchants whose trade was limited to the region, all able to borrow and lend at levels that evidenced fairly significant property holdings.

The contracts date almost exactly from the time of the earliest uprisings in Ypres and elsewhere in Flanders, all mounted against the so-called patricians who ruled the commercial cities in the county. In Ypres, the patriciate was composed of men from about thirty families who had long monopolized rule thanks to their possession of vast urban properties, the support of the French monarch and for much of the period the Flemish count as well, and their dominance, along with men from about twenty other families, of the luxury cloth industry that was the basis of the city’s fortunes.[[7]](#footnote-7) Foremost among these episodes were the ‘*Cockerulle*’ in Ypres of 1280 that broke out almost simultaneously with the ‘*Moerlemaye*’ in Bruges and the more famous 1302 battle of the Golden Spurs where armies from the major cloth towns in Flanders, now in alliance with the count, defeated the French host that had been marshaled in support of the cities’ patricians.

This study not only documents the existence of a ‘middle class’, as historians have recently characterized it, but also allows us to appreciate the role that credit played in creating and maintaining their status both by providing access to capital and enlarging their social networks. The data extracted from the contracts puts to final rest an argument born over a century ago with Henri Pirenne and fellow historians. According to this interpretation, the Flemish revolts were driven by the desperation of an artisanate being systematically exploited by mercantile elites who not only monopolized rule but also managed the entire economic infrastructure to serve their own interests, reducing the artisans in the textile industry to a form of debt servitude.[[8]](#footnote-8) Instead, this study proposes that the credit system, although certainly used by elites, was not theirs alone. It was also a tool of small producers, both securing their entrepreneurial independence and displaying the grounds upon which they stood as they claimed, and eventually won, political rights.

I. The contracts and their commercial setting

Thirteenth-century Ypres was one of the powerhouses of the then booming Flemish economy. With a population of about thirty thousand, it was the third largest city in the original county of Flanders (after Bruges and Ghent), and outside of Flanders in the north of Europe the city was then smaller only than Paris, probably London and possibly Cologne. Famous for the high-priced drapery that adorned elites throughout Europe, Ypres was the home of a Cloth Hall reputed to be the biggest in Europe and an annual fair that was part of a cycle of fairs held in five Flemish cities and interspersed with those of Champagne. Its economic might had earned it, along with a handful of other Flemish cities, significant rights of self-government as well co-governership (with the count) of the rich county itself. Although the Flemish cloth industry came under pressure during the last third of the thirteenth century, Ypres, along with the county’s other powerful cloth towns, remained a key player in English markets (and English politics) and had close ties to Italian, German and French merchants.

The contracts that are the basis of this study are known to historians as *lettres de foire* because they were used by merchants from all over Europe who traded at the Ypres fair. Like all the Flemish and Champagne fairs, the Ypres fair was pre-eminently a site for trade of precious English wools, dyes, and mordants such as alum for the textile industry; cloth to be distributed throughout Europe; and luxury products or industrial materials such as spices, silks, wines, timber, leather, wax, furs, arms, ores and finely worked metal wares, although all these fairs also served as a market for locals buying and selling produce, ordinary craft goods and the like. As importantly, these fairs also served as clearing-houses where merchants settled accounts.[[9]](#footnote-9) The Champagne fairs have left extensive administrative and legal records that expose their institutional history and identify key groups of actors in the system (and occasionally the identities of particular men). In addition we have some toll records from the fairs at Lille, Messines (Menen in its better-known Flemish form) and Torhout.[[10]](#footnote-10) None of these fairs, however, has left financial records anything like those from Ypres.[[11]](#footnote-11)

The contracts themselves survive either in transcriptions (about three hundred) or as summaries published in 1990 (5,598, including most of the transcribed contracts), not in manuscript, for Ypres’s archives, along with the city itself, were destroyed in World War I. All but a handful are dated between 1249 and 1291, the bulk of those between 1266 and 1291.[[12]](#footnote-12) Alongside these publications, we have the city’s cloth regulations and related records from the early fourteenth into the fifteenth century, a good run of town accounts from the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century, and incomplete collections of scattered council decisions, court judgements and the like.[[13]](#footnote-13) In form, the original documents were double or triple chirographs on parchment with an almost unvarying rhetorical structure. In addition to providing the name of the lender(s) and borrower(s), as well as that of any personal pledges (found in 14 per cent of the contracts), the document included a description of any material security proffered (8 per cent), the amount due, the due date, the presumed place of payment, and — far too occasionally — the purpose of the loan and the occupation of the borrower or lender.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Only a few contracts, however, contain all the data needed for reliable analysis. Although the actors’ names are always included, they are spelled in so many different ways that it is often impossible to distinguish one man from another; moreover, the same given name is used repeatedly, even within families, resulting in many homonyms and an inordinate number of men called “Jean” “Jehan,” “Johanus,” or their diminutives. It is even sometimes difficult to decide if a name very much like that of a patrician is in fact the same person, so common are some of the surnames and so variant the spellings. In adjusting for these difficulties, I always erred on the conservative side, but even so the data is dense enough to allow a much fuller examination of the businesses conducted by Yprois and the city’s sociopolitical structure than is available from the period, whether in Ypres or elsewhere in Flanders, indeed in any city in the north of Europe.

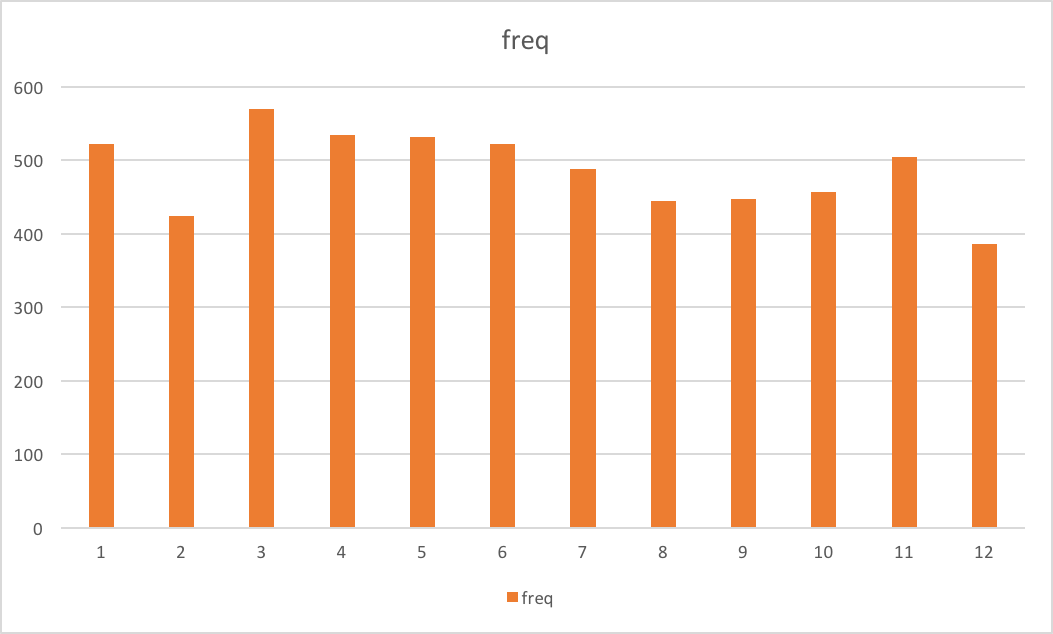
Formal properties of the documents alone help explain how ordinary householders and small producers could have gained access to a credit market dominated by the rich. All but a small handful of the contracts were written in the Picardese version of French, the language of trade in the broad region that served all creditors and debtors as a common language, even if it was not the spoken language of the Italians, English, and Germans who appear in the contracts, and in fact not that of most Yprois.[[15]](#footnote-15) The form of the agreement, a simple IOU then called a *lettre obligatoire,* is another sign of the credit market’s accessibility, for it required no particular notarial expertise to draft it and only basic literacy to read it.[[16]](#footnote-16) The chirographs also contained a clause requiring all participants to submit to the jurisdiction of the city: *que sa dette ne requerra par autre loi que par le loi de le vile d’Ypres* (this debt will be adjudicated only according to the law of the city of Ypres), a provision that assured Yprois lenders and borrowers that local courts would prevail in any dispute.[[17]](#footnote-17) Many of the debts, and probably all of them, also contained a clause allowing the debt to be collected by a representative of the lender: *a paier a lui ou a son commandement qui cette charte partie apportera* (to be paid to him or at his order to the person who presents this chirograph). Although not yet the endorsement that later would allow lenders to sell their credit instrument to another person, this clause made it possible to arrange payment at locations other than Ypres and, in fact, to write contracts outside of Ypres that would nevertheless be subject to Ypres’s law.

The contract also provided creditors strong protections of various kinds. One was the joint and several obligation, expressed by the phrase ‘each for all’ that was almost always inserted into the chirographs when there was more than one borrower, as there was in about 25 per cent of the deals: *cascun pour les tout.* A good number of the contracts (22 per cent in total) also included a pledge of material goods, most often real estate, or a personal guarantor. Finally, the agreement was officially witnessed by the city’s aldermen. Armed with this document, a creditor did not have to go through the laborious process of debt collection prescribed by local custom; he could just quickly seize assets: *a ceste connissance furent eschevins d’Ypre [names]* (the witnesses were aldermen of Ypres [names])*.*[[18]](#footnote-18) Backed by such provisions, lenders could be confident of their contract’s strength. Given that registrants voluntarily paid to have the document produced, handsomely so if we are to take evidence from fifteenth-century Ghent as our guide, we can be certain of the faith creditors and debtors put in it.[[19]](#footnote-19) Thus, although probably developed to serve elite trade, this instrument easily allowed ordinary citizens to exit the confines of family, neighborhood and craft as they gave and took credit.

