Financing a rebellious city. Social change, revolts, and inequality among the fiscal elite in fourteenth-century Bruges

by Sam Geens

Il XIV secolo fu un periodo tumultuoso, in cui l'Europa fu sconvolta da frequenti rivolte. Gli storici attribuiscono questi eventi all'aumento delle disuguaglianze: al contrario, l'impatto delle rivolte medievali su queste ultime è rimasto poco studiato a causa della mancanza di fonti. Il capitolo, per affrontare questo problema, ricostruisce le differenze nella ricchezza dichiarata al fisco dell'un per cento più ricco della città di Bruges, uno dei più importanti centri commerciali dell'Europa nord-occidentale. Il saggio dimostra una traiettoria stabile di queste differenze grazie al carattere aperto dell'élite cittadina in termini di ricchezza, occupazione, lignaggi e cariche. Si ritiene che ciò sia dovuto a trasformazioni sociali graduali e alle frequenti rivolte. In entrambe le evoluzioni, gli artigiani furono al centro della scena, cogliendo nuove opportunità nel mercato e nel governo, probabilmente a scapito delle classi inferiori.

The fourteenth century was a tumultuous period. Europe was disrupted by frequent uprisings. Historians attribute these events to rising inequality. Conversely, the impact of medieval revolts on inequality has remained understudied due to lack of sources. To address this, the chapter maps the differences in fiscal wealth for the top one per cent in Bruges, a major commercial hub in Northwestern Europe. Remarkably, it shows a stable trajectory thanks to the open character of the elite in terms of wealth, occupation, lineages, and office holding. I argue that gradual social transformations and frequent uprisings explain this. In both evolutions, craftsmen took centre stage. They seized new opportunities in the market and the government probably to the detriment of the lower classes.

Medioevo, secolo XIV, Bruges, élite, disuguaglianza, rivolte.

Middle Ages, 14th century, Bruges, elites, inequality, revolts.

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1. *A changing world: introduction*

Europe's fourteenth century was marked by social unrest, as indicated by the frequent outbreaks of mass uprisings.[1] Historians have characterised the period as "a plague of insurrection" or "the age par excellence of 'popular revolutions'".[2] These violent conflicts were manifestations and, in turn, also drivers of profound social transformations during the Late Middle Ages. Important examples of such transformations can be seen in the major European textile industries of Flanders and Italy. Faced with severe crises in the first half of the fourteenth century due to shifting international demand and disruption of trade by warfare, these urban economies reoriented from the mass production of cheap cloths to the luxury segment of heavy woollens.[3] Subsequently, some groups seized upon emerging opportunities. Above all, historians have pointed to the rise of craftsmen who were able to convert their growing economic capital into political clout often through violent uprisings. For example, one of the key demands during the famous Florentine Ciompi Revolt (1378-82) was the instalment of a new government in which minor guilds were better represented.[4] This chapter aims to understand how the interaction between the gradual social transformations and the related outbursts of popular uprisings shaped political and economic inequalities in the fourteenth century by looking at the distribution of fiscal wealth, occupational titles, and political offices among the very top of the urban society in Bruges, the main commercial centre of Flanders.

Remarkably, the study of economic inequality has devoted little attention to this fundamental social change in European societies. Instead, scholars have focused primarily on the impact of the Black Death when discussing the fourteenth century. The changes in the functional distribution of income and the fragmentation of elite patrimonies led to a decrease in disparities in the following century and a half across the entire continent. Such a prolonged and universal egalitarian trend is extremely rare in history and explains the preoccupation of scholars. Moreover, sources detailing the distribution of wealth are scarce before the Black Death. For the few localities with published data before 1348, most of them only pertain to a single year.[5] As a result, only the long-term evolution of economic inequality can be assessed, making it impossible to distinguish the disruptive impact of the plague from the more gradual social transformations and the role of uprisings. An assessment of the shorter-term evolutions is however needed as the handful of communi-

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[2] Mollat, Wolff, *The Popular Revolutions*, 11; TeBrake, *A Plague of Insurrection*.
[3] Munro, "Medieval Wollens."
[4] Franceschi, *Oltre il "Tumulto"*.
[5] Alfani, "Epidemics, Inequality and Poverty."

ties with multiple data points before the plague pandemic paint an unclear picture. In England, some counties experienced a significant decline in inequality whereas other communities witnessed stability or a slight increase between 1280 and 1332.[6] In the Republic of Florence, different trajectories can even be found in neighbouring localities. Between the last quarter of the thirteenth century and 1332, wealth differences declined by almost a third in the countryside of San Gimignano while it increased by five per cent in the city.[7] For all these reasons, the chapter mainly focuses on the first half of the fourteenth century and introduces a new methodology to overcome the lack of sources. More specifically, it proposes to look at the top one per cent of households because they are most easily identifiable and disproportionately influence inequality given their substantial wealth.

In contrast to the above economic studies, popular conflicts and social transformations have been central in medieval political history. Scholars have investigated which, why, and how people revolted. In turn, these questions are usually connected to larger themes of state formation and class identity. For example, Samuel Cohn argues that the Black Death reinforced the self – and class-awareness of artisans and peasants, which greatly enhanced the number of uprisings in the second half of the fourteenth century. Many of the iconic medieval revolts did occur in this period, such as the Jacquerie (1358), the English Peasant Revolt (1381), and the already mentioned Ciompi Revolt. But this does not mean that the plague pandemic was the only or necessary cause for outbreaks. Popular uprisings were already prevalent at the beginning of the fourteenth century in Flanders and Northern France.[8] Again, this observation underscores the importance of distinguishing the effects of social change and related revolts on inequality from those of the Black Death and subsequent plague waves.

In political history, the social extent of the fourteenth-century revolts is hotly contested. Some historians have claimed that the uprisings resulted in more 'democratic' urban regimes characterised by the representation of corporate associations.[9] Others have been more critical. They contend that elected guild members still belonged to the top of society. Most importantly, Raymon Van Uytven argued that the inheritable status of patricians (called *poorterij*) was simply replaced by wealth as a selection criterion. Only a handful of families managed to accumulate the necessary capital to contest the patrician families in governing the city. He concluded rather pessimistically that "despite the recurrent uprisings and reforms, the political power always returned into the hands of the wealthy".[10] In a similar vein, Samuel Cohn

[6] Alfani, García Montero, "Wealth Inequality," table 3.
[7] Fiumi, *Storia economica e sociale*; Alfani, Ammannati, "Long-Term Trends."
[8] Cohn, *Lust for Liberty*.
[9] This rich tradition dates back to Henri Pirenne. See for example: Boone, "La construction d'un républicanisme;" Prak, "Corporate Politics;" Dumolyn, "Guild Politics and Political Guilds."
[10] Van Uytven, "Plutokratie in de oude democratieën," 406.

