

Medieval market institutions

**The organisation of commodity markets in Holland,
c. 1200 – c. 1450**

Marktinstituties in de middeleeuwen

**De organisatie van goederenmarkten in Holland,
ca. 1200 – ca. 1450
(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)**

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List of abbreviations

AAL:	Archief Abdij van Leeuwenhorst (Nationaal Archief)
AG:	Archief van de gasthuizen (Regionaal Archief Leiden)
AGH:	Archief Graven van Holland (Nationaal Archief)
ASGB:	Archief Stads- en gemeentebestuur van Beverwijk (Noord-Hollands Archief)
BVGO	Bijdragen voor vaderlandsche geschiedenis en oudheidkunde
GRRek:	Archief Grafelijkheidsrekenkamer, II, Afgehoorde en gedeponeerde rekeningen (Nationaal Archief)
LLRK:	Archief Leenhoven en Leen- en Registratiekamer (Nationaal Archief)
NA:	Nationaal Archief
NHA:	Noord-Hollands Archief
OHZ:	Oorkondenboek van Holland en Zeeland (Koch, A. C. F., Kruisheer, J. G., Burgers, J. W. J., Sparreboom, J. and Dijkhof, E. C., eds., <i>Oorkondenboek van Holland en Zeeland tot 1299</i> (The Hague 1970 -2005)).
RAL:	Regionaal Archief Leiden
RGP:	Rijksgeschiedkundige Publicatiën
VMVOVR:	Verslagen en mededeelingen der Vereeniging tot uitgaaf der bronnen van het oud-vaderlandsche recht
WVOVR:	Werken der Vereeniging tot uitgaaf der bronnen van het oud-vaderlandsche recht

1. Introduction

In 1466 Philip the Good, duke of Burgundy, gave permission to install a scale for weighing cheese and butter to the villages Sloten and Osdorp, then situated about five kilometres west of Amsterdam but nowadays incorporated in the city's western suburbs.¹ The villagers had requested to be allowed to install the scale, because this would save them the trouble and the costs of having to take their dairy products to Haarlem or Amsterdam: a reliable weighing facility nearby obviously facilitated the wholesale trade of locally produced cheese and butter. The charter specifies that the villagers were expected to finance the new scale themselves, employ weights that were in common usage and henceforth pay a rent of £ 2 per year.

No reference is made to the local lord. To be sure, the lord of Sloten and Osdorp did pocket the revenues of the scale for several years, until they were reclaimed by the duke's officials in 1495,² but he clearly had no role in setting up the scale. Nor is anything heard of protests from Amsterdam or Haarlem against the new weighing facility, even though we do know that at a later stage, in the 16th century, towns objected to rural scales and tried to concentrate the dairy trade within their walls. If a protest was raised in 1466, it was not successful: the scale of Sloten and Osdorp was still in operation at the end of the 16th century.³

The scales of Sloten and Osdorp were one of a very considerable number of similar rural weighing facilities that emerged in the Holland countryside from the middle of the 14th century onwards. The dense network of rural scales had an important role in the dairy trade that developed in the late Middle Ages: it allowed small-scale rural producers to market their products at little expense and provided them with access not just to the consumers in Holland's urban centres but also to interregional trade networks that stretched to the southern Low Countries and the German Rhineland.⁴

The case of the Sloten and Osdorp scale touches upon the elements that form the central theme of this book: the institutions that shaped Holland's medieval commodity markets, the social and political relations, the conflicts of interest in which these institutions were grounded, and the effects of this institutional framework on market performance. These issues are related to a wider debate: the discussion about the commercialisation of medieval society.

¹ *Generale privilegien Kennemer-landt*, 176-177.

² Van Dam, *Vissen in veenmeren*, 204-205.

³ 'Register van Hollandt en Westvrieslandt', 79.

⁴ A more detailed analysis of the rise of rural dairy scales is presented in chapter 4.

1.1 Holland, a commercialising economy

Since the late 10th century a process of commercialisation took place in many parts of Europe. Pace and timing varied and the process was not necessarily unilinear, but on the whole the market as mechanism for the allocation of goods, labour, land and capital gained ground. For England, with its wealth of early source material, the progress of commercialisation can be traced in more detail than for any other part of northwestern Europe. Between the late 11th and the late 13th century English urbanisation levels increased. In the countryside customary rents in labour and kind were converted to money rents and wage labour became more important. Regional specialisation grew, infrastructure was greatly improved and interregional trade expanded. The number of markets and fairs proliferated and the volume of coinage in circulation soared.⁵

Compared to England, and in fact also to its neighbours on the continent (Flanders and the German Rhineland), Holland made a late start. Until the 10th or 11th century Holland had been little more than a wasteland swamp on the periphery of European civilisation; the only parts that were inhabited were the sandy dunelands along the coast, the river banks along the rivers, and a few pockets of maritime clay sediments in the north and in the southwest. From the 11th century onwards Holland's large central peat district was gradually reclaimed and settled: marshes were turned into farmland.⁶ Through a system of river toll posts the counts of Holland had started to tax the international transit trade on the Rhine and Meuse at an early stage, but Holland itself was not much involved in this trade: exchange beyond the local level was very limited. Only by the end of the 12th century the first signs of urbanity became manifest. Dordrecht, situated favourably at a confluence of waterways and in the heart of the comital toll system, was well on its way to become a small centre for the international east-west river trade in wine, grain, wood and salt, and some of the pre-existing settlements in the coastal region had begun to develop as regional market centres.⁷ Still, as late as the middle of the 13th century the Franciscan monk Bartholomaeus Anglicus, author of the encyclopaedia *De proprietatibus rerum*, in his description of the countries of Europe pictured Holland primarily as a land of lush meadows with plenty of cattle, grain fields, and forests rich in game. The contrast with the

⁵ The classic study on high medieval commercialisation is Lopez, *Commercial revolution*. The body of recent literature on the commercialisation of medieval England is large and growing. A survey and a synthesis of the main elements can be found in Britnell and Campbell, eds., *A commercialising economy*. As the introduction to this volume explains, opinions differ on the rate of change, largely because interpretations of the 1086 situation as described in the Domesday Book diverge widely. For recent quantitative estimates of urbanisation, monetisation and export trade in the late 13th century: Campbell, 'Benchmarking medieval economic development'. For a recent appraisal of commercial activity and population numbers: Langdon and Masschaele, 'Commercial activity'.

⁶ The classic study on the reclamations is Van der Linden, *De cope*. For a recent synthesis in English that includes the results of later research: Van de Ven, *Man-made lowlands*, 52-82.

⁷ Hoppenbrouwers, 'Van waterland tot stedenland', 118-121. For the river toll system: Verkerk, 'Tollen en waterwegen'. For Dordrecht: Van Herwaarden *et al.*, *Geschiedenis van Dordrecht*, 19-20.

section Anglicus wrote on neighbouring Flanders, praised mainly for its trade, industry and famous towns and ports, was speaking volumes.⁸

In view of such a late start the speed of economic change in the late Middle Ages is striking. In the second half of the 13th century, and particularly after 1270, the young towns of Holland began to grow. A large metropolis towering over the rest did not develop: instead, a sprinkle of small and very small towns emerged. All the same, the urban ratio rose rapidly. While around 1200 the urban population of Holland cannot have numbered more than a few thousand, by 1300 this figure already was around 30,000 (14% of the population) and just before the middle of the 14th century it had risen to about 55,000 (23%).⁹

Urban industries developed. The Haarlem *Accijnsbrief* of 1274 for instance, a charter listing the excises the urban authorities were allowed to levy, mentions the production and sale of a wide variety of industrial products, from beer to textiles, shoes, saddles and even ships.¹⁰ Products of urban industry were probably mainly sold in or near the town where they had been produced, but not exclusively so: the discovery of two late 13th-century Leyden cloth seals in excavations in Amsterdam makes it clear that trade between the Holland towns was beginning to develop as well.¹¹ So was international trade, although this was mainly conducted by foreign merchants. Around the middle of the 13th century the existing east-west trade route along the rivers Rhine and Meuse had been complemented with a north-south axis, creating a system shaped like an inverted 'T': a navigable route making use of Holland's network of inland waterways connected the river delta to the Zuiderzee. This route provided Flemish and German merchants with a safe alternative to the treacherous North Sea route. A series of toll reductions and safeguards shows that Hansa merchants frequented the Holland river delta in the second half of the 13th century.¹² By the end of that century trade contacts with England probably intensified as well. By then Holland shipmasters, and occasionally also Holland merchants, had begun to take an active part; along with their more numerous Zeeland counterparts they turn up in the correspondence between the English king and count Floris V dealing with trade conflicts between their subjects.¹³

In the second half of the 14th century Holland's economic development seems to have accelerated, notably at a time when many other countries were experiencing problems. It is true that the much quoted late medieval crisis was very often not a period of general decay; in many countries decline in some sectors or regions went hand in hand with partial recovery or even growth in

⁸ Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *De rerum proprietatibus*, 654, 680; Seymour *et al.*, *Bartholomaeus Anglicus*, 10, 35, 158. Cf. De Boer, 'Op weg naar volwassenheid', 28-30.

⁹ De Boer, 'Op weg naar volwassenheid', 33; Van Bavel and Van Zanden, 'Jump-start', 505. The figure includes urban settlements of all sizes.

¹⁰ Hoppenbrouwers, 'Van waterland tot stedenland', 123-134; Koch *et al.*, eds., *Oorkondenboek van Holland en Zeeland tot 1299* (hereafter *OHZ*) III, nr. 1681 (*Accijnsbrief*).

¹¹ Baart, 'Materiële stadscultuur', 99-100. The author also mentions finds of imported luxury articles such as silk and sub-tropical fruits in 13th-century Dordrecht and Amsterdam.

¹² Hoppenbrouwers, 'Town and country in Holland', 61; De Boer, 'Florerend', 132-133.

¹³ *OHZ* II, nrs. 505, 506; De Boer, 'Florerend', 139-144; Kerling, *Commercial relations*, 176-177.

others.¹⁴ Still, demographic developments indicate that in the latter half of the 14th century Holland did exceptionally well. The Holland narrative sources are strangely silent about the Black Death, which has given rise to the assumption, widely supported until a few decades ago, that the region was not much affected. Detailed research, however, has shown that although the exact impact of the first onset of the Plague is unknown, Holland was not completely spared. Moreover, there is no doubt the recurrent epidemics of the following decades took a heavy toll.¹⁵ Yet by the year 1400 –very early in comparison to, for instance, England– the total population of Holland had almost returned to its pre-Plague level and the urban ratio had actually increased: a full third of the population was now living in towns.¹⁶

These dynamics suggest a solid economic foundation and there is indeed abundant evidence of strong economic growth after 1350. Brewing and textile production both had older roots, but became major urban export industries in the second half of the 14th century.¹⁷ Shipbuilding followed a similar path from the early 15th century onwards; so did herring fishing and processing.¹⁸ To a certain extent the expansion was accompanied by a concentration of industrial activities in the larger towns. The revenues from the sale of hops and *gruit*, a mix of indigenous herbs used in brewing, and the impositions on weighing and measuring in Gouda and Schoonhoven provide a good illustration: in Gouda weighing revenues increased from an average of £ 24.8 annually in the late 1350s to £ 83 annually in the late 1390s, whereas for its much smaller neighbour Schoonhoven the corresponding figures were £ 12.4 and £ 15.5.¹⁹

At first sight the countryside seems to have fared worse than the towns. Since the reclamations the peat lands had been drained to allow for grain cultivation, but in the end this made matters worse: as a result the soil subsided, causing serious problems with water management. In the long run bread grain cultivation had to be given up. Dick de Boer, who was the first to study the impact of these ecological changes in detail, mainly focused on the negative consequences: the economic base of rural society was eroded and people migrated to the towns.²⁰ However, the rural economy proved to be more flexible than this suggests. Arable farming was largely replaced by a much more market-oriented cattle and dairy farming, which laid the foundation for Holland's rapidly expanding dairy exports.²¹ In addition, a wide range of non-agrarian or semi-agrarian market-oriented activities developed, like peat digging, brick making,

¹⁴ E.g. the studies presented in the volume edited by Seibt and Eberhard, eds., *Europa 1400*.

¹⁵ De Boer, *Graaf en grafiek*, 32-35, 63-133; Blockmans, 'Social and economic effects', 850-856, 861-862.

¹⁶ Van Bavel and Van Zanden, 'Jump-start', 505.

¹⁷ Unger, *A history of brewing*, 55-60; Kaptein, *Hollandse textielnijverheid*, 45-50.

¹⁸ Unger, *Dutch shipbuilding*, 25-34; cf. Niemeijer, *Van accijnsbrief tot Zuidam*, 17-18 (shipbuilding in Haarlem); Boelmans Kranenburg, 'Visserijbedrijf Zijdenaars', 325-330; Boelmans Kranenburg, 'Visserij Noordnederlanders', 290-291.

¹⁹ De Boer, *Graaf en grafiek*, 273-314 (nominal figures).

²⁰ Ibid., 211-245, 334-336.

²¹ Boekel, *Zuivelexport*, 10-12, 24-31.

shipping and fishing, spinning and weaving, and the construction and maintenance of dikes and canals.²²

Compared to the late 14th-century boom, the 15th century shows a more differentiated pattern of economic development. Comital and seignorial revenues from the river tolls had risen markedly in the second half of the 14th century, but demonstrate an erratic and on the whole stagnant pattern in the first decades of the 15th century. A war in the river area, a prolonged succession conflict and enmities with the German towns were at least partly to blame.²³ Neither did the incorporation of Holland into the expanding Burgundian empire herald mere economic bliss. Toll revenues did rise again from about 1440 onwards, but by that time the textile industry had been facing a serious crisis for several years; it recovered only gradually after 1450.²⁴ Notwithstanding these setbacks the overall impression is one of relative prosperity –especially in comparison to neighbouring regions– and increasing commercialisation. One of the most remarkable elements is the continued progress of urbanisation until about 1480, when a severe recession set in. Despite this late 15th-century crisis, in the early 16th century a staggering 45% of the Holland population lived in towns.²⁵ That by this time the Holland economy had developed some extraordinary characteristics is also demonstrated by the occupational structure in the countryside: agriculture covered only 41% of rural labour input, a strikingly small share for a pre-modern society.²⁶

Academic interest in the causes of the remarkable development of Holland's late medieval economy is relatively recent. The first to draw attention to the issue was H.P.H. Jansen, who in his 1976 inaugural lecture mainly focused on events in the latter half of the 14th century, when, as he believed, Holland experienced a sudden and drastic transformation from an agrarian and rural society into an urban, industrial and commercial one. Jansen suggested that in these years Holland had enjoyed a competitive advantage over its neighbours because of its low wage levels. That in turn was the result of the fact that there was no more virgin peat land available to absorb the labour surplus and, as Jansen thought, of the relatively mild effects of the Plague.²⁷

Curiosity as to what exactly had happened after the middle of the 14th century increased when De Boer's research had made it clear that Jansen's era of transformation had also been a period of deteriorating ecological conditions.

²² Van Zanden, *Rise and decline*, 30-34; Van Bavel, 'Early proto-industrialization', 1126-1145.

²³ This is a very concise summary of the data presented in: De Boer, *Graaf en grafiek*, 317-325 (toll at Spaarndam 1356-1399 and locks at Gouda 1356-1408); Bos-Rops, *Graven op zoek naar geld*, 85, 121, 165, 199 (revenues of all main tolls between 1389 and 1433); Ketner, 'Amsterdam en de binnenvaart door Holland in de 15e eeuw', 46-57 (tollen Gouda en Spaarndam 1405-1504); and Ibelings, 'Route 'binnendunen'', 224 (locks at Gouda from 1440 onwards). For the link between the decline of the revenues in the early 15th century and political unrest: Bos-Rops 86, 119, 163, 198-202, and Ketner 47, 52.

²⁴ For a reassessment of the notion of the 'Golden Age of Burgundy': Jansma, *Vraagstuk van Hollands weharen*; cf. for Haarlem: Zijderduijn, 'Conjunctuur', 16-17. For the fate of the textile industry: Kaptein, *Hollandse textielnijverheid*, 55-60.

²⁵ Van Bavel and Van Zanden, 'Jump-start', 505.

²⁶ Van Zanden, 'Taking the measure', 135-139.

²⁷ Jansen, 'Holland's advance', 10-17.

Whereas De Boer mainly stressed the negative effects of the subsiding of the peat soil, Wim Blockmans argued that the necessity of large grain imports had forced Holland to specialise in products like dairy, herring, textiles and beer, which were in demand in the markets of neighbouring countries, and in the building of the ships need to transport these commodities. In doing so, Holland in fact profited from its relatively late start. Techniques that had developed elsewhere -such as brewing hop beer- could easily be adopted and perfected.²⁸ Jan Luiten van Zanden drew attention to another effect of ecological change: the consequences for the rural labour market. He interpreted the growth of non-agrarian, market-oriented activities supplementary to farm work as a reaction to the diminishing prospects for subsistence farming and saw this as a process of proto-industrialisation that contributed materially to the rapid commercialisation of the Holland countryside.²⁹

The emphasis on the second half of the 14th century is understandable, because economic growth in these years makes Holland stand out from its neighbours. However, as we have just seen, trade and industry had begun their rapid expansion almost a century earlier. In his contribution to the *Geschiedenis van Holland* Peter Hoppenbrouwers claims that by 1350 Holland had probably already made up for much of its earlier backwardness.³⁰ That suggests that the late 14th-century boom had roots in the preceding period. This idea is supported by an analysis of the development of corn tithes, which shows that although arable yields did fall in the 1370s, they recovered afterwards; only after 1400 a really dramatic decline set in. This implies that arable farming was still possible at the end of the 14th century. Consequently ecological problems alone cannot explain the economic transformation that took place from the middle of the 14th century onwards, although they most likely did reinforce it.³¹

This moves the search for an explanation for Holland's rapid rise to an earlier stage: to the 11th to 13th centuries, when the reclamation of the extensive central peat district took place. The notion that the reclamations must have had a profound impact on the structure of society is not only based on the magnitude of the undertaking, but also on the way it was organised. Each reclamation project started with an agreement between a group of colonists and the count, or one of the noblemen who had purchased tracts of wilderness from the count with the purpose of selling it on. This agreement defined the rights and duties of both parties. The colonists each received a holding, large enough to maintain a family. In addition to personal freedom they acquired full property rights to their land: they could use it and dispose of it as they saw fit. At the same time the new settler community was incorporated into the fabric of the emerging state: the settlers accepted the count's supreme authority, paid taxes and performed military services

²⁸ Blockmans, 'Economic expansion', 48-56.

²⁹ Van Zanden, *Rise and decline*, 30-34. Van Zanden, 'A third road', 88-89.

³⁰ Hoppenbrouwers, 'Van waterland tot stedenland', 134.

³¹ Van Bavel and Van Zanden, 'Jump-start', 516-518.

if called upon.³² On the local level the count was represented either by the sheriff, an appointed functionary with lower jurisdictional authority, or, as in Sloten and Osdorp, by a village lord who was granted lower jurisdiction plus some additional rights. Only very few lords held higher jurisdictional authority as well.³³

Jan de Vries and Ad van der Woude have suggested that in the absence of obligations to a manorial lord and of restrictions imposed by collective farming practices a society developed characterised by ‘freedom, individualism and market orientation’. In their view this is part of the explanation for the rise of the Dutch Republic, with Holland as its leading province, to an economic world power in the early modern period.³⁴ The argument seems intuitively correct, but the exact nature of the link between the ‘absence of a truly feudal past’ and economic performance at this much later stage is implied rather than explained.

In one respect Bas van Bavel and Jan Luiten van Zanden have been able to establish a tangible connection between the period of the reclamations and Holland’s rapid economic growth in the late Middle Ages. They describe Holland before 1350 as a frontier society: whereas new land was abundant, labour was scarce and –in contrast to Jansen’s assumptions- wages were relatively high. This, combined with the near absence of urban control over the countryside and the fact that craft guilds had no formal political power and were therefore unable to dictate production conditions, induced the development of labour-saving techniques, which gave Holland’s industries a decisive competitive edge once, after the middle of the 14th century, wages began to rise in the surrounding countries.³⁵

There is another possible link, one that has not yet been fully explored. This concerns an element of vital importance to the process of commercialisation that Holland experienced: the organisation of commodity markets. As the example of the Sloten and Osdorp scales suggests, markets are more than neutral and spontaneous meeting places of supply and demand: they are shaped by rules, customs and practices that determine the risks, possibilities and costs of exchange, and thus determine market performance. These institutional arrangements in turn do not come out of the blue: they reflect the interests and the influence of groups of people in society. Following this line of reasoning, the social and political relations characterising Holland’s frontier society must have shaped market structures in such a way as to support and stimulate exchange.

For Holland’s medieval factor markets recent research has brought to light some remarkable characteristics that do indeed appear to have been related to the structure of society.³⁶ Markets for free wage labour based on short term contracts,

³² Van der Linden, *De cope*, esp. 5-16, 120-159, 160-202.

³³ Hoppenbrouwers, ‘Op zoek’, 230-231.

³⁴ De Vries, ‘On the modernity’; De Vries and Van der Woude, *First modern economy*, 159-165.

³⁵ Van Bavel and Van Zanden, ‘Jump-start’, esp. 524-526.

³⁶ This research was carried out at Utrecht University in the years 2001-2007 within the framework of the collective research project ‘Power, Markets and Economic Development: The Rise, Organisation and Institutional Framework of Markets in Holland, Eleventh – Sixteenth Centuries’. This book on commodity

able to supply large numbers of labourers, emerged at an early stage. Labour legislation never acquired a general character; it was restricted to proletarian workers in the towns and was less repressive than in, for instance, England. The difference is at least partly explained by the fact that in Holland bound labour was almost non-existent because of the absence of the manorial system. Land markets, not just in the towns but also in the countryside, operated smoothly thanks to a reliable and transparent registration of land transfers by public courts. Since early forms of funded debt were always based on real estate as collateral, these courts also acquired a central role in capital markets, developing and supporting a variety of instruments that facilitated credit transactions. Public courts could acquire and maintain this central position because competition by seignorial or ecclesiastical jurisdictions was weak: a homogeneous system of local courts, urban and rural, developed at an early stage.³⁷

Despite the explanatory value of institutional models, they have hardly been used in analysing medieval commodity markets in Holland. The literature on Holland's medieval trade is mostly based, often implicitly, on the assumption that markets emerged as a result of patterns of supply and demand, propelled mainly by exogenous factors, for instance demographic or technological developments.³⁸ It does not explain why markets were organised the way they were, nor does it pay much attention to the effects of market structure on market performance. There are exceptions. Some of the older works do discuss the organisation of markets, usually markets in a certain town or in a certain sector of the economy, in great detail. Much of this work concentrates on legal aspects, or is of a descriptive nature. However, the sections on the economy in J. Huizinga's series of articles on the rise of the town of Haarlem, the book by W.S. Unger on the food provisioning of the towns of Holland, and the articles by J.F. Niermeyer on late 14th-century Dordrecht as a trading centre, stand out because of the attention they pay to the interaction between social and political relations and the organisation of exchange.³⁹ This is also true for the much more recent work by Leo Noordegraaf on conflicts in internal trade, by Remi van Schaik on urban food provisioning in the northern Netherlands, and by Bart Ibelings on markets in various Holland towns.⁴⁰ Still, none of these authors takes the framework of commodity market institutions as point of departure for a coherent view on the relation between social and political structure, market organisation and market performance.

That is what this book intends to do. Its aim is to find out if favourable commodity market institutions rooted in Holland's specific social and political

markets is also part of the project. The researchers (Bas van Bavel, Jessica Dijkman, Erika Kuijpers and Jaco Zuiderduijn) hope to publish an article that provides a synthesis of the research results shortly.

³⁷ Kuijpers, 'Labour legislation'; Zuiderduijn, *Medieval capital markets*, 183-225. Hoppenbrouwers and Van Bavel, 'Landholding and land transfer'. For a comparison between the Low Countries and Northern Italy: Van Bavel, 'Organization and rise of land and lease markets'.

³⁸ A relatively recent example is provided by the chapters on the Middle Ages in Clé Lesger's study of Hoon (Lesger, *Hoon als stedelijke knooppunt*).

³⁹ Huizinga, 'Opkomst Haarlem'; Unger, *Levensmiddelenvoorziening*; Niermeyer, 'Dordrecht als handelsstad'.

⁴⁰ Noordegraaf, 'Internal Trade'; Van Schaik, 'Marktbeheersing'; Ibelings, 'Middeleeuwse vissstapel'; Ibelings, 'Aspects'.

structure contributed to the remarkable economic development Holland experienced in the late Middle Ages. The book therefore discusses the framework of commodity market institutions itself, the factors that gave rise to this framework, and its effect on market performance.

Three essential elements in the approach this book takes follow directly from this research question. The first relates to the concept of the market. Markets are seen as sets of institutions: rules, customs and practices that structure the exchange of goods. The official weekly markets and fairs in medieval towns and villages are part of this institutional framework, but they are by no means the only part. A great deal of trade bypassed these formal institutions, taking place at informal but still (semi-)public trade venues, for instance at convenient places along the road or at inns, or even in private, for example in the shape of long-term trade relationships between two individuals.⁴¹ In fact there is no hard dividing line: public and private markets are concepts designating the opposite poles of a continuum. The rules, customs and practices shaping the less public side of the market are part of this research as well.

The second issue concerns the time period under investigation. In order to find out if market institutions were indeed influenced by the characteristics of society formed by Holland's history of reclamation and settlement, the development of these institutions has to be traced back in time as far as possible. That is why the book mainly focuses on the 13th, 14th and the first half of the 15th century. In this way it includes both the 'formative' period of Holland as frontier society and the 'jump-start' of the second half of the 14th century and early 15th century. In many places a perspective to developments in the late 15th and 16th century has been included in order to outline the evolution and the long term effects of institutions emerging at an earlier stage; however, the book does not pretend to cover these later 150 years in detail.

The third element is the choice for a comparative approach: Holland is compared to Flanders (or to the southern Low Countries in a wider sense, depending on the availability of information) and England (when possible to eastern England in particular, being the most commercialised part of the country). By limiting the comparison to three regions bordering the North Sea, some explanatory variables for differences in the process of commercialisation can be excluded beforehand: the three regions enjoyed similar climatological conditions and they all had good access to (the same) sea trade routes. This makes it easier to focus on the impact of the social and political structure of the three societies on commodity market institutions. In this respect the three regions display significant differences. In England the early rise of a strong central power combined with the persistence of manorialism and the integration of feudal lordship in the organisation of the state gave rise to market institutions characterised, more than in Holland, by seigniorial and royal control. Indeed a more outspoken example demonstrating the role of medieval lords and kings in the organisation of markets

⁴¹ For England the importance of informal trade has been pointed out by Dyer, 'Hidden trade'.

would probably not be easy to find. In Flanders powerful cities dominated trade; as a result urban trade monopolies and mechanisms of compulsion and exclusion were much more prominent than in Holland. Admittedly in a European perspective Flanders was not a unique case; in Tuscany for one urban domination was probably even more pronounced.⁴² However, a comparison between Holland and Tuscany would make it much more difficult to unravel institutional and geographical causes of diverging market performance.

Some aspects of this comparative approach will be discussed in more detail in the last section of this introductory chapter. We will now first turn to some methodological issues related to the concept of institutions, focusing firstly on their effects and secondly on their origins.

1.2 An institutional approach

In the words of Douglass North, institutions are ‘the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction. In consequence they structure incentives in human exchange, whether political, social or economic’.⁴³ North’s definition leaves room for multiple interpretations about the nature of institutions and their effect on economic performance. Some scholars mainly, or even exclusively, focus on formal institutions: the official laws and the enforcement procedures that together form the official legal regime under which exchange is taking place. Others adopt a broader approach and include informal elements as well, even up to the values and beliefs that are seen as the most fundamental motivators of human activity.⁴⁴ This book pays attention to more than just formal rules and laws: it also aims to study the contribution of informal customs, traditions, codes of conduct and organisational arrangements to structuring commodity trade. Values and beliefs, however, are not studied here as institutions in their own right. Although private convictions have an important role in every society, their contribution to economic behaviour can best be observed by looking at the tangible rules, customs and practices, both formal and informal, that they helped give rise to.⁴⁵

Institutional economics share with classical economic theory the conviction that market incentives are the driving force for economic growth. People, in the words of Adam Smith, will always want ‘to truck, barter and exchange one thing for another’;⁴⁶ and it is fortunate that they do, for in this way markets stimulate specialisation and innovation. In the institutional view, however, people may be willing to engage in trade, but whether they are able to do so is ultimately decided by the level of transaction costs. Inefficient market institutions imply high transaction costs, and will therefore keep people from engaging in exchange.

⁴² For Tuscany: Epstein, ‘Cities, regions and the late medieval crisis; Epstein, *Freedom and growth*, 127-142.

⁴³ North, *Institutions*, 3.

⁴⁴ An outspoken example of the first is the ‘legal origin debate’, cf. Glaeser and Shleifer, ‘Legal origins’. The most prominent representative of the second is probably Greif, *Institutions and the path to the modern economy*.

⁴⁵ Ogilvie, ‘Whatever is, is right?’, 675-679.

⁴⁶ Smith, *An Inquiry into the wealth of nations*, 25.

Efficient institutions, on the other hand, lower transaction costs, thus promoting exchange and all the advantages that come with it.⁴⁷

The concept of transaction costs requires closer attention, since it is vital in explaining exactly how institutions affect market efficiency. In this book two broad categories of transaction costs are distinguished. The first category comprises all costs that need to be made to match supply and demand. They include both search and information costs, i.e. the costs of finding appropriate buyers or sellers and acquiring adequate information on market opportunities and market conditions, and bargaining and decision costs: the costs of negotiation and closing a deal. The second category is related to the issue of security. It covers not only the costs of policing and contract enforcement, but also those of rent-seeking (through disproportionate taxation of trade or requisitioning of market commodities) by the authorities, or alternatively of the attempts to keep such predatory regimes at bay.⁴⁸ Transport costs are not included in the concept of transaction costs as it is used here. Although it is clear that transport costs can influence market performance too, their origins are very different. Whereas transaction costs originate in social and political relations, transport costs are mainly influenced by geographical and technological factors. This book focuses on transaction costs because they have a direct relevance for the main research question.

As we will see, the framework of commodity markets as it evolved in late medieval Holland did indeed reduce transaction costs of both types, although it should also be said that the effect was neither uniform nor unilinear.

Not just the effects of institutions, but also their origins, have been, and still are, the subject of discussion. The notion that institutions develop more or less spontaneously because they provide an efficient response to economic needs is popular, but it is also problematic. It suggests that efficient institutions – ‘efficient’ being defined as contributing, in a given set of circumstances, most to the welfare of society – will automatically prevail over less efficient alternatives. Unfortunately, it doesn’t always work that way. Many societies end up with obviously inefficient institutions, simply because powerful groups or individuals create and sustain institutional arrangements that support their particular interests, if necessary at the expense of aggregate welfare. A more credible way to account for the development of institutions is the ‘social conflict view’ adopted in this book: the notion that institutions are the effect of a confrontation of various social groups. This implies that the institutions that develop are not automatically the most efficient ones for society at large; they merely suit best the interests of those that have the power to create and sustain them.⁴⁹

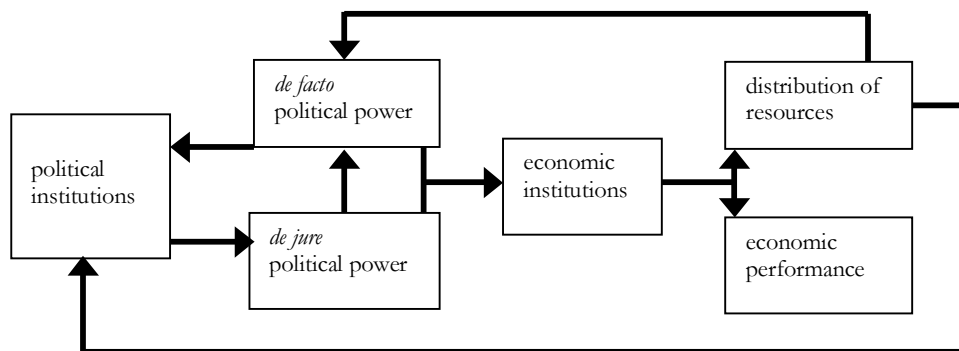
⁴⁷ North, *Institutions*, 27–35; North, ‘Institutions, transaction costs and economic growth’.

⁴⁸ Cf. Dahlman, ‘Problem of externalities’, 148, although Dahlman does not mention the costs of arbitrary expropriation. In the more recent literature there is a tendency to focus exclusively on the second category of costs, e.g. Acemoglu and Johnson, ‘Unbundling institutions’; Greif, ‘Fundamental problem of exchange’.

⁴⁹ This point was recently made forcefully by Ogilvie, ‘Whatever is, is right?’

What is more, institutions in turn tend to reinforce the position of power-holders. Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson and James Robinson explain why this happens by distinguishing between economic institutions (which include property rights, but also the structure of markets) and political institutions (see figure 1.1). They stress that economic institutions determine not only economic performance as a whole, but also the distribution of resources. Economic institutions in turn are determined by political power, which is based on political institutions, but also -and here the circle closes- on the distribution of resources. A second, equally circular mechanism specifies the nature of political power and its interaction with political institutions: groups with *de facto* political power consolidate their position by shaping political institutions that give them *de jure* political power as well. Together the two mechanisms explain the path dependency that appears to be a feature of many societies: institutions usually change only slowly and incrementally. They also explain how institutions can ‘petrify’: even if their original function no longer exists, they can still be maintained by groups that benefit from them and have both the *de facto* and the *de jure* political power required to sustain them.⁵⁰

Figure 1.1 Causes and effects of institutions (endogenous system)



Source: Acemoglu et al., ‘Institutions as a fundamental cause’, 392.

The related notion that efficient institutions arise more easily when rent-seeking lords or elites are kept in check by the presence of countervailing powers enjoys wide support. What this means in a concrete historical situation is another matter. S.R. Epstein, in his research on the development of commodity markets in Italy in the late Middle Ages, emphasized the impact of the rise of a strong central state, which, by removing constraints and impediments to trade raised by feudal lords,

⁵⁰ Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson, ‘Institutions as a fundamental cause’, 388-396.

towns or rural elites (such as toll barriers or protectionist urban regulations), increased market range and market size and in this way helped reduce transaction costs.⁵¹ But obviously a strong central state can also act as a rent-seeking institution itself, for instance by imposing high taxes on trade.⁵² In other words: the conditions that encourage favourable economic institutions to develop include more than just the strength of the state.

A useful approach of this issue is provided by Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson. They argue that beneficial economic institutions are more likely to arise when political institutions provide effective constraints on power-holders, when they give power to a broad group of people that have investment opportunities and will therefore benefit from secure property rights for all, and when opportunities for rent-seeking by power-holders are few.⁵³ With regard to commodity market institutions, this book will provide support for this assumption. It shows that in Holland these conditions were largely fulfilled. Urban elites were unable to dominate trade and concentrate it within the town walls by non-economic means, as their counterparts could, to a large extent, in Flanders. However, urban authorities in Holland did have the power to counteract attempts at rent-seeking by the count of Holland more effectively than the towns of England could withstand the English king; likewise the powers of seignorial lords to exploit rural trade were much more limited than in England.

Despite its explanatory powers, the institutional model presented by Acemoglu and his co-authors also has its weaknesses. For one, it focuses on endogenous forces and leaves very little room for the influence of exogenous factors. A second objection is closely connected to the first: the model explains institutional continuity much better than it explains institutional change. Admittedly, Acemoglu *et al.* do add that external events, especially sudden shocks like wars, may change the balance of powers in society and thus lead to an adjustment, or even a drastic turn-about, of the institutional framework.⁵⁴ However, the case of commodity markets in Holland presented here suggests that institutional change as a result of exogenous forces was not restricted to such rare occasions. It is quite easy to find examples of institutional innovation that clearly respond to (external) economic impulses, for instance the rise of specialised cattle fairs in the late 14th and early 15th century that will be discussed in chapter 2. Also, some of the practices that served to facilitate trade were probably copied from examples elsewhere. Some institutions migrate easily, and because of its late rise Holland was in a good position to adopt successful models developed in neighbouring regions. The replacement of the duel by truth-finding methods of proof in debt conflicts, to be investigated in chapter 7, is a good example of institutional

⁵¹ Epstein, 'Cities, regions and the late medieval crisis'; Epstein, 'Regional fairs'.