Although shared by a wide range of citizens, this credit system was nevertheless dominated by the elites, just as historians have long described. The city’s rich merchants show up in these records as debtors to foreign suppliers of English wool, thus testifying to the fact that after 1270, when the English crown imposed a four-year blockade on trade with Flanders and thereafter regularly disrupted the commerce, foreigners took over the business of importing wool to Flemish cities. Italians led the list of suppliers to Yprois; they, along with English exporters and merchants from the southern French town of Cahors, accounted for 34 per cent of the total value of loans registered between 1249 and 1291, all granted as sales credit to Yprois purchasers of the wool and all but a handful of the buyers members of the city’s elite. Merchants from other places apparently also supplied some English wool as well; those from La Rochelle, Lübeck, and Soest were probably the most important among them (together they accounted for 12 per cent of the total value of loans), although these merchants traded many other goods as well — wine, tin, furs, timber, and metal wares chief among them.

Although confirming the familiar story about the credit relations between suppliers of English wool and Ypres’s elite, the contracts also reveal that the business in English wool, including the production of cloth made from it, was only part of the city’s commerce. One sign of this diversity is provided by the dates of the contracts themselves, for very few of them were executed at either of the two fairs held at Ypres — the principal six-week fair that began at Lent and a shorter eight-day fair that began at Ascension — which were thought to have been at the center of the Yprois credit system. Instead, contracts were signed throughout the year, certain proof that the signed contract could be used anytime and almost everywhere to provide lenders the same protections as the document written for payment at a fair — and thus support various types of commerce not connected to fair cycles.[[20]](#footnote-20) (**Table I** below) The term *‘lettre de foires’* is, then, something of a misnomer.

**Table I: Distribution of chirographs by month, 1249-91**



And in fact, most of the creditors in these contracts, including the Yprois lenders themselves, did not always tie their businesses to fair cycles. The English and Italians, along with the merchants from Cahors, are the only significant exception.[[21]](#footnote-21) Even these creditors, however, set payment for a fixed date, typically a saint’s day, about 20 per cent of the time, which suggests that their Yprois debtors were active throughout the year and probably active in many different sites. The currencies in which these creditors demanded payment are another sign of their business models. As merchants of English wool, these suppliers usually denominated their loans in sterling, the currency they would have needed in English markets. So did the merchants from Lübeck and Soest, a signal of their commitment to trade of English goods, but merchants from La Rochelle (another probable supplier of some English wool) only rarely demanded payment in sterling, evidence that much more of their trade was in the northern French and Flemish region; there loans were almost always denominated in *livres d’artois* or *livres parisis* (the local currencies and in this period approximately equivalent). Other non-Yprois lenders almost always denominated their loans in the *livres d’artois* or *livres parisis* as well*,* indirect evidence that they were selling goods brought from the continent and that they did not trade in England. As additional evidence that their business was not confined to the fair cycle or to trade in English wool,, they settled only 46 per cent of their loans at a fair date. It was the same with Yprois lenders; they always denominated their loans in one of the local currencies and only 39 per cent of the time did they select a fair date for payment, which strongly suggests that a good portion of their business was not tied to the fair cycle.

The contracts thus indicate that Yprois debtors were borrowing a lot of money to buy goods such as the common textiles, metals, knives, swords, local wools, leather, meat, animals, and foodstuffs described in toll records from other Flemish fairs or to finance other projects, perhaps, for example, construction of a house or the payment of a promised marriage gift. While the entire collection of contracts is too incomplete to allow an estimate of the volume of trade enabled by this credit system, the collection does provide hard evidence of how portions of the credit market in Ypres changed from 1266 through 1291. They attest, as we have seen, to the post-1270 entry of foreign suppliers of English wool, but they also document changes in the market for finished cloth that occurred in connection with the *Cockerulle* of 1280. Although that revolt did not unseat the patrician government, it did result in the opening of the Cloth Hall to non-patricians, giving small producers direct access to buyers. Twelve per cent of all loans registered by those lenders identified by trade were in fact made by men who had entered the Cloth Hall after 1280, most of them small producers (drapers); 10 per cent of the borrowers in these loans could be identified as craftsmen, many in the textile trade, an indication that the drapers who extended the credit were financing men who helped produce the cloth (a great many borrowers unidentified by trade were surely also textile craftsmen).

Another development is registered by the contracts dated from 1289 and beyond, when all Yprois, no matter their social rank, were permitted to import wool directly from England so long as they paid the required fees to enter the so-called Hansa of London.[[22]](#footnote-22) Quite a few “new men” did, joining many of the patricians and other elite merchants who had returned to English wool markets, now in competition with Italians, Germans, English and French exporters. Among the newcomers to English wool markets were some who can be identified not just as wool merchants but also as drapers, men who both organized production and sold cloth. Joris van de Temple, for example, exported English wool and rented a stall in Cloth Hall in the early years of the fourteenth century, presumably to sell the cloth he had made or had ordered made; Watier Bruman, also an exporter, sold cloth through the Hall in the same period.

These patterns confirm evidence about the textile industry in Flanders that has emerged during the past few decades: the luxury cloth industry, however important to the city’s elite, was just part of the city’s textile business. Alongside cloths made of English wool and sold at prices rivalling the very best silks from the East, Ypres also produced a huge number of lower-quality woollens made of continental wools. Patrick Chorley first provided conclusive proof for this claim in 1987.[[23]](#footnote-23) Although he did not investigate who made this cloth or how it was marketed, we have a few regulations indicating that small producers were permitted to sell ‘half cloths’ outside the Cloth Hall even before the Hall was opened to them. Small producers of cheaper cloth could, it is evident, work independently, dealing directly with the merchants who would have supplied much of the continental wool used in their production, along with the dyes needed both for luxury and lower-quality cloth — men from cities in northern France or Flanders like Saint Quentin, Péronne, and Bruges. As we shall see, merchants from such cities were major lenders to Yprois and most of their borrowers were non-elites.

II. The credit network

A study of the identities of the participants in these contracts (investigated in the following section III) and, as importantly, of the shape of the entire market to which they belonged, the particular focus of this section, leave no doubt that the city’s mercantile elite worked alongside and sometimes in cooperation with a sturdy class of small producers who also had independent networks through which they borrowed and lent. The entire network was thus roughly segmented, with elite lenders and their borrowers at the top and more ordinary creditors and debtors further down the hierarchy (as measured by the size of loans and the social status of the lender or borrower). The lines of demarcation between these segments were permeable, however, for men from different ranks could be found at all levels of the market. Moreover, the sectors themselves were not composed of tight-knit groups of lenders and borrowers; instead individuals regularly dealt with a variety of lenders or borrowers.

As **Table II** below illustrates, non-Yprois lenders came from hundreds of different places and made loans of widely different value. Although the men importing English wool dominated the list in terms of the value of the loans they extended, merchants from several other cities so frequently loaned to Yprois that they accounted for almost as much of the credit extended. For example, the 104 loans made by Brugeois accounted for 8 per cent of the total, the 76 made by Lillois accounted for 4 per cent, and the 211 made by merchants from Saint Quentin accounted for 9 per cent. Alongside them operated many hundreds of different men, some from important cities like Tournai or Geneva, but most from smaller places, all of whose average loans were typically smaller — still usually large enough, however, to hire a semi-skilled artisan for a couple of years.[[24]](#footnote-24) And then there were a handful of lenders responsible for even fewer loans of smaller amounts; the three from merchants in the village of Furnes, for example, averaged only 122 d. st., about three months’ work.[[25]](#footnote-25)

**TABLE II Loans made by Non-Yprois creditors (from selected foreign cities or regions)**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Origin of lenders** | **No. of loans made** | **Average amount loaned (d. st.)** | **Total amount loaned (d. st.)** | **Per cent of**  **total value**  **of loans made by foreigners** |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **Italy**  ***Florence*** | *47* | *14,765* | *693,955* | **10%** |
| ***Lucca*** | *36* | *18,183* | *654,588* | **9%** |
| ***Piacenza*** | *25* | *15,056* | *376,400* | **5%** |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **England** | *18* | *23,972* | *431,500* | **6%** |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **France south**  **of the Loire**  *Bayonne* | *6* | *10,202* | *61,212* | 1% |
| ***Cahors*** | *16* | *16,413* | *262,608* | **4%** |
| ***La Rochelle*** | *51* | *8,284* | *422,484* | **6%** |
| *Montauban* | *3* | *19,497* | *58,491* | 1% |
| *Montpellier* | *2* | *6,040* | *12,080* | <1% |
| *St. Jean d'Angelin* | *11* | *16,332* | *119,652* | 2% |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **Spain** |  |  |  |  |
| Burgos (Burs) | 5 | 11,270 | 56,349 | 1% |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **Switzerland** |  |  |  |  |
| Geneva | 5 | 6,304 | 31,520 | <1% |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **German Empire** |  |  |  |  |
| *Aix-la-Chapelle* | *1* | *29,091* | *29,091* | <1% |
| *Brunswic* | *2* | *16,630* | *33,260* | <1% |
| *Cologne* | *9* | *8,532* | *76,788* | 1% |
| *Dinant* | *3* | *4,080* | *12,240* | <1% |
| ***Lübeck*** | *18* | *18,231* | *328,158* | **5%** |
| *Soest* | *5* | *15,240* | *76,200* | 1% |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **France north of the Loire**  *Amiens* | *4* | *2,142* | *8,568* | <1% |
| *Arras* | *62* | *2,766* | *111,492* | 2% |
| *Béthune* | *4* | *1,439* | *5,756* | <1% |
| *Bouvines* | *3* | *10,182* | *30,546* | <1% |
| *Brai sur Somme* | *6* | *1,549* | *9,294* | <1% |
| *Bruai* | *3* | *325* | *915* | <1% |
| *Corbie* | *45* | *2,518* | *113,310* | 2% |
| *Dinant* | *3* | *4,080* | *12,240* | <1% |
| *Encre* | *4* | *1,884* | *1,536* | <1% |
| *Harbounières* | *16* | *2,357* | *40,592* | <1% |
| *Ougnies* | *3* | *3,063* | *9,189* | <1% |
| *Paris* | *6* | *9,308* | *55,848* | 1% |
| *Péronne* | *38* | *3,552* | *134,976* | 2% |
| *Reims* | *1* | *1,278* | *1,278* | <1% |
| *Rouen* | *8* | *7,967* | *63,736* | 1% |
| *St. Omer* | *16* | *2,009* | *32,144* | <1% |
| ***St. Quentin*** | *211* | *2,863* | *604,093* | **9%** |
| *Tournai* | *17* | *925* | *15,725* | <1% |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **Historical**  **County of Flanders** |  |  |  |  |
| *Bailluel* | *6* | *502* | *3,015* | <1% |
| *Boesinghe* | *3* | *189* | *567* | <1% |
| ***Bruges*** | *104* | *5,660* | *588,640* | **8%** |
| *Cassel* | *2* | *444* | *888* | <1% |
| *Commines* | *4* | *999* | *3,996* | <1% |
| *Dixmude* | *6* | *3,360* | *20,160* | <1% |
| *Droninghes/Drongen* | *6* | *1,656* | *9,936* | <1% |
| *Furnes* | *3* | *122* | *367* | <1% |
| *Gravelignes* | *3* | *4,727* | *14,181* | <1% |
| *Ghent* | *27* | *1,831* | *49,437* | 1% |
| *Hénin* | *8* | *1,927* | *15,160* | <1% |
| ***Lille*** | *76* | *3,260* | *247,760* | **4%** |
| *Longemarke* | *4* | *740* | *2,960* | <1% |
| *Messines* | *5* | *1,252* | *6,260* | <1% |
| *Poperinghe* | *13* | *2,181* | *28,353* | <1% |
| *Steenvorde* | *3* | *303* | *909* | <1% |
| *Warneton* | *3* | *161* | *483* | <1% |
| *Vlamertinghe* | *3* | *216* | *648* | <1% |
| *Wijtschate* | *4* | *272* | *1,088* | <1% |
| *Zonnebeke* | *3* | *266* | *798* | <1% |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **Total loans from**  **selected foreign**  **sites** | ***1002*** |  |  | ***86%*** |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **Total loans from all other sites** | ***116*** |  |  | **14%** |