observed that many governments of Italian city-states became increasingly oligarchic after the Black Death despite the increasing wealth of the middle classes. By the fifteenth century, class solidarity had weakened in favour of patronage networks with the elite. As a result, popular uprisings became less frequent.[11]

The works of Van Uytven and Cohn both show that we need to integrate economic and political inequalities if we want to understand the social changes in the Late Middle Ages. Nevertheless, the topic of wealth and income disparities has played only a minor role in studying popular revolt since the 1980s. Previously, political historians emphasised polarization, economic oppression, and relative deprivation as key explanations for medieval uprisings.[12] From 1980 on, however, the focus shifted to political motives, such as the representation of craftsmen in governments and the infringement of urban privileges by monarchs.[13] Most recently, Jan Dumolyn, Wouter Ryckbosch, and Mathijs Speecke suggested reintroducing economic inequalities into the debate. Their analysis of confiscation records from the Ghent Revolt (1379-85) reveals that the majority of Bruges rebels were destitute textile workers, likely driven by concerns about living standards rather than the urban autonomy championed by their upper-middle-class allies. Accordingly, they have advocated for a socially more nuanced and multifaceted view of rebel motives.[14] Although economic inequalities have thus received some attention as causes of popular conflicts in the past and may become a prominent scholarly focus again, the reverse relationship has seldom been explored: to what extent did social change and the recurrent outbreak of revolts reinforce or alter economic inequalities? What were their long-term effects on wealth disparities? And how was this translated into political power?

To bridge the divide between the political and economic historiographies, this chapter focuses on the political and economic inequalities among the elite of Bruges, defined as the fiscal top one per cent. It explores their evolving social composition across multiple uprisings in the fourteenth century, especially before the Black Death. The first section introduces the context of the uprisings together with the employed sources. It proposes that records of forced loans and taxation of the elites may help to overcome the usual problem of source availability. It argues that the political bias commonly found in such records aids rather than hinders our analysis. The next section explores two measures of elite fiscal inequality. They depict an unexpected trend, which we cannot explain without the social context. To this end, the third section analyses the impact of the social transformations and the popular uprisings on economic mobility, office holding, and occupational representation among the elite. To what extent was the top one per cent an open and diverse group?

[11] Cohn, *Paradoxes of Inequality*.
[12] See for example: Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free*; Mollat, Wolff, *The Popular Revolutions*.
[13] See especially Tilly, Blockmans, *Cities and the Rise of States*.
[14] Dumolyn, Ryckbosch, Speecke, "Did Inequality Produce."

Did revolts like the Franco-Flemish War replace one plutocratic regime for another? How did the downfall of the textile industry in this period affect the wealth and occupational background of the elite? Lastly, the epilogue briefly reflects on the implications of these findings for the common citizens of Bruges.

2. *Tax the rich: Bruges and its sources*

Bruges offers an excellent case study because it was characterised by both the fundamental socio-economic changes and popular uprisings that we associate with the fourteenth century. The city was located near the North Sea in the County of Flanders and was one of the most important trading hubs in medieval Europe. The population of Bruges encompassed around 60.000 people at the start of the century.[15] As we have seen in the introduction, the cities of Flanders faced a severe crisis when the traditional focus on the mass production of cheap textiles became less profitable. In Bruges, this occurred in the last quarter of the thirteenth century. Like elsewhere, the city got a second breath by shifting to luxury woollens for the international market. Recently, Peter Stabel has argued that this conversion was complemented by the production of fashionable goods for the regional market. As a result, a far more diversified economy with a strong and varied group of craftsmen emerged by the end of the fourteenth century. According to Stabel, the transformation already started around 1300 but accelerated after the Black Death when increasing income boosted demand.[16] Historians argue that the profile of the local elite changed radically in the process. When the cloth industry fell into crisis, local merchant-entrepreneurs relinquished their role in international trade to foreign, mainly Italian and Hanseatic, merchants. Subsequently, the elite increasingly assumed the roles of brokers and rentiers. Thanks to the new focus on skilled production, some craftsmen amassed wealth and joined their ranks.[17] Such a change in the social composition of the city officials in Bruges has been recorded in prosopographical studies spearheaded by Jan Dumolyn and his students. They show that craftsmen not only entered the urban government from the early fourteenth century but also came to hold a majority in the following decades.[18] However, the connection of this evolution to wealth and its impact on inequalities remains understudied.

Situated in the heart of the County of Flanders, Bruges was the stage of many popular uprisings and revolts. These forms of collective action chal-

[15] Brown, Dumolyn, *Medieval Bruges*, 58.
[16] Stabel, *A Capital of Fashion*.
[17] Blockmans, "The Impact of Cities on State Formation;" Boone, Prak, "Patricians and Burghers;" Blondé, Boone, Van Bruaene, *City and Society*; Stabel, *A Social History*.
[18] Speecke, "De politieke orde van Brugge;" Dumolyn, Lenoir, "De sociaal-politieke verhoudingen;" Espeel, "De Brugse politieke orde."

lenged the established order to achieve specific economic or political improvements. In contrast to revolutions, they did not seek to overthrow the entire social order. The adjective 'popular' signifies the involvement of a large share of the population. It does not pertain exclusively to the lower classes. In fact, elites often spearheaded uprisings in the fourteenth century.[19] Major revolts occurred in Bruges during the Franco-Flemish Wars of 1297-1306 and 1314-6, the Flemish Peasant Revolt in 1323-8, the Artevelde Revolt in 1338-48, and the Ghent Revolt in 1379-85. These events affected most of the County. More localised uprisings are recorded in 1309-10, 1318, 1321-2, 1351, 1358-61, 1367, 1369, 1387, and 1391.[20] Within the limits of this chapter, it would be impossible to discuss all these episodes individually. Instead, I will mostly zoom in on the first period of revolts (1297-1316) and discuss the importance of repeated uprisings in the subsequent decades on a more general level.

To measure the impact on inequality, we need data on the entire distribution of wealth at regular intervals. However, comprehensive tax records are limited for fourteenth-century Bruges: of all preserved lists, only two feature a large share of the population. Unfortunately, they cover only a part of the city. To remedy this problem, we shift our attention to the top of society as they feature more regularly in the sources. Like most cities in this period, Bruges relied foremost on its excise duties – i.e. indirect taxes on consumption, such as beer or meat – to finance its regular expenses. However, they were often insufficient when faced with large and/or unexpected costs. In these cases, the aldermen could sell annuities to raise the necessary funds but this implied a recurring expense for a long period. The city accounts indicate that the practice remained relatively limited in Bruges.[21] Alternatively, the entire sum could be borrowed from international creditors with the downside of having to pay high interest rates. For example, Pope Boniface VIII had to intervene and absolve all interest in 1296 when Bruges was struggling to pay off a loan acquired from the famous Crespin family of Arras.[22] Lastly, the aldermen could turn to direct taxation or forced loans. The wealthiest citizens were the most logical contributors as they had the necessary capital and political investment in the city. Moreover, collecting money from a few households was cheaper and quicker than trying to tax the whole city, especially when most of them were unable to pay. As a result, the city accounts reveal a great number of levies on the wealthy for the fourteenth century.