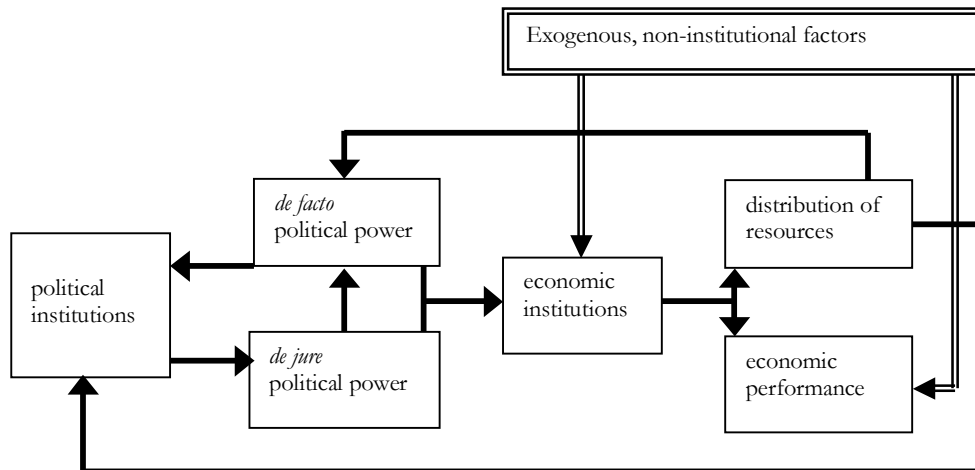
⁵² Cf. the 'predatory or exploitation theory' of the state of Douglass North (North, *Structure and change*, 21-22).

⁵³ Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson, 'Institutions as a fundamental cause', 395-396.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 292-293.

migration.⁵⁵ In cases like this, institutional change seems to have been the joint effect of endogenous and exogenous factors, although it can still be maintained that endogenous factors, by channelling the direction and setting the pace, were decisive. Figure 1.2 gives a graphic representation).

Figure 1.2 Causes and effects of institutions (mixed system)



More fundamental is a second flaw in the model. The development of commodity markets in medieval Holland provides clear indications that economic performance was not exclusively determined by institutions, whatever their origins. Exogenous forces had a direct impact as well (also visualised in figure 1.2). We will see that, even though in Holland the foundation for favourable commodity market institutions was laid before 1350, an acceleration of growth only took place in the second half of the fourteenth century, when economic circumstances changed. The contribution of non-institutional factors should not be seen as an alternative to the effect of institutions, but in interaction with it. In other words: an efficient institutional framework is a necessary precondition, but in itself it does not suffice to generate economic growth. Efficiently organised markets may sometimes actually create new economic opportunities, but more often they do something less spectacular: they determine whether people are able to turn opportunities that arise from other factors – most commonly changes in supply

⁵⁵ On institutional migration cf. Harris, 'Institutional dynamics'. The author identifies three factors that determine whether an institution is likely to migrate or not: the degree to which an institution can be detached from its religious, social and political environment and transplanted to another one, geographical conditions, and the timing of the development of the institution (whichever institution emerges first has the best chances of being adopted elsewhere (pp. 28-33, 40-41).

and demand, in turn influenced by demographic, geographic or technological change- into productivity raising activities, or are prevented from doing so.

1.3 Research questions

Whereas medieval markets for labour, land or capital can only very rarely be pinpointed to a specific time and place, commodity exchange frequently can. Part of the exchange of goods, and probably a very considerable part, took place at recognisable (although not necessarily formally authorised) trade venues: at the quays of a port town for instance, at a weekly market or fair, or perhaps at an informal gathering close to a village church. All these places were part of the institutional framework for commodity exchange, and a vital part too. Trade venues, and the rules and customs that determined their functioning, take centre stage in part I of this book.

Concentration of trade in time and space affected transaction costs in more than one way. Firstly it contributed to a reduction of search and information costs: it was relatively easy to find interested buyers and sellers and obtain reliable information on prices at a busy market place. Where advantages of scale allowed for the provision of specialised services such as brokerage and auctioning, bargaining and decision costs were lowered as well. Formal markets could also contribute to a reduction of costs related to security: the authorities often provided rules and enforcement mechanisms that were to guarantee orderly proceedings and fair dealing at the market place. There was a reverse side however: concentration of trade, especially when accompanied by restrictive policies or coercion, also provided opportunities for rent-seeking through taxation, the compulsory use of local services, or pre-emptive rights for local merchants.

The development of a network of trade venues was of course partly determined by demographic, geographic and economic factors, the elements that figure prominently in many studies devoted to the analysis of market networks.⁵⁶ However, the impact of social and political relations should not be ignored. It is from this perspective that part I begins with discussions of two categories of trade venues: fairs and (formal or informal) rural trade venues. It will be clear that these two categories do not cover the entire range of physical markets in medieval Holland. Nonetheless, both fairs and rural trade venues, as we will shortly see, did have an important role in the progress of commercialisation. Moreover, the development of these two categories of trade venues demonstrates the impact of social and political relations very well. Thus, an in-depth discussion of these two categories, more than an exhaustive enumeration of each and every type of trade venue that existed, contributes to the goal of this book: to show if and how the specific characteristics of the Holland society, in turn related to the county's

⁵⁶ A good example for England is Campbell *et al.*, *A medieval capital*; for Holland Lesger, *Hoorn als stedelijk knooppunt*.

history of settlement and reclamation, affected the organisation and thus ultimately the efficiency of medieval commodity markets. In order to avoid too narrow a focus, the development and functioning of fairs and rural trade venues is placed against a wider background: frequent attention is paid to both parallels and relations with other types of trade venues.

Chapter 2 analyses the role and development of fairs in late medieval Holland. Because of their periodic character and because of the legal regime they enjoyed -during the fair regular restrictions for foreign traders were usually lifted and immunity was offered for previously contracted debts-, fairs provide a good example of the advantages attached to concentrating trade in time and space. To be sure, medieval Holland was not known for its fairs: it never hosted gatherings of foreign merchants comparable to those of the Champagne region, or to the international fairs of Flanders or England. Still, Holland did have a substantial number of smaller fairs, many of them mainly serving the local market, but some with a role in regional or interregional trade as well. This fact has been noted before: in an article on fairs in the northern Low Countries written more than fifty years ago, Robert Feenstra recorded that between the 14th and 16th centuries several towns in Holland received licenses for fairs. However, Feenstra dismissed these fairs as unimportant: they were never more than local or regional affairs to begin with, and moreover became redundant when in the 16th century seaborne trade increased and Holland changed into 'one big permanent market'.⁵⁷ This view is in keeping with the notion expressed in much of the older literature that the fairs of the Middle Ages were representatives of an early, immature stage in the development of trade, to be superseded by more sophisticated permanent urban trading networks with the progression of economic development.⁵⁸

Yet a proliferation of lesser fairs was a very characteristic aspect of economic life in late medieval western and central Europe.⁵⁹ Epstein has linked the rise of these fairs to the rising standards of living after the demographic catastrophes in the first half of the 14th century. A higher demand for products like dairy, meat and textiles promoted regional specialisation and the rise of interregional trade. According to Epstein the rise of lesser fairs in the late Middle Ages demonstrates an adequate response to increasingly complex and variable patterns of production and trade. Fairs, as temporary facilities, could easily be established in convenient places in response to changes in supply and demand. But fairs did not simply spring up overnight in response to commercial needs: politics and power were important as well. Epstein focuses on the role of the central state: he claims new fairs only emerged when and where an increasingly powerful state helped to overcome the opposition of towns to the rise of trade facilities outside their

⁵⁷ Feenstra, 'Les foires', 221-222, 227-228.

⁵⁸ E.g. Lopez, *Commercial revolution*, 87-90; North and Thomas, *Rise of the western world*, 54-56; Britnell, *Commercialisation*, 90; Gelderblom, 'Decline'. Cf. Epstein, 'Regional fairs', 470, and Munro, 'New Institutional Economics', 412-413, who retrace the idea to the work of Max Weber.

⁵⁹ One of the first to draw attention to the 'rash of annual and biennial commercial gatherings' in the late Middle Ages was Verlinden, 'Markets and fairs', 151-153.

walls.⁶⁰ Whether this is what happened in Holland is doubtful: Feenstra's - admittedly preliminary- results suggest that Holland's fairs were largely established in the existing towns, not in villages. More detailed information is needed to bring to light if and how social and political relations in Holland affected the rise of fairs. Chapter 2 therefore presents a detailed chronological reconstruction of the pace and timing of the development of fairs in Holland between the early 13th and the late 15th century. It then continues to investigate the contribution to this development of economic changes on the one hand, and of political and social relations on the other.

The chapters 3 and 4 discuss the development of rural trade venues in relation to the commercialisation of the Holland countryside. That there was such a thing as commercialisation of the countryside in the Middle Ages is perhaps not self-evident. In the views of the Russian economist Chayanov, peasants based their decisions mainly on tradition and subjective habits instead of on an objective analysis of economic opportunities. They were primarily subsistence oriented and did not produce more than their own household could consume.⁶¹ Chayanov's notions have, explicitly or implicitly, found their way into the views of many historians. Yet his assumptions are not supported by new research, clearly demonstrating the involvement of many peasants with the market. Even when peasants did consume part of their own produce, surpluses were usually marketed, and ordinary villagers were routinely involved in the exchange of all kinds of commodities. Where market institutions were efficient and transaction costs were low, peasants did produce for the market as soon as they found there was a demand for their products. But where markets were difficult to enter or unsafe, creating high barriers to trade, peasants chose, very rationally, for subsistence as the less costly or less risky alternative.⁶²

In this light the availability of rural trade venues and the rules and practices that determined conditions for exchange at these venues mattered: they were an important part of the institutional framework that set the stage for rural commercialisation. In turn, the development and functioning of rural trade venues were strongly influenced by the structure of the rural society, which in Holland bore some rather unusual characteristics. Manorial lords who in England competed for market rights and thus initiated the development of a dense network of rural markets and fairs, were largely absent in Holland. While in Flanders much of the rural economy was geared to the industrial and mercantile needs of powerful cities, towns in Holland were small and only gradually gained political power.

The effects are not immediately obvious. Recent studies on the medieval English economy have done much to nuance the notion that lords did nothing but exploit their tenants. It turns out that peasants were quite capable of

⁶⁰ Epstein, 'Regional fairs', 462-464, 467-472.

⁶¹ Chayanov, *Theory of peasant economy*.

⁶² Hoppenbrouwers and Van Zanden, 'Restyling the transition', 22-26; Epstein, 'Cities, regions and the late medieval crisis', 5-8; Masschaele, *Peasants, merchants, and markets*, 33-34.

innovation and market participation, despite the limitations of the manorial system, and that many lords were well aware of the need to stimulate such economic activities.⁶³ In this line of reasoning the dense network of village fairs and markets, controlled by the lords who owned these trade venues, is first and foremost a positive contribution to a reduction of transaction costs for peasants, rural craftsmen and traders, thus permitting a higher level of exchange and specialisation.⁶⁴ Still, this should not blind us to the fact that a tight control over trade also facilitated seignorial exactions. Likewise, in pre-Plague Europe urban coercion (in the form of regional trade monopolies) sometimes showed positive returns: it gave urban elites an incentive to invest in infrastructure and urban institutions, and it provided both peasants and urban craftsmen with stable markets. However, the poor economic performance of 'urban coercive' regions like Flanders and Italy at the end of the Middle Ages suggests that by then the damage from rent-seeking outweighed the original benefits.⁶⁵

Chapter 3 explores the implications of the almost complete absence of seignorial control and urban coercion for the rise of an institutional framework favourable to rural commercialisation in 13th- and early 14th-century Holland. Chapter 4 shows how a tradition of informal trade and absence of coercion established before 1350 contributed to the rise of a highly market-oriented rural economy in the second half of the 14th and the early 15th century. It does so by discussing in detail the development and organisation of two types of newly emerging rural trade venues: fish markets along the North Sea coast and rural weigh houses for dairy in the north of Holland.

Chapter 5, the final chapter of the first part of the book, discusses another trade venue, the development of which was also shaped, and forcefully at that, by politics and power: the Dordrecht staple. From the late 13th century onwards Dordrecht, situated favourably at a crossroads of waterways, received a number of privileges from the counts of Holland that gave it the right to act as an exclusive depot for the transit river trade in wine, grain, wood and salt. The Dordrecht authorities took great pains to enforce these privileges in the entire river delta.⁶⁶ Thus, whereas fairs and rural trade venues show how concentration of trade could facilitate and stimulate commercialisation, the Dordrecht staple highlights the reverse side: the opportunities for rent-seeking offered by concentration.

Dordrecht's staple right present us with a double paradox. Firstly, the fact that Dordrecht managed to acquire and maintain a very substantial set of monopoly privileges seems at odds with the assumption that Holland's history of occupation and settlement had given rise to a society that knew but few non-economic constraints on trade. Secondly, although throughout the Middle Ages the Dordrecht staple gave rise to numerous complaints, in the second half of the

⁶³ Raftis, *Peasant economic development*, esp. 118-131.

⁶⁴ Masschaele, *Peasants, merchants, and markets*, 57-58, 83.

⁶⁵ Epstein, 'Town and country', 14.

⁶⁶ For a concise summary of the history of the Dordrecht staple right: Van Herwaarden *et al.*, *Geschiedenis van Dordrecht*, 79-88.

14th century, when the staple privilege reached its widest legal definition and Dordrecht flourished, Holland as a whole experienced a phase of strong economic growth. Chapter 5 examines this double paradox by investigating the conflicts between Dordrecht and two smaller neighbouring towns, Brielle and Schoonhoven.

Not all institutions that structured commodity exchange in medieval Holland can be related to a specific type of trade venue. Many rules, customs and practices were common to a variety of trade venues, or cannot be pinpointed in time and space at all. The second part of the book therefore abandons the distinction in categories of trade venues. It takes a complementary approach by focusing on rules, customs and practices that shaped commodity trade largely independent of the location where the exchange took place. Although in practice institutional arrangements frequently had more than one effect at the same time, for analytical purposes it is still useful to distinguish between institutions that primarily related to the matching of supply and demand, and institutions that had their greatest impact on security. This distinction is the guiding principle of the second part of the book, which presents these two parts of the institutional framework in two consecutive chapters.

As in part I, no attempt has been made to present an exhaustive discussion of all aspects of the two clusters of institutions. In chapter 6 in particular the selection has been narrowed down to just one aspect of a much larger group of rules and regulations directed at preserving the public character of the market and reducing information asymmetries: the organisation of weighing and measuring. The choice for this particular aspect is not based on the argument that it was of greater importance to commercialisation than, for instance, quality control. The organisation of weighing and measuring was chosen because it demonstrates with great clarity the impact of social and political relations on the development of the institutional framework, and thus contributes most to the central question of this book. It is presented here as a case study that also reflects developments in other aspects of market regulation.

To modern man systems of weights and measures are fixed and abstract entities: conventions that can be used to ascertain quantities of commodities regardless of their nature or of the circumstances. It has been the merit of the Polish historian Witold Kula to demonstrate that this situation is a relatively recent one. Kula argues that pre-modern weights and measures were 'representational' rather than 'conventional': weights and measures were closely linked to the nature of the commodity and the way it was produced. Measures for land for example were derived from the time needed to plough a plot or from the amount of seed required to sow it; consequently they varied from place to place and could change over time. From a modern perspective we can fault this measuring system for its

lack of standardisation, but as Kula notes, it made good sense in the context in which it was used.⁶⁷

Their ‘representational’ nature implied that weights and measures, much as all other institutions, were the product of social and political relations of the society in which they functioned. Powerful landowners for instance frequently managed to increase the size of the grain measure used for collecting dues in kind on their estates, whereas in the towns pressure from local retailers resulted in smaller measures.⁶⁸ How the specific political and social structure of the Holland society affected the organisation of weighing and measuring, and what this meant for market efficiency is the subject of chapter 6.

Chapter 7 discusses the same questions for a series of institutions that primarily deal with security: the mechanisms for the enforcement of contracts. Here we are not, as in chapter 6, dealing with just one example representing a much wider range of regulations. When in commercial exchange between strangers payment and delivery did not take place simultaneously, the enforceability of contracts was, in the words of Avner Greif, the ‘fundamental problem of exchange’: people were not prepared to enter into a commercial contract unless they were convinced the other party would fulfill his obligations. One solution to this problem relied on a system of communal responsibility: if somebody reneged on a contract with a stranger, all members of the culprit’s community (his town of residence for example, or the guild he belonged to) were held liable for the damage. The disciplining effect of the system ultimately depended on intracommunity self-regulation: a defaulter knew that afterwards his own community would seek compensation from him for the costs incurred through his actions. The alternative was a system of individual responsibility that allowed the injured party to bring legal action directly against the defaulter himself. This required the existence of an effective legal system imposed by an authority with enough power not only to issue rules but also enforce them.

In Greif’s work these two arrangements are fitted into a clear chronological framework. Greif argues that communal responsibility systems made impersonal exchange possible in a time when law enforcement by the state was non-existent. Merchant guilds for instance provided monitoring, coordination and internal enforcement mechanisms to correct defaulting, both between guild members and, through communal responsibility, with outsiders. In the 13th century, when larger political units were formed and strong rulers were able to guarantee security and enforce contracts, merchant guilds lost their function.⁶⁹

The notion of a transition from communal to individual responsibility has been questioned. Lars Boerner and Albrecht Ritschl for instance emphasize the coexistence and the mutual reinforcement of collective and individual mechanisms

⁶⁷ Kula, *Measures and men*, 3-8.

⁶⁸ Ibid., esp. 29-31 (land measures) and 54-62 (measuring of grain in Poland).

⁶⁹ Greif has written extensively on these issues, alone and with others. E.g.: Greif, Milgrom, and Weingast, ‘Coordination’; Greif, ‘Fundamental problem of exchange’; Greif, ‘Institutions and impersonal exchange’; Greif, *Institutions and the path to the modern economy*, esp. 91-123 and 309-349.

throughout the Middle Ages.⁷⁰ In a similar vein research by Oscar Gelderblom and Regina Grafe on merchant guilds in four major European towns between the middle of the 13th and the end of the 18th century demonstrates that throughout the entire period various types of merchant organisations existed, from individual agency to full-fledged merchant guilds endowed with formal privileges, disciplining powers and powers of exclusion. Which model prevailed at a given place and time depended on more than one variable: various economic and political circumstances played a part.⁷¹ Seen from this perspective the case of Holland is an interesting one. As we will see between the early 13th and the middle of the 15th century, merchant guilds were of very little significance, whereas urban authorities were actively engaged in contract enforcement almost from the moment they came into being. Apparently the Holland society provided fertile ground for a system of individual liability. Chapter 7 wants to show which factors contributed to this situation and how it affected the efficiency of contract enforcement.

Efficient institutions can be defined as institutions that by lowering transaction costs stimulate exchange and thus contribute to aggregate welfare. But how to assess the efficiency of institutions in an actual historical situation? A single institution may have many effects, intentional or unintentional: it may help reduce one type of transactions costs while raising another type, or open up possibilities for exchange to one group while closing them to others. Restricting access to urban markets to guild members for instance, a common kind of regulation in many medieval towns, reduced options to engage in trade for everybody else. On the other hand, since guilds also controlled quality and were able to discipline their members, buyers had less trouble acquiring correct market information and would be protected, to a certain extent, from cheating. How to weigh these advantages against the disadvantages? Moreover, institutions interact: they cannot be simply disentangled from the framework they are part of. That makes it difficult to study the effects of a single institution. It also means that more often than not a combination of institutions contributed to a single effect.⁷²

Here these issues have been tackled by combining different approaches. The first is the choice for a comparative approach mentioned earlier. The book does not pretend to exhaustively cover all rules, customs and practices that shaped medieval commodity trade in Holland. Rather, it focuses on differences and similarities between Holland, England the southern Low Countries in the three main elements underlying institutional theory: social and political relations, institutions, and economic performance. The comparison makes the links between these elements stand out and in this way helps to answer the research question. For practical reasons the analysis of the English and Flemish situation has been

⁷⁰ Boerner and Ritschl, 'Individual enforcement', 206-208.

⁷¹ Gelderblom and Grafe, 'Rise, persistence and decline of merchant guilds'.

⁷² Ogilvie, 'Whatever is, is right?', 668-675; cf. Gelderblom and Grafe, 'Rise, persistence and decline of merchant guilds', 3.

based on secondary literature, with very few references to the primary sources: another approach would not have been possible without severely curtailing the scope of the research. Consequently scope and depth of the comparison have been limited by the availability of research results.

There is a danger involved in this comparative approach: it may lead to overstressing the impact of endogenous factors. In order to minimise this risk a conscious effort is made to also take into account the influence of exogenous factors on the development of the institutional framework (mainly in part I) and to identify and explain similarities that existed regardless of social and political structures (particularly in part II).

Secondly, an attempt is made to complement the qualitative, in-depth analysis of aspects of the institutional framework with a quantitative, but more general assessment of the total. This is the essence of part III of the book. Whereas parts I and II provide an analytical discussion of different parts of the institutional framework, investigating the origins of the institutions and offering a qualitative assessment of their consequences for transaction costs, this last part of the book steps back from individual institutions. It tests, in a much more general way, the hypothesis that Holland's favourable framework of market institutions gave rise to better economic performance. It does so by looking at two quantitative indicators: market integration and market orientation.

Chapter 8 studies the level of market integration: the underlying assumption is that favourable institutions, by reducing transaction costs, promote the rise of well integrated markets. Departing from the view that efficient market institutions and low transaction costs will encourage and facilitate participation in market transactions, chapter 9 makes an attempt to estimate the degree of commercialisation of late medieval society in Holland.

Market integration and market orientation have been selected because they can be seen as general indicators of market performance, and because for these two aspects at least some quantitative information suitable for interregional comparison can be generated: for other aspects of market performance figures are simply not available. However, if as is indicated in figure 1.2, market performance is influenced not just by the quality of the institutional framework but also by exogenous forces, the two indicators cannot be expected to provide absolute proof of a causal relation between the institutional framework on the one hand and market performance on the other. The quantitative approach in part III should be seen as complementary to the much more detailed but qualitative information presented earlier. Only by combining the two approaches an assessment of the relation between institutions and market performance can be attempted, and even then conclusions on this issue have to remain tentative.

Part I

The institutional framework: trade venues

2. Fairs

2.1 Introduction

In 1447 the town of Hoorn, in West-Friesland, requested permission for a new fair in addition to its two existing fairs, to be held at a convenient time for the marketing of dairy products. The request was received favourably: duke Philip the Good granted a license for a fair on St. Lawrence, August 10. But the local authorities in Alkmaar, about 20 kilometres west of Hoorn, protested. The new fair was scheduled only two weeks before the fair in their home town; moreover in Hoorn no tolls were levied, whereas in Alkmaar the toll to be collected by the ducal officials was set at 2.5%. Alkmaar's protests were successful: in 1449 the duke withdrew Hoorn's license. The Hoorn authorities were not discouraged. They continued to organise their dairy fair and even had the audacity to advertise it as far away as Flanders. The duke reacted by prohibiting his subjects to visit the fair of Hoorn, but apparently to no avail. At the end of the 16th century both the August fair and the pre-existing Pentecost fair had developed into important venues for the dairy trade.¹

Although in contrast to England and Flanders large international fairs were unknown in Holland, the county did have many smaller fairs that served the local market or, as the Hoorn dairy fair, had a role in regional or interregional trade. Of course fairs were never the only trade venues; in fact trade in certain commodities, for instance wine, beer or fresh foodstuffs, bypassed fairs almost entirely. In this sense trade at fairs cannot be seen as representative for trade in general. However, an analysis of the effects of fairs on market performance in general and of the contribution of economic and political factors to the rise of fairs does help to answer the questions on which this book focuses.

As discussed in the introduction, views on the role of the lesser fairs of the late Middle Ages diverge: sometimes they are seen as pale reflections of the institutions of an earlier age, on other occasions as flexible solutions to new economic needs.² The chapter therefore begins with an attempt at clarification by positioning these two opposing views in a transaction costs perspective. The next step is a reconstruction of the pace and timing of the development of fairs in medieval Holland. Until now such an overall view has been lacking. In his article on medieval fairs in the northern Low Countries Robert Feenstra gives examples but does not present a full survey; later research has either followed the same approach or has been restricted to the position of an individual fair or a small

¹ *Handt-vesten Alkmaar en Hoorn*, 90; Fasel, *Stadsarchief Alkmaar*, summaries 80 and 81; Guicciardini, *Beschryvinghe*, 220; Velius, *Chronyk van Hoorn*, 633.

² For the historiographical background of these two views see section 1.3.

cluster of fairs.³ This makes it difficult to grasp the role fairs played in late medieval trade. A chronological reconstruction of the rise of fairs in Holland and a comparison to developments in England and Flanders can remedy this situation. The chapter then continues with an analysis of the role of these fairs in local trade and in the (inter-)regional trade in some of the products of Holland's agricultural specialisation as it took shape from the late 14th century: dairy, cattle and horses. The final section zooms in on the factors that caused the emergence of fairs.

2.2 Fairs and transaction costs

If fairs represent a necessary, but suboptimal phase in the development of commerce, their early decline should be seen as a sign of advance: they made way for more efficient institutions. If, on the other hand, fairs demonstrate commercial and institutional vitality and flexibility, it is the proliferation and continuation of fairs that signals progress instead of their demise. A transaction cost approach, based on the distinction between costs for providing security on the one hand and costs for matching supply and demand (in this case primarily search and information costs) on the other, can be of help here: it provides a theoretical foundation for the assessment of the contribution of fairs to market efficiency which can in turn be used to interpret the role of fairs in medieval Holland.

On the issue of security, fairs traditionally had important advantages over other trade venues. Fairgoers enjoyed the benefits of a special legal regime that provided protection from arrest for previously contracted debts and ensured the quick administration of justice for transgressions committed at the fair.⁴ The ways in which this protection was effectuated diverged. The elaborate system employed by the counts of the Champagne region in the late 13th century was unique. It was based on a series of agreements with neighbouring lords that forced these rulers, on pain of exclusion of their subjects from the Champagne fairs, to ensure safety on the roads and to grant the *gardes de foire* the right to enter their territories in order to enforce contracts entered into at the fair.⁵ In England the Crown was supposed to respect and enforce the right of all merchants to travel freely in the realm since Magna Carta. In addition, special royal safeguards were frequently granted to individuals and groups of merchants visiting the fairs. Beyond this, the role of the king was limited; but the individual owners of the great international fairs employed guards to maintain law and order at the fair and they installed special fair courts that, just as at the Champagne fairs, provided a quick and accessible means to resolve commercial conflicts. These courts allowed for a

³ Feenstra, 'Les foires', 220-221; Noordegraaf, 'Internal Trade'; Noordegraaf, *Atlas Nederlandse marktsteden*; Ibelings, 'Hollandse paardenmarkten'.

⁴ Van Houtte, 'Les foires', 179-180.

⁵ Bautier, 'Foires de Champagne', 117-126.

system of contract enforcement based on individual liability, even though communal elements such as boycotts were also used.⁶

Special fair courts did not exist in the southern Low Countries, where the competence of the local courts was temporarily extended over the fair and its visitor. However, the urban authorities fully respected the guarantees for a safe arrival, sojourn and departure granted by the counts of Flanders and the dukes of Brabant to visitors of the fairs; in fact, the Brabant towns, and Antwerp in particular, actively exerted themselves to punish any infringement of these rights and to ensure full protection for fairgoers on the road.⁷ Although the mechanisms for providing security diverged, the effects were similar: the costs of contracting and of the protection of property were kept in check.

Despite the unpretentious character of most of Holland's fairs, guarantees for the safety of visitors appear to have been as common as at the large fairs abroad. The grant of a fair to the young town of Schiedam in 1270 for instance promised all visitors, merchants or otherwise, foreigners or denizens, known or unknown, a safe arrival, stay and departure under the protection of the count, 'according to the custom of the other fairs in our county'.⁸ The license for a dairy fair in Schoonhoven granted more than two and a half centuries later used almost the same words, and then continued to specify that visitors to the fair did not have to fear 'capture, encumberment, arrest or harassment to their person or to their merchandise because of any debts whatsoever, as long as these debts are not made at the aforesaid fair'.⁹

The fairs of Holland had no special law courts: just as in the southern Low Countries local courts were responsible for administering justice. We know that the fairs were policed: in the late 14th century the bailiff of Heusden sent men over to Giessen every year to guard the fair in this village.¹⁰ Other than that little is known about the practicalities of the safeguards. Still, a case from mid-15th century Leiden shows that they were not mere standard formulas but had real meaning. A man called Thomas Cantels had been trying to recover a debt by seizing some property of the debtor, under normal circumstances a perfectly legal procedure if the debtor came from out of town. He found himself stopped by the local court on the grounds that during the fair 'nobody can be distrained or arrested'.¹¹ This is not surprising. The special legal regime of fairs mainly mattered to foreigners, as locals were protected from arbitrary arrest anyway by their burgess status; but in medieval Holland, as in other parts of Europe, visitors from a neighbouring town or from the surrounding countryside were considered 'foreigners' as well.¹²

⁶ Wedemeyer Moore, *Fairs of medieval England*, 158-166, 285, 287; cf. Greif, 'Institutions and impersonal exchange', 185, 189.

⁷ Van Houtte, 'Les foires', 179-180, 201-202.

⁸ OHZ III, 1525.

⁹ Van Berkum, *Beschrijving Schoonhoven*, 63-68.

¹⁰ De Boer, Faber, and Jansen, eds., *Rekeningen grafelijkeheid* III, 15, 23, 26.

¹¹ Blok, *Leidsche rechtsbronnen*, 154; cf. Feenstra, 'Les foires', 230 n. 3.

¹² Kosters, 'Rechtsmacht over vreemdelingen', 280-281. The implications of burgess status with regard to arrest for debts is discussed in more detail in chapter 7.

Therefore it is perfectly understandable that protection from arrest mattered to the visitors of small regional fairs as well as to those of the large international fairs.

There are strong indications that by the end of the Middle Ages the comparative advantage of the special legal regime of fairs was disappearing. In his study of fairs in medieval Flanders and Brabant, J.A. van Houtte states that immunity from arrest was restricted to fairs exclusively.¹³ However, in late medieval Holland weekly markets increasingly offered the same kind of protection. One of the first documents to illustrate this dates from 1307: in this year the count of Holland forbade his subjects to visit the new weekly market in Heusden, just across the southern border, but he simultaneously promised them immunity from arrest at the Geertruidenberg market that they were supposed to frequent instead.¹⁴ The episode indicates that competition between Holland and its neighbours may have influenced the decision; and indeed, contrary to Van Houtte's statement, some Brabant towns just across the border (Breda and Den Bosch for instance) also had 'free' weekly markets.¹⁵ In the 14th and early 15th centuries free weekly markets were also established in some villages in the south of Holland; the fact that in 1469 the market of Amsterdam is also referred to as 'free' suggests that by then immunity had been introduced for at least some pre-existing markets in other parts of the country as well.¹⁶

As a next step the need for any kind of periodic reinforcement of protection from arrest seems to have diminished. For one, in contrast to Bruges and Antwerp, the rise of Amsterdam as an international trade centre was not based on a pre-existing cycle of fairs. It relied on the commitment of local and central authorities to the safety of Amsterdam's foreign visitors throughout the year and on a system of conflict regulation answering to commercial needs as it had developed in regular law.¹⁷ Secondly, for some of Holland's local or regional fairs traditional immunity was abandoned and replaced by regular urban law. In early 16th-century Gouda the authorities issued a proclamation that during the next fair urban law would apply; they obligingly added a warning to beware of damages that might result.¹⁸ The immediate cause for this intervention probably was the unwanted side-effect of the immunity from arrest. Van Houtte uncovered several instances of abuse for the 15th-century Brabant fairs: people took advantage of the immunity from arrest in order to escape the obligation to repay previously

¹³ Van Houtte, 'Les foires', 180.

¹⁴ Niermeyer, ed., *Bronnen Beneden-Maasgebied*, nr. 177; freedom from arrest is confirmed in the renewal of Geertruidenberg's license for a weekly cattle market in 1398 (Niermeyer, ed., *Bronnen Beneden-Maasgebied*, nr. 713; De Jong, 'Veemarkt Geertruidenberg', 250-251). Possibly an even earlier reference comes from Schiedam, which in 1270 received a license for a fair; in the document the (pre-existing) weekly market is referred to with the term 'similiter cum omni libertate' (OHZ III, nr. 1524).

¹⁵ Breda (1321): Cerutti, *Geschiedenis Breda*, 110; Den Bosch (1328): 'Inventaris Oud Archief 's-Hertogenbosch', summary of inv. nr. 3876. Cf. the Brabant village of Lith, which was granted a free weekly market in 1359 by its ecclesiastical lord ((BHIC), 'Lokale geschiedenis').

¹⁶ Heerjansdam (1340): Niermeyer, ed., *Bronnen Beneden-Maasgebied*, nr. 320; Westenrijk (1439): *Chronologisch register vervolg Groot-Charterboek*, 14; Amsterdam: Breen, *Rechtsbronnen Amsterdam*, 76.

¹⁷ Gelderblom, 'Decline', 229.

¹⁸ Rollin Coucerque and Meerkamp van Embden, eds., *Rechtsbronnen Gouda*, 303.

contracted debts.¹⁹ In fact, the first reference of this kind in Holland dates back to the middle of the 14th century. In 1345 the Alkmaar authorities complained that the fairs were leaving their town 'lawless' (*rechteloos*) for weeks on end: they requested and obtained permission to apply regular urban law instead.²⁰ To be sure, this was a year in which trade was slack, probably as a consequence of the war with the Frisians who frequented Alkmaar in times of peace: that might explain why in this case the disadvantages of immunity from arrest outweighed the advantages. Yet both in Alkmaar and in Gouda it is unlikely that the traditional immunity would have been put aside if efficient alternative systems of conflict regulation were not available.²¹

The advance of these alternative systems should not be overrated. Events in the last decades of the 15th and the beginning of the 16th century make it clear that in times of crisis immunity from arrest could still be a valued attribute. In these years many towns and villages in Holland were experiencing serious financial problems, caused by a combination of economic decline and unrelenting fiscal demands from central government. They had to borrow heavily to provide the necessary funding.²² In cases like this, concerning public debt, the notion of communal responsibility was still very much alive: travellers from indebted communities were at risk of being arrested for the debts of their town or village of origin. That probably explains the series of explicit safeguards for visitors to both fairs and weekly markets dating from the late 15th and early 16th century. Amsterdam is a good example: between 1494 and 1512 the magistrate of Amsterdam repeatedly issued ordinances to assure the inhabitants from the surrounding towns and villages that visitors of the market and the fairs in Lent and September need not fear arrest for the debts of their community.²³ Similar assurances were given to visitors of the Lucasfair in Haarlem by the central authorities, on the request of the Haarlem magistrate. Likewise the installation (or confirmation) of free weekly markets in such diverse towns as Woudrichem, Enkhuizen, Gouda, Edam and IJsselstein around this time is probably not a coincidence.²⁴ Still, these were extra-ordinary circumstances; and what is more, the fact that the revival of immunity applied to weekly markets as well as to fairs supports the impression that at this stage the comparative advantage of fairs with regard to the costs of security was no longer of great significance.

¹⁹ Van Houtte, 'Les foires', 203- 205.

²⁰ Van Mieris, ed., *Groot charterboek* II, 698 (for a reference to the Frisian visitors cf. 604).

²¹ A more detailed discussion of these systems, their effects and their backgrounds follows in chapter 7.

²² Zuijderduijn, *Medieval capital markets*, 125-126.

²³ Breen, *Rechtsbronnen Amsterdam*, 297, 298, 304-305, 306-307, 309, 311-312, 317-317, 362, 382, 399, 402. On one occasion a similar safeguard was issued for the weeks between October 18 and November 11: perhaps to accommodate the autumn cattle trade? (*Ibid.*, 339).

²⁴ Haarlem: Noord-Hollands Archief, Stadsbestuur van Haarlem (stadsarchief van Haarlem), inv. nr. 666-669; the 1512 safe-conduct is printed in *Handvesten Haerlem*, 186-187. Woudrichem: Korteweg, ed., *Rechtsbronnen Woudrichem*, 334 art. 62; Enkhuizen: *Handvesten Enchuyzen*, 47-48; IJsselstein: 'Octrooi van de wekelijkse marktdag en haar privilegien in dato den 6e maart 1524'; Gouda: Rollin Coucerque and Meerkamp van Embden, eds., *Rechtsbronnen Gouda*, nr. 178; Edam: *Inventaris van het oud-archief der stad Edam*, 7.