The segmentation of this market is best illustrated by the average size of loans given. **Table III** below, made up of merchants from selected cities in each of three identifiable sectors, reveals the unsurprising fact that the clientele of the suppliers of English wool was overwhelmingly elite (surely more than the 53 per cent that could be securely identified); further, men positively identified as craftsmen in the contracts written by suppliers of English wool constituted a vanishingly small part of the whole. Men from patrician families took the largest loans from these merchants, again no surprise. Members of the patrician Balgh family, for example, took ten loans averaging 16,000 d. st. or above — i.e., above the average for this group of lenders. The patrician Bardoncs also took ten loans above this level; the patrician Piet de Soiles took nine.

It is somewhat of a surprise to find, however, that such men were not the sole clients of the Italians and other suppliers of goods from England. Consider, for example, that among the forty-four men who, as individuals, borrowed from the Italians during the entire period only eleven could be positively identified as members of patrician families; another eight are well known to historians as members of commercial families similarly positioned in commerce.[[26]](#footnote-26) But among those forty-four individual borrowers there were also at least eight men from relatively unknown families that were almost as active in trade but seem to have usually operated at a different level and with different people, dealing with the Italians only by exception. Most typically borrowed from fellow Yprois or from merchants in northern France and Flanders, which suggests that they were principally involved in providing goods from the region to artisans, retailers, and householders in Ypres — local wools, dyes, wine, foodstuffs and so on. They also loaned money quite regularly to fellow Yprois who were not among the city’s elite, thus suggesting that they stood in the middle of a credit system that drew in many hundreds of Yprois. For example, a group of men bearing the family name Slingher (almost certainly closely related) made fourteen loans during the period, all to different Yprois, which averaged the relatively modest amount of 2,511 d. st. (nevertheless, about five years work by a semi-skilled laborer). The loans they took overwhelmingly came from fellow citizens, some of them elites but most otherwise unknown Yprois.

Other occasional borrowers from the Italians were less active still. Laurens Bricham borrowed just once from the Italians, but he borrowed many times from merchants from cities like Corbie, St. Quentin, Arras, and Lille, as well as from men in his own city. An occasional lender to fellow Yprois, he also extended credit to people from nearby cities — Messines, Warmeston and Renighes among them. A more unusual borrower was Jakemes Keurle. He managed twice to secure credit from the Italians even if his record for repayment appears to have been horrible. He borrowed 1,302 d. st. from the Florentine Frecobaldi and registered the debt as past due in 1288; in the same year he registered a past due debt of 1,357 d. st. from the Richardi in Lucca; each amount, while much smaller than the loans taken from the Italians by the city’s elites, could have hired a skilled artisan for over two years. Although apparently in trouble with the Italians, Keurle nevertheless was able to borrow over 6,000 d. st. from Willaume de Pierre, a fellow Yprois, in 1287 and in the same year to lend over 2,000 d. st. to another citizen; in 1284, he even loaned over 2,000 d. st. to a certain Jehan de le Brievere, requiring only that his debtor repay when ‘il arrive a bonne fortune’.

Merchants from elsewhere in Europe sometimes worked at levels approaching that of Italian lenders. A case in point is provided by the five loans made by merchants from Burs (Burgos). One loan for 47,520 d. st. was for wool (sold to a consortium that included two men from patrician families), but another was for 5,640 d. st. and went to a group of five men, two of them artisans in the leather trade (*cordwanier)*; one of the borrowers in another loan was also likely a leatherworker. But most other non-Yprois merchants who concentrated their business at a level below the Italians came from Flanders and northern France. Although apparently sometimes delivering English wool, the bulk of their business was surely the supply of continental wools, dyestuffs, wines, wax, leather, and countless other materials for industry, along with grain and meat, perhaps fruit and other produce. Some of the lenders occupying this second tier were, however, not merchants, but bankers. Arras, to take the prime example, was the home of many professional money changers (in that period the financial capital of the region), and a few of the men known to have been in this business turn up in these contracts as lenders.[[27]](#footnote-27)Only 24 per cent of the Yprois who borrowed from these lenders could be positively identified as members of patrician families or as merchants of cloth or wool, and many of the cloth merchants were not members of the traditional elite; rather, they were drapers who had become visible (to us) only after 1280 when the Cloth Hall was opened to small producers and we have a few records of rental fees. Some 26 per cent of the contracts in this tier had an identified craftsman as at least one of the borrowers, in sharp contrast to the clientele of the elite wool merchants.

The third level of non-Yprois lenders was composed of men from places in Flanders and northern France whose infrequent loans were relatively small, as illustrated in **Table III** by fifteen cities whose lenders made at least three loans during the period. Even the merchants from the commercial and administrative city of Tournai made relatively small loans (an average of 925 d. st.) — this in comparison to second-tier merchants from Harbounières, whose sixteen loans averaged 2,357 d. st., not to mention the sixty-five from Arras that averaged 7,090 d. st. Still, seven of the seventy-two contracts named a merchant as borrower, usually someone selling cloth from the Hall after 1280, which suggests that these smaller cloth producers were sometimes getting raw materials and other goods from relatively obscure suppliers.

**TABLE III: The segmented credit market formed by non-Yprois lenders (sample accounting for 66 per cent of the total value of loans made by foreigners)**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **FOREIGN LENDERS** |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Tier (based on average size of loan)** | **No. of loans**  **made** | **Average**  **Size**  **of loan**  **(d. st.)** | **Total**  **Value**  **of loans**  **made**  **(d.st.)** | **Percentage of contracts with identified patricians or elite merchants as borrowers** | **Percentage of contracts with identified Yprois craftsmen as borrowers** |
| **1**(St. Jean d’Angelin, Piacenza, Lucca, Florence, Lübeck, La Rochelle, England, Cahors) | *209* | *14,974* | *2,679,425* | *53%* | *<1%* |
| ***2***(Arras, Corbie, Harbounières, Lille, Péronne, St. Quentin, Bruges, Ghent) | *573* | *3,348* | *1,904,968* | *24%* | *26%* |
| **3** (Amiens, Bailluel, Boesinghe, Bruai, Cassel, Commines, Encre, Furnes, Messines, Reims, Steenvorde, Tournai, Vlamertinghe, Witschate, Zinnebeke) | *72* | *864* | *61,397* | *10%* | *16%* |

No matter the financial level at which they usually worked and no matter their origin, however, most merchants operated independently of one another and had few steady clients. The only partial exceptions are the Italian creditors who worked in companies (including the Scotti from Piacenza, the Richardi from Lucca, or the Frescobaldi or Bardi from Florence), apparently the English (two names dominate the list of creditors from England) and the merchants from Cahors (two names from that city as well). Twelve different names appear as lenders in the eighteen loans from Lübeck, however, and forty different names in the fifty-one loans from La Rochelle. Even these lenders did not, however, have regular clients. The fifteen loans valued at more than the huge sum of 16,000 d. st. and above (the average loan extended by all foreigners was 6,089 d. st.) made by the Florentines, for example, had members of nineteen different families as borrowers, and twenty-four different individuals. Family members did sometimes borrow jointly — for example, Pierre and Jean Lo, members of a patrician family, borrowed 40,488 d. st. from the Frescobaldi; François and Michiel Piet de Soile, also from patrician families, borrowed 28,880 d. st. from the same company. But both of the Piet de Soiles and both of the Los entered into several different consortia with other, unrelated borrowers; the nine different lenders from Lübeck dealt with eighteen different debtors.