Medieval fiscal sources come with some methodological problems. In most cases, we have little to no information about who, what, and how much

[19] Dumolyn, Haemers, "Patterns of Urban Rebellion;" Castañeda, Schneider, *Collective Violence*; Cohn, *Lust for Liberty*.
[20] Dumolyn, Haemers, "Patterns of Urban Rebellion;" Verbruggen, *Geweld in Vlaanderen*; DeVries, "The Rebellion of Southern Low Countries."
[21] In the middle of the fourteenth century, the annual number of life annuities being paid out was around 150. This is similar to the number found in Aalst, a city with a population that was fifteen times smaller. Munro, "The Usury Doctrine;" Vandeburie, "De Zwarte Dood," 277.
[22] Bigwood, *Le régime juridique*, 578-83; Bigwood, "Les financiers d'Arras."

was taxed. Without knowledge of tax rates, it is impossible to compare the absolute wealth levels and we are forced to limit our analysis to the relative differences. To maintain a consistent sample across fiscal records with varying coverage, we focus solely on the top one per cent. This approach is justified because differences in the share of included households were primarily determined by changes in the minimum wealth threshold for taxation. Thanks to readily available estimates of the total population of Bruges at different times in the fourteenth century, it is possible to select the right number of households for each list that corresponds to the top one per cent.[23] Nevertheless, it would be naïve to think that we can capture real inequality. In medieval Flanders, tax officials assessed households through their perceived status and the value of different assets, such as immovable goods, annuities, or household goods. Criteria could however change over time and tax evasion was common, especially among the elite. In addition, officials used a limited set of tax dues instead of converting the total wealth of each household based on the tax rate. The method simplified the administrative process at the cost of loss of information. Depending on the level of fiscal cluttering, inequality could be significantly underreported.[24] For our samples, this last problem seems limited since officials employed on average one tax amount per four households.

The most important limitation for our study pertains to the social profile of the contributors. Certain groups, such as the clergy and nobility, were typically exempt from taxation in Bruges during this period. Because they were often wealthy, we are undoubtedly missing an important part of the top. For example, the abbots of the nearby abbeys of Ten Duinen and Sint Andries respectively paid the highest and third-highest contribution in the forced loan of 1379. To keep comparisons consistent across all levies, I have removed them from the sample. Nevertheless, we should be aware that we are looking only at a certain subset of citizens. This subset does not necessarily correspond to the richest part of society. In the context of frequent uprisings, political rather than economic considerations likely dictated who contributed to forced loans and taxes. On the one hand, officials could target political adversaries as a form of repression. For instance, a Florentine citizen complained in 1370 that tax officials were assigning disproportionally high assessments to Guelfs compared to Ghibellines.[25] On the other hand, certain households may have been eager to contribute more than their fair share because paying taxes was the hallmark of citizenship and provided status.[26] In many cases, taxation was the necessary precondition for political representation. Although this

[23] We have selected the top 125 households for the period 1296-1316, the top 92 households for the period 1340-8, and the top 63 for the period 1379-96. This selection is based on the demographic data found in Prevenier, "Bevolkingscijfers en professionele;" Prevenier, "La démographie des villes;" Deneweth, "Een demografische knoop;" Brown, Dumolyn, *Medieval Bruges*.
[24] Zoete, *De beden in het graafschap*, 55-66; Lambrecht, Ryckbosch, "Economic Inequality," 173.
[25] Brucker, *Florentine Politics and Society*, 94.
[26] Prak, van Zanden, "Tax Morale and Citizenship."

bias complicates the reconstruction of inequalities, the levies are still informative if we consider the social and political background of the contributors. Did the popular uprisings in Bruges mainly lead to the exclusion or inclusion of certain groups at the top of society? Did craftsmen use their newly found wealth to invest in citizenship? In this sense, the fiscal records are revealing for the aspirations of the elite and for perceived social inequalities, which were probably more important than real economic inequalities to contemporaries.

A focus on the changes among the top one per cent is not necessarily representative of the differences found in the entire population. Fiscal inequality among the wealthy follows its own logic and may therefore diverge from the general trend. Nevertheless, the impact of this small minority is often immense. They usually hold a large share of wealth relative to their demographic weight. For example, I have estimated that the top one per cent in Bruges held 16,2% of all communal wealth around 1300.[27] Recently, Guido Alfani has retraced the number of rich households and the share they owned between the fourteenth and twenty-first centuries in Europe.[28] He shows how extreme wealth concentration at the top often negatively influences the political decision process in favour of the richest, an argument that is also at the core of Bas van Bavel's explanation for the downturn of historic market economies. According to Van Bavel, flourishing market economies create wealth that new elites will eventually translate into political power causing polarization and a decline in the institutional ability to adapt.[29] In this perspective, the accumulation of wealth at the top will increase the potential for surplus extraction and hence the potential for economic inequality to rise. If this process reaches a certain threshold, social breakdown may follow in the form of rebellion or revolt. It is this relationship between inequality, economy, and politics we aim to explore for the case of Bruges. To this end, we have retraced all forced loans and taxation lists in the city accounts from the first available records until the end of the fourteenth century. Not all of them proved useful for our purposes. Some only targeted specific social or professional groups and others did not assess the wealth of households. Excluding all those, we are left with nine data points between 1296 and 1396.

The first distribution of wealth is derived from a forced loan in June 1296. Just a few months prior, the Flemish cities had agreed to financially support the French King in his war against England so they could avoid taxation by the Count for the same goal and hence safeguard their independence. Bruges donated no less than 1.500 lb. *groten Vlaams*, the equivalent of about 200.000 days of unskilled labour.[30] To recuperate this significant sum, the aldermen taxed the richest 675 households with the promise to reimburse their contri-

[27] Geens, "A Golden Age for Labour," table 5.2.
[28] Alfani, *As Gods among Men*.
[29] van Bavel, *The Invisible Hand?*
[30] Wages are taken from Geens, "A Golden Age for Labour," appendix 1.5 and 1.6.