But fairs offered other advantages besides protection from arrest: they also provided opportunities to reduce search and information costs. Because fairs were periodic events with a low frequency and also because –in contrast to permanent and weekly markets in many towns– access was usually open to outsiders,²⁵ they were able to attract a concentration of supply and demand that other trade venues could not always equal. Intuitively we would expect the advantages fairs had over permanent trade in this respect to diminish when aggregate trade volumes expanded. However, research in present-day developing countries has shown that the relation with scale is not as direct as that. In some cases periodic markets can be very persistent even when total trade volume increases: they lower costs for petty traders serving small communities, and for merchants buying up small surpluses, and they reduce the time investment small producers have to make to sell their products.²⁶

Circumstances in medieval Europe were probably comparable. Small towns and villages were numerous; periodic visits to several of these communities offered retailers in non-daily items a chance to spread costs. For small producers, especially for peasants producing seasonal commodities and living some distance away from the centres of demand, fairs provided good opportunities for selling the produce of a season without taking up too much time and –because of the competition between buying merchants– at a better price than in private transactions. For the merchants who acted as buyers, fairs saved time and money in comparison to the alternative of buying at the farmhouse gate.²⁷

In Holland, with its large number of landowning smallholders, these advantages may well have carried even more weight than elsewhere. To itinerant traders and smallholding peasants fairs must have provided attractive opportunities to reduce search and information costs in the 13th and early 14th century. With the rise of market-oriented dairy and cattle farming in the late 14th and 15th century the benefits of a dense network of fairs must have been even greater.

In short, even if in late medieval Holland fairs were no longer essential for trade from the perspective of security, their contribution to the reduction of search and information costs in local and regional trade was still vital. The analysis of the development of the number of fairs in the next section demonstrates the effects of the interaction of these two apparently opposite trends.

²⁵ Accessibility to outside traders is a common feature of fairs all over Europe. For Flanders: Van Houtte, 'Les foires', 200-201; for England: Wedemeyer Moore, *Fairs of medieval England*, 93-94. Accessibility of urban markets in general will be discussed in chapter 3.

²⁶ Hay, 'Notes'; Hay, 'Some alternatives'; Bromley, Symanski, and Good, 'Rationale of periodic marketing'.

²⁷ This argument is made by James Masschaele to explain the profusion of rural markets in medieval England: Masschaele, *Peasants, merchants, and markets*, 53-54; cf. Mitchell, 'Changing role of fairs', 557-558, for an 18th-century view on the advantages of dairy fairs over private dairy trade in the Midlands.

2.3 Fairs in Holland: a chronological reconstruction

Any attempt to reconstruct the development of fairs in Holland has to take into account the availability, reliability and validity of the sources. In contrast to England, where early governmental centralisation guaranteed both an effective royal control over market rights and a fairly systematic recording of them from about 1200 onwards, formal licenses for markets and fairs do not appear regularly in the Holland sources until the late 13th century.²⁸ That implies that only by screening a wide range of sources it is possible to gain insight in the development of fairs over time, although even then there is no guarantee of completeness. A survey of fairs held in medieval Holland has been compiled by systematically checking the most important editions of comital and local charters, accounts and by-laws for references (see appendix A). The analysis of the development of fairs in the following sections focuses on the 13th, 14th and early 15th centuries, but in order to be able to position the results in a long term perspective, the survey also covers the 12th century and the latter half of the 15th century.

Table 2.1 shows three sets of data derived from this survey. The first column renders the number of newly licensed fairs in each 50-year interval. The second column shows the total number of fairs first recorded in each 50-year interval. The figures include the newly licensed fairs referred to in the first column, but also all other first recordings of (apparently unlicensed) fairs. The third column shows the number of towns and villages with fairs first recorded in each 50-year interval: figures are lower than in the second column because many towns had more than one fair.

Table 2.1 Number of medieval fairs (licensed and recorded)

	Number of newly licensed fairs	Number of new recordings (licensed or unlicensed) of fairs	Number of new recordings (licensed or un-licensed) of towns and villages with one or more fairs
before 1200	-	1	1
1201 - 1250	3	7	5
1251 - 1300	7	13	9
1301 - 1350	15	29	12
1351 - 1400	20*	27	11
1401 - 1450	6	11	6
1451 - 1500	6	8	4
Total recorded before 1500	57	96	48

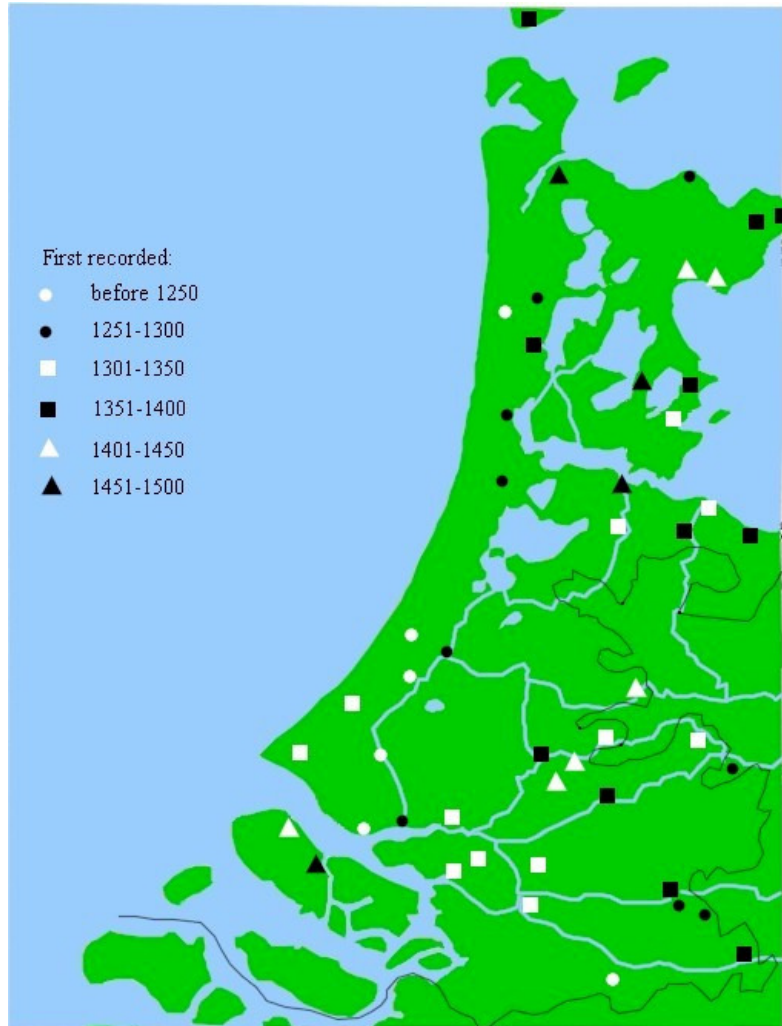
Sources: see appendix A

*: Including formal permission to Monnickendam, as a part of the charter of urban liberties, to uphold the three existing fairs.

²⁸ The system of licensing and the differences between England and Holland will be discussed in more detail in section 2.5.

Figure 2.1 presents the geographical distribution of the towns and villages with fairs. The map shows, unsurprisingly, that fairs first emerged in the oldest inhabited districts: the coastal strip and the river area. In the central peat district and in the north the share of places that were not recorded as having a fair until the late 14th or the 15th century is larger.

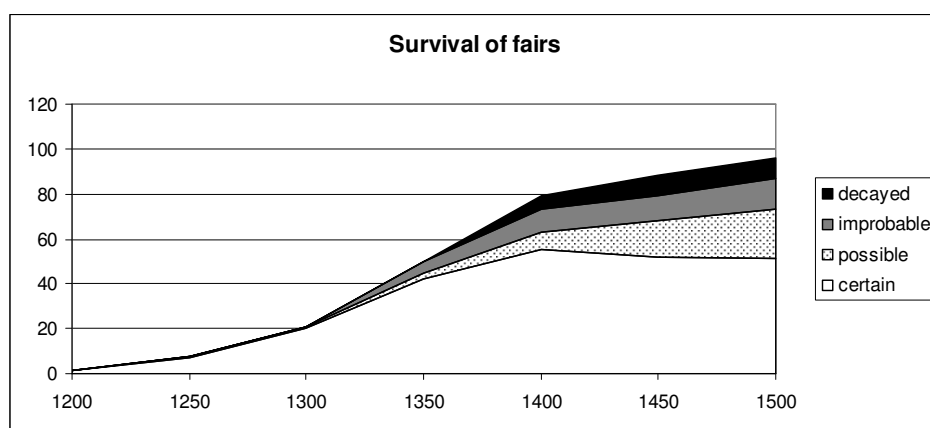
Figure 2.1 Towns and villages with fairs



Sources: see appendix A

Once established, not all fairs continued to function throughout the period under investigation; in some cases there is reason to believe they were never actually launched at all. Since it is not always possible to retrace the fate of individual fairs with certainty, figure 2.2 distinguishes four categories. The first covers the fairs that have left traces in the sources around or after the given date and therefore (almost) certainly still existed. The second category consists of the fairs that did function earlier, but for which there is no evidence around or after the given date. It is possible that these fairs were still there, but it is by no means certain. A third category consists of the fairs for which only an official license could be found, without any additional evidence that the fair ever materialised: it is improbable the fairs in this category ever really functioned and even less likely that they continued to do so for long. The final category covers the fairs for which there clear indications that they ceased to exist; in most cases these indications are remarks in the comital accounts stating a fair no longer rendered any toll revenues because it had decayed.

Figure 2.2 Survival of fairs first recorded before 1500



Sources: see appendix A

Although the table and the graph approach the issue from different angles, they suggest the same thing: fairs began to emerge in the 13th century and multiplied in the 14th century, while after 1400 growth rates declined. However, results for all three phases are in need of a critical evaluation.

The number of fairs in the 12th and 13th centuries may well have been underestimated as a result of the paucity of early sources: there is a very real possibility fairs have been overlooked because they did not leave any traces in the documents. In addition, several fairs that are first recorded in the 13th or early 14th

century probably have older roots. It is not a coincidence that the only fair mentioned before the year 1200 was held near Egmond abbey, on the festival of St. Adalbert, the abbey's patron saint. We are informed about it because the author of the *Miracula Nova Sancti Adalberti*, writing in Egmond around 1140, mentions it: he laments the preoccupation of some of the West-Frisian visitors to the festival with business and socialising at the fair instead of devotion.²⁹ But the records of Egmond are unique in Holland: no other source is as detailed and dates back in time as far. That obscures the view on similar fairs in the rest of the county. The rural fairs of Valkenburg and Voorschoten for instance, both situated near Leiden, were well established by the middle of the 13th century: as will be discussed later, around that time all kinds of payments were scheduled at these fairs. That suggests an early start, and indeed there is a chance reference to the Voorschoten fair dating from 1204 in the Egmond records supporting the suggestion; but that is all we have.³⁰

Likewise we are left in the dark about the origins of the fairs in Holland's oldest urban settlements. For Leiden, Haarlem, Delft, Alkmaar and Vlaardingen fairs are first attested between 1246 and 1272, in all cases as existing institutions.³¹ All of these towns had probably begun to develop as regional market centres in the 12th century, even though documentary evidence is available only for Alkmaar. Thanks to its proximity to and links with Egmond abbey we are informed about the destruction of the *forum* of Alkmaar by the West-Frisians in 1132 and also of the existence in the 12th century of a toll, a *monetarius* (mint master) and an Alkmaar grain measure.³² A market function of this kind suggests that the fair in Alkmaar may have predated the third quarter of the 13th century, although it is impossible to say by how much.³³ This is also true for the fairs in the other towns just mentioned. In fact it might be significant that for Medemblik and Muiden, the two towns in Holland with a commercial role going back to an even more distant past, fairs are recorded fairly early as well: in 1289 and 1308 respectively.³⁴ In the Carolingian era Medemblik was a trading centre on the Frisian trade route

²⁹ Vis, 'De 'Historia'', 124-125.

³⁰ The first reference to the two fairs in administrative sources dates from 1246, when they are mentioned as the dates for making a payment (OHZ II, 680). For the 1204 reference to Voorschoten: Gumbert-Hepp and Gumbert, eds., *Annalen van Egmond*, 323-324.

³¹ OHZ II, nr. 680 art 59 (Delft); OHZ III, nrs. 1435 (Leiden), 1442 (Haarlem), 1583 (Alkmaar); Niermeyer, ed., *Bronnen Beneden-Maasgebied*, nr. 39 (Vlaardingen); Henderikx, 'Graaf en stad', 50.

³² Henderikx, 'Graaf en stad', 50; Cordfunke, *Alkmaar in prehistorie en middeleeuwen*, 52, 55, 56; Gumbert-Hepp and Gumbert, eds., *Annalen van Egmond*, 176; Opperman, *Fontes Egmondenses*, 64, 69, 74, 75, 76, 83.

³³ In 1215 the abbot of Egmond granted, among other rights, half of the toll of the 'consecration of the church' and one third of the toll in Alkmaar to Willem the son of the lord of Egmond. The Alkmaar toll may or may not refer to a fair; the other toll probably does relate to a fair, but since no location is mentioned this might just as well be the fair in Egmond (OHZ I, nr. 357).

³⁴ OHZ IV, nr. 2385 (Medemblik); Hamaker, ed., *Rekeningen grafelijkeid I*, 7.

The item in the account records the revenues of the Muiden toll. Because the sum it renders is very high compared to the entry for the 'Muiden market toll' in 1342 (the next account available), C.L. Verkerk has suggested the 1308 entry might refer to the revenues of a river toll instead of a market toll (Verkerk, 'Tollen en waterwegen', 111). However that is unlikely: in both accounts the Muiden toll revenues are directly followed by the Ouderamstel toll revenues, referred to as the 'Ouderamstel market toll' in 1342, which experienced a similar drop. Ouderamstel, as far as we know, has never been the location of a river toll.

between Dorestad and the North Sea; the Frankish kings had a demesne here and they probably also levied a toll on trade. In Muiden the bishop of Utrecht levied a toll from at least the late 10th century onward. At that time Utrecht was the most important commercial centre in the northern Low Countries; Muiden seems to have served as an outpost. The relatively early emergence of fairs in these towns suggests that a market function on a regional scale may have been preserved, even though there is no evidence for continuity of the fairs themselves.³⁵

With the passing of time the reliability of the sources improves. By the end of the 13th century the count's chancery had developed into a permanent institution with a staff of professional scribes. Charters were being produced, and registered, in increasing numbers. The first comital accounts that have survived date from the early 14th century.³⁶ But although we gradually reach firmer ground, in the 14th century first attestations of apparently already existing fairs are still frequent: the high number of 'new fairs' both in the first and in the second half of the century is therefore at least partly the effect of belated recordings of older institutions.

Over time this effect must have worn off. That sheds a somewhat different light on what looks like a sharp drop in the number of new fairs around the year 1400: figures for the late 14th century are flattered by late recordings of pre-existing fairs, whereas those for the 15th century are probably more realistic. Still, the difference is such that there most likely was a real decline in growth rates; the number of fairs in operation may even have stabilised in the early 15th century. This should not be taken as a sign that the era of fairs had come to an end. As figure 2.2 demonstrates, the majority of fairs established before 1400 continued to function after that date. Moreover, judging by the number of licenses new fairs continued to be founded even after 1500: in the first half of the 16th century licenses were granted for at least six more fairs.³⁷ What is more, the fact that the Estates of Holland established several new fairs in the late 16th and early 17th century, many of them cattle fairs, bears witness to a continued role for fairs even in the early modern era.³⁸

The development of fairs in Holland stands out more clearly when it is compared to what happened elsewhere. In a European perspective, England is often regarded as a special case. The English network of fairs did not expand in the late Middle Ages; instead, it showed signs of contraction. Few new fairs emerged in the late 14th and in the 15th century, whereas at that same time several existing fairs

³⁵ Besteman, 'Pre-urban development of Medemblik', 4, 9, 21-28. Verkerk, 'Tollen en waterwegen', 110-111; Van Vliet, 'Utrecht, Muiden', 19-21.

³⁶ Burgers, Dijkhof, and Kruisheer, 'Doordringing van het schrift', 203-207. According to the authors (197-201) some towns, Dordrecht foremost among them, began to systematically keep registers and accounts even before the count did, but until the late 14th century only a fraction of what the urban clerks produced has survived. For the first comital accounts: Hamaker, ed., *Rekeningen grafelijkeheid I*.

³⁷ See appendix A for the locations of these fairs and for references.

³⁸ *Register van Hollandt en Westvrieslandt*, indices over 1580-1590, 1591-1599, 1600-1609 and 1610-1627; under 'beestemarkt', 'markt' and 'paardenmarkt'.

decayed.³⁹ However, England did experience a phase of strong growth in the 13th and early 14th centuries. In these years a remarkable proliferation of fairs and markets took place; the phenomenon has been interpreted as both the reflection of and a further stimulus to rapid commercialisation. Besides the large international fairs in Winchester, Westminster, St. Ives, Bury St. Edmunds, Northampton, Stamford and Boston, the English sources mention more than 2,300 lesser fairs established before the middle of the 14th century.⁴⁰ Yet a comparison with Holland suggests that pre-Plague England may not be as exceptional as has been assumed.

For one, thanks to the superior quality of English sources coverage for the early period is better than in Holland; early fairs are less likely to have escaped notice. Secondly, many English fairs and markets, especially those established after the middle of the 13th century, were short-lived: they functioned for a while, then decayed and were replaced by new attempts of an equally evanescent nature. Few accurate data are available for fairs, but for weekly markets some research has been done on 13th- and 14th-century survival rates. In Northamptonshire only 27 of the 43 markets recorded before 1330 were actually functioning in that year. For Huntingdonshire the corresponding figures (in the year 1348) are 9 to 11 out of 18 markets.⁴¹ If the two counties reflect a wider pattern and if fairs did not do better or worse than markets, perhaps half to two-thirds of the fairs recorded before the middle of the 14th century were actually functioning at that time. That would come down to an average of 0.9 to 1.2 fairs per 100 square kilometres, or expressed as a per capita figure to 2.6 to 3.5 fairs per 10,000 inhabitants. The corresponding numbers in Holland are 0.9 to 1.0 fairs per 100 square kilometres, which equals the English figure, or 1.8 to 1.9 fairs per 10,000 people: less than in England, but not in a totally different league, especially if the difference in the quality of sources is taken into account.⁴²

³⁹ Britnell, *Commercialisation*, 160-161.

⁴⁰ For the international fairs in general and the fair of St. Ives in particular: Wedemeyer Moore, *Fairs of medieval England*. For the proliferation of lesser fairs: Britnell, *Commercialisation*, 88-91; Letters, *Gazetteer of markets and fairs in England and Wales to 1516*, available from <http://www.history.ac.uk/cmh/gaz/gazweb2.html>. The exact number of fairs recorded before 1350 (2342) was obtained by communication from the Centre for Metropolitan History. Cf. Epstein, who claims that 'fairs were more numerous in England before the Black Death than anywhere else in Europe' (Epstein, *Freedom and growth*, 80).

⁴¹ Britnell, 'Proliferation', 219-220; Masschaele, 'Multiplicity', 257-258, 262; Masschaele, *Peasants, merchants and markets*, 170.

⁴² The figures for Holland are based on the 42 fairs certainly in operation in the middle of the 14th century, a population of 235,000 (Van Bavel and Van Zanden, 'Jump-start', 505) and on an estimated area of about 4600 square kilometres, calculated as follows. In 1833, when cadastral measuring began, the provinces of North-Holland and South-Holland covered 5511 square kilometres (CBS, *Jaarlijfers*, 1); about 940 square kilometres were agrarian land in new polders added between 1540 and 1815 (De Vries and Van der Woude, *First modern economy*, 31). No attempt has been made to correct for land loss or reclamations between 1350 and 1540.

The figures for the number of fairs per 100 square kilometres in England are based on the information of the Centre for Metropolitan History. Estimates of the English population just before the Black Death vary considerably. The figure used here is 4.5 million: this is the lowest of the estimates given by Hatcher for 1347 and at the same time the highest possible figure estimated by Campbell for any year during the Middle Ages on account of grain cultivation capacity (Hatcher, *Plague*, 68; Campbell, *English seigniorial agriculture*, 404).

Admittedly there is a striking difference between Holland and England in another respect. Whereas in Holland fairs were largely urban affairs – of the 96 fairs recorded before 1500 about 85% was located in a town – a considerable number of English fairs took place in the countryside, in villages or at manors.

After 1350 the expansion of the English network of fairs stagnated. In Holland, however, it continued to intensify, although there are indications that after 1400 the rate of increase was not as high as in other parts of the Low Countries. Information on fairs in Flanders, apart from the cycle of the five major fairs in Lille, Ypres, Messines, Thourout and Bruges, is unfortunately scanty and not suitable for a quantitative analysis. At the time this well-known cycle emerged, in the second half of the 12th century, a number of other fairs already existed, but they probably ended up in a second rank position when the five rose to prominence. There is scattered evidence that additional fairs were established in the 13th century. More importantly, there are clear indications that between the 14th and the 16th century fairs emerged in many small Flemish towns, and with the rise of rural textile industry also in an increasing number of villages.⁴³

For other parts of the Low Countries more quantitative information is available. Research by Jeroen Benders, partly based on the accounts of the counts (later the dukes) of Guelders, has shown that in this region by the late 13th century twenty fairs were in operation, while the total number of fairs recorded before the middle of the 16th century is 72 to 75. The dates of establishment of the new fairs, as far as they are available, indicate that the 15th and not, as in Holland, the 14th century was the period of strongest growth.⁴⁴ Likewise, for Luxembourg (and Lorraine) Michel Pauly describes a steady increase of the number of fairs between the 12th and the 16th century.⁴⁵ At the end of the Middle Ages Luxembourg may have had more fairs per 100 square kilometres than Holland. Guelders probably had less, but as both Luxembourg and Guelders were not nearly as densely populated as Holland, per capita figures must have been higher than in Holland in both cases.⁴⁶

A preliminary conclusion about the contribution of Holland's fairs to the functioning of commodity markets at large can now be drawn. The foundations for a network of fairs was in place well before the middle of the 14th century, much as it was in England; moreover, and in contrast to England, growth continued strongly in the second half of the 14th century. As fairs at this stage

⁴³ On the formation of the cycle of the five fairs and the existence of other fairs in the 11th and 12th century: Yamada, 'Mouvement des foires'. Some examples of 13th-century fairs are given by Van Houtte, 'Les foires', 188. On fairs in small towns and villages in late medieval Flanders: Stabel, *Kleine stad*, 256-258.

⁴⁴ Benders, 'Item instituimus', 657.

⁴⁵ Pauly, 'Foire luxembourgeoises', esp. 110, 116-117, 119.

⁴⁶ Assuming that Guelders covered about 6600 square kilometres (the area of the present province of Gelderland plus 33% for the *Overkwartier*), the total of 72 to 75 fairs recorded before the middle of the 16th century comes down to 1.1 fair per 100 square kilometres; the 82 fairs recorded in Luxembourg before the end of the 16th century result in a figure of 3.2 fairs per 100 square kilometres. In both cases this includes fairs that may not have survived until the end of the period. The figures should therefore be compared to a similarly construed estimate for Holland, which arrives at 2.1 fairs per 100 square kilometres in 1500.

both improved security and reduced search and information costs, the dense network that resulted must have given the efficiency of commodity markets a boost. In this light the fact that after 1400 intensification slowed down is not necessarily a sign of stagnation. The development of alternative mechanisms for the protection of property rights and the enforcement of contracts may have reduced the need for more fairs; and in many cases the density of the existing network may have sufficed to keep search and information costs at acceptable levels. We will return to this hypothesis later; but in order to do that it is necessary to investigate in more detail the role of firstly economic and secondly political factors in the development of fairs.

2.4 Economic function

One way to find out more about the contribution of economic factors to the rise of fairs in Holland is by investigating the trade conducted at these fairs. Information is scarce, but every now and again glimpses of what was going on do show up in charters or accounts: information on the type of transactions, the products that changed hands, catchment areas, and trade volumes. As a frame of reference it is helpful to distinguish between two types of fairs frequently found in medieval Holland. Many fairs were characterised by a predominance of retailing by itinerant traders and local producers to consumers in a region of limited proportions, usually a town and its immediate surroundings. A wide variety of products was sold at these fairs. Other fairs were dominated by wholesale transactions between agrarian producers in a region and merchants buying their products in order to market them elsewhere. Trade at these fairs was characterised by a certain degree of specialisation and often -although not always- by larger catchment areas.⁴⁷

It should be clear that the intention is not to categorise every single fair appearing in the sources. For one, fairs were rarely exclusively devoted to either function and the emphasis sometimes shifted over time, which can make classification of individual fairs hazardous. Moreover, the two types are not exhaustive. The rare examples of cloth fairs for instance –there were specialised cloth fairs in Gouda and in Gorinchem- do not quite fit in.⁴⁸ Still, distinguishing

⁴⁷ The first type corresponds with the 'lokalen Versorgungsjahrmarkt' in the classification of fairs proposed by Rothmann (Rothmann, 'Überall ist Jahrmarkt', 104-105). The second type mirrors Rothmann's 'Regionalen Gewerbejahrmarkt' except for the fact that in Holland this type of fair focused on agrarian and not on industrial commodities. Rothmann distinguishes five more categories, none of which are clearly recognizable in Holland, although as will be explained in section 2.5 the oldest markets probably originated as 'Lokaler grundherrschaftlichen Sammeljahrmarkt'.

⁴⁸ For the Gouda cloth fair at the end of the 15th century: Ibelings, 'Markt Middeleeuws Gouda', 48-49; Winnink, 'Markt in Gouda'. The fair was visited by many merchants from various towns in Holland; although it is not clear who the buyers were, it is likely they included other merchants or retailers besides local consumers. For the installation or confirmation of a cloth fair and five other fairs in Gorinchem in 1382: Bruch, ed., *Middeleeuwse rechtsbronnen Gorinchem* I, nr. 21; Stamkot, *Geschiedenis van Gorinchem*, 27.

between the two types that cover the majority of fairs in medieval Holland allows for a better understanding of the economic function of these fairs.

Local retailing

In Holland, as elsewhere, the fairs characterised by a predominance of local retailing were probably quite numerous. A well-documented example is the fair in the small town of Brielle. An urban bylaw that was revised in 1445 and must therefore date from before this year regulates the location of the stalls of a variety of tradesmen. The list begins with cloth retailers, both from Brielle and from elsewhere. They are followed by traders of metal objects like locks and scissors, of shoes, cake, mercery, jewelry, leather belts and bags, wooden plates, lanterns, wooden furniture and peltry. To be sure, the fact that the first five of the nine days the fair lasts are referred to as entry days, as at the large international fairs abroad, suggests that the urban authorities at least hoped to attract trade on a grander scale. Still, the enumeration of commodities as a whole makes it clear that retailing to locals dominated.⁴⁹

Bits and pieces of information from other locations indicate that there were many fairs with a similar role. A clue is provided by the fact that in some towns, especially small towns in an early stage of development, a convenient distribution of fairs over the year was scheduled. Vlaardingen, for instance, had a summer fair and a winter fair in the late 13th century. In the middle of the 14th century 's-Gravenzande had fairs in March and October, and Monnickendam had a 'first fair', a 'middle fair' and a 'last fair'.⁵⁰ This suggests a response to the need to regularly stock up with some of the necessities of life that weekly or daily markets did not provide.

For the 13th and 14th centuries detailed information on what was sold at these fairs is scarce, but cloth was probably an important item. We are best informed about the fairs of Valkenburg and Voorschoten. The owners of these fairs, the lords of Wassenaer, levied impositions on the measuring of cloth.⁵¹ Moreover, one of the oldest comital accounts –it dates from 1317- has entries for two small purchases of cloth at the Valkenburg fair, to be made into items of clothing for the children of two noblemen who had been placed in the count's care.⁵² If the early 15th-century situation is any indication, the range of products consumers could buy at these fairs probably also included (preservable) foodstuffs. In 1423 and 1424, for instance, the *Catharinagasthuis* (St. Catherine's hospital) in Leiden sent a servant to the fair of nearby Valkenburg in order to purchase cheese.⁵³

The Brielle example shows that local fairs were not put out of business by the rise of better equipped permanent urban markets in the course of the Middle

⁴⁹ De Jager, ed., *Middeleeuwse keuren Brielle*, 171-174.

⁵⁰ Vlaardingen: Muller, ed., 'Oude register graaf Florens', 172; 's-Gravenzande: Hamaker, ed., *Rekeningen grafelijkheid* I, 184; II, 21, 126; Monnickendam: Hamaker, ed., *Rekeningen grafelijkheid* I, 268-269.

⁵¹ Van Gent and Janse, 'Van ridders tot baronnen', 42.

⁵² Hamaker, ed., *Rekeningen grafelijkheid* I, 64-65.

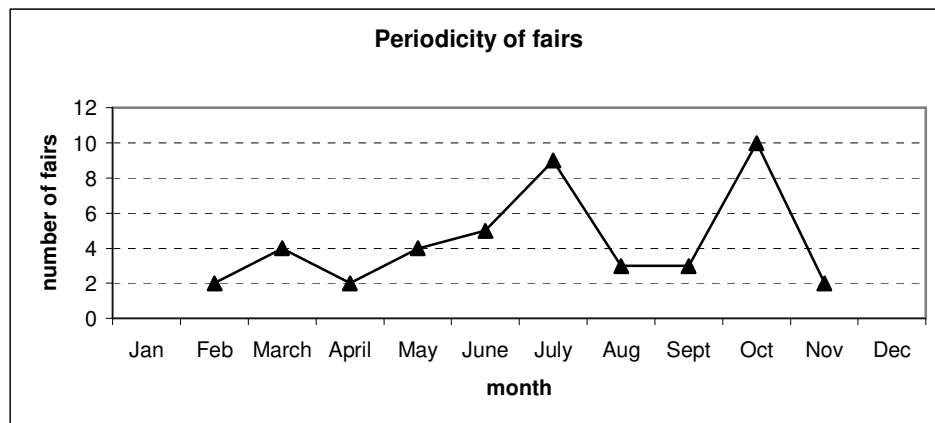
⁵³ RAL, AG inv nr. 334-36 f27v, 334-37 f26.

Ages, although they may well have concentrated more on certain specialised or even luxury consumer items. Late 15th- and early 16th-century references to the sale of jewelry at fairs in Amsterdam and Gouda confirm this impression.⁵⁴ The explanation is to be found in the fact that for the traders of these commodities fairs helped to lower search and information costs: they made it possible to spread costs and offer access to a concentration of potential customers at the same time.

Wholesale of agricultural products

Most of the fairs dominated by wholesale trade in a limited range of agricultural products, if not all, came into being after the middle of the 14th century. A first impression of the commodities these fairs specialised in, can be gleaned from their occurrence over the year. Figure 2.3 shows in which months the fairs that were first recorded between 1350 and 1500 took place.

Figure 2.3 Periodicity of fairs first recorded between 1350 and 1500



Source: see appendix A.

The graph covers 44 fairs; for two fairs the dates are unknown. For the dating of the fairs that were linked to the movable Christian holidays it has been assumed that Easter fell on April 8, the mid point of the possible Easter dates.

Two peaks are clearly visible. The one in July has a double background. On the one hand, it indicates the popularity of the dairy trade. July was a good time for

⁵⁴ Breen, *Rechtsbronnen Amsterdam*, 76, 533 ; Rollin Coucerque and Meerkamp van Embden, eds., *Rechtsbronnen Gouda*, 301; but see also 363-365 for an enumeration of much less valuable articles such as knives, shoes, pots and second hand clothing. Cf. Noordegraaf, *Atlas Nederlandse marksteden*, 24: in the 17th century many fairs specialised on luxury items and trinkets.

selling the cheese produced during spring and early summer; part of the July fairs served this purpose. Secondly, some other July fairs turn out to have been horse fairs. The peak in October is related to the sale of fattened livestock, ready for slaughter: many of the October fairs were cattle fairs. The role of fairs in the trade of all three commodities (dairy, cattle and horses) deserves more attention.

The timing of the rise of dairy trade at fairs suggests a link with the development of commercial dairy farming in the second half of the 14th century, stimulated by both ecological changes -the subsiding of the peat soil reduced possibilities for arable farming- and a rising demand for dairy products among the urban middle classes who in the aftermath of the Black Death had seen their purchasing power grow.⁵⁵ Soon, part of the dairy produced in Holland was exported to neighbouring regions. The late 14th-century accounts of the Guelders river tolls on the Rhine, Waal and IJssel repeatedly mention cheese from Holland, much of it probably on its way to markets in the German Rhineland.⁵⁶ Around 1400 Holland butter and cheese were also transported, in modest quantities, to Hamburg.⁵⁷ Transports of dairy products across the Zuiderzee go back to at least the middle of the 14th century.⁵⁸ Less than a century later they had reached impressive proportions. The register of the *Kamper pondtol*, a toll levied in Kampen at the mouth of the IJssel between 1439 and 1441, records over these two years a total of 6,700 barrels of butter, 6,800 *schippond* of cheese plus another 2,900 large and 97,000 small cheeses: the equivalent of 532,000 kilogram butter and at least 500,000 kilogram cheese per year.⁵⁹ The dairy products were shipped to the fairs of Deventer or one of the other IJssel towns, where they were mostly sold to German merchants. From the late 15th century onwards, the Brabant fairs had a similar role for dairy exports to the south.⁶⁰

Several fairs in Holland, especially in the northern part of the country, were involved in the regional and interregional dairy trade at an earlier stage in the marketing process: they offered peasants an efficient channel to sell their products at favourable conditions. In 1399 the villagers of Schermer for instance were granted exemption from the imposition on money changing when selling their dairy (and cattle) at the fairs of Alkmaar, Haarlem, Beverwijk and Akersloot.⁶¹ That this was the first step in a supra-local trade network is revealed by the accounts of the toll of Spaarndam, a toll post on the main waterway connecting the north of Holland to the more urbanised regions in the south. In July 1391 the toll officials registered the transport of 5500 cheeses and 23 tons of butter, all

⁵⁵ Hoppenbrouwers, 'Agricultural production', 101; Van Bavel and Gelderblom, 'Land of milk and butter', 56.

⁵⁶ Weststrate, *In het kielzog*, 106-107.

⁵⁷ Nirrnheim, ed., *Hamburgische Pfund- und Werkzollbuch*, nrs. 171, 174, 204, 269.

⁵⁸ Smit, *Opkomst*, 71.

⁵⁹ For a detailed calculation per town or village of origin see chapter 4; the translation into kilograms is based on the Alkmaar butter barrel of 158 kg and a *schippond* of 300 pounds of 0.494 kg each (Verhoeff, *Oude Nederlandse maten en gewichten*, 3, 119, 123).

⁶⁰ Sneller, *Deventer*, 56-63 (trade from Holland to Deventer) and 94 ff. (trade between Deventer and the German lands); Van Bavel and Gelderblom, 'Land of milk and butter', 57-58.

⁶¹ Van Mieris, ed., *Groot charterboek III*, 691-693.

purchased at the fair of Akersloot.⁶² This fair, situated in the middle of a dairy production region, is therefore a good example of a periodic market linking specialising production areas to consumer demand elsewhere. It also seems to be the only rural fair with a role in the dairy trade: the other fairs mentioned in the charter to Schermer were all urban fairs. So of course was the mid 15th-century dairy fair of Hoorn discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

Fairs were not the only option for peasants with dairy products to sell. In the northern part of Holland village scales, where dairy could be weighed and sold to visiting merchants, provided an alternative.⁶³ The permanent or weekly urban markets of towns like Edam, Monnickendam and Amsterdam were of course another possibility.⁶⁴ In Hoorn too the dairy trade must have been important long before the dairy fair was established; at more than £ 60 per year at the end of the 14th century, the revenues from the Hoorn weigh house suggest a lively trade.⁶⁵

In the central and southern part of Holland the role of fairs in the dairy trade was probably less pronounced, and that of permanent urban markets more so, than in the north. References to wholesale dairy trade at fairs in these regions are virtually absent before the 1530s, when the installation of a new dairy fair in Schoonhoven gave rise to a serious conflict with neighbouring Gouda reminiscent of the confrontation between Hoorn and Alkmaar almost a century earlier.⁶⁶ Still there is no doubt that commercial dairy production did take place in the central part of Holland well before the 16th century. The toll register of the Guelders river town of Tiel over the years 1394-1395 for instance records upstream cheese shipments from Gorinchem, Delft and Gouda.⁶⁷

In short, there is a link between the dairy export trade and fairs, but it is not a very direct one. Farmers visited fairs to sell their butter and cheese, especially in the north of the country; however, they also made use of a variety of alternative trade venues.

The late 14th and 15th centuries also witnessed the rise of several specialised cattle fairs in Holland. Some of them were important nodes in the developing international cattle trade network. On a modest scale cattle trade had been taking place for a long time. The first indication for Holland's role in this trade is provided by the charter of urban liberties of Geertruidenberg, dating from 1213. Geertruidenberg was situated on the overland route from Holland to Brabant,

⁶² De Boer, *Graaf en grafiek*, 365. Apart from the shipment from Akersloot the direction of the transport is not mentioned in the register: in theory dairy shipments from the south to the north may have been included.

⁶³ The role and development of these rural scales will be discussed in detail in chapter 4.

⁶⁴ Boschma-Aarnoudse, *Tot verbetering*, 124-125.

⁶⁵ Usually the weigh house was leased out together with the exchange, but for a few years (1384/85, 1385/86, 1389/90 and 1393/94) separate data are available (NA AGH 1568 f18v, 1569 f19v, 1570 f18v, 1571 f 10v). Weighing was usually obligatory for wholesale transactions, but not for retailing. Although other products were weighed as well, in dairy producing regions cheese must have dominated (Noordegraaf, 'Waag', 21-22.)