Both lenders and borrowers operating in the second tier of **Table III** were even less rigidly organized. The 573 loans in this tier were made by 265 different merchants. The circle of borrowers was even wider. The sixty-two loans from Arras lenders, for example, counted eighty-one different borrowers; the seventy-three from Lille counted seventy-nine, the 104 from Bruges counted 137. To be sure, many of the borrowers from Bruges’s creditors also borrowed from Lille’s lenders, for example, but that is just further evidence of the fluidity of these credit arrangements. It was the same for the third-tier merchants. In total fifty-nine merchants were represented from fifteen places and made a total of ninety-one loans; 105 different Yprois borrowers participated in the loans.

All the non-Yprois creditors, although accounting for just over half (53 per cent) of the value of loans extended to Yprois, made only 25 per cent of the loans. The rest were made by Yprois; their portion of the entire credit market was also segmented as measured both by the size of the average loan and the social status of the lender. **Table IV** below organizes the lenders according to rank as (1) patricians, (2) elite but non-patrician merchants of wool or cloth, (3) men who entered the Cloth Hall after 1280 and are thus considered non-elite cloth merchants, and (4) unidentified lenders (the vast majority).

**TABLE IV: The credit market formed by Yprois lenders**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Status of lender** | **Per cent of all**  **loans made**  **by Yprois** | **Average value of loans made**  **(d. st.)** | **Range of loan values (d. st.)** | **Per cent of loans made by lenders that went to identified craftsmen** |
| **1** Patricians (including those who rented stalls after 1280) | 16% | 2,230 | 34 - 61,818 | 8% |
| **2** Identified as non-patrician important merchants (including those who rented stalls after 1280) | 6% | 1,875 | 57 - 29,080 | 8% |
| **3** Renters of stalls (non-patrician and not identified as important  merchants before 1280) | 3% | 1,575 | 15 - 23,777 | 10% |
| **4** Other, non-identified lenders and identified craftsmen | 75% | 1,201 | 9 - 60,000 | 12% |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **All Yprois lenders** | **100%** | **1,405** | **9 - 61,818** | **11%** |

Just as historians have often described, patricians were frequent lenders to other Yprois and their loans were relatively large. Most of their loans, however, went to fellow elites (well over 80 per cent, as measured by monetary value). For example, Jean Firton, a patrician, made four loans during the period, two to members of patrician families, for an average of 15,411 d. st., and was part of two consortia that borrowed 6,109 d. st. and 9,887 d. st. from merchants who worked at the same level of the market. Equally prominent non-patrician merchants also gave the largest loans (and thus most total credit) to fellow elites. To be sure, as historians have often described, elites sometimes loaned to craftsmen. For example, members of the prominent patrician family of Biezebout made forty-two loans during the period, averaging 1,887 d. st.; seven of them were to craftsmen (none in the textile industry), averaging 806 d. st. But most elites loaned to artisans much less often, and in smaller amounts. In some contrast, Yprois lenders who first appeared in the Cloth Hall after 1280 (tier 3) seem to have lent to craftsmen more often than either of the two elite groups. Some of these lenders appear to have been craftsmen turned drapers or from families of craftsmen. For example, Jean Rike, identified as a candlemaker in a loan made in 1279, made several more loans after 1280 and at the turn of the fourteenth century was also often listed as a renter of a stall for selling undyed cloth. Men identified as craftsmen and those whose occupations we cannot track (tier 4) but who were not identifiable as elites were even more frequent lenders to the city’s artisans.

III. Ypres’s ordinary citizens as lenders and borrowers

The contracts leave little doubt that the entire credit network was not only socially complex and fluid, it was large — the different men named in all the contracts total about 4,500, accounting, as explained earlier, for about 30 per cent of the adult men who would have lived in Ypres at any time between 1266 and 1291, the twenty-six years during which all but sixty-six of the contracts are dated. In the single year 1284 when 637 loans were registered, 889 different Yprois male names appear as lender or as borrower from either a foreigner or an Yprois — approximately 13 per cent of the adult male population that would then have then lived in the city.

It is impossible to provide precise counts of the non-elites in this total because there are so many homonyms in contracts and very few ways to differentiate one man called, for example, ‘Lasin le Rous’ from ‘Lazin Roux’ or Nicholon Slinge’ from ‘Clais Slingher’ from ‘Nicolas Slinnge le jeune’. A fair estimate, however, is that at least 3,000 of them were ordinary Yprois, most never identified by occupation and appearing in the entire collection of contracts only once or twice.[[28]](#footnote-28) For example, Jean Abbelois and Pieron Scietsteen made two loans in 1281 for 509 d. st. and 582 d. st., both to different men. Neither man appears in other contracts, nor do any of the three borrowers. In some cases, however, it is possible to discover more. Pasquin Lam, for example, made eight loans averaging 654 d. st. between 1288 and 1291. Although Lam himself was never identified by trade and although only two of his thirteen borrowers were so identified in the contracts he wrote (a carter and a shipper/boatman), some of the eleven men who borrowed from Lam but whose trade was not named in that contract were labelled craftsmen in other contracts. Pierre Medem, for example, was named a dyer in another contract, although not identified by trade in his loan from Lam. Jean Merkem, another of Lam’s borrowers, was labelled a brewer in another contract. Each of these men appeared in other contracts as well (although there not identified by trade) but none of them dealt with Ypres’ patricians, the city’s other elite merchants, or foreign lenders known to have specialized in trade with the rich; they do not appear in sources related to sales of cloth in the Hall; they often loaned to craftsmen; and the loans they made were typically around 600 d. st., not an insignificant amount for a small producer given an annual wage for semi-skilled work of about 500 d. st.

However open this entire credit network was, it was effectively a male space, a sign I would argue that it functioned at a financial level above the family and neighbourhood networks where ordinary people everywhere in Europe regularly borrowed and lent. Women, we know, were typically active in these settings. In the credit network studied here, however, women made up no more than 4 per cent of all creditors (many of the names repeat) and only 5 per cent of the borrowers (again, there are many repeating names). When women appeared, they were typically identified as widows or in partnership with a family member, usually their husbands. In Ypres, we must conclude, women surely enjoyed robust property rights as heirs of family property and as successors to the marital estate, but men were the effective heads of businesses of any significant size, just as they were the heads of household.[[29]](#footnote-29)

The some three thousand ordinary men in these contracts were small producers of some kind, some of them artisans but others retailers, simple householders, or even merchants who operated below the city’s elite. Of the entire group, however, only 3 per cent of the creditors were positively identified as craftsmen (based only on the specific contract in which the individual was so identified), and their loans were relatively small (584 d. st., the approximate equivalent of just over a year’s work), but it is significant that 36 per cent of them went to identified craftsmen, while only 11 per cent of the loans made by all Yprois lenders went to identified artisans. Jean le Provost, for example, positively labelled a candlemaker in all his transactions, made four of his seven loans to craftsmen, for an average of 1,506 d. st. Although Provost’s borrowers seem to have been good credits, many craftsmen appear to have extended loans to craftsmen who were not able to pay on time; about 50 per cent of the craftsman-to-craftsman loans were registered as past due, while only 13 per cent of all loans registered by all Yprois were past due. For example, Jean le Mont, labelled a dyer, was owed 3,453 d. st. by a brewer who had not paid; Jean le Tac, a supplier of peat (*tourbier*)*,* registered a past due loan of 1,237 d. st. taken by a dyer. It is unclear why so many of the loans between craftsmen were in technical default (or were, in effect, being re-structured), but it may be that craftsmen normally registered few of the loans they made to one another, their occupational network being strong enough to secure the loan without the contract, so that the registration procedure disproportionately served them as a record they could use if, after some time, the debt remained unpaid.

Most of the craftsmen in these contracts were not, however, lenders; they were borrowers. Of those 4 per cent were drapers, another 25 per cent dyers. Alongside them we find a good number of fullers and finishers, but in total about half of all identified craftsmen who borrowed were in non-textile trades: butchers, brewers, fishers, masons, bakers, and so on. Many of these men borrowed from non-Yprois; in fact 36 per cent of the loans they took came from outsiders. A boatman, for example, joined with two family members and a tanner (*basanier*) to borrow 400 d. st. from a Tournai merchant. A maker of chaps owed 95 d. st. to a creditor from Wijtschate. Three brothers in the leatherworking trade borrowed 727 d. st. from a Bruges lender; a baker and a wheat supplier (*blaier*) joined two other men to borrow 278 d. st. from a merchant from Lille. Some of these craftsmen borrowed from Yprois elite as we have seen, but most artisans borrowed from more ordinary Yprois. A certain Jakemon Vettinc, for example, was named a dyer in two of the eight loans he took, all from eight different lenders, none of them from Ypres’s elite. Henri Marc, named a dyer in one contract, took five loans from four different lenders, none members of the elite. Sohier Herzeele, a brewer, took two loans from two different non-elite Yprois as did the fuller Jean Lotin.

Among these craftsmen the dyers stand out, for many of them appear to have been prosperous and were certainly very active in the credit market. There were, for example, about 243 lenders that could be securely labelled dyers via the contract itself or another source, and about 287 borrowers.[[30]](#footnote-30) About half of the loans taken by dyers came from non-Yprois, most of them from Flemish and French creditors, with lenders from St. Quentin at the top of the list, and the average loan topped 3,800 d. st. In comparison, the average loan a dyer took from a fellow citizen was just over 1,000 d. st. and few of their lenders belonged to the city’s elite. Dyers also regularly lent to other Yprois; their loans averaged just over 1,000 d. st., and at least 18 per cent of the time they went to other craftsmen. Jean Mont, for example, appeared fourteen times in the collection of contracts, all but once positively labelled a dyer, lending twice to Yprois. Like most dyers who loaned to fellow citizens, he also borrowed from creditors in Lille, St. Quentin, Harbounières, Ghent, Arras and Ypres, a pattern which suggests that he was financing his purchase of dyes that he would in turn use in his own business; he may also have been buying wool for his own shop or for the shops of others.