bution.[31] Although the original levy has been partially preserved, the reimbursements in the following years allow us to reconstruct the contribution of each household.[32] The list predates the outbreak of the Franco-Flemish War by a single year and may therefore serve as an excellent starting point for our study. This conflict arose when Philip IV, the King of France, sought to reinstitute his authority over the County of Flanders at the end of the thirteenth century. Theoretically, this was one of the richest parts of his realm, but it had remained relatively independent. At the beginning of 1297, the quarrel between crown and vassal erupted into a full-scale war when the Flemish Count Guy of Dampierre denounced his oath of fealty to Philip in favour of an alliance with the English King Edward I. The following revolt deeply polarized Flemish communities between supporters of the crown, known as Lilies, and supporters of the Count, known as *amici comitis* in the sources. Aside from political motivations, the conflict was also inspired by socio-economic tensions. Craftsmen predominantly favoured Guy of Dampierre whereas patricians mostly sided with Philip IV.[33]

The next observation pertains to the immediate aftermath of the first Franco-Flemish War. The Treaty of Athis-sur-Orge (June 1305) stipulated that the Flemish insurrectionists had to pay war reparations and a hefty annual fine. Although this provoked contestations in the next years, the aldermen of Bruges already organized a tax among 372 households in 1306 to muster the city's contribution.[34] Four years later, the 209 richest households were subject to a new tax to aid the war expedition against William I, Count of Hainaut and Holland.[35] For a long time, the Flemish counts disputed lordship over Zeeland and some lands east of the Scheldt, known as Imperial Flanders. The conflict occasionally erupted into violence. More importantly to our story of Bruges, the levy took place immediately after two minor uprisings had stirred the city. Several groups had violently expressed their discontent over the protracted peace negotiations with France. In addition, unrest had increased because the more 'democratic' experimentations with government in the wake of 1302 were being eroded.[36]

A fourth observation can be made during the second Franco-Flemish War. This time, the successor of Philip IV tried to take control of Flanders. However, the conflict remained limited to some battles at the borders as heavy rainfall hindered an invasion. Wealthy citizens lent the city money to fit out a fleet that would protect merchant vessels harassed by French privateers in

[31] Geirnaert, De Leeuw-Geirnaert, "Een fragment van een onbekende."
[32] Wyffels, De Smet, *De rekeningen van de stad*, 578-94 and 658-75.
[33] Trio, Heirbaut, Van den Auweele, *Omtrent 1302*.
[34] The city accounts don't mention the reason for the tax though references to the delivery of the king's money in Paris can be found in the expenses: Wyffels, Vandewalle, *De rekeningen van de stad*, t. 1, 956-66.
[35] Wyffels, Vandewalle, t. 1, 1267-72.
[36] Speecke, "Het eerste 'democratische' regime."

1316. In total, 385 households participated in the forced loan.[37] Unfortunately, no lists have been preserved in the municipal archives for the next decade. This means that we cannot assess the direct impact of the Flemish Peasant Revolt (1323-8). This revolt began with farmers resisting new taxes to pay the repartitions stipulated in the Treaty of Athis-sur-Orge. Social unrest soon spread to the cities, where craftsmen and merchants opposed the pro-French policies of the new Count. As a result, the uprising became one of the largest revolts in the fourteenth century.[38]

The next available records pertain to the outbreak of the Hundred Years' War. The English King, Edward III, had prohibited all trade with Flanders because the Count had proclaimed his loyalty to the French crown. The ban on wool was especially detrimental to the urban economy. Consequently, the Flemish cities under the leadership of Jacob van Artevelde once again revolted against their overlords. In 1340, Bruges organized two taxes to finance its militia who aided the invading English army in the battles of Sluis and Saint-Omer. The two lists contain 247 unique households.[39] To measure inequality, I have taken the average contribution per household. The methodology is applied to other years for which we have multiple collections. In 1345, Jacob van Artevelde was murdered and the new Flemish Count, Louis II, exploited the disagreements between the insurrectionists to break the revolt.[40] It is in this final stage of the uprising that our last observation for the first half of the fourteenth century can be found. In 1347, Bruges sent troops to aid the English army in its siege of Calais. The tax list of 141 households is not only interesting to assess the impact of the Artevelde Revolt but also serves as an excellent starting point to study the effects of the Black Death, which swept through the city only two years later.[41]

In the second half of the fourteenth century, the fiscal system of Bruges became more pervasive as large shares of the population started to contribute to direct taxes and forced loans. The reasons for this trend are manifold but the increased wealth after the Black Death was a necessary precondition. In 1382-3, many households contributed to a housing tax and more than half of them also paid a wealth tax to help the city recover after the Battle of Roosebeke (27 November 1382).[42] This event marked the end of Bruges' involvement in the Ghent Revolt (1379-85), a rebellion led by the son of Jacob van Artevelde that united the Flemish cities against the French crown. A forced loan among the wealthiest 145 households in 1379 allows us to assess the situation at the beginning of the revolt. The last observation is a wealth tax of 1394-6,

[37] Wyffels, Vandewalle, *De rekeningen van de stad*, t. 2, 1695-706; Verbruggen, "Een krijgsvloot uitgerust."
[38] TeBrake, *A Plague of Insurrection*.
[39] City Archive of Bruges (CAB), *Oud Archief*, City Account, 216, ff. 26*r*-36*v*, 1339-40.
[40] Dumolyn, Lenoir, "De sociaal-politieke verhoudingen."
[41] CAB, *Oud Archief*, City account, 216, ff. 26*r*-30*r*, 1347-8.
[42] Mertens, "Sociale geografie;" Deneweth, Leloup, Speecke, "Visualising Urban Change."

allowing us to assess inequality at the end of our period. This time, all but the poorest households contributed to the building of a new stone sluice at the outport of Damme, which was essential to the commercial flow of Bruges.[43] It is important to note that while this tax is socially the most comprehensive, its geographical coverage is more limited compared to the other lists we discussed. It only pertains to three of the city's six districts. Likewise, the wealth tax of 1382-3 provides only data for a single district. As a consequence, we might over – or underestimate inequality in these two periods depending on the number of households and wealth of the top one per cent living in other districts.

3. *From top to bottom: fiscal inequality*

To assess fiscal inequality within the top one per cent, we employ two different measures: the wealth share of the super-rich and the inverted Pareto-Lorenz Beta (β) coefficient. The first-mentioned measure is calculated by dividing the stock of fiscal wealth owned by the super-rich, defined as the top 0,1 per cent, by the total stock of fiscal wealth of the top one per cent. In other words, it shows us how much of the elite wealth is concentrated at the very top of the distribution. It serves as a proxy for the economic potential for a plutocratic rule. For example, a wealth share of 20% tells us that the super-rich contributed twice as much to taxes as we would expect based on their demographic weight. The second measure is calculated by dividing the mean tax amount among the top one per cent by the minimum amount of the same group (i.e. P99 or the cut-off point to belong to the top one per cent). The β coefficient informs us about the thickness or kurtosis of the upper tail of the distribution. For example, a result of 3,00 implies that the average household in the top one per cent was taxed thrice as much as its poorest peer.