⁶⁶ The two towns got into a serious conflict over the dairy fair established by imperial license in Schoonhoven in the 1530s. For a description of the conflict: Ibelings, 'Conflict over de zuivelmarkt'.

⁶⁷ Westermann, ed., *Rekeningen riviertollen Gelderland*, 49-88. The register records the transport of 4700 cheeses from Gorinchem, Delft and Gouda upstream over the course of 15 months.

which must have made it a perfect location for the trade in cattle from the southern part of Holland to the markets of the booming towns in the southern Low Countries. Apparently this trade took place on a frequent basis: although the charter granted in 1213 does mention three annual fairs, it states that the weekly market (*forum ebdomadale*) was the compulsory venue for cattle trade for Hollanders and foreigners alike.⁶⁸

By the middle of the 14th century another concentration of cattle trade venues had developed in the northern part of the county. Hoorn in particular stands out. In the spring of 1344 and 1345 comital functionaries purchased more than 200 cows and oxen in the north of Holland, partly for fattening and consumption by the count's household and partly as provisions for a war against the Frisians. About one quarter was bought in Alkmaar, the rest in Hoorn. Most of the people who sold their cattle to the count's purveyors were probably locals, or came from villages elsewhere in West-Friesland.⁶⁹ However, there are indications that the cattle trade soon developed an interregional component.

Ian Blanchard places the rise of an expanding system of cattle production and cattle trade, in which Holland had a role as a specialised fattening zone, in the 15th century, when a growing number of lean oxen was transported every year from Denmark to the Low Countries, mainly via overland routes.⁷⁰ But sea transports of cattle to the north of Holland started earlier than that, albeit on a more modest scale. Two Alkmaar toll tariffs, both dating from 1339, refer to visits of cattle merchants from eastern Friesland, just across the Zuiderzee, to the Alkmaar fair.⁷¹ Eventually it was not Alkmaar but Hoorn, as a conveniently situated port town, that developed into the main centre for the interregional cattle trade. It was mostly here that imported cattle was sold to farmers, to be grazed in Holland during the summer months. Another toll tariff, dating from 1389 and stating the toll for Danes selling horses and cattle in Hoorn, suggests that by this time cattle imports by sea over longer distances were no longer exceptional.⁷²

The Hoorn cattle market was a weekly market and not a fair, as is shown by the fact that all purchases of the count's functionaries in 1344 and 1345 took place on Fridays. At the next step in the production process, however, fairs had a more prominent part. In autumn the cattle, now properly fattened, was ready for slaughter and consumption. Haarlem's Lucasfair, officially established in 1355, was an important centre for this part of the cattle trade.⁷³ Cattle was sold here by farmers from Kennemerland and West-Friesland and by burgesses in the area who

⁶⁸ OHZ I, nr. 334. The privilege is repeated in 1275, when a fourth fair is added (OHZ II, nr. 1683).

⁶⁹ Hamaker, ed., *Rekeningen grafelijkeheid* II, 167, 316-317, 420-424. It is not clear whether the people from 'Oosterlant' in the list came from northern Germany or from a village of this name on the West-Frisian island of Wieringen (cf. Lesger, *Hoorn als stedelijke knooppunt*, 24-25; Gijsbers, *Kapitale ossen*, 35).

⁷⁰ Blanchard, 'Continental European cattle trades', esp. 428-429, 431-433.

⁷¹ Van Mieris, ed., *Groot charterboek* II, 604, 626. The second document in fact also mentions Danish merchants (and merchants from Flanders and Brabant), but in a tentative way: they may not have been frequent visitors (cf. Fasel, *Alkmaar in het drijfzand*, 55).

⁷² Gijsbers, *Kapitale ossen*, 34-35; *Handvesten Enchuyzen*, 81.

⁷³ *Handvesten Haarlem*, 39.

had invested in the profitable business of ox fattening.⁷⁴ Some buyers came from towns in other parts of Holland: the *Catharinagasthuis* (St. Catherine's hospital) in Leiden, for instance, twice purchased cattle in Haarlem around 1420.⁷⁵ But the fair of Haarlem may also have functioned as a link in a cattle trade from the grazing areas in Holland to the centres of consumption in the southern Low Countries: a safe-conduct granted to the visitors to the Lucasfair in 1511 refers to merchants from '*alrehande nacen*' (various nations).⁷⁶

Amsterdam was also a lively cattle trade centre, and probably from an early date at that.⁷⁷ However, it seems transactions took place at the weekly market, as in Hoorn, or on a permanent basis: although in the 17th century Amsterdam had both a spring and an autumn cattle fair, neither is mentioned in the Middle Ages.⁷⁸ Cattle trade did take place at a number of smaller fairs in the country. In the north the autumn fair of Beverwijk probably had a role similar to the Haarlem fair, although on a smaller scale: in the 14th century the counts of Blois occasionally bought fat oxen here. However, in the 16th century both Beverwijk fairs had turned into specialised leather fairs.⁷⁹ Likewise there are doubts about the success of the cattle trade at some rural fairs in this part of the country: of the fair in Grootebroek for instance nothing is heard after the early 15th century and although Schoorl certainly had two important cattle fairs by 1600 it is not clear if these fairs actually date back to the middle of the 15th century.⁸⁰ Perhaps at that point the attractions of the markets of Hoorn and Amsterdam and the fair of Haarlem left little room for competitors.

In the south and centre of Holland a number of urban livestock fairs emerged that did survive the Middle Ages. Among the six fairs granted to Gorinchem by the lord of Arkel in the 1380s was a cattle fair. Nearby Woudrichem had a fair for horses and cattle; similar fairs were established around 1410 in The Hague, Woerden and Schoonhoven. The Schoonhoven fair was actually not new: it had been moved to this town from the nearby village of Stolwijk.⁸¹

⁷⁴ Gijsbers, *Kapitale ossen*, 35. Gijsbers also mentions EastFrisians, but the only reference to their presence dates from 1351, when formally at least the Lucasfair did not yet exist (Van Mieris, *Groot charterboek* II, 806).

⁷⁵ RAL, AG inv nr 334-27 f 29v and 334-41 f 23.

⁷⁶ *Handvesten Haerlem*, 186-187. For the dependency of Brabant cattle fairs on supplies from Holland also: Van der Wee and Aerts, 'Lier livestock market', 240, 244; Blanchard, 'Continental European cattle trades', 428-429.

⁷⁷ Gijsbers, *Kapitale ossen*, 37. Gijsbers stresses the role of 15th-century Amsterdam in the trade of fattened cattle in the autumn, but the sources she mentions may as well be interpreted as referring to the trade in young animals in spring.

⁷⁸ Gijsbers, *Kapitale ossen*, 222; Kistemaker, Wagenaar, and Assendelft, *Amsterdam marktstad*, 37-39.

⁷⁹ Scholtens, *Uit het verleden van Midden-Kennemerland*, 113; Noord-Hollands Archief, Archief Stads- en Gemeentebestuur Beverwijk inv. nr. 40 (charter changing the dates of the leather fairs, 1547).

⁸⁰ Grootebroek: Pols, ed., *Westfriesche stadrechten* II, 270. Schoorl: the license for the two fairs which according to the villagers had been destroyed during the 'troubles' in the 1570s was confirmed by the Estates of Holland in 1609 and again in 1623 (*Register van Hollandt en Westvrieslandt*, 1607-1609 p. 810 and 1623-1626 p. 214; Regionaal Archief Alkmaar, Gemeentebestuur Alkmaar (oud archief, 1325-1815), inv. nr. 2318). According to Goettsch the original license had been granted in 1446, however no evidence in the primary sources has been found to support this assumption (Goettsch, *Schoorl*, 42).

⁸¹ Gorinchem: Bruch, ed., *Middeleeuwsche rechtsbronnen Gorinchem*, nr. 21; Woudrichem: Niermeyer, ed., *Bronnen Beneden-Maasgebied*, nr. 623. Woerden: Plomp, *Woerden*, 56-57. Schoonhoven: Van Berkum, *Beschrijving Schoonhoven*, 56-57. The Hague: NA AGH, inv. nr. 203 f32 (with thanks to Ronald van der Spiegel who pointed out this document to me).

This brings us to the last category of fairs: the growing group of specialised horse fairs. These fairs will be discussed here only briefly because they mainly date from after the period under investigation; still their development provides a good illustration of the role fairs could fulfil. The first horse fairs emerged in the late 14th and early 15th century, but in the course of the 15th century and especially after 1480 their numbers increased rapidly. Growth continued in the first decades of the 16th century. Several existing fairs appear to have grown into horse fairs. This kind of transformation seems to have occurred most often at rural fairs. The fairs of Voorschoten and Valkenburg (and Vlaardingen) are described as horse fairs in the toll accounts of the river tolls at Geervliet and De Gleede in the 1520s and 1530s, as is the fair of Alblisserdam.⁸² A prominent role for the horse trade can also be observed at some urban fairs, for instance those of Rotterdam, Gouda and Delft, although here it is clear that other merchandise was sold as well.⁸³

Moreover, several new horse fairs made their appearance, almost all of them situated in towns. Privileges for horse fairs were granted to Schiedam in 1483 and to Haarlem in 1512.⁸⁴ Gouda acquired a license for a second horse fair in 1502 and a third one was established in 1505.⁸⁵ The number of horses sold at these fairs was substantial. Bart Ibelings estimates sales for Gouda at 2,000 per year in the early 16th century; at the three fairs of Valkenburg, Voorschoten and Vlaardingen together over 3,000 horses were sold around 1550.⁸⁶

There are parallels in other countries. A significant growth of the horse trade has been demonstrated for 16th-century England too. The economic background is not so different from what happened in the continental cattle trade earlier. Regional specialisation and interregional trade were stimulated by a raised demand for horses and by the increasing variety of uses horses were put to. Certain areas became noted for the breeding or rearing of a specific type of animal. Fairs facilitated the exchange between breeders and rearers of horses, and between rearers and users.⁸⁷ Horse fairs in late 15th- and early 16th-century Holland may have had a similar role. We know that around this time horse breeding developed in Holland's river area, where large-scale farmers could muster the capital required for this trade.⁸⁸ We can only assume that despite the predominance of peasant smallholding in other parts of Holland, horse rearing and horse breeding found their way there too. There can be no doubt that by the late 15th century Holland was participating in the interregional horse trade: a Delft toll tariff of this period distinguished between buyers of horses from Holland and buyers from the

⁸² Smit, ed., *Rekeningen Hollandse tollē*, 238, 239, 240, 275, 280, 301, 340, 345; Ibelings, 'Hollandse paardenmarkten', 93, 106.

⁸³ Rotterdam: Kersbergen, 'Rotterdamsche jaar- en weekmarkt', 168. Delft: Soutendam, 'Oudste keurboek van Delft', 497-498. Gouda: the comital accounts show that one of the two fairs of Gouda was functioning (mainly) as a horse fair even before 1450: e.g. NA GRRek 1707 Gouda f5.

⁸⁴ Schiedam: NA GRRek inv. nr. 334, f 65. Haarlem: *Handvesten Haarlem*, 187-189.

⁸⁵ Geselschap, *Inventaris oud-archief Gouda*, summary nr. 243 and 255.

⁸⁶ Ibelings, 'Hollandse paardenmarkten', 93, 106; Ibelings, 'Conflict over de zuivelmarkt', 3.

⁸⁷ Edwards, 'Horse trade', passim; esp. 113, 121-122, 130.

⁸⁸ Van Bavel, 'Land, lease and agriculture', 36.

southern Low Countries.⁸⁹ Likewise, the toll registers of the horse fair of Vlaardingen from the late 16th century show that half of the horses changing hands there were bought by merchants from Brabant and another 20% by merchants from Flanders.⁹⁰

To sum up, late medieval wholesale fairs in Holland did much what they did in other parts of Europe: by reducing search and information costs for small-scale farmers and for the merchants buying their products, they facilitated regional and interregional trade in an age of growing specialisation. There can be little doubt that wider economic developments –in this case the rise of dairy and cattle farming– stimulated the development of fairs: this at least partly explains the large number of new fairs in the second half of the 14th century. On the other hand, the trade in dairy, cattle and horses also made use of the dense network of fairs that had emerged prior to 1350, when agrarian specialisation was not so prominent. The fact that such a network had come into being before the needs of regional specialisation called for it, suggests that other factors played a part in the rise of fairs as well.

2.5 Power and politics

The oldest fairs

As we have seen, many fairs, especially the oldest ones, developed without formal authorisation of the count of Holland. If a license was granted, it was no more than a formal confirmation of a pre-existing situation. However, the late rise of a formal licensing system does not mean power had nothing to do with the rise of the earliest fairs. A comparison with England and the southern Low Countries can be helpful here.

According to Michel Pauly the oldest fairs of Luxembourg formed near the centre of a domain, where tenants would come to pay their rents. If they paid in kind the lord would be happy to sell some of the surpluses; if rents had to be paid in cash the peasants would welcome opportunities to market their products. Since many large domains belonged to abbeys or other ecclesiastical institutions, the centres of these domains were often religious centres as well. In these cases rent payments were usually scheduled on the day of the festival of the patron saint; the gathering of people provided an extra stimulus for trade.⁹¹

English research has mainly focused on the origins of markets instead of fairs, but the results point in the same direction. As Richard Britnell has shown, many of England's oldest markets were associated with hundredal manors, the centres of the basic administrative units dating from the Anglo-Saxon period. Markets were often situated at hundredal manors first of all because this gave the king

⁸⁹ Soutendam, 'Oudste keurboek van Delft', 497-498.

⁹⁰ Ibelings, 'Hollandse paardenmarkten', 105.

⁹¹ Pauly, 'Faires luxembourgeoises', 112-113.

better control over what was going on there: that helped to ensure a regular and orderly conduct of trade, but of course it also provided a tighter grip on its revenues. Moreover, taxes and dues for the hundred, many of them ultimately to be transmitted to the king, were collected at the hundredal manor: consequently this was where the need to exchange products for silver was most keenly felt.⁹²

It can hardly be a coincidence that Holland's oldest fairs were all situated near centres of religious, manorial or comital power too. Very often it was a combination of more than one element. The Egmond fair is an obvious case: Egmond was Holland's oldest and most important abbey and also the centre of a large domain.

For the two well-known fairs of Valkenburg and Voorschoten matters are less obvious. Oppermann believed that the two fairs, together with those of Delft and Vlaardingen, formed a cycle, as in the Champagne region and Flanders, and suggested they were mainly frequented by Flemish merchants. The idea was taken up by Fockema Andreae, who assumed the count of Holland established the Valkenburg fair at that particular site to make it fit into the cycle.⁹³ To be sure, it is entirely possible that Flemish merchants did visit the fairs. The first reports of their presence in Holland date back to the 12th century,⁹⁴ and although the charter of urban liberties of Geertruidenberg, on the border with Brabant, does not specifically mention Voorschoten or Valkenburg when it states that merchants and their merchandise have free passage to the Holland fairs, these two old rural fairs must have been included, together with the first urban fairs.⁹⁵ The Holland fairs probably provided Flemish traders with opportunities to sell their merchandise to the local population with a minimum of expenditure on search and information costs. However, as Feenstra has pointed out, there are no indications whatsoever that the fairs of Voorschoten and Valkenburg provided a platform for international trade comparable to the fairs in Champagne region or in Flanders.⁹⁶

Feenstra did not offer an alternative hypothesis on the origins of the two fairs, but it is not difficult to venture one. Valkenburg and Voorschoten are both situated in the old heartland of the counts of Holland, the Rijnland region. In Valkenburg the count owned a large manor that was dissolved in the middle of the 13th century.⁹⁷ Considering the fact that the first reference to the Valkenburg fair dates from 1246, just before the dissolution of the manor, it probably first developed as a domanial fair on a comital manor. Notably, from the middle of the 13th century onwards all kinds of payments turn out to be scheduled at the

⁹² Britnell, 'English Markets', 188-189.

⁹³ Oppermann, *Untersuchungen*, 33; Fockema Andreae, *Warmond, Valkenburg en Oegstgeest*, 54.

⁹⁴ The oldest reference to Flemish merchants visiting Holland dates from 1128, when the countess of Holland promised free passage to the merchants of Flanders if they would support her son's candidacy as count of Flanders (Galbert van Brugge, *Moord op Karel de Goede*, 239-240).

⁹⁵ *OHZ* I, 334.

⁹⁶ Feenstra, 'Les foires', 219.

⁹⁷ De Monté Ver Loren, 'Hoven in Holland', 123-124; Fockema Andreae, *Warmond, Valkenburg en Oegstgeest*, 50-52; Hoek, 'Hof te Vlaardingen', 85.

Valkenburg fair, or at least on the date of this fair (mid September, at least in the 16th century). Some are rent payments connected to land or to other rights, while the 14th-century comital accounts also mention the payment of tithes from the regions of Rijnland and Delfland.⁹⁸ The most likely explanation is that once the fair was well established, the count also used the occasion for collecting other payments, not connected to domanial exploitation. In short, the fair assumed a role in the comital administrative machinery.

Voorschoten is a somewhat more complicated case. At the end of the 13th century the Voorschoten fair, together with lower jurisdiction in the parish of Voorschoten, belonged to the lords of Wassenaer. The Van Wassenaers were influential noblemen and major landowners in the region, but the centre of their possessions was the manor of Wassenaar, which is a few kilometres west of Voorschoten; there is no clear evidence for the existence of a manor in Voorschoten itself.⁹⁹ References to payments at the Voorschoten fair are even more frequent than for Valkenburg, they come from a larger region and they include comital taxes (*beden*) besides rents and tithes.¹⁰⁰ That would make sense if the fair was originally connected to a comital manor. It is not impossible that such a manor existed and that it was dissolved at an early stage, after which the Van Wassenaers acquired some of the rights previously attached to it; but it cannot be proven.¹⁰¹

The notion of a domanial origin of fairs which broadened to a wider administrative role is confirmed by what we know of some of the oldest urban fairs in the region. Delft and Vlaardingen both evolved around comital manors.¹⁰² By the year 1200 both settlements were well on their way to become regional market centres; they also functioned as power centres of the count.¹⁰³ In both towns references to payments made at fairs date back to the middle of the 13th century and in both cases the mid 14th-century comital accounts show that by that time regular payments of rents, tithes and taxes by people from the surrounding countryside took place at these fairs.¹⁰⁴ It is the same sequence of events, with one difference: Vlaardingen and Delft developed into towns, whereas Voorschoten and Valkenburg did not.

⁹⁸ A survey of the published sources between 1250 and 1350 shows the following references to the fairs of Valkenburg as payment date: Niermeyer, ed., *Bronnen Beneden-Maasgebied* 39; Van Mieris, ed., *Groot charterboek* II, 104, 277, 298, 300, 337, 437, 531; Hamaker, ed., *Rekeningen grafelijkheid* I 164, 173, 185; Hof, ed., *Egmondse kloosterrekeningen*, 9, 10.

⁹⁹ Van Gent and Janse, 'Van ridders tot baronnen', 7-11; De Monté Ver Loren, 'Hoven in Holland', 121-122; Muller, ed., 'Oude register graaf Florens', 171-172.

¹⁰⁰ Many of the references to payments at the Valkenburg fair also mention the Voorschoten fair. In addition: OHZ II, nr. 870; OHZ III, nr. 1747; OHZ IV, nrs. 1871, 2084; OHZ V, nr. 2385 (volume V was not systematically checked); Van Mieris, ed., *Groot charterboek* II, 608.

¹⁰¹ Van Gent and Janse do suggest that in the early 13th century count Willem I may have granted the Voorschoten fair, together with some other regalia, to Philip of Wassenaer as a reward for his support in a succession conflict (Van Gent and Janse, 'Van ridders tot baronnen', 11).

¹⁰² De Monté Ver Loren, 'Hoven in Holland', 111, 115-120.

¹⁰³ Henderikx, 'Graaf en stad', 51-53, 61-62.

¹⁰⁴ OHZ II, nr. 680; Niermeyer, ed., *Bronnen Beneden-Maasgebied*, 39; Hamaker, ed., *Rekeningen grafelijkheid* I, 160, 185.

There are a few rural fairs in other parts of Holland that may have similar origins. The fair of Ouderamstel is a good example. The fair is first mentioned in the mid 14th-century accounts for Amstelland,¹⁰⁵ but considering the region's history it may well have been older. Until the early 14th century Amstelland belonged not to Holland but to Utrecht. Ouderamstel was the region's administrative centre; it was probably also the location of a manor held by the lords of Amstel, who organised the reclamations of the surrounding peat lands on behalf of the bishop of Utrecht.¹⁰⁶ Two references from the end of the 14th century make it clear that at this fair rent payments were scheduled, although there is nothing to indicate taxes or tithes were paid here as well.¹⁰⁷ In contrast to the fairs of Voorschoten and Valkenburg, the Ouderamstel fair fell into decay in the 15th century: the comital accounts mention the fair no longer rendered any tolls, despite efforts to revive it.¹⁰⁸ The fact that after the early 14th century the Ouderamstel fair was no longer supported by an administrative function, as the fairs of Valkenburg and Voorschoten were, might explain its demise.

Perhaps this is also what happened in Egmond. The mid 14th-century abbey accounts do not mention the Egmond fair as the date for the payments of rents by the abbey's tenants. For the abbey's possessions in the central part of Holland the Valkenburg fair is frequently referred to, but for its properties in the north either no date is mentioned, or rents are due on October 1 or November 1.¹⁰⁹ In fact in the north of Holland a tradition of scheduling payments of rents and taxes at fairs seems to be lacking altogether: the comital accounts for Kennemerland, West-Friesland and Waterland do not refer to it either. It is possible that this is related to the fact in the 11th century the counts of Holland lost much of their control in the north. Their power base shifted to the central and southern part of Holland; in the region north of the IJ central authority was virtually absent until the counts reclaimed it in the 13th century.¹¹⁰ The fact that the Egmond fair is no longer referred to in the sources after the early 13th century confirms the notion that in Holland domanial fairs had little chance of survival unless they were bolstered by an administrative function or by urban commercial activity.

It is in the 13th century that formal authorisation of fairs and markets by the count of Holland becomes manifest. The notion that the ruler had authority over markets is much older. The Roman empire knew the *ius nundinarum*, the right of a landlord to install a new fair or market on his estate and collect the revenues, usually granted to him by the emperor, the senate or the provincial governor.¹¹¹ The principle was revived in the Carolingian empire in the second half of the 9th

¹⁰⁵ Hamaker, ed., *Rekeningen grafelijkheid I*, 7, 268, 311, 318.

¹⁰⁶ Speet, 'Kleine nederzetting', 32.

¹⁰⁷ Van der Laan, ed., *Oorkondenboek van Amsterdam*, nrs. 421 and 828.

¹⁰⁸ NA, GRRek 2904 f2 (account over the year 1449-1450); 2951 f6 (account over the year 1500).

¹⁰⁹ Hof, ed., *Egmondse kloosterrekeningen*, 9, 10, 13, 15.

¹¹⁰ Blok, 'Holland und Westfriesland'.

¹¹¹ Huvelin, *Droit des marchés*, 102-103, 107-108; Frayn, *Markets and fairs in Roman Italy*, 121-122; De Ligt, *Fairs and markets in the Roman empire*, 156-157, 169-170, 202-205.

century. Local lords desired confirmation of their right to hold a market or fair; the king wanted more grip on markets and fairs because of the links with his responsibilities for food provisioning, the preservation of peace and order, and the regulation of weights, measures and currency. After the disintegration of the Carolingian empire the Ottonian rulers in the German lands continued to exercise control over markets and fairs, but in the fragmented west the Frankish kings were no longer able to do so. In some regions territorial lords took over; the dukes of Normandy are the most prominent example. Elsewhere, however, control over markets and fairs passed to local lords.¹¹² When the kings of France regained some of their power in the 11th century, the royal license saw a tentative revival, at least for fairs.¹¹³

The relation between licenses and power is clearly visible in Holland too. A late 11th-century document, composed to support the claims of the bishop of Utrecht to sovereignty over Holland, does mention markets, mints and tolls (*marcatīs, monetis, theloneis*) as comital properties.¹¹⁴ But the first reference that proves the count was actually able to effectuate control over markets and fairs is the charter of urban liberties granted to Geertruidenberg in 1213, and only from about 1270 onward the extension and consolidation of comital power had progressed to a stage that made licenses for fairs and markets a regular feature of comital administration.

In England royal control over fairs and markets was achieved at a much earlier moment in time. Before the Norman Conquest most markets were rather informal affairs, often connected to gatherings of people around a church. But in the century after the Conquest the Norman and Angevin kings managed to do what their Anglo-Saxon predecessors had not been able to: they successfully claimed the right to license new markets and fairs.¹¹⁵ Markets that could credibly claim long usage were referred to as being held 'by prescription' and left undisturbed, but by 1200 even in the most remote corners of the realm a royal license was considered to be a prerequisite for a new market or fair. Royal jurisdiction over markets and fairs culminated in the *Quo Warranto* campaigns of the late 13th and early 14th century, when organisers of unlicensed markets (and people infringing other royal rights) were called before the king's courts to substantiate their rights.¹¹⁶

As we saw, in England literally thousands of licenses for markets and fairs were issued between 1200 and 1350. Lords, lay or ecclesiastical, applied for market licenses because of their potential as a source of revenues: market rights became an object of competition and conflicts between lords. This 'scramble' for market rights probably goes a long way in explaining the large number of English fairs recorded before 1350. As will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, in

¹¹² Endemann, *Markturkunde und Markt*, esp. 40-41, 66-70, 95-97; cf. Fockema Andreae, 'Het marktregaal'. For safeguards to the visitors of Roman fairs and markets: Huvelin, *Droit des marchés*, 113.

¹¹³ Endemann, *Markturkunde und Markt*, 87-91, 193-196.

¹¹⁴ OHZ I, nr. 85.

¹¹⁵ Britnell, *Commercialisation*, 10, 11-16, 19.

¹¹⁶ Masschaele, *Peasants, merchants, and markets*, 59-60; Masschaele, 'Multiplicity', 262.

Holland seignorial competition over markets was almost non-existent. Another factor was of greater importance in the rise of markets: urban ambitions.

Towns: negotiation and competition

It is easy to see why not just urban elites, but also craftsmen, innkeepers, petty traders and local consumers would have wished for a fair in their town. Fairs, even if the tolls belonged to the count, as they did in many of the smaller towns, attracted people and business, offered an extra outlet for the products of local industry, provided the townspeople with commodities that could not easily be obtained locally, and may well have been seen as an enhancement of urban status.¹¹⁷ In the 13th, 14th and even 15th century licenses were probably not that hard to obtain, but they did not come for free either. The principle of an exchange of privileges in return for financial, political or military support is a familiar one. Exactly how it affected the rise of fairs in medieval Holland is demonstrated by some of the licenses from the 14th century.

Between 1339 and 1342 the towns of Alkmaar, Rotterdam and Dordrecht received licenses for a total of five fairs. Around this time count Willem IV (1337-1345) was in constant need of money because of his luxurious life style and military ambitions. One way to meet this need was to donate privileges liberally – in exchange for payment of course.¹¹⁸ Dordrecht for instance paid a fair sum for the extension of its staple rights for all shipping on the Meuse in 1344.¹¹⁹ Whether the grants of fairs to Alkmaar, Rotterdam and Dordrecht were motivated by financial reasons cannot be proven, but it is a good guess.

Another upsurge of fair privileges can be observed between 1355 and 1357: a total of eight fairs was granted to Edam, Monnickendam and Enkhuizen (all as part of a grant of urban liberties), and to Haarlem.¹²⁰ It is not clear which fairs were new: certainly not all of them, for the charter of Monnickendam explicitly gives permission to uphold the existing three fairs and the revenues of these fairs are actually listed in the comital accounts over the years 1342 to 1345.¹²¹ All the same, the accumulation of so many privileges in such a short time span is remarkable. This time there are no signs of money transfers; in fact in at least one case (Enkhuizen) it was the count who bore the costs.¹²² Count Willem V had just won the succession conflict that had torn Holland apart for several years. The grants of liberties to a number of towns can be seen as part of a strategy to consolidate his powers: the towns gained a certain degree of autonomy, but in

¹¹⁷ For an (English) example of the value attached to fairs, even if there were no toll revenues: Kowaleski, *Local markets*, 65. For a description of the business fairs brought to locals: Wedemeyer Moore, *Fairs of medieval England*, 287.

¹¹⁸ Brokken, *Ontstaan Hoekse en Kabeljaanse twisten*, 21-22.

¹¹⁹ Niermeyer, 'Dordrecht als handelsstad' IV, 194; Hamaker, ed., *Rekeningen grafelijkheid III*, 311.

¹²⁰ Edam: Van Mieris, ed., *Groot charterboek III*, 31-35; Monnikendam: Ibid. II, 866; Enkhuizen: Ibid. II, 831-835; Haarlem: *Handvesten Haarlem*, 39.

¹²¹ Hamaker, ed., *Rekeningen grafelijkheid I*, 268-269, 318-319, 382.

¹²² Van Engen, 'Geen schraal terrein', 83; Boschma-Aarnoudse, *Tot verbeteringe*, 86-87.

return they were expected to confirm their loyalty to the new ruler. No doubt some towns used the situation to reinforce any existing rights to hold a fair, or obtain new privileges to this end.

Not all fairs established in this way were equally successful; the fairs of Edam for instance never came to much and those of Rotterdam were not a great success either.¹²³ But others did well: the Lucasfair in Haarlem developed into a major cattle trade venue. Obviously at least some of these fairs did answer to an economic need, even if the immediate cause for the granting of the license was a political one.

In the first years of the 15th century many towns received exemption from the market tolls of the fairs in Woudrichem, Giessen and Heusden, and sometimes Gorinchem as well, in return for supporting count Willem VI in the war against the lord of Arkel, one of the autonomous lords in the river region.¹²⁴ However, no more peaks of grants of licenses for fairs comparable to those of the middle of the 14th century can be discerned. As we saw, that was not because fairs were no longer needed: they still provided attractive opportunities to reduce search and information costs. The reasons are to be found in a combination of other factors. Firstly, it has already been suggested that after the rapid growth of the number of fairs in the 14th century a point of satiation may have been reached, especially when in the 15th century economic growth was more hesitant. Still, it is questionable if that alone would have deterred individual towns from trying to better their position.

The events around the Hoorn dairy fair illustrate what could happen if towns did try: they risked a confrontation with their neighbours. To be sure, there are also incidents that suggest an amicable solution. In 1462 the urban authorities of Enkhuizen, at the easternmost tip of West-Friesland, were given permission, by comital charter, to change the date of their fair from the Sunday before September 14 to September 29. The reason for the request was a wish to avoid competition with the nearest fair in eastern Friesland, on the other side of the Zuiderzee.¹²⁵ Rescheduling was probably common practice, but the fact that Enkhuizen asked official permission is exceptional: over time several small changes in the dates of fairs were brought about without any evidence of official authorisation.¹²⁶ In this respect Holland differs from Guelders, where even though the initiative also came from the towns, rescheduling usually took place by formal charter.¹²⁷ Still, just as

¹²³ Edam: Boschma-Aarnoudse, *Tot verbetering*, 121. The 14th-century comital accounts for Waterland, available for the years 1343 to 1375, do not mention the Edam fairs; the 15th-century accounts state the fairs have decayed (e.g. NA GRRek inv. nr. 2904 f4v, inv. nr. 2951 f13). Rotterdam: Kersbergen, 'Rotterdamsche jaar- en weekmarkt', 166.

¹²⁴ Smit, ed., *Rekeningen Hollandse tollén*, xxvii. Dordrecht received exemptions from the market tolls of Woudrichem, Heusden and Gorinchem in 1414 (Van Mieris, ed., *Groot charterboek* IV, 301).

¹²⁵ *Handvesten Enchuysen*, 32.

¹²⁶ E.g. the fair of Medemblik, which according to the 1289 license was to begin on St. Boniface (June 5), whereas the 1343 comital accounts refer to it as the fair on St. Odolfsday (June 12) (*OHZ* IV, nr. 2385; Hamaker, ed., *Rekeningen grafelijkheid* II, 271), or the autumn fair of 's-Gravenzande, which in 1334 took place on St. Victor (October 10) and in 1500 on St. Bavo (October 1) (Hamaker, ed., *Middeleeuwse keurboeken Leiden* I, 184 and II, 21, 126; NA GRRek inv. nr. 334 f27).

¹²⁷ Benders, "Item instituimus", 649-651, 655, 664.

in Guelders, and in fact in many other parts of Europe, on a regional level systems of fairs emerged that showed very little overlap in dates.¹²⁸

Self-regulation did not always work: in some cases conflicts did arise. The way these conflicts were resolved does not indicate a very active involvement of the central authorities. Intervention only took place as a last resort, and even then the outcome depended largely the ability of the towns to put up a fight and take advantage of favourable circumstances. As we saw, the authorities in Hoorn did not comply when in 1447 duke Philip the Good withdrew the license for the dairy fair. Why the duke let this pass is unknown, but perhaps the reason is to be found in problems with Holland's dairy trade at the fairs of Deventer. These problems originated in complaints about the weight of the butter tons, but gained momentum under the influence of the political and military struggles between Holland, Guelders and Utrecht. In 1463 the conflict even led to a temporary embargo: the duke forbade his subjects to visit the Deventer fairs.¹²⁹ The possibility of establishing a fair in Hoorn, Enkhuizen or one of the other towns of Holland as an alternative to Deventer had already been under discussion during the 1450s.¹³⁰ As a consequence Hoorn may well have profited from a lenient attitude of the central authorities. Likewise, the quarrel between Gouda and Schoonhoven over the new dairy fair established (by imperial license) in Schoonhoven in 1535 resulted in prolonged judicial proceedings at the *Grote Raad* (Supreme Court) in Malines; in 1540 small Schoonhoven was pressured into 'voluntarily' giving up its dairy fair because it could no longer afford to spend time and money on the lawsuit.¹³¹

Only in the 16th century the first signs of a pro-active central policy become manifest. When Haarlem requested licenses for three new horse fairs in 1512, emperor Charles V first asked for the advice of the Council of Holland. The fairs were granted, but only two instead of three, and only for three days each instead of the four Haarlem had wanted.¹³² Eleven years later the lord of Brederode wished to establish a horse fair in Amstelveen: this time not only the Council, but also the count's steward and the treasury were asked for advice.¹³³ The request made by Brielle in 1551 to split the existing November fair into two new fairs, one in November and one in September, was treated with even more care: the procedure included an investigation of possible damages to the fairs of nearby towns and villages and of the consequences for imperial revenues.¹³⁴ Notably, in England a standardised coordination mechanism had come into being at a much earlier stage. Soon after the year 1200 it had become customary for market

¹²⁸ As an example of the situation in Holland the schedule for the fairs in the northern part of the county around the year 1450 has been reproduced in appendix A. For Guelders: Ibid., 659. For a similar situation in Germany: Rothmann, 'Überall ist Jahrmarkt', 101.

¹²⁹ Sneller, *Deventer*, 75-76; Weststrate, *In het kielzog*, 161-169.

¹³⁰ Ibelings, 'Middeleeuwse visstapel', 57.

¹³¹ The conflict is described in detail by Ibelings, 'Conflict over de zuivelmarkt'. For the reasons for Schoonhoven's resignation: Van Berkum, *Beschrijving Schoonhoven*, 72-77.

¹³² *Handvesten Haarlem*, 187-189.

¹³³ Noordkerk and Farret, eds., *Handvesten*, 321-322.

¹³⁴ Van Alkemade, Van der Schelling, and Matthijssen, *Beschrijving Brielle* II, 171-173.

licenses to be granted with a 'buyer beware' clause. If the new fair or market gave rise to protests of owners of pre-existing nearby markets, the matter was brought before one of the royal courts. If the court judged the complaint to be justified, the new owner ran the risk of losing his license, plus the effort and money he had spent to acquire it.¹³⁵ The fact that in Holland a more or less comparable system did not develop until much later is a clear sign that central control was not nearly as strong.

In short, urban ambition was an important factor in the pattern of development of fairs in Holland. It contributed to the rapid rise of fairs in the 14th century, when towns were sometimes able to make use of a favourable bargaining position to ensure their rights to hold a fair; it also put restrictions on further expansion in the 15th century. The direction of urban ambition depended on economic possibilities; the capacity to act upon it was determined by social and political relations.

2.6 Conclusions

In view of earlier research stressing the proliferation of lesser fairs in post-Plague Europe, perhaps the most striking aspect of the development of fairs in Holland is the fact that many fairs date back to the early 14th, the 13th or even the 12th century. By 1350 much of the network of fairs was already in place; densities were not much lower than in England. Considering Holland's 'late awakening' that is remarkable: it demonstrates the speed with which the country was catching up with the rest of Europe.