Other records from the early fourteenth century, after the Cloth Hall was opened to non-patrician producers, suggest that some of these dyers were cloth producers as well as dyers. For example, Jean Waghenare, who made two loans in which he was positively identified as a dyer, appeared as renter of a stall selling ‘half cloths’ (*demidraps*). Similarly, Jakeme Parchi borrowed fourteen times in the period, in five contracts identified as a dyer; he also rented a stall. These men seem, however, to be exceptional, for among 323 individual renters of stalls found in the two surviving lists of rental fees only forty-five bore family names of men named dyers in chirographs, and only seven of those bore the same given name as well.[[31]](#footnote-31) It is a bit of a puzzle to find that men as prosperous as the dyers and as central to the industry did not enter the Cloth Hall or become merchants of English wool once that trade was open to them. A regulation of 1289 suggests, however, that they were deliberately excluded from cloth production in order to protect drapers: it specified that ‘no person who makes cloth may dye cloth, nor have association [‘*compaingnie*’] with anyone who has drapery dyed’.[[32]](#footnote-32) Further, in 1280 it had been decreed that no draper could practice another trade while he was producing cloth, a restriction that would have kept dyers out of direct production.[[33]](#footnote-33)

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that dyers had become important players in regional commerce. A certain ‘Jean Neuve-Église’ is a case in point, although there surely was more than one ‘Jean Neuve-Église’ in the credit market, so common is the name in the contracts. It is all but certain, however, that the ‘Jean Neuve-Église’ labelled as dyer in some contracts, was the same man who borrowed significant sums from lenders in St. Quentin, Corbie, Bruges, Genoa, Aix-la-Chapelle, Péronne, Langemarke, Lucca, and Béthune. He seems to have been importing English as well as local wools, along with dyes and other goods, although apparently not actually making cloth or organizing its production for later sale in the Hall.[[34]](#footnote-34)

We have other examples of the city’s almost rich, many them apparently financing a variety of businesses and businessmen. Members of the Flamenc family, for example, made twenty-one loans during the entire period, at a relatively high average of 2,091 d. st. Five of their twenty-six different borrowers were members of patrician families and in total six of their debtors were cloth merchants. Two were dyers, each of whom borrowed 1,338 d. st. After 1280, the Flamencs also took significant loans from suppliers from St. Jean d’Angelin and Reims among other cities, whose merchants then supplied wool. Tierri Winnart, another regular creditor to Yprois, had a somewhat different clientele and operated at a lower level of the market. He made forty-three loans averaging 706 d. st. to sixty-three different men, six of them to dyers, two to fullers and two to leatherworkers.

The ordinary men who populated so many of these contracts were thus a diverse group; along with merchants like the Flamencs and Winnant, dyers like Neuve-Église, many prosperous drapers, brewers, and butchers, there were hundreds of bakers, masons, fishers, peat sellers, millers and so on, not to mention textile workers like fullers and wool preparers who surely were statistically more numerous in the economy than they appear in these sources. Only luxury trades outside of textiles seem to be missing. Ypres evidently had few of the goldsmiths, jewellers, silversmiths, wine sellers, scribes, book makers or merchants of books that one finds in Paris or Bruges at the same time, presumably a sign that Ypres was a single-industry export town with a relatively wealthy elite bound to that trade and a parallel economy of small producers. Yet, however ‘ordinary’ the craftsmen, retailers, and non-elite merchants in these contracts may have been, they knew to profit from the presence of the buyers and sellers from all over Europe who frequented the city and they had taken full advantage of the credit mechanisms available in this busy commercial center. The infrastructure provided by the cloth trade and the money that flowed into Yprois purses from that trade freed them from dependence on the city’s elite for production financing, other capital needs, or even living costs, and also firmly secured the loans they made to one another, thus widening their circle beyond neighbourhood, family, and craft. In short, ordinary citizens of Ypres preserved their economic independence with the help of the very mechanisms – the luxury trade and the legal institutions serving it – that seemed to previous historians to have been instruments of their dispossession.

IV. Historiographic implications

Once, it seemed obvious to many scholars that the late medieval uprisings in Flemish cities like Ypres could be inserted into a social history of capitalism. In this interpretation, Ypres’s mercantile and political elites, like those in other Flemish commercial cities, were proto-capitalists and the textile artisans they employed were proto-proletarians.[[35]](#footnote-35) Henri Pirenne was principally responsible for this interpretation, but he was not alone. In his 1923 study of the cloth industry in French-speaking Flanders and France Georges Espinas explained that the elites, once having acquired luxury wool, ‘sold wool [to drapers], made drapery [by governing the production process], sold drapery’ [in international markets, thus reserving all the profits for themselves].[[36]](#footnote-36) Hans Van Werveke continued this thesis, in 1954 explaining that ‘[by the thirteenth century] the masters among the craftsmen were mere wage-earners’ and the capital ‘was concentrated in [hands of] the sole merchant-entrepreneur’ who exercised what another specialist from the same period called ‘tyrannical rule’.[[37]](#footnote-37) According to this understanding, the *Cockerulle* of 1280 in Ypres and the many other uprisings that began in Flanders in the thirteenth century were early versions of class war. The victory in the 1302 battle of the Golden Spurs was ‘achieved’, according to Hans Van Werveke, ‘by the simultaneous action of the class struggle in the towns and of the policy of Count Guy of Dampierre’.[[38]](#footnote-38)

The contracts examined here provide the basis for another story about the economic, social and political structure of commercial cities in late medieval Flanders and thus another way of interpreting the many years of unrest in these cities. They introduce the people who directly or indirectly authored the few scattered petitions or other records of their speech surviving from sources documenting popular unrest in cities like Ypres that historians have recently begun to investigate. Walter Prevenier introduced us to some of that language in an article from 2002, and we now have several more studies from Jelle Haemers, Jan Dumolyn, and others.[[39]](#footnote-39) Drawing upon evidence from Ypres, Bruges, Ghent, Douai and other cities, these scholars have agreed that although the uprisings each had their own characteristics, the protestors similarly represented themselves as the ‘*commun’* or *‘gemeente*’, terms that then referred to the entire community, and claimed to speak for ‘the common good’. Although economic injustices were on their list of grievances, their chief complaints were political — they charged their governors with corruption, called for fiscal accountability, and demanded a share in rule.

The contracts from Ypres make it clear that these men were property owners who had access to relatively significant amounts of capital from a wide range of creditors and the wherewithal to regularly extend credit to their fellow citizens. While the textile artisans in these contracts certainly had economic grounds for discontent and while other tradesmen in the city probably felt the effects of what had to have been a slowdown in the industry when the English closed their markets to Yprois exporters, they were hardly dispossessed artisans fighting for their economic and social lives.[[40]](#footnote-40) Such men would have been perfectly capable of articulating a case for political and economic rights and organizing to win them. We do not know whether any of the men named in the credit records actually fought in the *Cockerulle* or joined the army of 1302, but we can be certain that this is the demographic from which those men came.[[41]](#footnote-41)

We can also be certain that while such men won some economic advantages as a result of the *Cockerulle*, they did not owe the political energy and military capacities they displayed in the 1302 battle with the French solely to economic gains made after 1280.[[42]](#footnote-42) **Table V** below provides partial but powerful evidence for this claim. Men positively identified as craftsmen (who must stand in for the thousands of men unidentified by trade whose patterns of borrowing and lending matched theirs) were as active in the portion of the credit market made up of Yprois before the *Cockerulle* as they were afterwards, a clear sign that they were not on the brink of proletarianization at the time of that uprising. In short, if we can take craftsmen’s access to credit markets as our guide, little changed as a result of the *Cockerulle*; indeed, even though we have many more contracts per year for the post-1281 period, the percentage of craftsmen among the debtors hardly changes.

**Table V: Craftsmen as borrowers from Yprois lenders before and after the Cockerulle**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | **Yprois lenders** | **Yprois**  **lenders** |  | **Non-Yprois**  **Lenders** | **Non-Yprois**  **Lenders** |
|  |  | **Pre 1281**  **No. of contracts** | **Post 1281**  **No. of contracts** |  | **Pre 1281**  **No. of contracts** | **Post 1281**  **No. of**  **contracts** |
| All Yprois borrowers |  | 1,023 | 3,197 |  | 507 | 656 |
| Yprois  Craftsmen as  borrowers |  | 122 (12%) | 474 (15%) |  | 111 (22%) | 169 (26%) |
| Yprois  Drapers as  borrowers |  | 4 (<1%) | 31 (1%) |  | 3 (1%) | 3 (<1%) |
|  | Positively  identified | 2 (<1%) | 28 (1%) |  | 1 (<1%) | 0 |
|  | Probable | 2 (<1%) | 3 (<1%) |  | 2 (<1%) | 3 (<1%) |
| Yprois  Dyers as borrowers |  | 31 (3%) | 68 (2%) |  | 86 (17%) | 66 (10%) |
|  | Positively  identified | 15 (>1%) | 60 (2%) |  | 35 (7%) | 63 (10%) |
|  | Probable | 16 (>1%) | 8 (<1%) |  | 51 (10%) | 3 (<1%) |

We can also be certain that men like these Yprois populated nearby cities like Ghent and Bruges, although we cannot quantify their presence or their socioeconomic status as clearly as we can for Ypres. We do know, however, that in Bruges, where the *Moerlemaye* occurred almost simultaneously with the *Cockerulle*, the revolt included, according to Carlos Wyffels, seventy-two ordinary men even though it was led by a faction of the elite. Only three of the seventy-two were specifically named as textile workers, and many of the rest appear to have been carpenters, masons, shoemakers and brewers, a pattern that nicely parallels the demographic in the Ypres chirographs.[[43]](#footnote-43) Using Wyffels’s research (and that of other specialists) as well as their own extensive investigations of Bruges’s sources in their forthcoming *Bruges: A Medieval Metropolis*, Andrew Brown and Jan Dumolyn sketched a picture of socioeconomic conditions in that city closely resembling the one drawn here for Ypres, even though there were distinctive features to Bruges’s economy and even though the evidence from Bruges is not nearly as quantitatively robust as that from Ypres. By the thirteenth century, they concluded, Bruges had a ‘middle class’ that was politically still powerless ‘but undoubtedly enjoying a higher living standard than the average textile or leatherworker’ [in other medieval cities]; some artisans, they noted, had managed to rise to the status of merchants. A few were able to join the Hanse and thus export English wool. Between 1281 and 1299 a list of 199 new members included some butchers, bakers, brewers and brokers, even some women.[[44]](#footnote-44)