The choice for the two measures is not random. In inequality studies, the wealth share of different subgroups at the top relative to the total stock is one of the most common and intuitive statistics reported. While the β coefficient is less popular, it is still often used in more specialised studies because it can be calculated from tabulated data, a common feature of present-day data sets.[44] While values typically range from 1,00 to 3,00 for income distributions, the β coefficient for wealth can return much higher results. In addition, I have chosen the two measures because they have different sensitivities. Whereas the wealth share is heavily informed by the highest tax amount, the β coefficient is more dependent on the lowest. Accordingly, together they may help to

[43] De Meyer, "De sociale strukturen te Brugge."
[44] Atkinson, Piketty, Saez, "Top Incomes," 679-81; Alvaredo, Atkinson, Morelli, "Top Wealth Shares."

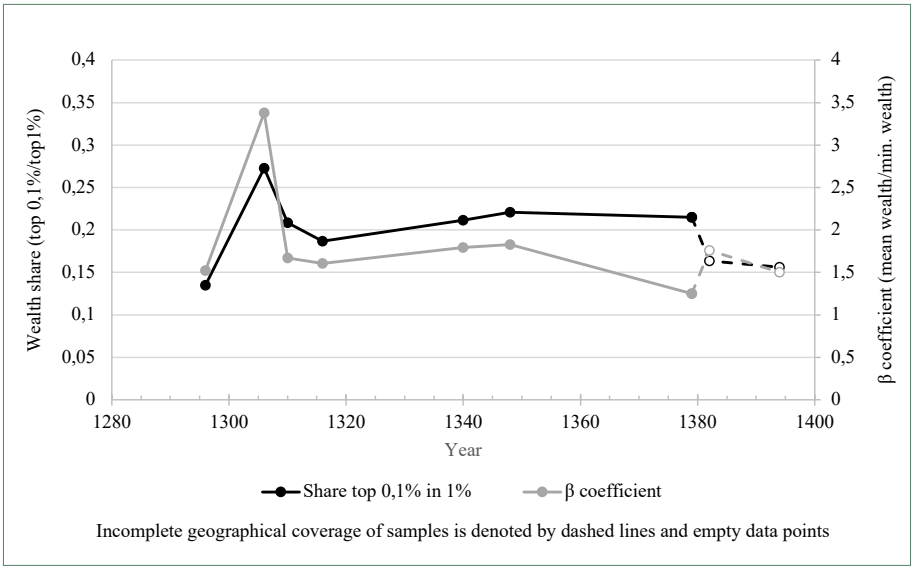

Figure 1. *Fiscal inequality within the top 1% of Bruges (1296-1396)*
Sources: see section 2, footnotes 27, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 35.

overcome any problems arising from fiscal clustering at the top or bottom of the distribution.

The results for the direct taxes and enforced loans in Bruges can be seen in Figure 1. The wealth share and the β coefficient showcase a very similar trend. In the long run, both series depict remarkable stability. The super-rich contributed a fifth of the elite taxes in this period and the average household possessed about 1,5 times more fiscal wealth than the poorest member of the top one per cent. This is surprising in light of the many uprisings and the socio-economic transformations in early fourteenth-century Bruges.[45] We would expect that the gradual replacement of the merchant-entrepreneurs by brokers and craftsmen as local elites had a large impact on inequality. After all, the former group is considered to be much wealthier than the latter. Disparities logically would increase sharply early on when some merchant-entrepreneurs were still present among the elite. Aside from this relative evolution, the results are also surprising in absolute terms. The disparity among the fiscal elite is limited if we compare it to some other cases. For example, we can find a wealth share of 30,5% and a β coefficient of 2,11 in 1352 in Florence, a city that was very similar in size at that time (9.955 households versus 9.200 in Bruges in 1347).[46] The results for Bruges instead resemble the levels found

[45] See above the section 2.
[46] Own calculations from State Archive of Florence, *Estimi*, Gabella della sega, 306, 1351-2.

in much smaller cities. In 1325, the population of Prato was three times less numerous (3.377 households) but the super-rich owned about 17% of the total elite fiscal wealth. The β coefficient was also similar with a value of 1,54.[47]

Moving to the short term, some (minor) fluctuations are visible. Inequality demonstrates a clear spike in 1306 though it rapidly returns to its previous levels in the following decade. As such, the impact of the first Franco-Flemish War seems very temporary and that of the second negligible. Disparities among the rich then increased slightly over the next decades, reaching a new peak in 1347. Again, the Artevelde Revolt does not seem to have affected inequality at the top in a substantial way. The precise impact of the Black Death is difficult to measure because we lack an observation of its immediate aftermath. Nevertheless, both series still register (a slight) decline in elite wealth differences in 1379 though we should note that the β coefficient is probably underestimated due to fiscal clustering at the bottom. The forced loan shows much more diversity at the top of the distribution, which is why the wealth share is probably more accurate. The issue may also explain why our two series exhibit a unique divergence in trends for the subsequent data point. The wealth share suggests a clear decline whereas the β coefficient implies an increase after the Ghent Revolt. The analysis is further complicated by the limited geographical coverage of the 1382-3 tax. Nevertheless, we may assume that the egalitarian trend is more plausible based on a study of probated wealth in the nearby city of Ghent between 1370 and 1400. Here, disparities among the middle and higher classes leaving an inheritance declined during the Ghent Revolt.[48] Despite the outbreak of some minor uprisings in the following years, wealth inequality in Bruges remained stable among the top until the end of the century.

4. *We are the one per cent: the evolving social composition of the elite*

So how should we interpret these results? Why does elite wealth inequality remain so stable during one of the most transformative and tumultuous periods in Bruges' history? To answer these questions, we must turn to the social composition of the fiscal elite. Below, we first explore how permeable the top one per cent was for individuals and families. On the one hand, significant and continuous changes in the top one per cent could indicate difficulties in accumulating wealth over extended periods and signal a broad scope for elite citizenship. Fiscal inequality is kept in check by the regular rise and fall of individuals and families who want to invest in the urban community. On the other hand, compositional shifts might also be a reflection of the political turmoil.

[47] Alfani, Ammannati, "Long-Term Trends." For the distribution, see the EINITE database: www.dondena.unibocconi.it/EINITE.
[48] Geens, "The Great Destruction."

Rival governments, both populist and traditional, may have used taxation and expulsion as weapons against their political opponents. A stable profile of the top one per cent would indicate a hereditary elite. After establishing the level of permeability, we turn to the economic and political evolutions to explain the (lack of) changes in the social composition. The hypothesis is that the crisis of the traditional industries and the recurrent outbreak of popular uprisings questioned policies that favoured the top of society. Given that we cannot reliably identify the top one per cent in the second half of the fourteenth century due to the limited geographic coverage, we will focus the analysis on the first half.