Although Holland's oldest fairs probably had manorial origins, urban economic needs and urban ambition seem to have been the main driving force behind the expansion in the 13th and early 14th century. In the form of immunity from arrest, fairs provided the security needed to stimulate commercial activity; for petty traders and for peasants selling a small surplus they also reduced search and information costs. Holland's fragmented pattern of urbanisation -large towns were absent while small and very small towns were plentiful- ensured a rapid growth of the number of fairs. The establishment of a fair did require comital permission, but the count could be persuaded to grant a license without a great deal of trouble: a right to the toll revenues, or in times of political turmoil some much-needed financial or military support, was probably all that was required.

This did not change in the second half of the 14th century; in fact in these years an extra element was added that stimulated the rise of fairs. The cost advantages fairs provided were particularly suited to the needs of Holland's growing group of dairy and cattle farmers looking for markets for their products. Both pre-existing and newly established fairs came to fulfil a role in the dairy and

¹³⁵ Britnell, 'King John's early grants'.

the cattle trade, always as a complement to other trade venues: weekly markets, permanent trade in towns or informal trade in the countryside.

In the early 15th century further intensification of the network of fairs slowed down because of a combination of factors. Although in times of crisis the fair's traditional immunity from arrest could still be a valuable asset in a country characterised by a high degree of urban autonomy, under normal circumstances a special legal regime protecting fairgoers was no longer needed: regular law provided good alternatives. But the rise of a good number of horse fairs in the 15th and 16th century suggests that cost benefits for small agrarian producers seeking distant markets had not disappeared, and the persistence of local fairs indicates that this is also true for retailers, or at least for retailers in certain specialised products. Most likely satiation, in combination with a reduced pace of economic growth, provides at least part of the explanation: in a situation like this there was much less room for urban ambitions. Interurban competition may well be accountable for the remainder.

A warning is in place here. The driving force of urban ambition in the development of fairs should not blind us to the fact that a process of commercialisation took place in Holland's countryside as well. In part, trade in rural products took place via urban markets, but rural trade venues, many of them of a less formal nature, had an increasingly important role as well. It is to these rural trade venues that we now turn.

3. Rural markets c. 1200 – c. 1350: a late start?

3.1 Introduction

Around 1280 the villages of Akersloot, Uitgeest and Wormer in Kennemerland received exemption from the river tolls in Holland as a reward for supporting the count in his war against the Frisians.¹ The toll privilege suggests an early involvement of the villages in regional or even interregional trade, but for the next fifty years or so the sources remain silent on the subject of rural commerce in Kennemerland. Then, in the year 1347, at the outbreak of the succession conflict between the later count Willem V and his mother Margaretha, Willem signed a document that prohibited weekly markets in the villages of Kennemerland and ordered the villagers to frequent the urban market of Alkmaar instead. The privilege was most likely intended to gain the much-needed support of Alkmaar at this time of political upheaval; as we will see it is doubtful if it was ever effectuated.²

The commercialisation of Holland's countryside has briefly been a subject of debate in the 1970s and 1980s. In his pioneering work on the rural economy of the Netherlands, De Vries reported a proliferation of rural trade venues in the 16th century, which, he believed, reflected the start of a process of rural commercialisation. In a critical reaction Noordegraaf claimed that this process had begun much earlier than that. He pointed out a number of village markets with medieval origins, but did not attempt a systematic survey.³ Since then little attention has been paid to rural trade venues in Holland. In Reinoud Rutte's work on town formation in the high Middle Ages, for instance, markets are referred to as precondition or accompaniment to the emergence of towns; that markets also existed outside an urban context is not mentioned.⁴

The case of Kennemerland demonstrates two important aspects of the process of commercialisation of the Holland countryside. First of all, the toll privilege for the three villages and the reference to village markets suggests that even by the middle of the 14th century this process was already on its way. The Kennemerland example also indicates that an attempt to investigate the early stages of rural commercialisation will have to include more than just formal markets and fairs: the village markets that Alkmaar wanted to put an end to were most likely unchartered.

¹ Akersloot and Uitgeest: OHZ III, nr. 1764. Uitgeest: Ibid., IV, nr. 1926.

² Brokken, *Ontstaan Hoekse en Kabeljauwse twisten*, 50; Noordegraaf, 'Internal trade', 16; NA AGH, inv. nr. 220 f 29 nrs. 226 and 227.

³ De Vries, *Dutch rural economy*, 155-161; Noordegraaf, 'Platteland', 13-14. Cf. Hoppenbrouwers, 'Town and country in Holland', 63, who shares Noordegraaf's point of view.

⁴ Rutte, *Stedenpolitiek en stadsplanning*, 123-139.

This chapter compares the organisation of rural trade in Holland to both England and Flanders in the 13th and early 14th century. The differences between the social and political characteristics of the societies in the three countries have been outlined before. Here the implications of these diverging paths of development for the commercialisation of the countryside will be explored by focusing on two elements: the relations between town and countryside on the one hand, and the role of lordship on the other.

In shaping the relation between town and countryside, urban coercion (in the form of regional trade monopolies) plays a vital part. For 15th- and 16th-century Holland, Peter Hoppenbrouwers has demonstrated that the increasingly powerful towns did not develop into coercive city-states because their ambitions were kept in check by three elements: the power of central government, resistance of village lords to urban intrusion, and the continuing competition between towns.⁵ Here it will be argued that this situation had older roots. A comparison between Holland, England and Flanders shows that in Holland even in the 14th century a balance of powers between the count, the towns and rural communities on the one hand, and between groups in the towns on the other, gave rise to a framework of market institutions that was favourable to rural commercialisation.

The role of lords will be studied here by comparing their involvement with trade and trade institutions in Holland to the situation in England. In England seignorial power and ambition was an important stimulus to the development of a dense network of markets and fairs in the countryside in the 13th and early 14th century. As we will see, the English multiplication of rural trade venues was not mirrored in Holland. It is argued here that while this may have implied a disadvantage in the short run, it also laid the foundations for a tradition of informal rural trade that made it easier for the inhabitants of Holland's countryside to take advantage of new economic opportunities, once these opened up.

3.2 Urban intrusion or urban attraction

In medieval society the dividing line between town and village was often thin. Legal urban status, physical appearance and functional characteristics did not always coincide. Large 'villages' sometimes acquired market functions and perhaps one or two other urban characteristics, making it difficult to distinguish them from the smaller towns.⁶ Still, despite the uncertainty created by problems of distinguishing between towns and villages, a comparison of the development of trade venues in the 13th and early 14th century does show some clear differences. In Holland before the middle of the 14th century rural fairs (and a few weekly markets) are recorded in only nine villages. Egmond, Voorschoten, Valkenburg, Giessen and Ouderamstel each had annual fairs; they have been discussed in

⁵ Hoppenbrouwers, 'Town and country in Holland', 64-67, 69-71, 76-79.

⁶ For a discussion and a historiographical survey of problems of defining urbanity: Stabel, *Kleine stad*, 14-16.

chapter 2. Alblas should be added to this short list: a fair in Alblas is recorded in the comital accounts for the year 1331. Ammers was granted a weekly market in 1327 as part of a (failed) attempt of the count to allow this river toll post to develop into a town.⁷ Rijsoord and Heerjansdam each received licenses for one or two fairs and a weekly market around 1340: we will return to them shortly.

Even taking into account that some of Holland's rural markets and fairs may not have left any traces in the sources, the figures pale in comparison to, for example, the counties of Essex and Suffolk in eastern England, each more or less comparable to Holland in size, although not quite as populous. Here the impressive numbers of 66 (Essex) and 77 (Suffolk) non-urban settlements with one or more annual fairs, a weekly market or both were recorded before 1348. These two counties belonged to the most commercialised part of England, but even in Staffordshire in the West Midlands, a more traditional and also a smaller and much more sparsely populated county, a total of 25 rural settlements with a market or a fair before 1348 can be identified.⁸ To be sure, it is unlikely all these villages survived as market centres until that date, but as we will see this was the case in Holland as well. The difference is striking, especially since, as the previous chapter has shown, in 13th and early 14th-century Holland a solid foundation was laid for the development of a network of urban fairs. However, this increase of urban trade venues was not balanced by a similar multiplication of rural markets and fairs.

Nor, for that matter, was this the case in Flanders. Even though the available information on early rural fairs and markets in Flanders is not as detailed, it is clear that here, perhaps even more than in Holland, numbers were small. Daily and weekly markets in particular were a strictly urban phenomenon. There were a few early rural fairs, but their number only began to grow in the 16th century. Moreover, by that time some villages, despite urban protests, managed to obtain a license for a weekly market as well.⁹ The Ghent region provides an example. Here in the 16th century only three rural market settlements are reported: Zottegem, Izegem and Sint Niklaas. In all three the markets had only been formalised in the 16th century, although they may have functioned as informal trade venues somewhat earlier.¹⁰

⁷ Ammers: Van Mieris, ed., *Groot charterboek* II, 435; Smit, ed., *Rekeningen Hollandse tollén*, xxxiii. Alblas: Hamaker, ed., *Rekeningen grafelijkheid* I, 130).

⁸ The numbers have been calculated by confronting the settlements with markets and fairs before the year 1348 in Essex and Suffolk as recorded in Letters, *Gazetteer of markets and fairs in England and Wales to 1516*, available from <http://www.history.ac.uk/cmh/gaz/gazweb2.html>.) with the lists of urban settlements in Essex and Suffolk composed by Christopher Dyer (I am grateful to professor Dyer for allowing me to use this information) and with the survey of urban settlements in Staffordshire given by Terry Slater (Slater, 'Plan characteristics', 24-26: 2nd, 3rd and 4th order towns). About size and population numbers: Essex covers 3885 square kilometres, Suffolk 3804, and Staffordshire 2620; the area of medieval Holland was about 4600 square kilometres (see chapter 2). The population of Holland in 1348 is estimated at 235,000 (Van Bavel and Van Zanden, 'Jump-start', 505). The population of Essex in the year 1290 is estimated at 144,000, that of Suffolk at 185,000, and that of Staffordshire at 56,000; fifty years later figures may have been somewhat higher (Campbell, 'Benchmarking medieval economic development', 31).

⁹ Stabel, *Dwarfs among giants*, 159; Stabel, *Kleine stad*, 259, 275; Sabbe, *Belgische vlasnijverheid*, 201-202.

¹⁰ Stabel, *Kleine stad*, 20, 274.

Pace and pattern of urbanisation probably provide part of the explanation for the scarcity of rural markets and fairs in Flanders and Holland. Flanders was already highly urbanised by the middle of the 14th century: at that moment the share of the population living in towns was probably even higher than the 35% estimated for the year 1469, when the first reliable figures become available.¹¹ The urban network was dominated by the cities of Ghent, Bruges, and in the 13th century also Ypres. In addition about fifty medium-sized, small and very small towns functioned as market centres on a more modest scale. Under those conditions there may have been less need for additional trade venues in the countryside.¹² For Holland, however, the situation was different. Urbanisation had started much later than in Flanders, and although the urban ratio was rising rapidly, on the eve of the Black Death no more than about 23% of Holland's population was living in towns. Admittedly, by pre-modern European standards that is a very respectable percentage. It moreover indicates a higher level of urbanisation than in England: estimates for the share of the English population living in towns (including small towns) vary between 15 and 20% around the year 1300. Ratios probably changed little afterwards.¹³ Still, the difference in urban ratio seems small when compared to the difference in the number of rural markets.

It is true that Holland's pattern of urbanisation was decentralised: Holland had no metropolis like London. In the middle of the 14th century even Holland's largest city Dordrecht, with its approximately 7,500 inhabitants, did not equal the size of England's second-tier towns like York, Bristol or Norwich. Instead, the county was sprinkled with small and very small towns, almost all of them endowed with urban liberties, even though some harboured no more than a few hundred souls.¹⁴ Despite their modest size, most of these towns had a weekly market and many also had one or more annual fairs, providing ample market opportunities for people living in their immediate hinterlands. However, this decentralised urbanisation pattern cannot fully account for the near absence of rural markets either. After all, England, or at least certain parts of the country, had their fair share of small urban settlements as well, even if borough status was not granted to all of them. Staffordshire, for instance, numbered 22 urban settlements, Essex 23 and Suffolk as many as 34: in all cases less than Holland's 38 medieval towns, but not in an entirely different range.¹⁵ For a more solid explanation for

¹¹ Prevenier, 'Démographie'; population numbers in the towns have been slightly revised by Stabel, 'Demography and hierarchy', 210-213. Here Stabel's figure for the urban population (just over 224,000) and Prevenier's for the countryside (just over 423,000) have been combined to calculate the urban ratio of 35%.

¹² Stabel, *Dwarfs among giants*, 159-160; Stabel, *Kleine stad*, 256-258.

¹³ For Holland: Van Bavel and Van Zanden, 'Jump-start', 505. For England: Campbell, 'Benchmarking medieval economic development', 36; Dyer, 'How urbanized was Medieval England?', 173, 177.

¹⁴ For population numbers of English towns: Campbell, 'Benchmarking medieval economic development', 13-14. For a survey of towns in Holland and their population: Lourens and Lucassen, *Immonertallen*, 54-71, 100-123.

¹⁵ Dyer, 'Small towns', 507 (plus the large towns in each county not included in this list). For Holland: the towns listed by Lourens en Lucassen (see previous note) minus Purmerend and Heenvliet (which in the 14th century did not yet have urban characteristics) plus Geertruidenberg, Heusden, Woudrichem en IJsselstein (which are now in Noord-Brabant and Utrecht but were at the time part of Holland).

the absence of a dense network of markets and fairs in the Holland countryside we will also have to look at the social and political context.

In the past, many scholars have stressed the limited control of English medieval towns over rural trade. Because they usually did not have extraterritorial jurisdiction, these towns could rarely do more than restrict access to the urban market for outsiders by conferring trading privileges and toll exemptions on their own burgesses.¹⁶ Could the absence of urban coercion explain why rural markets and fairs proliferated in England, but not in Flanders and Holland? In order to answer this question the relationship between town and country will be studied here from two perspectives. The first concerns the instruments towns had at their disposal to concentrate trade within the walls and keep down commercial activities in the surrounding countryside. The second looks at the accessibility of the urban markets for non-burgesses in general and the inhabitants of nearby villages in particular.

Towns and rural trade

A closer look at the English situation suggests that relations between towns and countryside were not as consistently devoid of coercion as they have sometimes been made to look. In the 12th and 13th century some English towns did have extraterritorial powers allowing them to control rural trade. The 12th-century Nottingham charter of urban liberties for example obliged peasants from the hinterland to bring their products to the town's weekly market. The port towns on the eastern coast involved in the herring trade also claimed monopolies, and sometimes even resorted to violence in their attempts to guard their position as herring trade centres against any upstart neighbours.¹⁷ Despite the rise of many rural alternatives, even in the 14th century some towns claimed trade monopolies. In 1327 the establishment of new markets in a seven-mile radius (11 kilometres) around London was forbidden, and fifty years later Great Yarmouth was granted a market monopoly for a region of the same dimensions.¹⁸

The pioneering work of Maryanne Kowaleski on the Devon regional trade network allows for a more detailed analysis of the role of coercion in the relationship between town and countryside for one particular city: Exeter. Kowaleski stresses the natural attraction of the Exeter market for peasants and merchants from villages and small towns in the hinterland, and no doubt the urban market did offer better facilities, a wider range of commodities and a much larger circle of potential buyers and sellers than were to be found in the countryside.¹⁹ Even so, Exeter apparently felt the need to employ non-economic

¹⁶ Galloway, 'Town and country in England', 116-117; Britnell, 'Proliferation', 251-217.

¹⁷ Nottingham: Alsford, *Florilegium Urbanum*, available from <http://www.trytel.com/~tristan/towns/florilegium/flor04.html>. Herring port towns: Kowaleski, 'Commercialization of the sea fisheries', 180-181. See for more examples: Ballard and Tait, eds., *British borough charters* II, 241-246.

¹⁸ London: Galloway, 'Town and country in England', 116-117; Great Yarmouth: Fryde, 'Peasant rebellion', 779.

¹⁹ Kowaleski, *Local markets*, chapter 7, esp. 297-298 (cattle), 303 (hides), 311-312 (fish).

means in its attempts to dominate trade in the Exe estuary. Here the interests of the city clashed with those of the earls of Devon, who tried to exploit the favourable location of their manors in the estuary by stimulating the development of fairs, markets and port facilities. Although Exeter was never able to fully control trade along the length of the estuary, the city did enjoy a considerable degree of jurisdictional control over the manor of Topsham, which served as Exeter's outport. The urban authorities levied customs on all import commodities landed at Topsham (except for one third of the wine custom, which had to be handed over to the earl) and they prohibited unloading elsewhere in the estuary unless by special license. Moreover, royal writs for custom collections in Topsham were put into effect by Exeter officials and not by the manor's bailiff.²⁰

From the 13th century onward Exeter also tried to gain control over the fish trade in the estuary. The city even resorted to military means to achieve this, raiding two small estuarine communities that were believed to have transgressed Exeter's rights. In the early 15th century, after lengthy judicial proceedings, Exeter was granted the right to tax the fish trade at the busy, although unchartered, fish market of Exmouth. The urban authorities also prosecuted 'forestalling' of fish in villages situated on the roads between the coast and the town, thus extending the town's jurisdiction well outside its walls.²¹ The Exeter example shows that some English towns did use non-economic means to enforce their central position in trade. Still, extraterritorial privileges like the ones Exeter claimed were limited in their geographical range. They were, moreover, difficult to maintain, especially when markets multiplied in the 13th and early 14th century.²²

The situation in Flanders was different. In the late 11th and 12th centuries, Flanders had rapidly risen to a position of economic primacy in northwestern Europe. By the middle of the 13th century the towns of Flanders were booming. In particular Bruges as a trade centre, Ypres as an industrial centre, and Ghent in both capacities, had expanded rapidly. The economic success of these three towns gave them considerable political leverage as well. Between the late 13th and the mid 14th century, triggered perhaps by a crisis in the urban draperies, Ghent, Bruges and Ypres step by step acquired a series of instruments to control the economies of the surrounding countryside. At the end of the 13th century they gained the right to levy taxes and regulate trade and industry in the 'ban mile', stretching some six kilometres outward from the city walls. In the first half of the 14th century industrial and trade monopolies in a much wider area were added. The towns also gained control over many roads and waterways, and they used the position of their courts as courts of appeal for the region to subordinate villages and small towns to their rule. The control of the three cities was at its peak during the decade of the Artevelde regime in the middle of the 14th century, when Ypres, Bruges and especially Ghent governed the county by themselves. During these years the cities'

²⁰ Ibid., 196, 223-224.

²¹ Ibid., 223-224, 308, 309-310. Fish markets will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

²² Britnell, 'Proliferation', 216; Masschaele, *Peasants, merchants and markets*, 1-2.

respective spheres of influence, which until then had been informal in character, were transformed into official administrative 'quarters'.²³

The three cities never intended to completely destroy rural industry and trade. After all, the links between urban and rural economy were vital. Most of the preparatory work for the urban wool industry, such as combing, carding and in particular spinning, was undertaken in the countryside, organised and controlled by urban merchant-entrepreneurs.²⁴ For the small towns in particular the incorporation into an urban network dominated by the big cities brought advantages as well as restrictions: these towns had an important role as intermediaries between the metropolises and the countryside, and they often managed to acquire some profitable regional monopolies and privileges for themselves.²⁵

Still, the effects of urban domination over the countryside on rural trade were deeply felt. Let us have a look at the vital cloth sector first. In 1314 the count of Flanders, whose political foothold was not strong, had granted Ghent a monopoly on textile production in a five-mile zone from the city walls (about thirty kilometres). Eight years later, Ypres and Bruges acquired the same monopoly, Ypres in a three-mile zone and Bruges in the Franc, its own hinterland of comparable dimensions. Cloth production in these zones, that together covered most of Flanders, was only allowed in the small towns that had pre-existing privileges for this purpose. Initially, the sale of this cloth was to take place only in the local cloth hall (sometimes directly to foreign merchants, but more often to Bruges brokers acting in their name) or at the annual fairs in other Flemish towns. Later, much of the cloth was sent directly to the Bruges international staple market.²⁶ Ghent in particular was adamant in protecting its industrial monopoly, if necessary by force. Bruges was more lenient when it came to production, but did not allow any transgressions of its staple rights.²⁷

As a consequence of the urban cloth monopolies, rural cloth industry and cloth trade, in the 13th century common in many parts of the countryside, were now suppressed, except for a very few villages that could claim ancient rights. One of them was Thourout, in the Bruges region, the scene of one of Flanders' famous international fairs. Despite its urban status Thourout was no more than a large rural bourg. It probably owed the continued existence of its fair to the protection of the powerful Benedictine abbey under whose walls it had originally emerged.²⁸ Another example is the annual fair held in Sint-Lievens-Houtem, in the southern part of the Ghent region, in the 14th and early 15th century. Here woollen cloth

²³ This paragraph is based on Nicholas, *Town and countryside*, esp. 53, 59-65, 76-78, 98, 125-126, 142-146, 178-181, 187-189. For the 15th-century development of the political, judicial, fiscal and military control of the cities over their quarters see Blockmans, *Volksvertegenwoordiging in Vlaanderen*, 107-127.

²⁴ Van Bavel, 'Early proto-industrialization', 1147-1148.

²⁵ Nicholas, *Town and countryside*, 115-116; Stabel, *Dwarfs among giants*, 163-164, 271-272.

²⁶ Nicholas, *Town and countryside*, 98, 119; Stabel, *Kleine stad*, 89-91.

²⁷ Ibid., 102-109, 196-197.

²⁸ Van Houtte, 'Les foires', 180-181.

was sold as well as various other products.²⁹ Likewise, in the village of Jabbeke, in the Franc of Bruges, a 'marchiet' existed where cloth made in the nearby villages was sold; merchants from Holland were among the buyers. In the early 15th the cloth trade in Jabbeke apparently attracted the attention of the authorities in Bruges.³⁰ As later references to the Jabbeke market are lacking, Bruges may well have been successful in its attempts to suppress it. Thourout, Sint-Lievens-Houtem and Jabbeke were exceptions. In general, village cloth markets were rare in the 14th and 15th century. Rural venues for textile trade did not really develop until the 16th century, and then it was not woollen cloth but linen that dominated them; the towns did not monopolise the linen industry to the same extent as the production of woollen cloth.³¹

Urban monopolies were also common in the victualing trade. Here they were often induced by concern of the urban authorities for the town's food supply. Several small towns compelled peasants living nearby to bring the grain they produced to the urban markets; some even actively suppressed grain trade in the countryside.³² Sometimes other victuals were included in the monopoly as well. Late 14th-century Ghent, for example, did not allow grain, meat and fish sales in a wide region (three to five miles, or 18 to 30 kilometres) from the city. The prohibition for grain was related to Ghent's staple privilege for all grain transports on the Scheldt and Leie. David Nicholas has pointed out that the staple itself was not a serious problem for the surrounding countryside. This part of Flanders was not producing much grain anyway and peasants were free to purchase grain for personal consumption from their neighbours; in fact restrictions on the amount of grain they could buy on a visit to Ghent even encouraged them to do so. The staple mainly affected long distance trade: food provisioning of the towns of Flanders was dependent on grain imports from northern France, and Ghent, because of its geographical position and its economic and political supremacy, was in a position to dominate this trade.³³

The grain staple, however, did allow Ghent to extend its control over the other towns in the region and to acquire a dominant position in water transport.³⁴ It also illustrates once again how much towns were bent on concentrating every important and profitable line of trade within their walls. To be sure, there must have been informal trading in daily products in the countryside.³⁵ As long as no more than local exchange was at stake, the towns probably did not care too much, but attempts at anything else were carefully kept in check.

The attitude of the towns of medieval Holland towards rural trade is much closer to the English than to the Flemish situation. In 13th and early 14th-century Holland,

²⁹ Thoen, *Landbouweconomie*, 1012.

³⁰ Van Houtte, 'Les foires', 178-179; Gilliodts-van Severen, ed., *Cartulaire de l'ancienne estaple* I, 391, 466.

³¹ Sabbe, *Belgische vlasnijverheid*, 200-202, 74-78.

³² Stabel, *Kleine stad*, 226-227.

³³ Nicholas, *Town and countryside*, 122-124.

³⁴ Stabel, *Kleine stad*, 119-120.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 256-257, n. 8; see also 265, 267, 269 for purchases of 15th-century religious institutions in villages.

coercion exerted by towns was rare. Only a few towns were able to acquire extraterritorial privileges that allowed them to compel people to visit the urban market.

The most outstanding exception is no doubt the staple of Dordrecht. In the late 13th century this town, favourably situated at the confluence of Rhine and Meuse, acquired a staple privilege for the river trade in wine, grain, wood and salt, which gave it, at least for the trade in these commodities, a position not unlike Ghent or Bruges. The background and the effects of the Dordrecht staple will be discussed in another chapter. Here it suffices to say that until the early 15th century Dordrecht only claimed monopoly rights over the transit trade and did not force people from the surrounding countryside to frequent the urban market.

Regional trade monopolies did exist in some small towns in Holland's few grain producing regions. Naarden, in the Gooiland region, and Goedereede, on the island of Westvoorne in the Meuse delta, both boasted official privileges, dating from 1376 and 1332 respectively, that made them the compulsory market for their district's agricultural products. Goedereede's nearest neighbour Brielle may have a similar position on the island of Westvoorne, for in 1477 the regional monopolies of both Goedereede and Brielle were officially confirmed.³⁶

A second and more important category of towns with regional trade monopolies in the 13th or early 14th century had a different profile. They were situated in border areas and were therefore able to profit from their strategic position and the count's need for their loyalty and political support. Geertruidenberg is a good example. We have seen in the previous chapter that in the early 13th century Geertruidenberg was granted a charter of urban liberties that made its weekly cattle market the compulsory venue for cattle trade for the entire region of Zuidholland, the rural district around Geertruidenberg and Dordrecht.³⁷ In his work on medieval town planning Rutte has pointed out that Geertruidenberg was not the only place to receive liberties around this time. Similar privileges had recently been given to nearby Breda and Bergen op Zoom by the lords of Breda. More to the east, the duke of Brabant had founded Den Bosch in much the same way. Between Den Bosch and Geertruidenberg the lord of Heusden promoted the rise of this small river town. All these lords were taking advantage of the rise of trade to further their political goals and they did this by founding market centres.³⁸ By making Geertruidenberg into such a centre, the count of Holland established his authority in the region and prevented a shift of economic activity and fiscal gains to his adversaries.

Political conflict continued to determine the position of Geertruidenberg as a market centre throughout the 14th century, as is demonstrated by the count's reaction to the installation of a weekly market in Heusden in 1307: he forbade his

³⁶ Naarden: Van Mieris, ed., *Groot charterboek* III, 320; Goedereede 1332: Niermeyer, ed., *Bronnen Beneden-Maasgebied*, nr. 271 n. 1; Brielle and Goedereede 1477: Van Alkemade, Van der Schelling, and Matthijssen, *Beschrijving Brielle* I, 39-40. The rules usually said that farmers had to offer their products for sale at the urban weekly market first; if they were not sold, they could take them elsewhere afterwards.

³⁷ OHZ III, nr. 1154; Korteweg, 'Stadsrecht van Geertruidenberg', 67-68.

³⁸ Rutte, *Stedenpolitiek en stadsplanning*, 125-127.

subjects to visit it.³⁹ In 1398 duke Albrecht of Bavaria once more declared Geertruidenberg to be the compulsory market for cattle. He too was probably motivated by a wish to bind the town to Holland and keep the duke of Brabant out, just like his 13th-century predecessor.⁴⁰

It is doubtful if the obligation to conduct all cattle trade in Geertruidenberg was very effective. Geertruidenberg's strategic location did help: overland travellers from Zuidholland to the south could hardly avoid the town. The fact that the prohibition to sell cattle anywhere else than in Geertruidenberg had to be repeated several times is significant however: it clearly was not easy to maintain.⁴¹ Apart from the fact that the pull of market centres dominated by other lords could not be easily neutralised by prohibitions, policing the entire countryside for illegal private cattle transactions must have been an impossible task.

More examples of attempts at the use of monopolies as an instrument of political strategy can be found in the border region between Holland and Utrecht. When in 1326 a conflict rose between the count of Holland and the bishop of Utrecht over the land of Woerden, count Willem III ordained that all butter from that region had to be marketed in the town of Oudewater. No doubt, he had the same double intention as in the case of Geertruidenberg: to keep trade and the profits it brought out of the bishop's reach and to gain the support of the burgesses of this small border town.⁴² The compulsory market for hemp, grease and hides established in the town of Woerden by duke Albrecht in 1396 illustrates in more detail how far the sovereign was willing to go in order to consolidate his position in a contested region.⁴³ The charter, which explicitly refers to Woerden's border location, suited the requirements of the entrepreneurs in Woerden's emerging rope industry, as it guaranteed the supply of raw material in the form of locally produced hemp.⁴⁴ Moreover, around this time Woerden's defences apparently were a point of serious concern to the duke: he made several attempts to hasten their improvement and to help the town to raise funds. He even allowed Woerden to have *buitenpoorters* (people living in the countryside but enjoying –in return for payment– the formal status of burgesses) for three years to cover the expenses of the fortifications.⁴⁵

Still, the examples of urban monopolies in 13th and early 14th-century Holland are restricted in number and in range: they relate to a limited number of towns in regions with specific characteristics. That coercion was not used more widely had nothing to do with a lack of enthusiasm on the side of the towns.

³⁹ Niermeyer, ed., *Bronnen Beneden-Maasgebied*, nr. 177.

⁴⁰ De Jong, 'Veemarkt Geertruidenberg', 254.

⁴¹ Apart from the two editions of the charter of liberties in 1213 and 1275, the compulsory market is also stressed in a charter dated between 1247 and 1256 (*OHZ III*, nr. 1075) and in 1257 (*Ibid.*, nr. 1154).

⁴² Plomp, *Woerden*, 30; Niermeyer, *Bronnen Beneden-Maasgebied*, nr. 251.

⁴³ NA AGH, inv. nr. 228, f 199.

⁴⁴ Van Bavel, 'Early proto-industrialization', 1140. Cf. Ibelings, 'Aspects', 266.

⁴⁵ Plomp, *Woerden*, 49-51. This was exceptional: in Flanders *buitenpoorters* were very common (Verbeemen, 'Buitenpoortertij', 85-96), but in Holland the count had forced most towns to give them up in the middle of the 14th century. *Buitenpoorters* were, because of their burgess status, exempted from rural taxation and thus threatened to erode the foundation of comital tax revenues (Bos-Rops, *Graven op zoek naar geld*, 26-27).

Events during the civil war in the middle of the 14th century show that at times when the power of central government was at a low, towns did try to take advantage and attempted to extend their domination over the surrounding countryside. After the death of count Willem IV, the two contestants for power, Willem and his mother Margaretha, were prepared to grant towns almost anything they wanted in return for their support. In what must have been an attempt to copy the industrial privileges of the Flemish cities, the towns of Leiden, Delft, Haarlem and Amsterdam in 1351 all acquired the right to prohibit textile industries within a distance of three miles (about 18 kilometres) from the town walls.⁴⁶ Alkmaar was apparently more interested in trade than in industry. As we have seen it was granted a market monopoly, which forced the people of Kennemerland to offer their products for sale at the Alkmaar weekly market.

But although this privilege offers an illuminating perspective on the ambitions and wishes of the town, it held little relevance in everyday life. Most of the privileges dating from the years of civil war were repealed in 1355 and 1356, when Willem was firmly established as the new count Willem V and decided on a *revocatio generalis*. He revoked all privileges granted for political reasons by either himself or his mother in the years before, on the argument that many of them weakened the unity and strength of the state. The extraterritorial rights of the towns mentioned above, including Alkmaar's market monopoly, were no doubt among the privileges that had to be handed back. To be sure, the *revocatio* required extensive negotiations and some towns were more successful in this respect than others. The Zeeland town of Middelburg for instance succeeded in having the restrictions on weaving and fulling in the surrounding countryside renewed. For the Holland towns, however, there is no evidence of a renewal; this most likely means that Alkmaar lost its formal market monopoly only a few years after it was granted.⁴⁷

The first sets of by-laws of Holland's larger towns that have survived come from Haarlem and Leiden. They date from the late 14th century, although many of the regulations incorporated in them are older. These by-laws confirm the impression that restrictions on rural trade were not common. Leiden forbade its burgesses to buy fish between Rijnsburg, situated a few kilometres west of the town, and Ter Waddinghe, just south of it.⁴⁸ Haarlem imposed a similar restriction on the purchase of grain at Spaarndam.⁴⁹ Probably both towns were reacting to incidents that had caused commotion among the local vendors; there is no indication the prohibitions reflect a general policy of suppression of rural trade.

⁴⁶ Van Mieris, *Groot Charterboek* II, 807; Van der Laan, ed., *Oorkondenboek van Amsterdam*, nr. 131. Niermeyer, *Delft en Delfland*, 92.

⁴⁷ Leupen, *Philip of Leyden*, 128-132. According to Leupen (p. 131) the Leiden privilege was renewed as well, but the texts Leupen refers to (a passage in the treatise of Philip of Leyden in which Philip expresses his disapproval of this kind of privileges and the edition of the 1351 charter by Van Mieris) do not mention this. For Middelburg: Unger, ed., *Bronnen Middelburg* III, nr. 42 note 5.

⁴⁸ Hamaker, ed., *Middeleeuwse keurboeken Leiden*, 54, 91.

⁴⁹ Huizinga, ed., *Rechtsbronnen Haarlem*, 58.

It is true that this was going to change in the 15th and especially the 16th century, when many towns, Dordrecht being the most outspoken example, did try to monopolise regional trade in agrarian products; the process will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. But most 14th-century towns were simply not in a position to make any dreams that they might have had on coercive policies come true: the count, except for the short lapse in the middle of the century, did not let them. Therefore, whereas in Flanders a link between the absence of rural markets and urban trade monopolies can safely be assumed, in Holland we will have to look for another explanation.

Accessibility of urban markets to outsiders

Complementary to the attitude of towns to trade in the countryside is the degree to which they allowed 'foreigners' –including merchants from other nearby towns and countryfolk– to sell products at the urban market. Once again England, Flanders and Holland show distinctive paths of development. The differences should not be overstated. They were prominent in certain branches of trade, especially those dominated by guilds, but much less so in other sectors. The grain trade, for instance, vital for urban food provisioning, was relatively free everywhere. In London corn mongers from market towns in the region and foreign merchants were active besides their London colleagues.⁵⁰ Even in Ghent foreign merchants had no problems selling part of their grain in the urban market to the local bakers, brewers and individual burgesses; in fact the Ghent staple regulations compelled them to do so, simply because this was the most efficient way to guarantee a steady supply of grain.⁵¹

However, in England burgesses were often privileged when it came to access to the urban market in other branches. Outsiders –and for that matter also people who lived in town but did not have full burgess status– had to deal with all kinds of restrictions and impediments. In many English towns, merchant guilds had emerged in the 11th or 12th century. These guilds enjoyed important privileges, allowing them to enforce trading regulations. Only guild members were allowed to trade toll free, and in some trades they had exclusive monopoly rights. As a consequence, access to the market for outsiders (and for non-members living in town) was restricted.⁵²

Admittedly, there were ways around this obstacle. Outsiders could sometimes gain access by joining the local merchant guild as a 'foreign member'. Based on an analysis of the 13th-century membership lists of the Shrewsbury merchant guild, James Masschaele has shown that joining the guild was a popular option among peasant fishermen, butchers, bakers and traders from nearby villages. But this privilege did not come for free: an entrance fee had to be paid, which of course

⁵⁰ Gras, *Evolution of the English corn market*, 165-166; Campbell *et al.*, *A medieval capital*, 78.

⁵¹ Bigwood, 'Gand et la circulation', 431-433, 438-439.

⁵² Britnell, *Commercialisation*, 27-28; Gross, *The gild merchant* I, 43-46. For a more detailed analysis of the role and functioning of merchant guilds see chapter 7.

meant that transaction costs (i.e. mainly search costs) were higher for outsiders. Moreover, there are clear indications that the Shrewsbury guild only admitted outside members when it was in its own interest to do so: victuallers were very welcome because of their role in food provisioning, but traders in wool and wine, who might compete with the most powerful urban merchants, seem to have been refused.⁵³

In Exeter the privileges of the merchant guild were probably assumed by the 'freedom' of the city in the early 13th century. The effects were much the same as in Shrewsbury. Only burgesses – in 1377 no more than 21% of all households belonged to this category – could engage in retailing without having to pay the regular market tolls on all sales. In certain trades, such as the retailing of fish, clothing and hides, burgesses had monopoly privileges.⁵⁴ In the course of time the exclusion of outsiders was mollified in more than one way. For one, several small towns and villages in Exeter's hinterland acquired toll exemptions on purchases for personal use and on the sale of their own agricultural products. Moreover, by the late 14th century the fines imposed on illegal retailing by non-burgesses appear to have developed into retrospective licensing fees. Still, this illustrates once more that even if the urban market was not as inaccessible as the official rules made it seem, there was a price to be paid for entering it. People from the surrounding countryside coming to trade in Exeter bore the heaviest burden of urban trade taxation.⁵⁵

Sometimes local conditions did bring about exceptions to the rule of urban dominance. Whereas in London the powerful fishmongers' guild claimed a monopoly on the retailing of fish, in many other towns retail sales of fish by non-burgesses were allowed, albeit under strict conditions.⁵⁶ Late 14th-century Winchester went further than most: here the urban authorities, motivated perhaps by a concern for the food of the poor, actively encouraged fish traders from out of town to come to the urban market by offering them better places for their stalls and more favourable hours of sale. In practice however, the urban fishmongers still dominated the retailing trade: despite repeated fining for forestalling and regrating, they continued to buy in bulk from the outsiders and resell at high profit to the consumer.⁵⁷ Thus, in a circuitous way, the Winchester case actually reinforces the impression that outsiders were usually at the losing end.