We also know that Bruges and other important Flemish cities like Ghent followed similar, if not identical, political trajectories as Ypres, and, despite being competitors in the cloth trade, often antagonists in court as they squabbled about river rights or grain markets, and even sometimes adversaries in armed conflict, the Flemish industrial and commercial cities were able to form an alliance in 1302 against the patricians. Further, the kinds of people revealed by these chirographs did not disappear after 1302, even as market conditions worsened, forcing Flemish cities to find new market niches, even establish new industries. Indeed, these people show up time and time again in sources from later decades, well into the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries when the Burgundians began political centralization of the Low Countries, the Champagne fairs had died out, and the plague and war were eviscerating much of Europe. A recent study of fifteenth-century pardon letters from the region, for example, displays many of the same kinds of social actors that appear in the chirographs — men (and women) with small businesses, a robust sense of their rights, and the political energy to press their claims against the powerful.[[45]](#footnote-45) Comic literature from the period features some of the same types as they quarreled and cooperated among themselves, worked with and stood up to their social betters, and manipulated the system to assure their own survival and preserve their honor.[[46]](#footnote-46) The evidence from thirteenth-century Ypres’s debt contracts thus not only clarifies the etiology of the late medieval uprisings in cities like Ypres and helps explain their success, it also provides a firm basis for a larger story about business, economy, society, and politics in Flemish cities during this period — and beyond.

1. \* My thanks to Peter Arnade, Marc Boone, Adam Kosto, Maryanne Kowaleski, Francesca Trivellato, and the readers for *Past and Present* for their critique and suggestions. Thanks as well to Tingna Ma, Ben Serby, and Tineke Van de Walle for help constructing the database and to Deborah Shulevitz for expert copyediting.

   See section IV below for a discussion of this literature regarding the uprisings in Flemish cities. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Samuel Cohn, *Popular Protest in Late Medieval Europe: Italy, France and Flanders* (Manchester, UK, 2004); Samuel Cohn, *Lust for Liberty: The Politics of Social Revolt in Medieval Europe, 1200–1425* (Cambridge, Mass., 2006); Jan Dumolyn and Jelle Haemers, ‘Patterns of Urban Rebellion in Medieval Flanders’, *Journal of Medieval History*, xxxi (2005). Also Jonas Braekevelt *et al*., ‘The Politics of Factional Conflict in Late Medieval Flanders,’ *Historical Research*, lxxxv, no. 227 (2012); Marc Boone, ‘Social Conflicts in the Cloth Industry of Ypres (Late 13th, Early 14th Century): The Cockerulle Reconsidered’, in Marc De Wilde, Anton Ervynck, and Alexis Wielmans (eds.), *Ypres and the Medieval Cloth Industry in Flanders: Archeological and Historical Contributions* (Asse-Zelik, Belgium, 1998); Justine Smithuis, ‘Popular Movements and Elite Leadership: Exploring a Late Medieval Conundrum in Cities of the Low Countries and Germany’, in Justine Firnhaber-Baker and Dirk Schoenaers (eds.), *The Routledge History Handbook of Medieval Revolt* (Abington, Oxon and New York, 2017) as well as the volume itself; Karl Czok, ‘Zunftkämpfe, Zunftrevolutionen, oder Bürgerkämpfe,’ *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Karl-Marx Universität Leipzig*, viii, no. 1 (1958–9); Carlos Wyffels, ‘Nieuwe gegevens betreffende een XIIIde eeuwse "democratische" stedelijke opstand: de Brugse "Moerlemaye" (1280­–81)’, *Bulletin de la Commission Royale*, cxxxii (1966); for further discussion of the role of elites in this uprising see Agatha Anna Bardoel, ‘The Urban Uprising at Bruges, 1280–1281. Some New Findings about the Rebels and the Partisans’, *Revue belge de philologie et d’histoire*, lxxii-iv (1994). For early modern state building and urban revolts, see Wim Blockmans, ‘Alternatives to Monarchical Centralization: The Great Tradition of Revolt in Flanders and Brabant’, in H. G. Koenigsberger and E. Müller-Luckner (eds.), *Republiken und Republikanismus im Europea der Frühen Neuzeit* (Munich, 1988); Marc Boone, ‘Patricians and Burghers: The Great and the Little Traditions of Urban Revolt in the Low Countries’, inK. Davids and J. Lucassen (eds.)*, A Miracle Mirrored. The Dutch Republic in European* Perspective (Cambridge, 1995); Marc Boone, ‘The Dutch Revolt and the Medieval Tradition of Urban Dissent’, *Journal of Early Modern History*, xi, no. 4 (2007); and Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 900-1992* (Oxford, 1992). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Cited in Jelle Haemers, ‘The Identity of the Urban “Commoners” in 13th Century Flanders’, *Imago Temporis: Medium Aevum*, x(2016), 192; originally from Léon

   Vanderkinder, *Le Siècle des Artevelde. Etudes sur la civilisation morale et politique de la Flandre et du Brabant* (Brussels, 1879). In addition to the sources in n. 1 above, we have Jelle Haemers, ‘Révolte et requête. Les gens de métiers et les conflits sociaux dans les villes de Flandre (XIIIe-XVe siècle)’, *Revue historique*, dclxxvii (2016); Otto Oexle, ‘Die Kultur der Rebellion. Schwureinung und Verschwörung im früh- und hochmittelalterlichen Okzident’, in Marie-Theresa Fögen (ed.), *Ordnung und Aufruhr im Mittelalter. Historische und juristische Studien zur Rebellion* ((Frankfurt am Main, 1995); Knut Schulz, *Denn sie lieben die Freiheit so sehr... Kommunale Aufstände und Entstehung des europäischen Bürgertums im Hochmittelalter* (Darmstadt, 1992). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Haemers, ‘The Identity of the Urban “Commoners”’, 192. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Work on credit networks in later medieval England is ongoing, but the evidence outside of peasant communities from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries is thin, and much of it treats debts in dispute or default rather than those registered when the agreement was made. See P. R. Schofield and N. J. Mayhew (eds.), *Credit and Debt in Medieval England c. 1180­–c. 1350* (Oxford, 2002); Chris Briggs, *Credit and Village Society in Fourteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 2009); Pamela Nightingale, ‘Monetary Contraction and Mercantile Credit in Later Medieval England’, *Economic History Review*, new ser., xliii, no. 4 (1990); Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, ‘Women, Credit and Family Relationships in England, 1300-1620’, *Journal of Family History*, xxx (2005). Notarial records from the south of Europe have yielded more information about peasant indebtedness and, to a lesser extent, about credit relations among ordinary urbanites; see, for example, M. Berthe (ed.), *Endettement paysan et crédit rural dans l’Europe médiévale et moderne* (Toulouse, 1998). Municipal registers kept by Hansa cities during the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries provide precious information about credit networks, almost exclusively among rich merchants and property owners; see Erich von Lehe, ‘Die Schuldbücher von Lübeck, Riga und Hamburg — ihr Quellenwert zur hansischenFrühgeschichte’, in A. van Brandt and W. Koppe (eds.), *Städtewesen und Bürgertum als geschichtliche Kräfte* (Lübeck, 1953). Also Claire Billen and Martha Howell (eds.), *Le Crédit au quotidien*, *Histoire urbaine*,special issue(in press); Gabriela Signori, *Schuldenwirtschaft: Konsumenten- und Hypothekarkredite im spätmittelalterlichen Basel* (Constance and Munich, 2015); Julie Claustre, ‘Vivre à crédit dans une ville sans banque (Paris XIVe–XVe siècle)’, *Le Moyen Age*, cxix, no. 3–4 (2013)*.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. During the twenty-six years between 1266 and 1291, about 15,000 adult men would have lived in Ypres, assuming a constant population of 30,000, one quarter of which was adult male (thus a gender and age distribution typical of the period), and a death rate of adult males matched by the rate at which males came of age in the city or immigrated to it. One scholar has estimated that the some 7,000 chirographs surviving before World War I (including the debt agreements examined here) account for only 10 per cent of the total that were executed between 1249 and 1291: Arthur Merghelynck, *‘Vade-mecum’ pratique et utile de connaissances historiques et indicateur nobiliaire et patricien de ces contrées* (Tournai, 1897),cited in Kristof Papin, ‘À propos de l’analyse des dettes passées devant les échevins d’Ypres 1249–1291,’ *Westhoek Info*, ix, no. 2 (1993), 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. For the patriciate, Selma Fecheyr, ‘Het Stadspatriciaat te Ieper in de 13e eeuw’, *Jaarboek van het XXXVIe Congres van de Federatie van de kringen voor Geschiedenis en Oudheidkunde van België te Gent* II, Handelingen – Maatschappij voor geschiedenis en oudheidkunde te Gent 1956 (Ghent, 1956). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. For more on this interpretation and its afterlife, see section IV below. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. # For a useful account of the genesis and operations of fairs in western Europe, *c*. 1200–1600, see Franz Irsigler, *Messen, Jahrmarkte und Stadtentwicklung in Europa = Foires, marchés annuels et développement urbain en Europe* (Trier, 2007).