Table 1. *Persistence of the top 1% (share of a cohort identified in next levies) of Bruges (1296-1340)*

A. *Individuals*

		Cohort			
Levy	1296 (N= 154)	1306 (N= 169)	1310 (N= 134)	1316 (N= 153)	1340 (N= 92)
1296	-				
1306	3,9%	-			
1310	16,2%	2,4%	-		
1316	13,6%	3,0%	11,9%	-	
1340	1,3%	1,8%	1,5%	5,9%	-
1348	1,3%	0,6%	1,5%	7,2%	33,7%

B. *Families*

Levy	1296 (N= 116)	1306 (N= 157)	1310 (N= 120)	1316 (N= 120)	1340 (N= 83)
1296	-				
1306	20,7%	-			
1310	33,6%	12,1%	-		
1316	36,2%	18,5%	31,7%	-	
1340	18,1%	12,1%	17,5%	23,3%	-
1348	19,8%	7,6%	18,3%	20,8%	42,2%

Sources: see section 2, footnotes 27, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 35.

Table 1A quantifies trends in upward and downward social mobility by measuring the persistence of individuals from one tax list or forced loan to subsequent levies. The personal names recorded by tax officials were varied (i.e. very few homonyms) and often included additional information, such as familial ties or physical characteristics (e.g. son of, the old, the tall). They were also consistent, making it possible to identify individuals with great certainty across multiple lists. Overall, the figures in Table 1A are pretty low. For example, the persistence rate during the relatively calm period between 1310 and 1316 is about one in ten, which suggests that the elite were a rather

permeable group. This idea is confirmed if we shift our focus from those that remained within the top one per cent to the newcomers. On average, the share of names that did not feature in any previous tax or loan was 79,9% per levy. However, these statistics obscure important differences between years. The persistence rate between 1340 and 1347 is much higher than those reported for the early fourteenth century (see Table 1A). Part of the explanation must be sought in the timing of the two levies. Both took place when the Artevelde revolt was still ongoing. As a consequence, we lack observations of the biggest disruptions, namely the initial outbreak in 1338 and the repression by the count in 1348.[49] Nevertheless, it seems that the years of the revolt were less impactful than the Franco-Flemish Wars had been for the top.

At the other end of the spectrum, the persistence rates for individuals in 1306 were very low (maximum 3% can be found in subsequent levies). In addition, virtually all of them were newcomers in the top one per cent (96,4% of the total). So, what was happening? As mentioned earlier, 1306 marked the end of the first Franco-Flemish War. Four years earlier, the Lillies had fled Bruges, either voluntarily or forced to do so by the *amici comitis* amidst the unfolding revolt. Consequently, their houses and belongings were confiscated by the new governing body. In all likelihood, many of the exiled Lillies had not yet returned to Bruges or were having difficulties reclaiming their properties at the time of the levy.[50] To test this hypothesis, I retraced the political affiliation of individuals mentioned between 1296 and 1316.[51] This was possible for 25,7% of all cases but the success rate was much higher for the first levy (52,6%). The data shows that although both parties were roughly similar in size before the outbreak of the war (36 Lillies versus 45 *amici*), not a single Lilly could be identified in the tax of 1306. This suggests that the taxation was probably connected to the punishment of the rebellious *amici comitis*. The repression did not last, however. The persistence rate for the cohort of 1306 is very low. Lilies contributed again in the next levies. This is also visible from the rising persistence rate for the cohort of 1296 in 1310 (from 3,9% to 16,2%). These observations may also explain the sudden spike in fiscal inequality between the first two data points. In 1296, Lillies paid on average more than *amici comitis* (contributing 117,2 d. par. versus 95,9 d. par.). The repressive nature of 1306 implied the taxation of less wealthy households to finance the repartitions. Some of the top contributors could be found in the lowest ranks of the tax in 1296 and many others were completely new. For example, Jan Musecoeninc, who barely ranked within the top five per cent before the war, paid the second-highest due in 1306.

[49] Dumolyn, Lenoir, "De sociaal-politieke verhoudingen."
[50] Dumolyn, Pajic, "Enemies of the Count."
[51] Names were checked against lists derived from: Verriest, *Le registre de la 'loi'*; De Smet, "De Inrichting van de Poorterlijke;" Wyffels, "Een 'opstand' te Brugge;" Verbruggen, "Beschouwingen over 1302;" Van den Auweele, "De Brugse gijzelaarslijsten;" Prevenier, "Leliaards en klauwaards;" Vandermaesen, "De confiscatie van goederen."

Individual experiences are only one part of the story. Persistence rates decline as levies are further removed from an individual's initial observation due to increased mortality. Very few can still be observed after twenty years. In contrast, wealth does not cease to exist at the death of its owner. Many goods are passed on to the children or other kin. Nobility often followed deliberate strategies that favoured the eldest son to prevent the fragmentation of the patrimony, but it is unclear if urban elites in early fourteenth-century Bruges were already imitating this pattern as they would in later periods.[52] It is therefore necessary to assess to what extent families were able to consolidate their position in the top one per cent. Familial persistence rates are reported in Table 1B. Unsurprisingly, they are higher than the individual rates. Nevertheless, they are still low. In the long run, only one in five families was able to remain at the top of the fiscal pyramid. The most successful lineage was the Bonin family with ten different members recorded in the top one per cent. Known for the building of their grand urban palace called the Seven Towers (see Figure 2), they constituted one of the most famous families of Bruges.[53] Other successful lineages with more than five members include Hertsberghe (9 members), Cant (9), Dop (8), Calkers (7), Deken (7), Danwild (6), and Grand (6). This does not mean that the top one per cent was dominated by a select few families. Two-thirds of the families (65,5%) only boosted one member in the taxes or loans. On average, about half of the surnames (54,8%) were new per levy. Admittedly, we only have information about the paternal line so the figures are probably too low. Lineages sometimes died out in the male line. The inheritance was passed on to a daughter and, after her, to the grandchildren who were named after their father. But even if we double the persistence rates in Table 1B, more than half of the contributors would still be unaffiliated with a family that already belonged to the top one per cent.

If we move from the general level to the evolution of openness, we can observe the same outliers as we have for the individual persistence rates (i.e. 1306 and 1347). More interestingly, we can also observe a fundamental change in the concentration of fiscal wealth by certain lineages. In the tax of 1296, one-fourth of the families (24,7%) had at least two contributing members. By 1310, this share had declined by more than half (10,4%). The first Franco-Flemish War seems to have had a large impact on the composition and dynamics of the top one per cent. The low levels of lineage dominance would persist for the remainder of the first half of the fourteenth century. Between 1340 and 1347, the share of families with more than one contributing member was still only 14,1% on average. As such, both upward and downward social mobility in the top one per cent must have been high.

One of the potential reasons for the increasing permeability of the top one per cent relates to the already-mentioned socio-economic transformations.

[52] Dumolyn, "Patriarchaal patrimonialisme."
[53] Gailliard, *Bruges et le Franc*, 298-341.