That the exceptions and mitigations had not solved the fundamental problem of limited access to urban markets is demonstrated by the fact that freedom of trade in towns was a (secondary) issue in the Peasant Revolt of 1381. This demand was apparently triggered by the privileges granted to the town of Great Yarmouth, which had successfully claimed a trading monopoly within a seven-mile radius. In June 1381 country folk occupying Great Yarmouth tore up this hated charter. In

⁵³ Masschaele, *Peasants, merchants, and markets*, 152-160.

⁵⁴ Kowaleski, *Local markets*, 96, 185, 300-301.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 198, 186, 200, 221.

⁵⁶ Kowaleski, 'Internal and international fish trades', 29-30.

⁵⁷ Keene, *Survey of medieval Winchester*, 260-261.

July, at their meeting with the king, the rebels secured the promise that all the king's subjects should be allowed to buy and sell freely in all cities, boroughs, market places and everywhere else in the realm. Needless to say, the promise was not kept.⁵⁸

The institutional arrangements in Flanders were even more exclusive and protectionist than those in England. Once again the cloth trade deserves special attention because of its vital importance to the Flemish economy. In keeping with the urban production monopolies, in general only locally made cloth could be sold in the town cloth hall. Ghent provides an illuminative example. The Great Charter granted to the city in 1297 stipulated that only cloth that had been fulled within the city (or its ban mile) could be sold in the town. Some years later the rules were sharpened: not just the fulling, but also the weaving of the cloth had to be done in the city.⁵⁹

Regulations on the sale of cloth were usually strictly enforced by inspectors of the local cloth guilds policing the urban markets.⁶⁰ Here too, in the course of time the rules were relaxed to some extent. The sale of cloth from the town's hinterland (presumably only from the places that had production privileges) was often permitted and allowances were also made for types of cloth from elsewhere that were not manufactured locally.⁶¹ Bruges moreover had been something of an exception from the beginning: it had always welcomed cloth produced in the Franc at its export market.⁶²

Just as in the cloth trade, protection of the urban market also characterised the trade in victuals. Because of the importance of a regular food supply, much of this trade was submitted to strict regulation and close corporative control. Selling victuals was, officially at least, the privilege of guild members, who by definition had to be burgesses. The official line was carried through strictly for the trade in meat, fish and bread. The sale of meat in particular was almost completely monopolised by the butchers' guilds. As the membership of these guilds had become hereditary in many towns -a development unknown in England- the meat trade was virtually inaccessible to outsiders. To a lesser extent, this was also true for fishmongers and bakers. Only in times of dearth were exceptions made to this rule.⁶³

In other branches of victualling, however, the regulations were not so strict. Vendors of fruits and vegetables, for example, were often allowed to sell their merchandise in town, although they did have to buy their way in by paying a recognition fee to the vendors' guild, and still had to put up with less convenient hours and places. Peasants were almost always allowed to sell their own

⁵⁸ Britnell, *Commercialisation*, 224; Fryde, 'Peasant rebellion', 779-780.

⁵⁹ Nicholas, *Town and countryside*, 110-111.

⁶⁰ Stabel, *Kleine stad*, 142-143.

⁶¹ Stabel, 'Markets and retail', 813.

⁶² Nicholas, *Town and countryside*, 105-106, 159.

⁶³ Stabel, 'Markets and retail', 805-806; Van Werveke, 'Ambachten en erfelijkheid', 15-16.

agricultural products, but only if they did so in bulk.⁶⁴ In practice that would have meant, much as in the Winchester fish trade, that local traders bought up the stocks for retailing at the urban market.

The markets of the 14th-century towns of Holland were more easily accessible to outsiders than their English and Flemish counterparts. It is hard to say how and when this situation developed, as the 13th-century sources are almost entirely silent on this subject. We know that around 1200 Dordrecht had a merchant guild that monopolised the cloth trade in the local market, but most likely the guild disappeared at some point during the 13th century: later references are lacking.⁶⁵ Because it is mentioned in the urban charter of liberties of the mid 13th century, we also know that the authorities in Delft tried to restrict the activities of foreign merchants to the annual fair. At the weekly market only local traders were allowed to sell their merchandise.⁶⁶

But in the late 13th or early 14th century these restrictive policies seem to have given way to a more liberal regime. The charter of urban liberties of Brielle (1343) is very explicit on this issue. It states that everybody can come to the weekly market and sell whatever he wants, while paying the same excises as the burgesses of Brielle have to pay.⁶⁷ The late 14th-century by-laws of Haarlem and Leiden display a similar attitude. In these towns people from the countryside were free to come and sell their products in town at the weekly market, although usually not on other days of the week.⁶⁸ By-laws from later periods show that this was customary in other towns as well, and not just for agricultural commodities. In mid 15th-century Goedereede for example outsiders were allowed to sell food, cloth, clothing, shoes and 'small items' at the weekly market. The early 16th-century by-laws of Hoorn have a similar paragraph.⁶⁹ Likewise, 15th and 16th-century markets for firewood and peat in the towns in the central part of Holland were usually open to all sellers, whatever their origins.⁷⁰ Where restrictions did exist, they seem to have been relatively mild. In early 15th-century Gouda foreign cloth merchants and butchers from out of town were given less favourable places for their stalls than the locals, but during the fairs and in the weekly market they paid the same excises. Delft used a system of reciprocity: it was prepared to allow foreign merchants in if their hometowns did the same for Delft merchants.⁷¹

⁶⁴ Stabel, 'Markets and retail', 804-805.

⁶⁵ OHZ I, nr. 241. For a more detailed discussion of the Dordrecht merchant guild see chapter 7.

⁶⁶ OHZ II, nr. 680 art. 59.

⁶⁷ Cappon and Van Engen, 'Stadsrechtsoorkonden van Brielle', 157 art. 38. (*'Item soe wie den markedach ten Briele versoeken willen, die moghen vercoe(n) up dien dach wat goede dat si daer bringhen, up sulken asijs als die porters van binnen.'*).

⁶⁸ Hamaker, ed., *Middeleeuwse keurboeken Leiden*, 49, 96; Huizinga, ed., *Rechtsbronnen Haarlem*, 56 (art. 55), 62 (art. 80).

⁶⁹ E.g.: Goedereede: Pols, 'Rechten der stad Goedereede', 314. Hoorn: Pols, ed., *Westfriesche stadrechten II*, 98 art. 124.

⁷⁰ Cornelisse, *Energiemarkten*, 281.

⁷¹ Gouda: Rollin Coucerque and Meerkamp van Embden, eds., *Rechtsbronnen Gouda*, 44 art 5; Ibelings, 'Markt Middeleeuws Gouda', 48-49. Delft: Soutendam, ed., *Keuren en ordonnantiën der stad Delft*, 202-203, Fruin, 'Oudste der tot dusver bekende keurboeken van Delft', 353.

Only at the end of the Middle Ages restrictions on market access became more common. Most likely there was a relation with the rise of guilds, especially retailers' guilds. In contrast to the southern Low Countries, in Holland most guilds of craftsmen and retailers did not emerge until late. Due to the late rise of urbanisation and industrialisation, but probably also because of the hostile attitude towards guilds adopted by the authorities after the guild revolts in the south in the late 13th and early 14th century, very few guilds were established before 1400.⁷² Only Dordrecht, Holland's oldest and largest town, already had an elaborate system of guilds in the 13th century; Dordrecht was also the only town in Holland where (in 1367) the guilds were able to acquire access to the ranks of urban government. In this light it is not surprising that in this town the sale of meat and fish was monopolised by the butchers' and fishmongers' guilds in much the same way as in Flanders. Membership of these two guilds even bore a hereditary character, unique in Holland.⁷³ At the end of the 14th century a butchers' guild also existed in Haarlem. The guild regulated the sale of meat in the meat hall and most likely only guild members could rent a stall in that hall.⁷⁴ Elsewhere, however, trade monopolies for guilds were rare. The Gouda situation mentioned above makes this clear: butchers from out of town may have had to put up with stalls in the back of the hall, but they were not refused.

In the second half of the 15th century more towns started to introduce restrictions on retailing by non-burgesses, at least for certain commodities. While in Amsterdam retailing of fruit on the weekly market had been open to everyone in the early 15th century, it now became the privilege of the members of the guild of St. John, the guild of the fruit vendors.⁷⁵ Likewise, retail trading in meat and fish, equally free in the beginning of the 15th century, was in 1488 restricted to the members of the guild of St. Peter, the guild of the butchers and fish vendors. Rotterdam had adopted a similar regulation regarding the sale of fish in 1465.⁷⁶ At the end of the 15th and the beginning of the 16th century newly emerging bakers' guilds in Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Leiden succeeded in monopolising the sale of bread, banning rural bakers from the urban market, although these restrictions usually did not apply to the weekly market and were lifted altogether in years of dearth.⁷⁷ According to W. van Ravesteijn, who studied the regulation of trade and production in 16th and early 17th-century Amsterdam, measures intended to protect craftsmen and retailers against competition, especially competition from

⁷² De Munck, Lourens, and Lucassen, 'Establishment and distribution of craft guilds', 36-37, 41; Lourens and Lucassen, 'Oprichting en ontwikkeling van ambachtsgilden', 48-50.

⁷³ Niermeyer, ed., *Bronnen Beneden-Maastricht*, 276 (guild charter 1367); Fruin, ed., *Oudste rechten Dordrecht I*, 97, 227; Van Werveke, 'Ambachten en erfelijkheid', 14-15; Van Vollenhoven, *Ambachten en neringen*, 44.

⁷⁴ Huizinga, ed., *Rechtsbronnen Haarlem*, 97-99.

⁷⁵ Breen, *Rechtsbronnen Amsterdam*, 22 and 23 (the by-law on page 23 is later addition to the otherwise early 15th-century collection of by-laws).

⁷⁶ Amsterdam: Ibid., 23-24 and 232-233. Rotterdam; Van der Schoor, *Stad in aanwas*, 74; Unger, *Levensmiddelenvoorziening*, 146-147.

⁷⁷ Unger, *Levensmiddelenvoorziening*, 96-103.

outsiders, gained ground after 1500, as long as they did not damage the interests of wholesale trade.⁷⁸

Perhaps the liberal regime of the 14th and early 15th century can partly be attributed to the high speed of urbanisation and the large number of small towns. This may have induced urban authorities to give potential suppliers of victuals a warm welcome: the risk that they would turn to another town that offered better conditions was certainly very real. The comparison with Flanders and England, the position of Dordrecht and also the partial change of attitude that took place in some towns in the late 15th and early 16th century, strongly suggests a second determining factor. The fact that in most Holland towns guilds emerged late and had little political influence most likely contributed to the openness of urban markets as well. In keeping with the model of institutional development outlined in the introductory chapter, it seems that when guilds acquired the power to dictate conditions, a self-reinforcing process of restricting access to urban markets was set in motion.

Holland was not immune to this process, but for reasons connected to Holland's late rise it did have a favourable starting position: until the late 15th century urban markets were relatively open to outsiders. The effects are clear: the towns of Holland offered easily accessible opportunities to peasants and farmers wanting to sell their products, thus lowering search costs. Easy access to urban markets certainly helps to explain the scarcity of rural markets, but as we will see in the next section, there were more reasons for the absence of a dense rural market network.

3.3 Lords and their involvement with rural markets

So far we have focused on the relationship between town and countryside. There is, however, a second element conditioning the institutional framework that determines opportunities for rural trade: the role of lordship and its implications for commercial activities in the countryside. It is this aspect that will be discussed in this section, based on a comparison between England and Holland. We have seen before that in Holland the manorial system had disintegrated at an early stage. When in the 11th-13th centuries the peat district was reclaimed, the emerging pioneer communities were placed directly under comital authority. The count was represented either by the *schout* (sheriff), an appointed functionary with lower jurisdictional authority, or by an *ambachtsheer*, a village lord who was granted the same authority as a (hereditary) right. Only very few villages had lords who also held higher jurisdiction. By the end of the 13th century perhaps half of all villages had an *ambachtsheer*; their number may have grown slightly in the 14th and 15th centuries. Although most of these local lords were noblemen and many owned at least some land in the village, that was not what made them *ambachtsheer*: the

⁷⁸ Van Ravesteyn, *Onderzoekingen*, 162-163.

essence was the banal right of lower justice in the seignory, granted by the count. In addition, many lords acquired additional privileges that brought in money, such as fishing rights in local waters that could be leased out, and the right to the revenues of the local mill.⁷⁹ There were regional differences –we will return to them in the next chapter– but in the greater part of Holland the local lord did not have any authority over the villagers beyond the rights to certain revenues, granted to him by the count.⁸⁰ His powers were much more limited than those of a manorial lord in England. How this affected his involvement with trade is illustrated here by looking at two aspects: market licenses and seignorial impositions on rural trade.

Lords and licenses

In chapter 2 it has been argued that Holland's oldest rural fairs may well have developed at or near manorial centres, at a time when parts of the manorial system were still functioning. All of these fairs were –as far as we know– unlicensed. Most likely only a few of them survived to the end of the Middle Ages, Voorschoten and Valkenburg the most prominent among them. The prolonged success of these two fairs should probably be attributed to the fact that they had also acquired an administrative function: it was here that people from the surrounding countryside paid their taxes and tithes, as well as their rents.

Licensed rural trade venues were rare before the middle of the 14th century. As we have seen, in this respect Holland was very unlike England, where in the 13th and the first half of the 14th century thousands of lords acquired a royal license for a market or a fair. In Holland seignorial competition over markets seems to have been almost non-existent. In the late 13th century the counts of Holland began to issue market licenses in a regular way to towns, but grants to lords were rare. We have information about two of these grants from the late 13th century, both set in a semi-urban context. In 1270 count Floris V issued a license for a fair and a weekly market in Schiedam to his aunt and former guardian Aleid. Six years later the same count Floris gave lord Gerard van Velsen permission for a weekly market in Beverwijk.⁸¹ Both settlements were already showing some signs of urban development at the time these market rights were granted, both received charters of urban liberties afterwards and developed into small market towns. In both towns lordly ownership of the market turned out to be temporary: control over the market and its revenues eventually came back to the count through inheritance.⁸²

Two more cases of market licenses granted to lords, in the countryside proper, date from the reign of count Willem IV (1337-1345). At first sight they are

⁷⁹ Hoppenbrouwers, 'Op zoek', 230-231; De Monté Ver Loren, *Hoofdlijnen*, 141-146-147; Janse, *Ridderschap in Holland*, 146-158.

⁸⁰ Enno van Gelder, *Nederlandse dorpen*, 28-29, 70.

⁸¹ OHZ III, nrs. 1524 and 1738.

⁸² Van der Feijst, *Geschiedenis van Schiedam*, 13-14; Alders *et al.*, *Ontstaan van Beverwijk*, 15-16, 21.

reminiscent of the English competition for market rights, which makes it worthwhile to have a closer look at the circumstances. The villages of Rijsoord and Heerjansdam are both situated in the Zwijndrechtse Waard. This river island west of Dordrecht was diked in 1332, after severe flooding. The count organised the funding for these extensive works by promising potential investors seignories on the island. One of these investors was Gerard Alewijnsz., a prominent burgess of Leiden and senior clerk at the count's chancellery.⁸³ Alewijnsz. received lower jurisdiction in Rijsoord, as this part of the Zwijndrechtse Waard was called, in 1333. In the years to come, this grant was followed by a series of additional privileges: the right to build a church and nominate its priest, the right to issue by-laws, fishing rights in the river Waal, toll exemptions for the people living in Alewijnsz.' seignory, and finally, in July 1339, a license for a weekly market and two annual fairs in Rijsoord.⁸⁴

About a year later, in July 1340, the count granted seignorial rights over Heerjansdam, another part of the Zwijndrechtse Waard, to Tielman Jansz., an influential member of the Dordrecht elite, later to become the count's steward in Zuidholland and a member of the count's council.⁸⁵ Jansz. also received a license for a weekly market and a fair in Heerjansdam, plus some other rights, including the tithes of the count's lands in the seignory. This twofold accumulation of banal rights was rounded off with the donation, in August 1340, of some rents in Rijsoord to Gerard Alewijnsz. and the grant of fishing rights in the Waal to Tielman Jansz. in March 1342.⁸⁶

At first sight the situation resembles the 'scramble' for market rights taking place in England, but in Holland seignorial actions like this were exceptions, not the rule. We do not even know if Alewijnsz. and Jansz. really wished to establish trade venues in their respective seignories or perhaps just tried to outbid each other in collecting status-enhancing seignorial rights. In either case, there are no indications the licenses were ever put into effect. The two men probably owed their exuberant series of privileges to the readiness of count Willem IV to sell rights in exchange for some much-needed cash.⁸⁷ Alewijnsz. and Jansz., wealthy, influential and moving in government circles, were the perfect candidates to take advantage of the situation, or perhaps we should say: the count was in a good position to take advantage of them and their ambitions.

During the reign of Willem IV's predecessors as well as his immediate successors, circumstances were apparently different: there are no signs of lords obtaining market licenses. This points to a second reason why a proliferation of rural fairs and markets did not take place in Holland: the absence of a strong feudal aristocracy, the group that in England used market licenses to improve its own position.

⁸³ Van Kan, *Sleutels tot de macht*, 175-179.

⁸⁴ Nat. Arch., LLRK inv. nr. 232, f 500v, 501v, 502v; inv. nr. 225 f 230.

⁸⁵ Van Herwaarden *et al.*, *Geschiedenis van Dordrecht*, 267.

⁸⁶ Nat. Arch., LLRK inv. nr. 232, f503v-504.

⁸⁷ Brokken, *Ontstaan Hoekse en Kabeljaanse twisten*, 21-22.

Since lords established markets in order to gain from them, we should be aware that even if in many respects rural markets facilitated exchange, at the same time they facilitated seignorial surplus extraction. Trade, to be sure, was taxed both in Holland and in England. However, related to the distinctive position of lords, there were differences between the two countries. Here the mechanisms of taxation of trade will be explored by comparing three aspects that illustrate these differences: the regulation of commercial activities of villein peasants, the regulation of the sale of bread and ale in villages, and the attitude to informal trade venues, in particular the Sunday gatherings of buyers and sellers around parish churches. The issue at stake here is not an outright denial of the favourable effects of a network of rural markets outlined by, among others, Masschaele.⁸⁸ However, it is clear that taxation can significantly raise transaction costs. Taking this reverse side of the regulation of rural trade into account will allow for a more balanced view of the contribution of seignorial power to commercialisation.

In England, even for villein peasants trade in most commodities was free in the sense that they could sell their surpluses where and when they wanted; a general obligation to frequent the lord's market or fair did not exist. This is perhaps not surprising. The rapid expansion of the number of trade venues in the 13th and early 14th century made enforcement almost impossible: lords would not have been able to control the movements of their tenants in detail. Trying to lure a neighbouring lord's tenants to one's own market was under these circumstances a more effective strategy. Moreover, in a situation of increasing shortage of land there were easier ways for manorial lords to profit from a rising level of commercialisation: they could make money by commuting labour services into cash rents, increase existing cash rents, demand entry fines, or convert customary holdings to leasehold (which implied that rents could be fixed in relation to the market for land). All of these developments are visible in the 13th and early 14th century.⁸⁹

There were a few exceptions to this general freedom of trade for villeiners. These were related to the concept that a peasant's goods and money were ultimately at his lord's disposal. From the 10th century onwards, many lords had acquired grants of *tol*. *Tol* was the right to exact a levy on certain types of transactions taking place on the manor (but not necessarily at a chartered manorial market).⁹⁰ Grants of *tol* were often combined with the right of *team*, which allowed the lord to call to justice any of his tenants suspected of possessing stolen cattle and unable to produce witness testimony to prove legal acquisition.

In the 13th century and early 14th century the right of *tol* was but rarely exercised, and then only with regard to livestock: in those cases villein tenants needed a license to sell their horses, oxen or pigs, or were expected to compensate

⁸⁸ Masschaele, *Peasants, merchants, and markets*, 57-58, 83.

⁸⁹ Dyer, *Making a living*, 137-145, 178.

⁹⁰ Britnell, 'English Markets', 190-191.

their lord for the sale.⁹¹ The restriction to livestock may have been related to its direct importance to the lord: cattle and horses were used to work the lord's demesne and were sometimes turned into the lord's lands to manure them.⁹² Examples of enforcement are rare, but they do exist: around 1300 a tenant was fined by the court of Halesowen for selling animals without the lord's permission.⁹³ It is perhaps not a coincidence that the extortionate tolls the lord of Bakewell was found to be levying in 1330 –in the course of the *Quo Warranto* proceedings he was forced to reduce them to more reasonable levels- mainly regarded tolls on cattle sales payable by the sellers: presumably the lord's tenants, who may not have had the freedom to sell their livestock somewhere else.⁹⁴

In theory there was a difference with Holland, where lords lacked a firm base in manorial lordship and villeinage, and seignorial control over villagers' sales of cattle, or for that matter sales of any other product, was non-existent. In practice, however, the distinction was not very significant: after the 11th or 12th century only very few English lords imposed constraints on their villein tenants' freedom to sell their products.

Seignorial regulation and taxation of the sale of locally prepared bread and ale on the other hand was very common. In the English countryside bread and ale were offered for sale in village markets by – relatively speaking- large producers, such as the baker Adam Pistor, who owned several stalls in the market of Botesdale.⁹⁵ They were also sold informally, at an inn, or simply at a door or window, or in the street. Many people, especially married women, engaged in baking and brewing to supplement the family income. The majority did so only occasionally and infrequently, but some were active as bakers and brewers on a more regular basis.⁹⁶

Seignorial regulation in this line of trade rested on the Assizes of Bread and Ale, a series of late 12th and 13th-century national ordinances that regulated the prices of bread and ale by connecting them to the market price of grain.⁹⁷ If a market license was granted, the enforcement of the royal assizes was usually considered to be part of that grant.⁹⁸ In practice, this came down to the annual or bi-annual fining by the local court of everybody engaged in the sale of bread and beer for 'breaking the assizes', whether he or she was guilty of any real transgression of the rules or not. These amercements in turn evolved into a

⁹¹ Britnell, *Commercialisation*, 64-65.

⁹² Gras, *Evolution of the English corn market*, 18-19.

⁹³ Poos, Razi, and Smith, 'Population History', 362.

⁹⁴ Illingworth, ed., *Placita de Quo Warranto*, 140; The royal court forced the lord of Bakewell to cancel all tolls payable by the sellers of cattle and lowered the rates of the tolls payable by the buyers. Cf. Salzman, 'Legal Status', 206.

⁹⁵ Smith, 'A periodic market', 477.

⁹⁶ Bennett, *Women in the medieval English countryside*, 120-129, 190-191; Bennett, *Ale, beer and brewsters*, 19-20.

⁹⁷ Britnell, *Commercialisation*, 94-95; Davis, 'Baking for the common good', 465-466. The price of a loaf of bread was fixed while its weight was allowed to vary with grain price fluctuations; for ale each grain price was associated with a set price for a gallon of ale.

⁹⁸ Masschaele, *Peasants, merchants, and markets*, 61.

system of retrospective licensing fees, much like the fines to be paid by retailing non-burgesses discussed earlier: they legalised the commercial activities of the bakers and brewers since the previous session of the court.⁹⁹

The literature on the subject usually stresses the modest level of the amercements: they amounted to no more than a few pennies.¹⁰⁰ That, however, implied that small-scale and infrequent producers could lose much of their profits: they made only a few pennies per brewing or baking anyway.¹⁰¹ Large producers made much higher profits, of course, but in their case the fines to be paid appear to have been much higher as well. Adam Pistor, the baker in Botesdale, was amerced a total of 68s 6d for 'breaking the assizes' of bread and ale in the course of the twelve years between 1282 and 1293: on average a sum of 5s 8d per year.¹⁰² In 1385, at the leet court of Brandon, Richard Cook paid a total of 7s, and Reginald Chapman and his wife a total of 4s 6d.¹⁰³ Therefore it is safe to assume that the amercements, even if they were not an insurmountable barrier to trade, could significantly raise transaction costs.

In the Holland countryside, baking and brewing must have been common by-employments as well, and here too female participation in this line of trade was probably high.¹⁰⁴ But seignorial taxation on these activities was virtually non-existent. To be sure, in the 13th and most of the 14th century a comital tax on brewing, the *gruitgeld*, was levied everywhere in Holland, in the countryside as well as in the towns. The *gruitgeld* originated in the *gruitrecht*, the count's monopoly on the sale of *gruit*, the mixture of indigenous herbs used in brewing before the introduction of hops. In many towns the count had leased or granted the *gruitgeld* to the urban community at an early stage; when in the course of the 14th century *gruit* was largely replaced by hop, the *gruitgeld* made way for, or developed into, a series of urban excises on the production and also on the sale of hop beer.¹⁰⁵ But in the countryside events took a different turn. Some village lords did manage to get hold of the *gruitrecht* when *gruit* was still commonly used, but apparently few were able to turn it into an excise on hop beer afterwards. When in the early 16th century Habsburg central government had the fiscal potential of all towns and villages investigated, it turned out that only in a limited number of villages a seignorial excise was levied on the sale of beer; evidence for seignorial taxation of brewing is lacking altogether.¹⁰⁶

⁹⁹ Bennett, *Women in the medieval English countryside*, 120. For urban equivalents cf. Kowaleski, *Local markets*, 187, and Davis, 'Baking for the common good', 488-489.

¹⁰⁰ Davis, 'Baking for the common good', 489.

¹⁰¹ Bennett, *Ale, beer and brewsters*, 23-24.

¹⁰² Smith, 'A periodic market', 477.

¹⁰³ Bailey, *The English manor*, 229.

¹⁰⁴ Unger, *A history of brewing*, 16. For an example of women engaged in brewing and baking in an urban context (13th century Haarlem): Hoogewerf, *Haarlemse stadsrecht*, 223-226.

¹⁰⁵ Unger, *A history of brewing*, 41-44; Doorman, ed., *Middeleeuwse brouwerij*, 16-20; Jensma, 'Bronnen recht van de gruit', 169-180.

¹⁰⁶ For an example of a village lord in possession of the *gruitrecht*: Van Mieris, ed., *Groot charterboek* II, 619-620. For a list of villages that paid beer excise to their lord in 1514: Naber, *Terughlik*, 48-49. In the Heusden district, this excise is referred to as *gruitgeld*, which suggests continuity with an older seignorial imposition.

For bread the situation is even more straightforward. Some villages did have local regulations fixing the weight of a loaf of bread. In early 15th-century Grootebroek (in West-Friesland) for example, each loaf of (rye) bread had to weigh eleven pounds. In Assendelft (Kennemerland) the compulsory weight was twelve pounds.¹⁰⁷ However, there is nothing to indicate these regulations developed into a system of licensing fees similar to the English system, nor is there evidence for any other imposition on baking or selling bread in villages.

Most likely this absence of seignorial taxation on baking and brewing can be attributed to a combination of two factors. First of all, 13th and 14th-century Holland had no national ordinances regulating the prices of bread and ale. Town authorities, especially in times of dearth, did control bread prices from at least the late 14th century onward.¹⁰⁸ The regulations of the weight of bread in Grootebroek and Assendelft mentioned above suggest that villages followed the same strategy. However, price regulation was always a strictly local responsibility. A national standard that might have served as a starting point for a system of licenses was simply lacking. Considering the fact that Holland's pace of political centralisation was much slower than England's, this is hardly surprising.

Secondly, Holland's local lords were usually not strong enough to bend regulations to serve their own purposes. The fact that Egmond abbey, in the 14th century one of the very few manorial lords left in the country, did demand *moutgeld* (most likely a tax on making or selling malt) from its villein tenants is a telling sign: it illustrates that manorial lords did have possibilities for taxation, but that these were lacking elsewhere.¹⁰⁹

Seignorial profits from cattle sales and from the sale of bread and ale were not restricted to chartered markets, but taxation of trade in many other commodities was. Successful rural markets could provide an attractive addition to manorial revenues. At the end of the 13th century the market of Botesdale for example rendered its lord, the abbot of Bury St. Edmunds, a total of £ 8 to 9 per year in rents, tolls and fines: a little under 10% of the total revenues of the manor of Redgrave to which the market belonged.¹¹⁰

According to Masschaele, market tolls on transactions were usually no higher than about 1% of the value of the goods. However, it should be kept in mind that tolls on transactions were often only part of a package of payments to be made to the lord. Stalls or shops had to be rented, and services like weighing had to be paid for. The adjudication of trade disputes by the court required the payment of a fee as well. Fines were levied on transgressions of market regulations such as forestalling or the use of incorrect measures and weights.¹¹¹ For Exeter,

¹⁰⁷ Pols, ed., *Westfriesche stadrechten* II, 255; *Handvesten Assendelft*, 61-63.

¹⁰⁸ Van Schaik, 'Marktbeheersing', 470-471, 476-477.

¹⁰⁹ Meilink, *Archief abdij van Egmond*, 60.

¹¹⁰ Smith, 'A periodic market', 464-465.

¹¹¹ For transaction costs in England: Kowaleski, *Local markets*, 192-196; Masschaele, *Peasants, merchants, and markets*, 67-69; Wedemeyer Moore, *Fairs of medieval England*, 193-202. For Holland: Smit, ed., *Rekeningen Hollandse*

Kowaleski estimates a peasant paid perhaps 1-2d for his weekly trip to the urban market in taxes and tolls, a total of 4-8s a year. Contrary to Kowaleski's suggestion that was not a negligible sum: it amounts to 5 to 10% of the £ 4 the 'average' yardlander was able to make each year by selling his farm's surpluses.¹¹² Taxation levels were probably lower at rural markets, which had fewer facilities to offer, but there still was a price to be paid for selling one's products at the market.

The issue at stake here is the degree of formalisation of rural markets. Informal trade venues did exist in both England and Holland. For England, Dyer's exploration of late medieval 'hidden trade' has revealed the existence of many venues besides licensed fairs and markets: trade took place at or near large estates, on the fringes of towns, in country inns, and at quays or bridgeheads.¹¹³ Holland most likely had similar informal trade venues. The attempts of Alkmaar to have markets in the neighbouring villages prohibited, suggests that rural trade did take place, despite the scarcity of official and licensed trade venues in the countryside. The Kennemerland villages of Akersloot, Uitgeest and Wormer mentioned in the introduction of this chapter may offer an example of informal centres of regional or even interregional trade.

By their very nature these informal trade venues were not systematically recorded. A quantitative comparison between the two countries is therefore not feasible. There is, however, one aspect of informal trade that does allow for a comparison, albeit of a qualitative rather than a quantitative nature: the attitude towards informal local gatherings at the parish church. Both in England and in continental northwestern Europe some of the oldest markets can be traced to informal gatherings of people buying and selling foodstuffs on a Sunday, near the local church. In 13th-century England most of these Sunday assemblies were converted into chartered markets on another day of the week. Partly this was due to the views of the Church, which in the early 13th century vigorously promoted a strict separation of commerce and worshipping.¹¹⁴ On this issue England seems to have been several years ahead of the continent: the teachings of Eustace of Flay, a Norman abbot preaching in England in 1200 and 1201 on the need to observe the Lord's day, apparently fell on fertile ground.¹¹⁵

Perhaps the abbot's admonitions would not have met with so much enthusiasm if there had not been a financial motive involved as well. That this was the case is demonstrated by an example quoted by Salzman: in 1306 the farmers of the measures and tolls complained that if the gathering of buyers and sellers taking place every Sunday at the church of Crosthwaite was allowed to continue, nobody would be able to collect the tolls. In fact, Crosthwaite is a late example:

tollen, xv; De Boer, *Graaf en grafiek*, 295-313; and the enumeration of levies in the charter of urban liberties of Geertruidenberg (1213), *OHZ* II, nr. 334.

¹¹² Kowaleski, *Local markets*, 200. For the estimate of the revenues of a yardlander: Dyer, *Standards of living*, 114-115. The sum of £ 4 is the higher of the two estimates given by Dyer and includes 1s for the sale of poultry and garden produce.

¹¹³ Dyer, 'Hidden trade', esp. 147-150.

¹¹⁴ Britnell, *Commercialisation*, 10, 84-85; Britnell, 'Proliferation', 212; Sawyer, 'Early fairs and markets', 64-68.

¹¹⁵ Cate, 'English mission', esp. 78, 87.

even though informal Sunday *congregaciones* never entirely disappeared, by 1300 many of them had successfully been either suppressed or transformed into formal markets.¹¹⁶

In Holland the attitude towards informal Sunday commercial gatherings seems to have been more lenient. A mid 14th-century ordinance of the count did prohibit the Sunday market of Middelburg (Zeeland) and the surrounding region on religious grounds.¹¹⁷ By that time, the influence of canon law was probably felt in Holland as well: in 1388 the count moved the market of the small town of Woudrichem from Sunday to Wednesday.¹¹⁸ But several 15th and even 16th-century examples testify to the fact that although the authorities objected to informal Sunday trading, the practice did not disappear easily. Around 1400 the local authorities in the West-Frisian village of Grootebroek prohibited buying and selling in the church or at the churchyard, a clear sign that it was still going on.¹¹⁹ In the middle of the 15th century an informal market seems to have developed around the church of the village of Schagen. In this case seignorial involvement did transform the informal gathering into a formal market: in 1463 Schagen received a license from its lord for a weekly market on Thursday.¹²⁰ But in the middle of the 16th century the lord of Naaldwijk, near The Hague, prohibited the sale of victuals in the village during mass, implicating that if only people would postpone their commercial activities until after mass there would be no objections.¹²¹

In fact this is a telling sign: it suggests that in Holland restrictions on Sunday trading were probably as much influenced by religious motives as in England, but much less by seignorial aspirations to extract money from trading. It must have been the combination of these two elements that contributed to the early suppression of informal trade in England. From this perspective, Dyer's conclusion that the decline of many chartered markets after 1350 was accompanied by an increase of informal trade is not surprising.¹²² By that time the power of lords to channel trade through venues profitable to themselves was declining.

The seignorial restrictions on cattle transactions, the presentments in the manorial courts for transgressions of the assizes of bread and ale, and the early attempts to gain control over informal Sunday trading all demonstrate that English lords put their superior possibilities for profiting from rural trade to good use. That, to be sure, does not automatically mean the advantages of the English network of rural markets and fairs were offset by cost-raising seignorial taxation.

¹¹⁶ Salzman, 'Legal status', 207; Britnell, 'Proliferation', 211-212. Admittedly there were also several cases of existing formal markets being moved from a Sunday to another day of the week. These moves were obviously not motivated by financial considerations, especially not if the owners were ecclesiastical institutions (Cate, 'English mission', 84-85).

¹¹⁷ Van Mieris, ed., *Groot charterboek* II, 612.

¹¹⁸ Korteweg, ed., *Rechtsbronnen Woudrichem*, nr. 179.

¹¹⁹ Pols, ed., *Westfriesche stadrechten* II, 272.

¹²⁰ Bregman, *Schagen*, 17-18.

¹²¹ Groenewegen, ed., *Naaldwijk*, 46.

¹²² Dyer, 'Hidden trade', 153.

On the short term they were probably not. Even if in practice the options of going to a market with more favourable trading conditions were limited by urban protectionism and by the expenses of transport and travelling, competition between lords and markets must have kept taxation of market exchange within reasonable bounds.¹²³ But in the long run the effects may have been different. Whereas in England an institutional framework based on formal trade venues and seignorial control had developed, in Holland a tradition of informal rural trading, free from lordly involvement, was established. By its nature it was easily adaptable to changing circumstances.

3.4 Conclusions

At first sight it looks as if Holland in the middle of the 14th century had hardly developed anything resembling an institutional framework for rural trade; unlike England the county could not boast a dense network of rural fairs and markets. But then, the relation between the proliferation of markets and the degree of commercialisation of the countryside may not be as straightforward as the English literature often suggests. An analysis of the social and political context and its effects on market institutions clarifies this.