   [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Leopold August Warnkoenig, *Histoire de la Flandre et de ses institutions civiles et politiques jusqu’à l’année 1305*, trans. A. E. Gheldolf, 5 vols. (Brussels, 1835–64), ii, and S. Poignant, *La Foire de Lille : contribution à l’étude des foires flamandes au moyen âge* (Lille, 1932). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. For the absence of archival records from Champagne like those from Ypres, see R.-H. Bautier, ‘Les Registres des foires de Champagne : à propos d’un feuillet récemment découvert’, *Bulletin philologique et historique*, *1942–1943* (Paris, 1945), esp. 157–88. For details regarding procedures at the Champagne fairs, including descriptions of the participants (Yprois among them), see F. Bourquelot, *Études sur les foires de Champagne, sur la nature, l’étendue et les règles du commerce qui s’y faisait aux XIIe, XIIIe et XIVe siècles* (Paris, 1865). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Guilliaume Des Marez published 232 of them in their entirety (217 for the period between 1249 and 1291) in his *La Lettre de foire à Ypres au XIIIe siècle: contribution à l’étude des papiers de crédit* (Brussels, 1900–1) or in *Le Droit privé à Ypres au XIIIe siècle* (Braine-l'Alleud, Belgium, 1927). Carlos Wyffels (ed.), *Analyses de reconnaissance de dettes passées devant les échevins d’Ypres (1249–1291)* (Bruxelles, 1991) contains the notes that Des Marez took from another 5,505 credit records (where he included twelve full transcriptions as well). Together then, we have 5,722 records from the 1249–91 period, most of them debt records. According to Des Marez, 7,032 records survived at the end of the nineteenth century. Another scholar, A. A. Merghelynck, also took notes from this collection, claiming that there were 7,018 or 7,019 in total: Arthur Merghelynck, *‘Vade-mecum’ pratique et utile de connaissances historiques et indicateur nobiliaire et patricien de ces contrées* (Tournai, 1897). His notes can be found in the Bibliothèque royale de Belgique, Fonds Merghelynck, no. 990. Also see Kristof Papin, *Zoekgids voor het fonds Merghelynck : Vijf genealogische vormingsavonden* (Ypres, 1997) and his ‘À propos de l’analyse de reconnaissance de dettes’. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. # GeorgesEspinas and Henri Pirenne (eds.)*, Recueil de documents relatifs à l’histoire de l’industrie drapière en Flandre : première partie : des origines à l’époque bourguignonne*, 4 vols.(Brussels, 1906–24); Georges Espinas and Henri Pirenne (eds.), ‘Additions au recueil de documents relatifs à l’histoire de l’industrie drapière en Flandre’, *Handelingen van de Koninklijke Commissie voor Geschiedenis*, xcvii (1929); Henri-E. de Sagher and Johan-H. de Sagher (eds.), *Recueil de documents relatifs à l’histoire de l’industrie drapière en Flandre : deuxième partie: le sud-ouest de la Flandre depuis l’époque Bourguignonne,* 4 vols. (Brussels, 1966), iii; Guillaume Des Marez et Émile de Sagher (eds.), *Comptes de la ville d’Ypres de 1267 à 1329*, 2 vols. (Brussels, 1913, rprt. 2009); Thierry De Limburg-Stirum (ed.), *Codex diplomaticus Flandrie inde ab anno 1296 ad usque 1325 ou recueil de documents relatifs aux guerres et dissensions suscitées par Philippe-le-Bel, roi de France, contre Gui de Dampierre*, 2 vols. (Bruges, 1879–89); Louis Gilliodts -Van Severen (ed.), *Coutumes des pays et comté de Flandre : quartier d’Ypres : sources et développement de la coutumes d’Ypres,* 2 vols. (Brussels, 1908), ii; Prosper de Pelsmaeker (ed.), *Coutumes de pays et comté de Flandre : quartier d’Ypres (VI) : régistres aux sentences des échevins d’Ypres* (Brussels, 1914); (ed.), ‘Edition critique des versions françaises de la ‘Grand Keure’ de Philippe d’Alsace, comte de Flandre pour la ville d’Ypres’, *Handelingen van de Koninklijke Commissie voor Geschiedenis,* cxlvii (1981); (ed.), ‘Les Keures inédites du plus ancien livre des keures d’Ypres’, *Handelingen van de Koninklijke Commissie voor Geschiedenis,* xciv (1930); Émile de Sagher (ed.), *Notice sur les archives communales d’Ypres et documents pour servir à l’histoire de Flandre du XIIIe au XVIe siècle,* (Ypres, 1898).