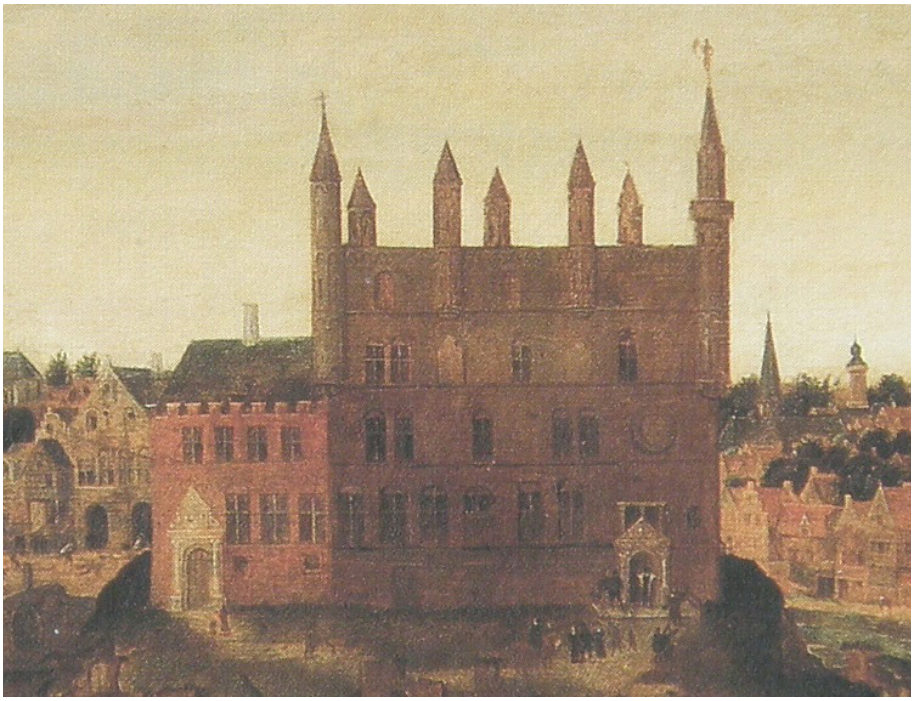

Figure 2. Pieter Claeissins de Oude, *Septem Admirationes Civitatis Brugensis*, 1550
Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Septem_Admirationes_Civitatis_Brugensis.jpg.

To test this idea, we explore the average contribution and the occupational composition of the fiscal elite. Looking at the first variable, we can see that the fiscal burden (or investment) expressed in the number of days worked by an unskilled labourer continuously declined during the first half of the fourteenth century: from 950 workdays in 1296 to 187 workdays in 1347. Although the size of the levies was partly dependent on the size of the expenses, the evolution seems in line with the unfolding economic crisis and the declining absolute levels of wealth among the local elite. The only exception to this trend is the tax of the *amici comitis* in 1306. Remarkably, the mean levy among the top one per cent was only equivalent to 20 workdays. In other words, the financial punishment of the rebels was marginal when compared to the other levies. In combination with the lack of additional repressive tax registers in this period of frequent uprisings, this observation suggests that Bruges was mainly focused on reconciliation after conflict. This policy has also been observed by other historians in the grants of pardons and the organization of processions to bolster communal feelings.[54] Nevertheless, punishment was

[54] See for example: Speecke, "Het eerste 'democratische' regime."

not completely absent. As we will see, the most prominent rebels were often expelled from the city for several years.

The second socio-economic transformation pertains to the changes in the occupational structure of Bruges. Unfortunately, most levies do not mention this type of information. Some historians have tried to overcome the issue by cross-referencing the names of individuals in other sources, such as city accounts.[55] Notwithstanding some important results, the link is sometimes uncertain, and data is missing for the majority of individuals. I have therefore followed a different approach. The levy of 1316 was not organized according to geographical but occupational criteria. The obvious advantage is that we have information for every household. The downside is that we fail to capture any secondary occupations. This is important because many people were active in different fields. Moreover, the officials also included a category of patricians (*poorterij*). This concept does not relate to a particular occupation but to privileged status. For our purposes, I have equated this category with the traditional establishment. The levy of 1316 reveals that the vast majority of elite households (92,3%) still belonged to this patriciate. A small upcoming group was that of the hostelers and brokers (6,2%) but the overlap between the two groups was large. Nevertheless, it is interesting to see that some patricians were identified with their guild membership while others were not. For example, the officials recorded that Gillis van der Leye was a cloth cutter but still categorised him as a patrician. The rise of new groups is most visible in two other contributors. The hammersmith Pieter de Kettelare was the 47th richest person on the list (out of 125) and the mattress maker Lamsin van Heedelheem ranked last among the top one per cent.

The results show that the source of wealth was indeed shifting from one regime to another, but the transformation was far from complete in the first decades. The speed of change and its impact on the top is difficult to measure because we lack similar data for the fourteenth century. However, an occupational categorisation can be found in a tax list of 1411. This time the patricians only constitute 12,7% of the top one per cent, which is similar to the importance of hostellers and brokers (14%), weavers (12,7%), and dyers (11,3%). The other half of the list features individuals from no less than eighteen different occupations! While they include prestigious and de facto hereditary professions such as bakers and butchers, they also pertain to more common and open occupations like masons or glovers.

Changing economic opportunities may certainly explain why social mobility among the elite was high in the very long term but it does not explain why a change was already visible in the first decade of the fourteenth century. To this end, we turn our attention to the role of revolts and uprisings. Many historians have pointed out how the first Franco-Flemish War heralded

[55] For Bruges, see: De Meyer, "De sociale strukturen te Brugge."

the breakthrough of the middling groups in the political system.[56] In Bruges, nine of the thirteen positions as aldermen and council members were reserved for guild members from 1304 on. Patricians claimed the remaining four. Whereas popular regimes were short-lived in many other parts of Europe, the power of guilds in the urban governments of this area would remain substantial during the late medieval period. This does not mean that their position was uncontested. Between the outbreaks of large revolts, patricians often managed to reclaim some of their influence. In Bruges, this happened especially in 1311-23 and 1328-38. The intense competition for power prevented one group from dominating the political landscape for extended periods. Policy choices, such as taxation, were thus never structurally catered to the benefit of one party. Several studies have analysed this phenomenon in great detail through the occupational background of aldermen.[57] Here, we try to link the political office holding with fiscal wealth to test the hypothesis of Van Uytven: was Bruges a plutocracy?