Holland's scarcity of rural markets and fairs was not caused by a weakness of central government, or by urban suppression of rural trade. With only a few exceptions at times or places where the count's authority was under severe pressure, the 14th-century towns of Holland were unable to acquire the extraterritorial powers with which to dominate the countryside. In this respect Holland resembled England much more than it resembled Flanders. For an explanation for the scarcity of rural markets before 1350 we have to look at two other factors. For one, urban markets offered relatively easy access to outsiders, more so than in England or Flanders, thus providing good marketing opportunities for countryside products. Secondly Holland did not have a class of lords comparable to the English aristocracy with its manorial power base. Consequently not nearly as many rural fairs and markets were established, but on the other hand there were probably more opportunities for informal exchange.

Looking at the differences between Holland, England, and Flanders from a long-term perspective, an additional, albeit tentative, conclusion is possible. In England feudalism, through the active involvement of manorial lords in establishing markets, had stimulated an early commercialisation of the countryside, whereas in Holland manorialism had almost entirely disappeared by the middle of the 13th century and could therefore not contribute to the development of rural fairs and markets in the same way. In Flanders the early rise of towns and urban industry had contributed to the emergence of proto-industrial activities; in Holland a class of influential industrial entrepreneurs able to extend its activities in

¹²³ Masschaele, *Peasants, merchants, and markets*, 68-69.

the countryside was in the middle of the 14th century still largely lacking. Consequently, while the institutional framework for rural trade emerging in England was firmly based on formal trade venues and seignorial control, and that in Flanders on urban domination, in Holland a tradition of informal rural trading, relatively free from seignorial or urban control emerged. As we will see in the next chapter, the farmers and fishermen of Holland could fall back on this tradition and build on it when, in the second half of the 14th century, economic conditions changed.

4. New institutions for rural trade (c. 1350 – c. 1450)

4.1 Introduction

In January 1341 count Willem IV of Holland was called upon to adjudicate between two parties haggling over the Katwijk sea fish market: the villagers from Katwijk, who insisted their fish market was the compulsory market for the region, and the people from neighbouring Noordwijk, who were equally determined in their claim that no such compulsion existed. A disagreement between two communities was common enough, but this one required special care because the lords of the two villages were involved as well: both actively supported the claims of their villagers. These were moreover no ordinary local lords. The lord of Katwijk was Philip of Wassenaer, who had very recently acquired the position of *burggraaf* (burgrave) of Leiden. This had made him a very powerful and affluent man: the *burggraaf* owned various rights and goods in and around Leiden, the seignory of Katwijk among them. Noordwijk belonged to Jan of Beaumont, the count's uncle and a man with great personal prestige and influence. The charter relating the count's judgment in the conflict states that investigations had shown Katwijk had possessed a fish market for a long time, although it had never had a compulsory character. The count ruled this situation was to be continued: Katwijk was to keep its fish market, but nobody was to be forced to visit it.¹

In the second half of the 14th and the early 15th century some newly licensed fairs and weekly markets were established in the countryside. Many of the West-Frisian villages that acquired urban status in the early 15th century also received market rights, even though in most cases it is doubtful if these markets ever materialised.² Schagen and Purmerend, both in the north of Holland, received market licenses from their lords in 1463 and 1484 respectively; both developed into small market towns.³ The villages Zuidland/Westenrijk (1439), Heenvliet (1469) and Oude Tonge (1473) on the islands in the south-west were also given market licenses by their lords.⁴

But most new rural trade venues emerging in the late 14th and early 15th century were not regular weekly markets or fairs providing facilities for local trade in a wide range of products. Instead, they focused on just one product in an

¹ Van Mieris, ed., *Groot charterboek* II, 619. For Philip of Wassenaer: Van Gent and Janse, 'Van ridders tot baronnen', 14-15, 33-34. For Jan of Beaumont: Waller Zeper, *Jan van Henegouwen*, 65-66, 208.

² The West-Frisian 'towns' where officially licensed fairs or markets probably did take place around 1400 are Grootebroek (because of a reference in an early 15th-century by-law: Pols, ed., *Westfriesche stadrechten* II, 270), Schellinkhout (because the charter of urban liberties explicitly mentions the market is being held on Thursdays: Van Mieris, ed., *Groot charterboek*, III, 773), and perhaps Niedorp (because the mid 14th-century comital accounts mention revenues from money changing in Niedorp (Hamaker, ed., *Rekeningen grafelijkheid* II, 270, 361).

³ Bregman, *Schagen*, 18; *Inventaris van het archief van Purmerend*, summary nr. 57.

⁴ Van Limburg Brouwer, ed., *Boergoensche charters*, 50; 't Hart, *Historische beschrijving Heenvliet*, 450; Van de Waal and Vervoorn, *Beschrijving Goedereede en Overflakkee*, 412.

expanding sector of the economy. They were usually not licensed, but they were not illegal either: the authorities, local or central, knew these trade venues existed, usually supported their functioning and in some cases also drew revenues from them. Connecting production areas to distant markets, the new rural trade venues reflected the growth of interregional trade and at the same time stimulated it: especially for small-scale rural producers they provided easily accessible marketing opportunities against low costs.

Two categories of late 14th and early 15th-century rural trade venues will be discussed in this chapter. The aim is to find out which factors stimulated their rise and shaped the way they were organised, and to assess their contribution to the commercialisation of the countryside. Firstly, the rise of commercial sea fishing was accompanied by the emergence of fish markets in villages along the North Sea coast. Noordwijk was among them: in 1417 the wardens of St. Catherine's hospital in Leiden combined a trip to Noordwijk for other purposes with the purchase of fish in this village.⁵ The development and organisation of these sea fish markets will be explored by looking at three factors that helped to determine the structure of these markets: the effects of seignorial control, the role of towns and urban merchants, and the contribution of the fishing communities themselves. A comparison with England mainly focuses on the first of these three elements, a comparison with Flanders primarily on the second factor.

Secondly, parallel to the rise of dairy trade, village weigh houses emerged in the north of Holland. The factors contributing to the rises of these weigh houses and their effects on rural commercialisation will be analysed in the same way. Here we will focus on two elements: the role of towns and urban merchants, and the contribution of rural communities. As no direct equivalents to Holland's rural weighing facilities were found in England or Flanders, the comparative element has largely been dropped here.

4.2 Seaside fish markets and the sea fish trade

The rise of commercial sea fishing

In England the rich herring grounds off the eastern coast had been exploited for commercial purposes from at least the early 11th century onwards, stimulated perhaps by the growth of aristocratic wealth in combination with a wider adherence to religious dietary rules. Several Domesday Book entries on large herring rents payable to a lord or to the king bear witness to the existence of large scale herring fisheries.⁶ In Flanders the first references to sea fish trade date from the early 11th century as well.⁷ Findings of bones of marine fish in inland towns support the impression that commercial sea fishing must have begun around the

⁵ RAL AG, inv. nr. 334-25 f. 34.

⁶ Kowaleski, 'Commercialization of the sea fisheries', 177-178, 228; Salzman, *English industries*, 259.

⁷ Degryse, *Vlaanderens haringbedrijf*, 72.

year 1000. Not surprisingly, in Flanders not the aristocracy but the fast growing urban population is considered to have been the driving force behind the development of commercial sea fishing.⁸

In Holland sea fishing emerged much later. In the 12th and 13th centuries fishing probably mainly took place in the waters of the river delta: these provided plenty of fish and offered more safety than the open sea. Sea fish, primarily salted herring and cod, did become part of the diet in Holland's young towns, but most of it was imported from Scandinavia by Hansa merchants. Only in the late 13th century local fishermen began to venture out to sea in significant numbers. As in Flanders, this was probably stimulated by a rising urban demand for fish.⁹

Around 1300 the herring shoals off the coasts of Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, Norfolk and Suffolk were attracting fishermen not only from England, but also from abroad. The Flemish and the Dutch were among them. During the herring season they regularly landed their catch in one of the English ports that by then had developed a lively herring trade. There the fish was smoked, dried or salted, and then sold. The annual fairs of Scarborough and Great Yarmouth in particular, each lasting about six weeks in autumn, were visited by merchants from all over England and from the continent as well.¹⁰

In 14th-century eastern England offshore fishery was mostly based in the port towns. Professional fishermen from these ports fished for several fish species, each in the appropriate season, of which the herring *fare* was the most important. Following the herring shoals on their southward journey along the English coast, fishing expeditions often took men away from home for long periods. Offshore fishing was risky and even in the early 14th century it required considerable investments. That explains why fishery and fishing industry concentrated in the hands of an urban elite of ship-owners. Many owned more than one ship and hired skippers and crewmen for the season. In numerous villages along the eastern coast sea fishing was practised as well, but usually in combination with agriculture or other occupational activities. Village fishermen mostly stuck to coastal fishing, using small boats that could easily be drawn upon the beach. They participated in herring fishery, but in a much more modest way than the urban specialists, fishing only for herring during the short period when the migrating herring shoals passed nearby.¹¹

Village fishermen in Flanders and Holland, perhaps encouraged by the increasing demand for herring in the growing towns or pressured by overfishing in the southern North Sea, ventured out much further.¹² The Great Yarmouth murage records over the year 1344/45 mention the exact origin of the Flemish

⁸ Eryvynck, Van Neer, and Pieters, 'How the north was won', 232-233.

⁹ Boelmans Kranenburg, 'Visserij Noordnederlanders', 285-286; Boelmans Kranenburg, 'Visserijbedrijf Zijdenaars', 322.

¹⁰ Kowaleski, 'Commercialization of the sea fisheries', 180-188; Saul, 'English towns', 77-78; Saul, 'Herring industry', 35-36.

¹¹ Bailey, 'Coastal fishing', 103-104, 106; Pawley, 'Lincolnshire coastal villages', 154-159.

¹² Eryvynck, Van Neer, and Pieters, 'How the north was won', 234-235.

vessels visiting this port town.¹³ The records do not show which were fishermen bringing in fish and which were merchants fetching fish cargoes, but the fact that most Flemish ships came from Blankenberge, Ostend, Sluis and Heist suggests that the first category was predominant. Sluis was a small port in the Scheldt delta, but the other three were settlements on the North Sea coast without –at that time– any harbour facilities. Blankenberge and Ostend had acquired legal urban status, but Heist never became more than a village.¹⁴

The murage register also records ships from Holland. More than half of the Holland vessels visiting Great Yarmouth came from the town of Brielle, in combination with its outport Maarland: by this time Brielle, situated favourably in the Meuse delta, with good harbour facilities and easy access to the hinterland, was rapidly developing into Holland's most important fishing port. But in addition the Yarmouth register repeatedly records ships –and they can only have been fishing boats– coming from a series of villages along the southern half of the sandy North Sea coast: Scheveningen, Katwijk, Noordwijk and Wijk aan Zee.¹⁵

In addition to their contacts with the Yarmouth fair, by this time these villages probably functioned as fish markets in their own right as well. For Katwijk and implicitly also for Noordwijk this has already been shown. In mid 14th-century Scheveningen an official of the count purchased three porpoises and over 3,000 codfish as provisions for a military campaign, suggesting that here too trade in fish was going on.¹⁶ These village fish markets were probably simple beach markets: fishermen beached their ships, unloaded the catch and sold it on the spot. Markets of this type were quite common in medieval northwestern Europe; they existed in the Baltic region as early as the Viking age.¹⁷ Beach markets must have provided cheap and easily accessible market opportunities, thus lowering search costs for both fishers and fish merchants.

The role of the North Sea villages is reflected in their contribution to the late 14th-century inland sea fish trade. The toll register of the Guelders river town of Tiel records many shipments of herring, probably salted or smoked, on their way to towns in Guelders or the German Rhineland. Of all herring passing the Tiel toll post between March and December 1394, a surprising total of 150 *last* was transported by shipmasters from The Hague, who almost certainly had bought it in Scheveningen; although geographically and socially a separate community, Scheveningen was administratively a part of The Hague.¹⁸ The amount of herring from Scheveningen almost equals the 153 *last* of herring coming from Brielle in the same period. In addition The Hague shipmasters also transported other kinds

¹³ Smit, ed., *Bronnen geschiedenis handel met Engeland* I, 244-254. For a brief description of the information on herring fishery given by the murage records: Childs, 'Eastern fisheries', 21.

¹⁴ This contradicts the claim of Degryse that only the port towns participated in fishing expeditions to the English coast (Degryse, *Vlaanderens haringbedrijf*, 31). Cf. Danhieux, 'Visserij Zuidnederlanders', 280.

¹⁵ Smit, ed., *Bronnen geschiedenis handel met Engeland* I, 244-254.

¹⁶ Hamaker, ed., *Rekeningen grafelijkheid* II, 168-169. About the same quantity of cod was bought in Brielle, 170-172.

¹⁷ Meyer, 'Fishing in the western Baltic Sea', 15.

¹⁸ Egmond, *Visboek*, 23.

of fish in the winter months, whereas Brielle seems to have focused almost entirely on herring.¹⁹

At the end of the 14th century Dutch and Flemish fishermen began curing herring on board their ships. The technique itself, consisting of gutting and salting the herring and packing it tightly into casks, was not new: it had been practised before in Scandinavia. The use of it on board was an important innovation however: it allowed for longer, uninterrupted expeditions to more distant fishing grounds, thus making a considerable increase in production possible.²⁰

Competition from the large herring busses from Holland and Flanders has often been named as an important cause of the decline of herring fishery in the east of England, but it is clear that it cannot have been the only one. In Great Yarmouth the signs of crisis were becoming visible in the late 14th century, before the introduction of the innovations in Dutch and Flemish herring fishery. Probably the insecurity and damage resulting from the Hundred Years War were part of the story, as were coastal erosion and silting. Both Mark Bailey and Maryanne Kowaleski have tentatively suggested that the regulation and protectionism characterising the Yarmouth herring trade may have contributed to the decline of the large eastern fisheries as well.²¹

In the mean time, the introduction of the new curing techniques in Holland had induced significant changes in the organisation of sea fishing; changes that introduced characteristics reminiscent of the situation in 14th-century eastern England. Curing on board required larger ships and these in turn needed proper harbour facilities, leading to a concentration of the rapidly expanding herring industry and herring export trade in the port towns. This development was reinforced by the more capital-intensive nature of offshore fishing and the greater risks that were involved: urban capital became essential to finance fishing expeditions. Although villagers were still frequently hired as skippers and crewmen, and some of them even owned shares in the large herring busses, large-scale herring fishing and herring trade increasingly came to be dominated by wealthy urban entrepreneurs.²²

Independent fishing activities based in the villages now concentrated on coastal fishing, which, however, seems to have suffered little or no damage from the rise of the 'great' herring fishery.²³ In fact, in addition to the villages on the southern part of the coast, like Katwijk, Noordwijk and Scheveningen, by the middle of the 15th century several villages in the north turn out to be engaged in commercial fishing as well: Wijk aan Zee, Egmond, Callantsoog, Huisduinen,

¹⁹ Westermann, ed., *Rekeningen riviertollen Gelderland*, 47-90. A last of herring equals the contents of 12 to 14 herring tons, or about 120 litres.

²⁰ Unger, 'Netherlands herring fishery', 337-338, 344.

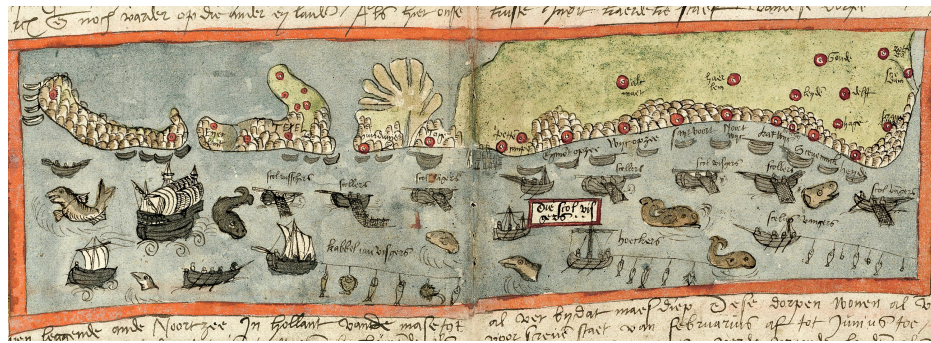
²¹ Kowaleski, 'Commercialization of the sea fisheries', 191-198; Saul, 'English towns'; Bailey, 'Coastal fishing', 108-111.

²² Boelmans Kranenburg, 'Visserijbedrijf Zijdenaars', 326-330.; Van Bavel, 'Early proto-industrialization', 1141-1142, 1154; Danhieux, 'Visserij Zuidnederlanders', 282.

²³ Boelmans Kranenburg, 'Visserijbedrijf Zijdenaars', 330-332.

Petten and the villages on the island of Texel.²⁴ All these villages plus a few more (Zandvoort and Terheide) are also on a map of the Dutch coast made by the Scheveningen fish merchant and auctioneer Adriaen Coenen, showing the villages involved in coastal fishing in the late 16th century (figure 4.1). The by-laws of Callantsoog suggest that even in the 15th century these villages had beach markets: the first reference to fish sales in Callantsoog dates from 1415, while a 1452 regulation explicitly refers to fish sales on the beach.²⁵

Figure 4.1 Map of the villages engaged in fishing for plaice in the late 16th century



Source: Adriaen Coenen, *Visboeck*, f. 138v-139 (detail)
(National Library of the Netherlands, manuscript 78 E 54).

In part the explanation for the continued role of fishing villages in commercial sea fishing can be attributed to a combination of economic and geographic circumstances. Rising standards of living stimulated demand for a wider choice of fish than just herring, and preferably fresh fish at that; coastal fishing was able to provide this. Moreover Holland had no port towns with direct access to the sea on the North Sea coast: between the Meuse delta and the northern islands no rivers or navigable creeks entered the sea. This must have placed the North Sea fishing villages in a favourable position when it came to provisioning the markets of the rapidly expanding towns in the immediate hinterland. Still, a comparison with Flanders suggests that this is not the whole story.

According to Peter Stabel, in Flanders concentration of offshore fishing in towns like Ostend induced a decline of the smaller fishing towns.²⁶ However,

²⁴ Fish from Texel and Callantsoog is reported in the toll register of Kampen over the years 1439-1441 (Smit, 'Kamper pondtolregister'); the fish was apparently on its way to the fairs of Deventer or one of the other IJssel towns. All villages are mentioned in a protest against the revival of the Naarden staple for fish dating from 1452 (Noord-Hollands Archief, Stadsbestuur van Haarlem (stadsarchief van Haarlem), inv. nr. 81; this document will be discussed in more detail below.

²⁵ Schoorl, 't Oge, 165-166, 172-174.

²⁶ Stabel, *Dwarfs among giants*, 49-50.

some Flemish fishing villages did quite well in the 15th century. Small Wenduine, for example, had only three or four fishing boats around 1400; in 1467 the number had risen to twelve.²⁷ More importantly, Heist was, after Dunkerque, Newport and Ostend, still one of Flanders' major fishing centres.²⁸ So was the village of Walraversijde, near Ostend. Recent archaeological research has revealed that the fishermen of Walraversijde mainly fished for herring, cod, flatfish and eel in the southern North Sea. They also processed flatfish destined for the urban markets, probably by smoking. The fact that the village had no harbour and the boats had to be beached, made a large-scale herring industry impossible. Still, coastal fishing complemented by some agriculture and other activities seems to have provided the villagers with a livelihood.²⁹

But at the end of the 15th century the Flemish and the Dutch paths of development diverged. The Flemish fishing villages experienced a serious crisis. The village of Walraversijde presents an extreme case: the eastern quarter of the village disappeared and a century later the village was deserted altogether. The direct cause of its decline is obvious: political upheavals in the late 15th century wrought havoc upon the Flemish coastal region. Several villages were partially abandoned, Walraversijde being one of them. However, unlike the surrounding agrarian communities, it did not recover afterwards. The fishermen may have decided to move to one of the ports; at this stage Stabel's assumption that fishery concentrated in the towns does prove correct.³⁰

Holland had to deal with wars and economic problems in the last quarter of the 15th century too. There can be no doubt the coastal villages suffered from the disruptions; Petten and Wijk aan Zee for instance were attacked by pirates.³¹ Still, Ad van der Woude's claim that the coastal villages, plagued by coastal erosion and sand drift, never fully recovered afterwards, seems too pessimistic. That the villages declined in the 17th and 18th centuries is clear enough, and it is also true that the *Informacie*, an assessment of economic and demographic conditions made for fiscal purposes in 1514, does not give a rosy picture for most seaside villages.³²

However, in contrast to the situation in Flanders other sources indicate a continued and quite successful role in coastal fishing and in the fish trade. The Scheveningen fish merchant and auctioneer Adriaen Coenen, born in 1515, wrote that in his boyhood the fishermen of Scheveningen, Katwijk, Noordwijk, Wijk aan Zee, Egmond, Petten, Callantsoog and Huisduinen exported dried plaice to the

²⁷ Doehaerd, 'Génèse d'une entreprise maritime', 9-11.

²⁸ Tys, 'Landscape and settlement', 161.

²⁹ At Walraversijde extensive archaeological research has been carried out, which has resulted in a large number of publications. For a recent survey: Tys, 'Expressions of power', and Pieters, 'Material environment of Walravenside'.

³⁰ Tys, 'Expressions of power', 25. Tys also mentions the intrinsically temporary and movable character of many fishing communities and the decline of privateering, being an additional source of income, as causes of the decline.

³¹ Van der Woude, *Noorderkwartier*, 354.

³² Ibid., 410-412; Fruin, ed., *Informacie*: Wijk aan Zee (20-21), Zandvoort (59-60), Texel (149-152) Callantsoog (158-159), Petten (164-165), Huisduinen (166-167), Terheide (267-268), Katwijk (279-280), Noordwijk (316-318), Egmond (604-605).

Antwerpen fair, where it was bought by merchants from Germany.³³ Coenen's story is supported by a document concerning a conflict on the existence of toll privileges for Callantsoog. In 1527 a shipmaster from Alkmaar and the widow of a fish merchant from Callantsoog testified that they had repeatedly transported fresh, salted and smoked fish from Callantsoog over Holland's inland waterways to Zeeland and Brabant, without having to pay the river tolls.³⁴ Clearly the coastal villages had retained, or regained, a role in the interregional fish trade. In this respect their position was different from their Flemish counterparts.

The reasons for the difference are not immediately obvious. The absence of port towns on the North Sea coast may have placed the Holland villages in a favourable position when it came to provisioning the markets of the rapidly expanding towns in their immediate hinterland, but it does not explain how these villages could acquire and maintain a vital role in interregional trade as well. After all, from a geographical perspective the towns in the Meuse delta and on the Zuiderzee coast were in a better position to develop as interregional fish trade centres. An explanation of the continued success of the coastal villages must therefore look beyond the development of supply and demand: social and political factors were involved. One of these factors was the extent of seignorial control over sea fishing and the fish trade.

Impositions and beach markets: seignorial control?

Since almost every stretch of the English coastline belonged to some manor, sea fishing could hardly escape seignorial attention. That was not necessarily a bad thing. In their efforts to improve their own income some lords created conditions that benefited their tenants as well. The lord of Blythburgh, for instance, forcefully opposed the attempts of the neighbouring town of Dunwich to establish a trade monopoly, and supported his tenants' boycott of the Dunwich fishing and trading tolls.³⁵ There were also lords who actively invested in the construction of quays or harbour facilities.³⁶ Still, many lords seem to have been satisfied with simply expropriating part of the fishermen's products or profits. The most common way to do this was by requisition: tenants involved in fishing had to give up part of the catch to their lord, originally in kind and later in money. Alternatively purveyance systems were used, forcing tenants to offer their fish for sale to the lord first, at a fixed price.³⁷ Requisitioning already existed in the 11th century, as is shown by the Domesday Book herring rents mentioned earlier. In the course of time impositions became more varied, and probably also heavier. In the 13th and 14th century rural fishermen usually paid a 'dole' or 'share' to their lord, which could

³³ Boelmans Kranenburg, 'Visserijbedrijf Zijdenaars', 332.

³⁴ Schoorl, 't Oge, 189-191.

³⁵ Bailey, ed., *Bailiff's Minute Book*, 11-13.

³⁶ Fox, *Evolution*, 16.

³⁷ Ibid., 52-55, 122-129.

take the shape of a tax on the boats, the nets, the fishermen in person, or their catch.³⁸

In Holland lords profited from sea fishing too. In his comparison of the social structure and the organisation of community life in village in various parts of the Low Countries in the 16th century, the Dutch historian Enno van Gelder concludes that in the coastal district lordly control over village affairs was stricter than elsewhere.³⁹ No wonder: the sandy strip behind the dunes had been inhabited since Carolingian times, many of Holland's most powerful noble families originated in this region and it was here that remnants of the manorial system survived longest. It is true that seignorial control over fishing at sea was light when compared to the regulation of fisheries in inner waters. Freshwater fishing rights traditionally belonged to the *regalia*; over the centuries many of these rights had been granted to local lords while others were still in the hands of the count of Holland. Even though some rural communities had managed to obtain fishing rights in nearby waters, on the whole freshwater fishing was allowed only to the lessees of comital or seignorial fishing rights. Fishing at sea on the other hand was open to everybody who was prepared to take the risks of sailing out.⁴⁰ Still, upon their return to the beach fishermen were confronted with seignorial power.

It is therefore not surprising to find that requisitioning of sea fish took place. Egmond abbey, for instance, traditionally claimed a small portion (in kind) of the fish caught at sea by its villein tenants for consumption by the monks: the so-called *hofvis*. In the early 15th century the abbey was forced to give up the *hofvis*, together with almost all other customary duties. Many of these duties were abolished altogether, but some – and the *hofvis* was probably among them – were transferred to the (lay) lords of Egmond.⁴¹ Most likely this kind of due existed in other coastal villages as well. In the *Informacie* of 1514 the representatives of Zandvoort reported that the local fishermen had to give up a small portion of their cod, haddock and plaice, by then transferred into a money due, to their lord, the lord of Brederode.⁴²

In Katwijk seignorial exactions were more oppressive. The lords of Katwijk, the Van Wassenaers, were not only entitled to the *hofvis*, but also levied an imposition of 5% of the value of all fish brought ashore (the *pondgeld*). Both dues were also imposed on foreigners bringing their fish to Katwijk. In the 14th century the local fishermen moreover paid an additional tax per person, the *riemgeld*.⁴³ Katwijk is directly adjacent to Valkenburg and had probably been part of the count's manor there, before it was dissolved in the middle of the 13th century.

³⁸ Salzman, *English industries*, 267- 267-269; Fox, *Evolution*, 55-57; Kowaleski, 'Expansion of the south-western fisheries', 441.

³⁹ Enno van Gelder, *Nederlandse dorpen*, 14-32, 32-39, 67-89, esp. 67-69.

⁴⁰ De Boer, 'Roerende van der visscheryen', 118, 124-125.

⁴¹ Hof, *Abdij van Egmond*, 202, 398; Meilink, *Archief abdij van Egmond*, 81-84; Johannes a Leydis, *Egmondsche abtenkroniek*, 211-212.

⁴² Fruin, ed., *Informacie*, 59.

⁴³ Van Gent and Janse, 'Van ridders tot baronnen', 33.

Even in 1333 the *hofvis* was still in the hands of the count, as his instructions to a man called Hughe Jansz. to 'keep' his fish in Katwijk indicate. Perhaps these origins explain the far-reaching arrangements in Katwijk.⁴⁴ Despite numerous protests from local fishermen and outsiders, the Van Wassenauers held on to the lucrative *pondgeld* until the early 19th century.⁴⁵

Yet it is exactly the frequency of the protests against the impositions levied in Katwijk that suggests these dues surpassed what was considered normal. The impression is confirmed by the fact that the representatives of Zandvoort reporting to the government inquisitioners in 1514 mention only the *hofvis* and do not refer to an additional tax like the Katwijk *pondgeld*; it is unlikely they would have overlooked such an imposition if it had existed. In other respects too the situation compares favourably to what was customary in England. Egmond abbey did not impose labour services for villein fishermen, as the Devon manor of Stokenham did even in the middle of the 14th century. Nor are there any indications for the existence of a common type of due in England: a levy on the use of the foreshore, the area between the high and low water marks, where fishermen drew up their boats, dried their nets, or placed stakes for fishing.⁴⁶ Moreover, no revenues from fishing, or from the use of the foreshore at that, are recorded in the few medieval seignorial accounts from Holland's coastal district that have survived: they are not mentioned in the late 14th-century accounts of Jan of Beaumont and his successors as lords of Noordwijk, nor in the remnants of the 16th-century accounts of the lords of Brederode for Callantsoog.⁴⁷

There is a parallel with ecclesiastical taxation of fishery and fish trade. Whereas in England tithes were commonly levied on sea fishing, in Holland fish tithes did not exist.⁴⁸ Admittedly, from about the middle of the 15th century onwards we do find evidence of payments by fishermen in seaside villages to the local church, but they have a different background. At least in some villages they originally bore the character of a bilateral agreement rather than a tax. Moreover, they served a purpose that was of direct interest to the community: the upkeep of a fire beacon. Noordwijk is a good example. In 1444 a contract between sixteen Noordwijk shipmasters and the churchwardens of the local church was drawn up: the fishermen agreed to the payment of a yearly sum which would be used by the churchwardens to light a fire beacon to guide the ships.⁴⁹ Scheveningen by-laws of the mid-16th century also mention contributions to the churchwardens for a fire beacon, but despite the fact that the impositions were modest (in 1550 the rate was set at 3 *schelling* per crew member for the season), it seems to have been a

⁴⁴ Fockema Andreae, 'Hollandsche grondheerlijkheid', 55; Van Mieris, ed., *Groot charterboek* II, 547.

⁴⁵ NA, Archief Familie van Wassenauer van Duvenvoorde, inv. nrs. 2632-2646.

⁴⁶ Fox, *Evolution*; Salzman, *English industries*, 122-129, 64-66.

⁴⁷ Noordwijk: Waller Zeper, *Jan van Henegouwen*, 194; e.g. NA Archief Graven van Blois nrs. 269 (1379/1380) or 284 (1395/1396). Callantsoog: Schoorl, *'t Oge*, 273-274, 314-320.

⁴⁸ Salzman, *English industries*, 274-275; Heath, 'North Sea fishing', 56-57; Fox, *Evolution*, 107-115.

⁴⁹ Kloos, *Noordwijk*, 78-79.

problem to get the shipmasters to pay. This suggests that by then the voluntary character of the arrangement was wearing off.⁵⁰

The reasons for the absence of fish tithes in Holland are best understood by looking at the situation in the southwestern part of Flanders. Here the abbey and convents holding patronage rights over the parish churches of the coastal towns and villages one by one acquired papal permission to levy herring tithes in the late 12th and early 13th century; it is no coincidence that this happened at a time when the commercial importance of herring fishery was increasing rapidly. The introduction met with fierce protests in towns like Calais and Nieuport, but with the support of the count of Flanders resistance was broken and tithe payment was enforced.⁵¹ As we saw, in Holland commercial sea fishing along the North Sea Coast did not develop until the late 13th century. By that time in Holland many of the regular tithes on grain, other crops and cattle had fallen into the hands of worldly lords.⁵² Fragmentation and lay ownership must have diminished possibilities to obtain ecclesiastical support for attempts to introduce fish tithes. That in turn must have made it difficult to overcome the usual resistance against new tithes.⁵³ Still, even Egmond abbey, entitled to corn tithes and cattle tithes in Noordwijk and Egmond, apparently did not tithe sea fishing in these villages.⁵⁴

Differences between Holland and England are also reflected in the extent of seignorial authority over seaside fish markets. When the commercialisation of sea fishery took off, beach markets emerged in England as well as in Holland, but in keeping with the general tendency of seignorial grip on markets, most were soon brought under lordly control. The lord filed for a formal market license with the Crown and once he had obtained it, set rules to regulate trade and profit from it.⁵⁵ Only a few coastal fish markets, like those of Exmouth and Brixham in Devon, seem to have escaped seignorial attention, perhaps because of their remoteness from the seat of manorial authority.⁵⁶

As far as we know, none of the lords of the seaside villages in Holland ever obtained a formal license for the village beach market. It is clear that despite the absence of a market charter, the fish market in Katwijk was controlled and regulated by the lord of Wassenaer, who put it to use as a source of revenues. But we already saw that Katwijk, with its remnants of a past as a comital manor, was exceptional. In Callantsoog the lord of Brederode did issue rules for the fish auction on the beach, but these bear the character of a confirmation of local customs regulating transactions between parties. In 1452, for instance, the lord established that if a buyer could not pay in cash on the spot, the seller was allowed

⁵⁰ Enno van Gelder, 'Visserij en vischverkoop', 389-390, 394-395.

⁵¹ Degryse, *Vlaanderens haringbedrijf*, 26-28, 63-70.

⁵² Kosters, *Oude tiendrecht*, 51-52, 147-149; Nolet and Boeren, *Kerkelijke instellingen*, 328-329; Kuys, *Kerkelijke organisatie*, 60-62.

⁵³ For resistance to the introduction of 'lesser' tithes on previously free products in the 16th century: Kosters, *Oude tiendrecht*, 111-117.

⁵⁴ Hof, *Abdij van Egmond*, 456-463; for a list of the 14th-century tithes in Noordwijk Hof, ed., *Egmondse kloosterrekeningen*, 22-23.

⁵⁵ Fox, *Evolution*, 90.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 21-23, 27-28.

to cancel the transaction and find himself another buyer.⁵⁷ Some years later the lord of Brederode did allow the churchwardens to tax the fish auction for the benefit of the church, but this too might just as well be a confirmation of a local arrangement between fishermen and churchwardens, similar to the Noordwijk contract mentioned earlier.⁵⁸

In short, as a consequence of a combination of social and political factors (the early demise of the manorial lordship) and economic developments (the late rise of sea fishing), seignorial control over beach markets in Holland was not as strong as in England. The rise of informal fish markets along the North Sea coast must have contributed to a reduction of transaction costs: fishermen could offer their catch for sale at a series of easily accessible places at a modicum of expenses.

Inland trade, staple markets and beach market auctioneers: the role of towns and merchants

Having established the relative freedom of the sea fish trade from seignorial control, it is now time to turn to the involvement of towns and merchants. To what extent did they control the fish trade and shape the organisation of the beach markets? One way to find out more about their role is by looking at the next stage of the marketing of sea fish: the transport from the beach to inland urban markets. The toll registers of Heusden, on the Meuse, over the years 1378-1380, are interesting for more than one reason. As will be shown below, since the middle of the 14th century Heusden was a compulsory staple market for sea fish transported upstream; the toll register should therefore provide a good survey of at least the river-bound part of sea fish exports. Moreover, the register allows for a comparison between the positions of Scheveningen and Katwijk in the inland fish trade.⁵⁹ Large quantities of haddock, plaice and cod, probably smoked, dried or salted, were brought to Heusden from both villages. The Hague shipmasters, transporting fish from Scheveningen, paid a total of 106 £ 5 s to the toll guards, Katwijk shipmasters a total of 84 £ 2 s, suggesting that Scheveningen was a slightly larger fishing centre than Katwijk.⁶⁰

Dick de Boer believes that at least the Katwijk shipmasters were fishermen taking their catch directly up river to the Heusden fish market.⁶¹ That may well have been true in some of the cases. However, as table 4.1 shows, many names appear more than once in the register, some of them as often as 13 times. It is

⁵⁷ Schoorl, *'t Oge*, 173.

⁵⁸ Goettsch, *Schoorl*, 174, 179.

⁵⁹ Niermeyer, ed., *Bronnen Beneden-Maasgebied*, 637-640, 650-653; cf. Ibelings, 'Economie: veel consumptie, weinig productie', 168-169.

⁶⁰ That the shipmasters from 'The Hague' mentioned in the register really came from that town and not from Scheveningen, is confirmed by a comparison of their names with the results of the *Inquisitie* of 1369, an enquiry into malpractices of the count's functionaries in the region that gives an inventory of the names of the heads of households in every village (NA AGH, inv. nr. 676). Of the 37 shipmasters arriving at Heusden between 1378 and 1380, at least 6 could be retraced as inhabitants of the town of The Hague in 1369 (f 48v-50), whereas none of the names corresponded with the list of inhabitants of the village of Scheveningen (f47-47v). I am grateful to Ronald van der Spiegel for allowing me to use his transcription of the *Inquisitie*.

⁶¹ De Boer, 'Roerende van der visscheryen', 122.

unlikely fishermen would make these regular trips up river themselves. The frequent transporters, and probably also some of the less frequent ones, must have been fish merchants, who had first bought their merchandise from the fishermen. In Scheveningen this trade was clearly dominated by merchants from The Hague.⁶² In Katwijk local merchants were prominent, even though they probably lived in the inland village of Katwijk aan de Rijn and not on the coast.

Table 4.1 Frequency of payments made at the Heusden toll for fish by shipmasters from Katwijk and The Hague, 1378/1379 and 1379/1380

Frequency of payments at the toll	Number of shipmasters from Katwijk ⁶³	Number of shipmasters from The Hague
12 or 13 times	-	2
10 or 11 times	-	1
8 or 9 times	3	1
6 or 7 times	-	3
4 or 5 times	6	6
2 or 3 times	10	6
Once	11	18
Total	30	37

Source: Niermeyer, *Bronnen Beneden-Maasgebied*, 637-640, 650-653.