    [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Payments could extend for years if the specified instalments were kept up, although the majority of the loans were settled within the year, usually within a few months. For a fuller analysis of the chirographs and their use in the Low Countries during the period, see Thérèse de Hemptinne and Martha Howell, ‘The “*lettres de foire*” of Ypres (Second Half of 13th Century): Windows into the Commercial Culture of a Late Medieval Industrial Giant’, *Les Actes de la Commission internationale de diplomatique* (in press). Unlike the ‘*gardes des foires de Champagne et de Brie*’ who used a special seal to validate their charters and who kept registers of the written agreements (which by the end of the thirteenth century had come to stand for the original contract itself), the aldermen of Ypres did not use a seal; instead they relied on the chirograph itself. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. On the use of French in medieval Flanders, especially Ypres, see Guillaume Des Marez, ‘Note sur l’emploi de la langue française à Ypres’, in Godefroid Kurth (ed.), *La Frontière linguistique en Belgique et dans le nord de la France*, 2 vols. (Brussels, 1898), ii ; Walter Prevenier and Thérèse de Hemptinne, ‘La Flandre au moyen âge, un pays de trilinguisme administratif’*,* in  O. Guyotjeannin (ed.), *La Langue des actes : actes du XIe congrès international de diplomatique, Troyes, 2003* (Paris, 2004). On the Picardese variant of French, see Serge Lusignan, *Essai d’histoire sociolinguistique : le français picard au Moyen Age* (Paris, 2012). Des Marez, *La Lettre de foire,* 8–9n. 3, mentions four chirographs in Middle Dutch; only one of these (April 1252) is a ‘*lettre de foire*’. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. For discussion of the usage of the ‘IOU’ or *lettre obligatoire* during the period in the southern Low Countries and England, see Des Marez, *La Lettre de foire*, 24–9. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Similarly, at the Champagne fairs officials formed a court of last resort for trade disputes; on the submission clause there, see Maria Milagros Cárcel Ortí (ed.), *Vocabulaire international de la diplomatique* (València, 1994)*,* no. 235. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. For an explanation of these procedures in the southern Low Countries, see Phillipe Godding, *Le Droit privé dans les Pays-Bas méridionaux du 12e au 18e siècle :* *cinquième partie : les obligations* (Brussels, 1987), in particular, see ‘L’Inexécution des obligations’.  [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. In fifteenth-century Ghent, the simplest version of a *staten van goed* (a kind of post-mortem inventory) cost the equivalent of two to four days’ wages: Marc Boone, ‘De Gentse staten van goed als bron voor de kennis van de materiële cultuur: mogelijkheden en beperkingen’, *Archives et bibliothèques de Belgique,* numéro special 25 (Brussels, 1988), ii. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Since eighty-two of the documents do not even involve an Yprois, it is also evident that non-Yprois could avail themselves of the services of the city’s clerk; even they, however, rarely executed their contracts during the period of the fair itself. As previous scholars have noted, Ypres had become a kind of clearing house for debtors and creditors throughout the region : Wim Blockmans, ‘Transactions at the Fairs of Champagne and Flanders, 1249–1291’, in Simonetta Cavaciocchi (ed.), *Fiere e mercati nella integrazione delle economie europee, secc. XIII – XVIII : atti della trentaduesima settimana di studi, 8-12 maggio 2000* (Florence, 2001); David Nicholas, ‘Commercial Credit and Central Place Function in Thirteenth-Century Ypres’, in Lawrin Armstrong, Ivana Elbl, and Martin M. Elbl (eds.), *Money, Markets and Trade in Late Medieval Europe: Essays in Honour of John H. A. Munro* (Leiden, 2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. It would not, however, have been necessary for a merchant to be on site at any of these fairs to collect payment because the contracts, as we have seen, allowed a representative to replace the creditor. The Yprois debtors could presumably also use representatives, whether at the Champagne fairs or in Flanders. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. O. Mus, ‘Het aandeel van de Ieperlingen in de Engelse wolexport, 1280–1330’, *Economische Geschiedenis van België: Behandeling van de bronen en problematiek* (Brussels, 1972); Adolf Schaube, *Die Wollausfuhr Englands vom Jahre 1273* (Berlin, 1908). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Patrick Chorley, ‘The Cloth Exports of Flanders and Northern France during the Thirteenth Century: A Luxury Trade?’, *Economic History Review,* new ser., xl, no. 3 (1987); Patrick Chorley, ‘The Ypres Cloth Industry 1200–1350: The Pattern of Change in Output and Demand’, in *Ypres and the Medieval Cloth Industry in Flanders*. Also see Simone Abraham-Thisse, ‘*Kostel Ypersch, gemeyn Ypersch:* les draps d’Ypres en Europe du Nord et de l’Est (XIIIe et XIVe siècles)’, in *Ypres and the Medieval Cloth Industry*,and Renée Doehaerd*, Les Relations commerciales entre Gênes, la Belgique et l'Outremont d’après les Archives notariales génoises aux XIIIe et XIVe siècles*, 3 vols. (Brussels, 1941). For details on the production of cheaper cloths, see A. E. Verhulst, 'La Laine indigène dans les anciens Pays-Bas entre le XIIe et le XVIIe siècle’, *Revue historique*, ccxlviii, no. 2 (1972); G. De Poerck, *La Draperie médièvale en Flandre et en Artois: technique et terminologie* (Bruges, 1951)*;* D. Cardon, *La Draperie au Moyen Age: essor d'une grande industrie européenne* (Paris, 1999). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Here and throughout this essay, the annual wage for semi-skilled work is estimated at about 500 d. st. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Throughout this essay all currencies have been converted into English pennies sterling (d. st.). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Mus, ‘Het aandeel van de Ieperlingen in de Engelse wolexport’ and Fecheyr, ‘Het Stadspatriciaat te Ieper in de 13e eeuw’ have each provided lists of men considered elite. Their lists somewhat differ from one another but I used them, along with my own evidence, to identify both patricians and the elite merchants who worked with them. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. For this history, see Georges Bigwood, *Le Régime juridique et économique* *du commerce de l’argent dans la Belgique du moyen âge* (Brussels, 1921–2), recently treated in Wim Blockmans, *Metropolen aan de Noordzee: de geschiedenis van Nederland 1100–1560* (Amsterdam, 2010) and Marc Boone, ‘Centre et périphériques: les facteurs de croissance économique au moyen âge,’ in *I paesaggi agrari d’Europa (secoli XIII–XV), Pistoia 16–19 maggio 2013* (Pistoia, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. The few scholars who have examined the ‘*lettres de foire*’ remarked on the presence of such men in the records, but the difficulty of managing this volume of data did not allow them to go beyond this observation: H. Coppejans-Desmedt, ‘Handel en handelaars op de Vlaamse jaarmarkten in de tweede helft van de XIIIe eeuw’, in H. Coppejans et al. (eds.), *Album Carlos Wyffels: aangeboden door zijn wetenschappelijke medewerkers* (Brussels, 1987); Blockmans, ‘Transactions at the Fairs of Champagne and Flanders’; Nicholas, ‘Commercial Credit and Central Place Function’; also see Papin, ‘A propos de l’analyse de reconnaissance de dettes’. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. For more on this issue and references to relevant literature, see Martha Howell, ‘Women, Credit and Patriarchy in Late Medieval Flanders’, in *Mélanges François Menant* (in press). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. The names often repeat, so these figures somewhat overstate the total number of individual dyers who borrowed or lent, but it is worth noting, in comparison, that only forty-two men identified as drapers — many of them also duplicates — were named as borrowers. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Espinas and Pirenne, *Recueil de documents relatifs à l’histoire drapière en Flandre: première partie,* nos. 871 and 873. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Espinas and Pirenne, *Recueil de documents relatifs à l’histoire drapière en Flandre : première partie,*  no. 765–13. [query whether this reference is correct? What does the ‘13’ indicate?] [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Espinas and Pirenne, *Recueil de documents relatifs à l’histoire drapière en Flandre : première partie,* no. 750–5. [see query above] [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Men with the same family name turn up equally frequently in the debt records as well (fifty-four times in total), often positively identified as textile workers, indicating that this Jean Neuve-Église was part of a family network of merchants and producers in the industry. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Henri Pirenne, whose views are best accessed in *Histoire économique et sociale du moyen âge: nouvelle édition et mise à jour par Hans van Werveke*  (Paris, 1969), is chiefly responsible for founding this tradition; referring to subsequent uprisings in the 1320s, for example, he wrote that ‘the revolutionaries wanted to impose a dictatorship of the proletariat on their adversaries’, 177. Also Henri Laurent*, [La Draperie des Pays-Bas en France et dans les pays méditerranéens (XIIe–XVe siècle): un grand commerce d'exportation au moyen âge](https://clio.columbia.edu/catalog/3281600?counter=1)* (Paris, 1936); Hans Van Werveke, ‘De Koopman-ondernemer en de ondernemer in de Vlaamsche lakennijverheid van de middeleeuwen’*, Mededeelingen van de Koninklijke. Vlaamsche Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schoone Kunsten van België, Klasse der letteren*, viii, no.4 (1946); Georges Espinas, *Les origines du capitalism,* 4 vols. (Lille, 1933–49)*;* Georges Espinas, *La vie urbaine de Douai au moyen âge*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1913). Georges Espinas, *La draperie dans la Flandre française au moyen-âge*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1923). [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Espinas, *La Draperie dans la Flandre française*, ii, 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Hans Van Werveke, ‘Industrial Growth in the Middle Ages: The Cloth Industry in Flanders’, *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., vi (1954), 4, 6; J. Demey, ‘De Vlaamse ondernemer in de middeleeuwse nijverheid’, *Bijdragen voor de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, iv (1949), 144. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Van Werveke, ‘Industrial Growth’, 241. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Walter Prevenier, ‘Conscience et perception de la condition sociale chez les gens du commun dans les anciens Pays-Bas des XIIIe et XIVe siècles’, in Pierre Boglioni, Robert Delort, Claude Gauvard (eds.), *Le Petit Peuple dans l’Occident médiéval. Terminologies, perceptions, réalités*, (Paris, 2002). Haemers, ‘The Identity of Urban “Commoners”’, provides a guide to the literature on this issue and an analysis of the rhetoric; also Jelle Haemers and Jan Dumolyn, ‘Reclaiming the common sphere of the city. The revival of the Bruges commune in the late thirteenth century,’ in Jean-Philippe Genet (ed.), *La Légitimité implicite* (Paris, 2015); Jelle Haemers and Dries Merlevede, ‘”Le commun se esmeut”. Een onderzoek naar het politieke optreden van het “gemeen” in het kader van de Gentse opstand (1379–1385)’, *Revue belge de philologie et d’histoire,* lxxxviii (2010); Jan Dumolyn, ‘”Criers and Shouters”: The Discourse on Radical Urban Rebels in Late Medieval Flanders’, *Journal of Social History*, xlii, no. 1 (2008). For elite views of the popular classes in these revolts, see Jan Dumolyn, ‘“Le povre peuple estoit moult oprimé”: Elite Discourses on “the People” in the Burgundian Netherlands (Fourteenth to Fifteenth Centuries)’, *French History*, xxiii (2009); for a study of subversive speech in cities of the day, see Jan Dumolyn and Jelle Haemers, ‘”A Bad Chicken was Brooding.” Subversive Speech in Late Medieval Flanders’, *Past and Present*, ccxiv (2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. The cloth industry throughout the Low Countries changed in significant ways from the thirteenth into the sixteenth century. Alongside competition from Italian, English and Brabatine producers of high-end drapery, cities like Ypres confronted serious challenges from rural producers who could make a cheaper, lower-quality cloth. Émile Coornaert’s, ‘Draperies rurales, draperies urbaines: l’évolution de l’industrie flamande au Moyen Age et au XVI siècle’, *Revue belge de philologie et d’histoire*, xxviii, no. 1 (1950), early analyzed the tensions between urban and rural producers, and many scholars have contributed to the literature. For a guide see John H. Munro, ‘Medieval Woollens: Textiles, Textile Technology, and Industrial Organisation, *c.* 800–1500’, in David Jenkins (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Western Textiles*, 2 vols. (Cambridge and New York, 2003), i; and John H. Munro, ‘Medieval Woollens: The Western European Woollen Industries and their Struggles for International Markets, *c*. 1000–1500’, in *ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. We have better evidence about the participants in another uprising of 1304, when several *échevins* were murdered and the residences of the city’s elite looted. A handful of the some one-hundred men named as looters (about 20 per cent of whom were specifically identified as weavers or fullers; no other trades were identified) can be found in the database of chirographs, and many more shared a family name with men who appeared regularly in the records from the 1270s forward. Among the men charged with the murder itself we find some of the same names (Jacop Dickemue, weaver, was charged as a murderer and men with the same family name were listed as looters; all appeared regularly in the chirographs as borrowers and lenders). Some charged only with murder also appeared in the database (Jehan Lievekint, for example, took several loans in the late 1280s and in 1291) and many of the alleged murderers bore the same family name as men in the database: Espinas and Pirenne*, Recueil de documents relatifs à l’histoire de l’industrie drapière en Flandre: première partie,* nos. 878 and 879. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. In a series of otherwise authoritative articles from the 1930s examining the *Cockerulle*, G. Doudelez reasoned that this uprising marked a watershed in the city’s socioeconomic history; thereafter, he said, drapers ‘gradually assembled fortunes sufficient to permit them, twenty years later [in the battle of the Golden Spurs], to challenge the merchants’ political power and to share it with them’: G. Doudelez, ‘La Révolution communale de 1280 à Ypres’, *Revue des questions historiques,* lxvi, (I: Mar. 1938), lxvi (II: May-Sept. 1938), 6, lxvii (III: Jan. 1939); rprt : O. Mus and J. A. Van Houtte, *Prisma van de geschiedenis van Ieper* (Ypres, 1974), 57. The evidence from the contracts suggests, however, that the *Cockerulle* was a watershed of a political, not economic, kind. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Wyffels, ‘Nieuwe gegevens,’ document 8, 113–27. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Andrew Brown and Jan Dumolyn (eds.), *Bruges: A Medieval Metropolis, c. 850–1550* (Cambridge, in press); the quote is from p. 120. My thanks to Jan Dumolyn for sharing the manuscript with me. We also have some administrative and fiscal records from fourteenth and fifteenth century Bruges, which provide a count of the craftsmen in the city’s militia or on tax rolls; although they are hardly direct measures of financial capacity, they provide rough indications: Jan Dumolyn, ‘Population et structures professionnelles à Bruges au XIVe et XVe siècles’, *Revue du Nord,* xci, no.329(1999). [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. # Peter Arnade and Walter Prevenier, *Honor, Vengeance, and Social Trouble: Pardon Letters in the Burgundian Low Countries* (Ithaca, N.Y, 2015). Also see, more generally, Walter Prevenier, ‘*Utilitas communis* in the Low Countries’, in Elodie Lecuppre-Desjardin and Anne-Laure Van Bruaene (eds.), *De Bono Communi: The Discourse and Practice of the Common Good in the European City (13th–16th c.)* (Turnhout, Belgium, 2010).

    [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. # Herman Pleij’s *Op belofte van profijt: stadsliteratuur en burgermoraal in de Nederlandse letterkunde van de middeleeuwen* (Amsterdam, 1991)provides good examples of this literature from the northern Low Countries; from the Burgundian period in the south, we have as one example the *Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles,* which describes precisely the same kinds of townspeople — energetic, clever, sometimes unscrupulous, and certainly perfectly capable of asserting their rights.[query whether there should be a bibliographic reference to this work here?]

    [↑](#footnote-ref-46)