Van Uytven substantiated his claims by cross-referencing the names of aldermen with taxation records for several cities in the Low Countries. He observed that more than half of the aldermen belonged to the wealthiest classes in most cases. However, his data pertained predominantly to the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[58] By this period, revolts had already taken a different character. Political representation took a back seat to the battle against the centralization efforts of the Burgundian Dukes. New social classes, like craftsmen, had largely succeeded in gaining a place in the city government but were now confronted by the growing power of the dukes. For example, the introduction of a permanent, central appeal court undermined the autonomy of the urban justices.[59] In Van Uytven's study, the only sample for the first half of the fourteenth century encompassed the already mentioned levy of Bruges in 1316. Most tellingly, it showcased the lowest level of plutocracy. Nevertheless, Van Uytven rapidly dismissed it as a relic from the first Franco-Flemish War that was already erased in the next decade. The database of taxes and loans collected for this chapter allows us to test if the revolt of 1297-1306 fundamentally changed the link between fiscal wealth and political representation and if this change was only temporary. To this end, I cross-referenced all contributors with the names of aldermen elected five years before and after a levy.[60]

Table 2 shows the results on an individual and family level. The figures do not collaborate Van Uytven's interpretation of a closed political elite based on wealth, at least within the case of Bruges. He severely underestimated the

[56] See above the section 2.
[57] See above the footnote 18.
[58] Van Uytven, "Plutokratie in de oude democratieën," 406.
[59] Dumolyn, Haemers, "Patterns of Urban Rebellion."
[60] Information on the aldermen was derived from Hilderson, "Schepenbank en patriciaat;" Lenoir, "De politieke verhoudingen;" Speecke, "De politieke orde van Brugge."

egalitarian effect of the first Franco-Flemish War and subsequent uprisings. More than one-third (36,8%) of the individuals in the tax of 1296 would serve as an alderman. In contrast, the probability of becoming elected halved during the first half of the fourteenth century (on average, 15,5% of contributors became aldermen). Likewise, the elite families of this period claimed almost all offices (97,1%) between 1291 and 1301. Afterwards, this figure plummets to circa 55%. In other words, half of the policymakers did not belong to the top one per cent either through their own or familial fiscal wealth. A true plutocratic regime never materialised in the first half of the fourteenth century.

Table 2. *Share of aldermen belonging to the top 1% in of Bruges (1291-1352)*

Tax	Share of contributors that were/became aldermen (N= 134)	Period of offices	Share of offices held by families that belonged or would belong to 1% (N= 430)
1296	36,8%	1291-1301	97,1%
1306	8,0%	1301-11	55,2%
1310	13,6%	1305-15	55,2%
1316	28,8%	1311-21	63,5%
1340	10,9%	1335-45	55,1%
1347	16,3%	1342-52	54,1%
Total	19,6%	1291-1352	62,4%

Sources: for the levies, see section 2, footnotes 27, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 35; for the names of aldermen, see footnote 43.

Aside from broader political representation, revolts also impacted inequalities in a more direct way. One of the most common tactics during uprisings in fourteenth-century Flanders was the temporary or, less commonly, permanent expulsion of opposing groups through forced pilgrimages, hostage-taking, or outright banishment. In many cases, their goods were also confiscated. As we have seen, this happened to the Lillies in the first Franco-Flemish War. Similarly, the subsequent peace treaty of Athis-sur-Orge (June 1305) forced 3.000 rebels from Bruges and its hinterland to go on a pilgrimage. This obligation was eventually bought off, but important waves of expulsions did occur during many following revolts, especially the Flemish Peasant Revolt in 1323-8, the Artevelde Revolt in 1338-48, and the uprising of 1358-61. Although random individuals from the opposing group could be chosen as an example, punishment usually focused on the leaders, which often included elite members.[61]

The (temporary) expulsion of elites must have impacted inequality in a sudden manner. Politically, offices became vacant for members of another fac-

[61] Dumolyn and Pajic, "Enemies of the Count;" Jan Herwaarden, O*pgelegde bedevaarten*.

tion. Economically, the confiscated goods were used to finance government expenditure, effectively redistributing wealth to the wider urban community. For Bruges, the scale of disruption caused by expulsions can be gauged through hostage lists from 1301, 1305, 1328, and 1351. Although banishments and forced pilgrimages also occurred during this period, the 1.740 names on the lists already provide a valuable picture.[62] I therefore cross-referenced the names with those in the levies of the first half of the fourteenth century. The exercise reveals that at least 65 members of the fiscal top one per cent had been the target of expulsion, roughly one in ten (9,5% of the taxed households). Among them, we can find the wealthiest members of the elite. For example, Martin Coopman paid the second-highest contribution in the tax of 1347 before being taken hostage in 1351. Similarly, the already-mentioned, politically influential families did not escape punishment: Lamsin Bonin, Johannes Cant, Walter Danwild, and Gillis Hersberghe all feature on the list of 1301. In combination with changing economic opportunities, the recurrent outbreaks of uprisings thus resulted in a relatively open and egalitarian group of elites, particularly through representation in the government as well as the regular expulsion of its members and the confiscation of their goods.

5. Pro bono communi*: epilogue*

The fourteenth century was one of the most transformative episodes in Bruges' history. Historians have pointed to the rise of the craftsmen and their guilds but their coming to power was not evident. Their privileges would regularly be challenged by the old establishment of patricians. Repeated revolts and uprisings continuously shifted the balance of power and the severe crisis of the traditional industries cut profits. Unsurprisingly, few elite families were able to hold on to their wealth. The composition of the top one per cent was in a constant state of flux. Not a single group was able to dominate this volatile landscape. As a consequence, fiscal inequality between the rich remained in check during the entire fourteenth century. The Black Death may have contributed to this stable trend, adding even more disruption into the equation, but its origins were clearly related to the first Franco-Flemish War when middling groups claimed their political rights through violent means. The fiscal basis for citizenship expanded. Tax lists reveal that this movement was not hijacked by a select few *nouveaux riches* for many decades. Half of the aldermen did not belong to the top one per cent. As such, policy potentially favoured a larger share of the population than before. In this sense, the stable differences between the elite might be an indication of declining economic and political inequality in the wider society. The limited appearance of

[62] The names can be found in Van den Auweele, "De Brugse gijzelaarslijsten;" Lenoir, "De politieke verhoudingen."

craftsmen in the top one per cent by 1316 certainly hints at the potential for upward mobility of new groups. However, we should not jump to conclusions too quickly. The decline of the traditional textile industry entailed a loss of opportunities for the lower classes. The new luxuries and fashionable goods required far less unskilled labour in favour of highly skilled craftsmen. Craft guilds were primarily aimed at protecting the fortunes and rights of this last group. If the evolution of unskilled real wages is indicative of the experience of the lower classes, the first Franco-Flemish War probably ushered in a prolonged period of misery.[63] It would therefore be misleading to label the revolts of the first half of the fourteenth century as fully egalitarian or even democratic as some historians have done in the past.[64]

[63] Geens, "A Golden Age for Labour."
[64] Verbruggen, *Vlaanderen na de Guldensporenslag*, 154-65.

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