The table also shows that the merchants making the most frequent trips came from The Hague. Altogether seven men from The Hague came to Heusden more than five times in the course of the two years the toll register covers, whereas only three merchants from Katwijk managed the same frequency.

Of course merchants from other towns may have been buying fish in Katwijk, Scheveningen or any of the other coastal fish markets as well, and sending it up river. Research by F. van Kan on late 14th and early 15th-century Leiden has revealed the involvement of some of the members of the Leiden elite with freshwater fishing and the freshwater fish trade; they acted as lessees of the rich fishing waters north of Leiden.⁶⁴ However, there is little to indicate that these men were active in the sea fish trade as well. The Guelders toll registers of Tiel over the years 1394 and 1395 do mention some sea fish shipments from Leiden, but none of the shipmasters belonged to the small group of elite fishing water lessees identified by Van Kan.⁶⁵

⁶² Although there are indications that in the middle of the 14th century some Scheveningers were involved in the inland fish trade as well (Van der Spiegel, 'Kabeljauwverkopers in Scheveningen').

⁶³ For Katwijk three persons could not be identified because only a (very common) first name was mentioned in the register.

⁶⁴ Van Kan, *Sleutels tot de macht*, 85-88, 264.

⁶⁵ Westermann, ed., *Rekeningen riviertollen Gelderland*, 64, 69, 71, 72, 75, 77, 79, 81, 84. Van Kan does identify a shipmaster passing the toll in Lobith in 1326 as a member of a family of Leiden fish merchants, but admits that it

Even if merchants from Leiden or any other town did purchase fish in Katwijk to ship it inland, they clearly did not push the local merchants out of this line of trade. Indeed as we have seen earlier, there is evidence that merchants from coastal villages were still involved in the interregional sea fish trade in the early 16th century.

A second element of urban control over the sea fish trade, or at least an attempt in that direction, is represented by the existence of staple markets for sea fish trade in two towns. Even though the Katwijkers had failed in their attempts to monopolise the fish trade on the North Sea coast, compulsory staples for the interregional sea fish trade were established in the 14th century elsewhere in the county. One of them has just been mentioned: in 1357 count Willem V granted the town of Heusden, on the Meuse, a staple right for all fish transported upstream. Fifteen years earlier, in 1342, a similar privilege had been granted to Naarden, on the Zuiderzee shore, 'for all fish caught between Kampen and Muiden'.⁶⁶

In Flanders, the same kind of staple privileges had been granted to some of the small towns in the Zwin estuary when in 1323 Bruges received its general staple privilege. Dried fish was to be sold only in Monnikerede and Hoeke and all trade in herring –at the time still imported by German Hansa merchants– was to take place in Damme, as Bruges' outport.⁶⁷ When in the early 15th century on-board curing techniques were introduced, their use was at first prohibited by the count of Flanders, probably under pressure from the merchants of the German Hansa who until then had monopolised the herring trade. But as the prohibition turned out to benefit the position of Zeeland's and Holland's fisheries on the international herring market at the expense of the Flemish, it was lifted in 1420.⁶⁸ Afterwards cask herring could be bought in Damme and in the main fishing ports, but not elsewhere. No doubt herring was also sold illegally outside these designated markets, but as the records of the water bailiff in Sluis show, offenders were persecuted even in the late 15th century.⁶⁹

In Holland, on the other hand, by that time attempts to concentrate the sea fish trade in the two staple towns were no longer very effective, as a protest filed in 1457 against the Naarden fish staple shows. Apparently duke Philip of Burgundy had recently issued an ordinance reviving the obligation to market all fish from the Zuiderzee in Naarden; obviously the staple right had not been maintained for some time. The protest voices a series of objections, ranging from complaints about Naarden's inconvenient location and lack of facilities to the statement that the fish trade, backbone of the nation's wealth, had always been free and should remain so. The complainants also stated that in Naarden they

is the only piece of evidence for involvement with the interregional sea fish trade (Van Kan, *Sleutels tot de macht*, 88).

⁶⁶ Van Mieris, ed., *Groot charterboek* III, 28, and II, 656.

⁶⁷ Nicholas, *Town and countryside*, 119.

⁶⁸ Unger, 'Netherlands herring fishery', 345-347.

⁶⁹ Lambert, 'Merchants on the margin?', 6-7.

could not make the best price for their fish, because the town did not attract enough foreign merchants. The document is not signed, but it does mention almost all towns in Holland as being the victim of the revival of Naarden's staple right - and the North Sea villages Scheveningen, Katwijk, Noordwijk, Zandvoort, Petten, Callantsoog, Huisduinen and Texel as well.⁷⁰

It looks as if the protest was successful: the Naarden fish staple did not survive long afterwards.⁷¹ Its Heusden counterpart may have declined even earlier: there are no records of its existence after the 14th century. A later attempt by Haarlem, in the early 16th century, to acquire a monopoly on the herring industry and herring trade, came to nothing: even though the privilege was granted, it was probably impossible to effectuate in view of the protests raised by the other towns.⁷²

A final aspect of merchant involvement in the sea fish trade that needs to be mentioned here concerns the role of merchants in the day-to-day running of the fish markets at the North Sea beaches. Actually little is known about the practicalities of the organisation of these markets in the 14th and early 15th century, but by looking at some 16th-century evidence and comparing it with the scraps of information on previous centuries that do exist, it is possible to get an idea of some of the main characteristics.

We saw earlier that in the 15th century the offshore herring fishery concentrated in the towns and that it was increasingly dominated by urban merchant-entrepreneurs, who hired villagers as crewmen for their ships. Similar relations have been demonstrated for freshwater fishing and the freshwater fish trade in the Haarlem region in the late 15th and early 16th century. This trade was controlled by a few merchants from the young town of Purmerend, men who ran their affairs as proto-capitalist entrepreneurs: they did business on a large scale both in Holland and abroad and they employed village fishermen in their service, providing them with boats and fishing gear and paying them a salary.⁷³ However, it seems proto-capitalist relations did not affect coastal fishing and in particular the village fish markets to the same extent.

In early 16th-century Scheveningen the fish market was bound to detailed rules, set by the The Hague authorities on the advice of a number of Scheveningen shipmasters. First independent inspectors checked the quality of the fish brought ashore. Then the fish was auctioned via a system of descending bids; the ship that had arrived first had priority and the others followed in a fixed order.⁷⁴ A late 16th-century conflict between the Scheveningen fishermen and the auctioneer Adriaen Coenen provides some additional information on the role of this functionary. In 1580 a group of fishermen filed a request with the Prince of

⁷⁰ Noord-Hollands Archief, Stadsbestuur van Haarlem (stadsarchief van Haarlem), inv. nr. 81. Cf. Ibelings, 'Middeleeuwse visstapel', 57-58.

⁷¹ Ibid., 58.

⁷² *Handvesten Haarlem*, 204-207 (privilege); NA AGH, inv. nr. 969 (protest).

⁷³ Van Dam, *Vissen in veenmeren*, 169-178.

⁷⁴ Enno van Gelder, 'Visserij en vischverkoop', 374-375, 379-380, 383-388.

Orange. They stated that they had accepted Coenen's appointment as Scheveningen's auctioneer some years earlier because he was a local and would not be in office for long anyway, since he was of advanced age and weak health. However, they wanted to be sure that after Coenen's death the old situation was to be restored. They added testimonies, not just from Scheveningen but also from Katwijk and Terheide, explaining that in Scheveningen and in every other fishing village along the North Sea coast it had always been the custom for each shipmaster to choose his own auctioneer. For the course of one year this man was not only to put up the shipmaster's catch for auction and keep account of the sales, but also to advance him money to pay his crew, maintain his fishing gear and even buy a new boat if necessary. The appointment of Coenen as the only auctioneer in Scheveningen had been a deviation from tradition, which, since Coenen was apparently unable to provide the fishermen with credit, was causing serious trouble.⁷⁵

The role attributed to the auctioneers is reminiscent of that of the 'hosts' operating in the Flemish fishing towns and villages, best known from 15th-century Wenduine. Here in the beginning of that century the local fishermen had contracted a wealthy burgess from neighbouring Blankenberge to act as their moneylender and auction their fish. Afterwards this role was taken over by a Bruges merchant. The arrangement is not to be confused with the widely known system whereby foreign merchants were assigned to townsmen who provided housing, mediation on the market and other commercial services: the host in Wenduine had local fishermen under his care, not foreigners.

For the fishermen the host solved several problems at once. They could leave the marketing of the fish to someone who knew his way about in commerce, which left them free to sail out again. As the host guaranteed payment of the fishermen every week, advancing the money from his own pocket if the urban fish merchants had not paid in time, they were ensured of a regular income. Moreover, credit was available to them on flexible terms: even young fishermen without any possessions of their own were able to get a loan.⁷⁶ Of course there was a price to be paid. The host received a commission of 5% on all fish sales, but as Jean-Claude Hocquet has made clear, his rewards were much more substantial than that. The interests on the loans he provided may have been as high as 20%. His investments in boats and fishing moreover entitled him to a significant part of each catch.⁷⁷

This hosting system is in keeping with the domination of Flemish urban merchant-entrepreneurs in other sectors of the economy. Some of the characteristics that came with the system are familiar as well: an obligation for the fishermen to bring all fish to the auction in his home town or village, a tendency

⁷⁵ Ibid., 395-399.

⁷⁶ Doehaerd, 'Génèse d'une entreprise maritime', 9, 12.

⁷⁷ Hocquet, 'Pêcheurs, hôtes et seigneurs', 101, 103. A hosting system with comparable characteristics existed in 14th-century Yarmouth in England (Saul, 'Herring industry', 38).

towards monopolisation and the wish to reserve the position of host to locals.⁷⁸ In the early modern period the hosting system in some places –Hocquet mentions Boulogne– evolved into downright exploitation of subservient fishermen, who were tied to their host for life. The position of host moreover became a hereditary office.⁷⁹

Did hosts resembling those in Flanders also operate in the late 14th- and early 15th-century fishing villages on Holland's North Sea coast? The purchases of codfish made in Scheveningen in the year 1345 in preparation for the campaign against the Frisians do not show any signs of it. On this occasion Jan van Diest, the count's purveyor, purchased cod in small portions, usually a few dozen to a few hundred at a time, from a large number of men. The accounts of Van Diest's activities moreover show that part of the fish was bought directly from the *boekers*, the shipmasters of a type of boat used in coastal fishing. But then, wartime provisioning may have been a special case; even though in Holland there is nothing to indicate a system of arbitrary exactions like the 13th-century English purveyances, regular market practices may temporarily have been pushed aside.⁸⁰

The situation in Callantsoog throws a little more light on what these regular practices were. For one, as we saw earlier, the fishermen of Callantsoog were not obliged to sell their fish at the local market. More detailed information can be gleaned from a set of mid 15th-century customs. They stipulate that if someone wanted to buy fish at the beach auction or in the village and he could not pay in cash, the shipmaster had the right to sell his fish to somebody else.⁸¹ Auctioneers are not mentioned; the financial arrangements suggest direct contacts between buyer and seller and do not leave room for an auctioneer in the role of moneylender or intermediary.

All indications point to the same conclusion: in Holland the position of villages and villagers in the fish trade was stronger, and that of towns and urban merchants weaker than in Flanders. The inland fish trade was not or only very partially channelled through urban (staple) markets. Fishing villages had direct links to interregional trade networks; moreover besides urban merchants, local merchants from the villages participated in the inland fish trade. Finally beach markets were not completely dominated by urban capital and urban merchants; the fishermen themselves remained at least partly in control.

⁷⁸ Doehaerd, 'Génèse d'une entreprise maritime', 15, 17-18, 19.

⁷⁹ Hocquet, 'Pêcheurs, hôtes et seigneurs', 104.

⁸⁰ For the purchases in Scheveningen in 1345: Hamaker, ed., *Rekeningen grafelijkeid* II, 168-172; Van der Spiegel, 'Kabeljauwverkoopers in Scheveningen'. For a description of the organisation of wartime provisioning in late 14th-century Holland: Janse, *Grenzen aan de macht*, 299-308. For the English purveyances: Maddicott, 'English peasantry', 299-318; Masschaele, *Peasants, merchants, and markets*, 36-41, 220-224.

⁸¹ Schoorl, *'t Oge*, 173.

The suggestion of a strong position of the fishing communities receives support from the fact that some of them acquired exemption from the count's river tolls. From at least the early 11th century onwards the counts of Holland had been levying tolls in the delta of the rivers Rhine and Meuse in order to profit from the growing river trade. Gradually a system of toll posts had developed that effectively controlled all main waterways. It was virtually impossible to enter or leave the delta by ship without passing a toll post. This meant that toll exemptions were of vital importance for everybody who was engaged in interregional trade. Although until at least the late 14th century the revenues from the river tolls were an important source of income to the count, by the middle of the 14th century almost all towns in Holland had negotiated toll exemptions. As a consequence the brunt of the tax burden fell on foreign merchants, who usually had to pay toll upon entering Holland and upon leaving it, and on those villages that were engaged in interregional trade.⁸²

Some villages, however, acquired toll exemptions as well as the towns. The villages of Akersloot, Uitgeest and Wormer had secured this privilege at an early stage, as a reward for supporting count Floris V in his wars against the West-Frisians.⁸³ By the early 15th century two of the fishing villages at the North Sea coast had also managed to get hold of toll exemptions: Scheveningen (in 1387) and Katwijk (in 1401).⁸⁴

The importance of toll exemption for the fish trade can be demonstrated by two examples. The first regards the fish merchants of the town of The Hague. They had acquired exemption as early as 1339, a fact that not only reflects their role in the inland fish trade, but no doubt also reinforced that role.⁸⁵ The second example relates to the early 16th-century discussions around the toll privileges of Callantsoog mentioned above. Whether the attempts of the fish merchants of Callantsoog to ensure toll exemption in Holland and Zeeland were successful is not clear.⁸⁶

That fishing communities were quite capable of defending their interests can also be deduced from the peculiar sequence of events around the location of the Katwijk fish market at the end of the 14th and the beginning of the 15th century. In 1388 the fishermen of Katwijk requested that the fish market be moved from Katwijk aan de Rijn, situated a few kilometres inland, to Katwijk aan Zee, the actual fishing village directly at the coast. They claimed it was too troublesome and too costly for them to transfer the fish from their ships onto carts and take those

⁸² Smit, ed., *Rekeningen Hollandse tollén*, X-XIV; XLV.; Verkerk, 'Tollén en waterwegen', 99-107.

⁸³ Akersloot and Uitgeest: OHZ III, nr. 1764. Uitgeest: Ibid. IV, nr. 1926.

⁸⁴ Niermeyer, ed., *Bronnen Beneden-Maasgebied*, nr. 609; Van Mieris, ed., *Groot charterboek* III, 741.

⁸⁵ Niermeyer, ed., *Bronnen Beneden-Maasgebied*, nr. 314.

⁸⁶ Schoorl, *'t Oge*, 189-191.

to Katwijk aan de Rijn. The count assented to their request, but explicitly stipulated that Katwijk's lord, Van Wassenauer, was to lose none of his rights as a result of the move.⁸⁷

In the next 25 years the fish market was moved back and forth between Katwijk aan de Rijn and Katwijk aan Zee four more times. Each move was motivated primarily by protests and complaints of the communities of Katwijk aan Zee and Katwijk aan de Rijn respectively, with the lord of Wassenauer usually being on the side of Katwijk aan de Rijn: he must have felt having the fish market closer by gave him more control of what was going on there. The Katwijk fishermen probably grew frustrated, because in 1408 it was actually thought necessary to forbid them to move elsewhere with their families. Finally, in 1413 the fishermen in Katwijk aan Zee obtained what they wanted: the market was established permanently at the coast. No doubt the payment of 20 gold *nobels* to the treasury had eased the decision.⁸⁸ Once more, the Katwijk fishermen had turned out to be quite capable of promoting their commercial interests.

The claims of the coastal villages to a strong bargaining position can partly be explained by their very considerable contribution to the fish industry and the fish trade, and by their importance for wartime provisioning. But the most important reason seems to be rooted in the structure of the society of medieval Holland: the lack of seignorial and urban domination. Even in Katwijk, where lordly control was exceptionally strong, the lord in the end was unable to withstand community pressure when it came to the location of the market.

To sum up, although late medieval Holland witnessed the rise of large-scale urban herring industry and herring trade, coastal fishing did not decline. In part this can be attributed to the new opportunities that were created by urbanisation and rising standards of living, resulting in a growing demand for fresh fish and fish species other than the traditional herring. Changes in demand stimulating regional specialisation and interregional trade can also be demonstrated for other commodities. Charles Cornelisse has, for instance, shown that at the end of the Middle Ages peat exports from Holland to the southern Low Countries increased significantly. As Cornelisse notes, this was a stimulus to the Holland rural economy.⁸⁹ Still, it is not self-evident that villagers were able to profit from newly arising commercial opportunities. It was the institutional framework that developed under the influence of a balance of powers between the count, village lords, merchants and rural communities that allowed them to take full advantage. The prolonged success of the coastal fish markets and especially their pivotal role in the interregional fish trade suggests that in the long run this firm institutional foundation paid off.

⁸⁷ Van Mieris, ed., *Groot charterboek* III, 498-499.

⁸⁸ Van Gent and Janse, 'Van ridders tot baronnen', 42; the payment is mentioned in the account of the count's treasurer over 1413/14, NA AGH inv nr. 1267 f 13 (with thanks to Ronald van der Spiegel for pointing this out to me).

⁸⁹ Cornelisse, *Energie markten*, 229-234, 286.

4.3 Rural weigh houses and the dairy trade⁹⁰

In the year 1597 the Estates of Holland, then the leading province in the Dutch Republic, issued a proclamation on weighing in the countryside.⁹¹ The proclamation was meant to concentrate weighing connected to wholesale trade at official urban weigh houses. Village communities were no longer allowed to install new scales without explicit permission of the Estates. The exploitation of existing weigh houses in the countryside could be continued, but only if there was proof they had been in operation before the 1570s, or if they had been installed by formal privilege.

The proclamation included the results of an investigation conducted to find out if this was the case: villages had been requested to produce evidence of either the respectable age or the legal basis of their weigh house. The document mentions about sixty villages possessing weigh houses. With the exception of the region around Dordrecht, they were found in almost every part of the country. The locations are indicated in figure 4.2.

Under the circumstances it was to be expected that in many villages the people testified their weigh house dated back to ‘times immemorial’. More surprising is the fact that in several cases this actually turns out to be true. In the part of Holland north of the IJ, although not in the central and southern part of the county, the origins of a number of rural scales can indeed be retraced to the late 14th or early 15th century. A systematic check of the Gousset index (an 18th-century index of all the rights and privileges granted by the counts of Holland in the pre-Burgundian era) for all the villages listed in the 1597 resolution, provided references to seven village scales in the north of Holland, all dating from the years 1390 to 1425.⁹² A survey of the accounts of the count’s stewards in Waterland and Zeevang and in Kennemerland and West-Friesland in the same period rendered information on four or five more weigh houses.⁹³ Table 4.2 and figure 4.3 summarise the results.

⁹⁰ In Dutch the word ‘*waag*’, commonly used in the sources, can mean ‘scales’ or ‘weigh house’. Here both have been used, as interchangeable terms, although in reality village scales were probably rather simple affairs, set up in an existing building that was also used for other purposes or even in the open air.

⁹¹ *Register van Hollandt en Westvrieslandt*, 76-81.

⁹² NA LLRK, inv. nrs. 203-232. The index, composed by Martinus Gousset, a clerk at the Leenkamer, lists summaries of all feudal rights Gousset was able to retrace in the archives of the counts of Holland, the counts of Blois, the lords of Voorne and some other noble families with extensive possessions, grouped by town or village, in chronological order. The Gousset index is probably not complete. Besides the usual flaws in the original recording of privileges and in the preservation of records, there is also Gousset’s selection of the records included in the index to consider, and the possible mistakes he made in the compilation of the summaries. Still, within these limits the index provides the most comprehensive overview of its kind. For more information on Gousset and the compilation of the index: Van Riemsdijk, *Tresorie en kanselarij*, 703-704.

⁹³ For Waterland and Zeevang accounts are available for the years 1351 to 1369 and for the year 1375: they were all consulted (NA AGH, inv. nrs. 1662-1679). For Kennemerland and West-Friesland accounts are available for the years 1344 to 1428, with some gaps. All accounts between 1382 and 1405 were consulted, and after that the accounts for every fifth year (NA AGH, inv. nr. 1566-1577, 1583, 1588, 1593, 1599).

Figure 4.2 Villages mentioned in the proclamation of 1597 as possessing a weigh house.



Source: *Register van Hollant en Westvrieslandt van den jaare 1597*, 76-81.

Not all scales continued to function until 1597. The 1450 accounts for Waterland for instance report that the weigh houses in Akswijk and Broek had declined; but a new weigh house had emerged in 'Udormgerdam' (present-day Durgerdam?).⁹⁴ There are other indications that new rural weigh houses continued to be established in the north of Holland throughout the 15th century. In 1441 the village of Assendelft apparently had scales: in that year the lord of Assendelft set the tariff for weighing.⁹⁵ In 1466 the villages of Sloten and Osdorp, just south of the IJ but still in Kennemerland, were granted a weigh house.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ NA GRRek 2904 f 4-4v.

⁹⁵ *Handvesten Assendelft*, 35.

⁹⁶ *Generale privilegien Kennemer-landt*, 176-177.

Table 4.2 Rural weigh houses in the north of Holland around 1400

Village ⁹⁷	Year of first reference
Waterland en Zeevang:	
Akswijk (Havixwijk)	1375
Purmerend	1368
Broek in Waterland }	1368
Waterland }	1359/60
Uitdam ⁹⁸ }	1375
Kennemerland:	
Graft	1392
Oostzaan	1417 or before
Westzaan	1421
Wormer	1384/85
West-Friesland:	
Grootebroek	1424
Niedorp	1391
Schellinkhout	1402

Sources: see appendix B

In the central and southern part of Holland rural weighing facilities probably did not emerge until later. The only reference to village scales predating the 16th century in this region comes from Valkenburg: a weighing facility in this village is mentioned among the possessions of the *burggraaf* of Leiden in 1360.⁹⁹ The Valkenburg scales were probably linked to the well-known fair in this village, as were the other rights of the *burggraaf* in Valkenburg (the market tolls, the measures for cloth and butter, and the rights to the exploitation of various facilities for games and gambling). Apparently the scales were not available throughout the year: in 1597 the villagers reported there was no public weighing facility in Valkenburg. Neither do the Gousset index or the accounts of the count suggest a 14th or early 15th-century origin for any of the other late 16th-century rural weigh houses in the central or southern part of Holland.

⁹⁷ Including settlements with formal urban status (sometimes not until later), but with a decidedly rural character at the end of the 14th and early 15th century: Purmerend, Grootebroek, Niedorp and Schellinkhout.

⁹⁸ The accounts mention a weigh house 'in Waterland' between 1359/60 and 1367, a weigh house in Udam in 1368, 1369 and 1375, and a weigh house in Broek in 1375. Most likely either the weigh house in Udam or the one in Broek –which of the two is not clear– was the same as the earlier weigh house 'in Waterland'. Boschma-Aarnoudse believes that there is a mistake in the accounts: she thinks the weigh house of 'Udam' is actually the urban weigh house in Edam. I find this hard to believe, especially since other revenues from Edam were recorded correctly. Unless more conclusive evidence comes up, I am inclined to believe 'Udam' is Uitdam and not Edam. (Boschma-Aarnoudse, *Tot verbeteringe*, 122-123.)

⁹⁹ Hoek, 'Hof te Vlaardingen', 85.

Figure 4.3 Rural weigh houses in the north of Holland around 1400



Sources: see appendix B.

The weigh houses in the north were clearly established with the dairy trade in mind. The entry in the comital registers allowing Niedorp in West-Friesland to install scales in 1391 for instance states that villagers were to have their butter and cheese weighed at the scales and that this was also where these products should be sold.¹⁰⁰ Similarly, when in 1392 the count allowed a man called Voppe Berwoutsz. to install and exploit a weigh house in Graft in Kennemerland, he ordered that all butter and cheese produced in the village was to be weighed and sold at this weigh house.¹⁰¹

There can be little doubt that the development of rural weighing facilities in late 14th- and early 15th-century Holland was related to the rise of the dairy trade around this same time. But just as the exact nature of the link between fish markets and fish trade was not easy to establish, the chain of cause and effect is all but clear. Were village scales simply an institutional response to the economic needs of the dairy trade or were they a driving force behind this trade, themselves originating from other factors? The fact that village scales concentrated in the north of Holland adds poignancy to the question. It is true that here towns were

¹⁰⁰ NA AGH, inv. nr. 228 f 6v.

¹⁰¹ NA AGH, inv. nr. 198 f 46.

fewer and wider apart than in other parts of the country. On the other hand many weigh houses were not situated in the most isolated and least urbanised parts of the north, but in Waterland, Zeevang and the south-east of Kennemerland: regions with several small towns, located moreover within relatively easy reach of Amsterdam, on the other side of the IJ (see figure 4.3). A better understanding of the mechanisms underpinning these patterns requires, first of all, a clarification of the position of the weigh houses in the dairy trade.

Rural weigh houses and the rise of dairy production and dairy trade

As has been shown in chapter 2, dairy production developed strongly in late medieval Holland under the influence of both ecological changes -the subsiding of the peat soil reduced possibilities for arable farming- and an increasing demand for dairy products at home and abroad. Even in the late 14th century dairy was being exported to the German lands and to the southern Low Countries. Exports grew rapidly, as is shown by the *Kamper Pondtolregister*. In Kampen, at the mouth of the river IJssel, a toll was levied between 1439 and 1441 on all ships coming from Holland. The toll was collected by an Amsterdam functionary, to be handed over to the towns of Kampen and Deventer afterwards. It was intended as compensation for the damages inflicted on merchants from these towns by Holland pirates in the war between Holland and the German Hansa towns, which had just ended. The register shows large shipments of cheese and butter from the north of Holland, to be sold in Deventer to merchants from the Rhineland or other parts of Germany.¹⁰²

The Kampen toll register gives fairly detailed information about the origin of these shipments. Notably, a considerable part of the dairy from Kennemerland, West-Friesland and Waterland seems to have bypassed the urban markets in these districts. As table 4.3 demonstrates, a quarter to one third came straight from the rural production areas to the IJssel region. The situation resembles the direct lines between production centres and foreign markets we already saw in the sea fish trade.

The impression that many northern villages had direct trade relations with the IJssel region receives support from events in 1463, when a conflict that originated in disagreements about the size of butter tons erupted in political enmities. Duke Philip of Burgundy prohibited his subjects to visit the Deventer fairs; the prohibition was proclaimed not just in Holland's main towns but also in a large number of villages in the north.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Smit, 'Kamper pondtolregister'; Cf. Sneller, *Deventer*, 56-63 (trade from Holland to Deventer) and 94 ff. (trade between Deventer and the German lands).

¹⁰³ Sneller, *Deventer*, 76-77. The villages where the prohibition was proclaimed were Purmerend, Schagen (both were by this time rapidly growing into small towns), Oosthuizen, Grootebroek, Winkel, Akersloot, Uitgeest, Krommenie, Assendelft, Westzaan, Zaandam and Oostzaan.

Table 4.3 Dairy shipped to the IJssel towns by ships from Waterland and Zeevang, Kennemerland and West-Friesland, 1439-1441

Place of origin ¹⁰⁴	Butter	Cheese	
	number of butter tons	Weight indicated: in <i>schippond</i> ¹⁰⁵	weight not indicated: number of cheeses
<i>Towns:</i>			
Edam	211	139	82,200 small cheeses
Monnickendam	230	289	2,000 small cheeses
Hoorn	1,928	1,390	3,000 small cheeses
Enkhuizen	490	260	
Medemblik	566	325	150 small cheeses
Haarlem	405	958	25 small cheeses
Alkmaar	406	337	6 baskets with cheese
Beverwijk	39	72	
<i>Total from towns:</i>	<i>4,273 (75%)</i>	<i>3,769 (67%)</i>	<i>87,375+ small cheeses</i>
<i>Villages:</i>			
Purmerend	444	546	5 cheeses and 5,400 small cheeses
Bumma	545	607	
Westzaan	318	450	100 cheeses
Akersloot	77	117	
Texel	3	73	2,100 cheeses and 4,500 small cheeses
Other villages	20	24	
<i>Total from villages:</i>	<i>1,407 (25%)</i>	<i>1,815 (33%)</i>	<i>2,205 cheeses and 9,900 small cheeses</i>
Total from towns and villages	<i>5,680 (100%)</i>	<i>5,584 (100%)</i>	<i>2,205 cheeses and 97,275+ small cheeses</i>
Other parts of Holland			
<i>Amsterdam</i> ¹⁰⁶	432	661	191 cheeses
Naarden, Muiden, Weesp	375	285	400 cheeses
Leiden	52	12	
Other/unknown	198	217	100 cheeses
Total for Holland	<i>6,736</i>	<i>6,795</i>	<i>2,896 cheeses and 97,275+ small cheeses</i>

Source: Smit, 'Kamper pondtolregister'.

¹⁰⁴ The toll officials registered the location the ship had set out from; probably this was often -but not always- also the home town of the merchant or captain (Smit, 'Kamper pondtolregister', 211).

¹⁰⁵ A *schippond* was the equivalent of 300 pounds.

¹⁰⁶ The figures for Amsterdam have been copied from Smit, *Opkomst*, 313; these figures are also based on the Kamper Pondtolregister.

One of these villages, Akersloot, had a fair where in the late 14th century dairy was sold: in the year 1390/91 cheese and butter bought at this fair was transported south via the toll of Spaarndam, near Haarlem.¹⁰⁷ The data from the Kampen toll register show that Akersloot had a role in the dairy trade at other times of the year as well: butter and cheese from Akersloot arrived in Kampen throughout the season. But Akersloot was by no means the most important rural export centre: much larger quantities of dairy came from two villages that had weigh houses in the late 14th and early 15th century (Purmerend and Westzaan) and from a third village or district called Bumma,¹⁰⁸ also situated in the region where the concentration of village scales was highest. This suggests that in the middle of the 15th century village scales in the north of Holland provided elementary links in the interregional dairy trade to the IJssel region.

Transaction costs theory helps to explain why. For two reasons rural weigh houses must have provided Holland's many small-scale dairy farmers with an attractive alternative to selling at the farmhouse gate on the one hand, and making frequent trips to one of the urban markets on the other. Firstly, an accurate and reliable assessment of weights obviously helps to reduce information costs for buyers and sellers alike. That Holland's village scales thus contributed to a lowering of transactions costs in the interregional dairy trade is confirmed by the fact that the Kampen toll register records a large part of the cheese coming from Holland, including the cheese coming directly from the countryside, in units of weight. Apparently notes or tokens issued by rural weigh houses in Holland were accepted by the toll collector in Kampen. Admittedly these advantages were provided by urban weigh houses as well as by rural ones, but for farmers who did not live in the vicinity of a town, the presence of a reliable weighing facility near home implied that the reduction in transaction costs was not offset by high transport costs. There was a price to be paid: weighing did not come for free. But although the tariffs of the rural weigh houses are unknown, judging from the very moderate revenues in the comital accounts they cannot have been high.¹⁰⁹ There are no indications of any kind of quality control taking place at the rural weigh houses; that may seem surprising, but on the other hand it is in keeping with the character of these low-profile facilities.

Secondly, a dense network of weigh houses reduced search costs. Farmers could be fairly sure to meet suitable buyers at the weigh houses: merchants and traders who came to butter and cheese for resale at nearby or more urban distant markets. In this respect the function of these weigh houses for the dairy trade is not unlike the role attributed by Masschaele to rural markets in England with regard to the country's primary export product wool. Masschaele argues, firstly,

¹⁰⁷ De Boer, *Graaf en grafiek*, 364-374, esp. 365.

¹⁰⁸ According to Smit, 'Bumma' or 'De Bom' is a polder in Waterland ('Kamper pondtolregister', 211). I have not been able to retrace its exact location: possibly the edge of the Beemster lake (with thanks to Jaap Haag at the Waterlands Archief for the suggestion) or the region around the Burkmeer, a small lake south of Broek.

¹⁰⁹ The weigh house in Waterland for instance rendered between 2 and 4 £ per year in the 1360s (NA AGH inv. nr. 1670 f18 to inv. nr. 1676 f11); the weigh house in Wormer rendered between 1 and 2 £ per year in the last two decades of the 14th century (NA AGH inv. nr. 1568 f18v to inv. nr. 1572 f10v).

that peasants, or rather the well-to-do top tier of the peasantry, supplied the greater part of agricultural produce for the market, including more than half of England's most important export product wool, and secondly that it was exactly this group of peasants that needed rural trade venues to sell their produce. Large ecclesiastical institutions or lay landlords did not: if they wanted to sell wool for export they had opportunities to negotiate private contracts with merchants engaged in international trade. Peasants, however, were dependent on England's network of markets to pool small individual surpluses in an efficient way.¹¹⁰

From this theoretical perspective it can be argued that rural weigh houses simply emerged in answer to the economic needs of small-scale dairy production. This is also suggested by the fact that in Flanders and England, where dairy production was organised differently, village weighing facilities did not exist. On the small and very small farms that dominated inland Flanders, dairy was a by-product of the cattle that was held for its manure and for the meat it provided to the peasant and his family.¹¹¹ In the fertile lowland coastal region, however, farms that specialised in cattle and dairy farming had emerged as early as the 12th century, growing in numbers afterwards.¹¹² The *polders* of the castellany of Veurne in particular stand out as a dairying region. In this part of Flanders farms were usually large and leasehold was common. In the 16th century many of these leasehold farms specialised in the production of butter and cheese.¹¹³ The wholesale dairy trade seems to have concentrated in the two main towns of the district, Veurne and Diksmuide. These towns both had weekly dairy markets and annual fairs that attracted many wholesale dairy merchants.¹¹⁴ The comital accounts of the late 14th and early 15th centuries report revenues from a few weigh houses in small towns –the weigh house in Veurne is one of them– but not from rural facilities. Although exploitation of rural scales by some local lords cannot be ruled out without more detailed research, until now no evidence has come up to support this possibility.¹¹⁵

In England too dairying was usually a by-product in a system of mixed farming. However, in the 13th and early 14th century several demesnes did engage in large-scale dairy production. They were mainly located in the more commercialised and densely populated parts of the country: the London region and East Anglia, especially eastern and central Norfolk. It is estimated that these dairying demesnes sold on average half of their dairy produce.¹¹⁶ Just as in the wool trade this was mostly done by private contract.

Both in coastal Flanders and in England the scale of dairy producing farms may have precluded the need for small-scale rural weighing facilities. Still,

¹¹⁰ Masschaele, *Peasants, merchants, and markets*, 53-54; for private contracting also Power, *Wool trade*, 42-44.

¹¹¹ Thoen, *Landbouweconomie*, 792.

¹¹² Verhulst, *Landschap en landbouw*, 91.

¹¹³ Vandewalle, *Geschiedenis van de landbouw*, 95-99, 218-219.

¹¹⁴ Hoornaert, 'Boter en kaas', chapter 7 A section 4b.

¹¹⁵ Soens, *Rentmeesters*, 249, 312, 325.

¹¹⁶ Campbell, *English seigniorial agriculture*, 143-150. For an example of an estate that produced a significant amount of butter and cheese: Biddick, *The other economy*, 91-99.

explaining the absence of rural weighing facilities in Flanders and England from property structures alone is not satisfactory; in both cases the social and political context should be taken into account as well. For Flanders it is not clear if urban concentration of the dairy trade as it developed in the Veurne district was enforced by non-economic means, but the tendency to restrict wholesale trade to the urban market is certainly in keeping with general practice in Flanders. This at least suggests that a tradition of urban dominance supported by social and political relations may have played a part.

In England the increase of labour costs after 1350 induced many lords to lease out their dairy herds to their tenants, who did not have access to the same marketing channels and might have benefited from facilities like those in Holland. But then, in England weighing was organised in a different way altogether. In London and other major ports weighing beams were installed by the Crown and operated by royal officials; in the rest of the country scales and weights were usually the property of private merchants, although both royal officials and local authorities checked if the weights that were used accorded with the national standards.¹¹⁷ Much of the rural dairy trade was conducted via middlemen and itinerant cheese mongers who purchased cheese and butter at the farm house for retailing at a nearby fair or market.¹¹⁸ In 18th-century England this was considered to be a practice that went against the interests of the dairy farmers; they preferred to sell their cheese at one of the specialised dairy fairs of that age.¹¹⁹ Perhaps similar fairs already existed in the Middle Ages; rural weigh houses, however, did not.¹²⁰

This brief comparison suggests that Holland's weigh houses had roots that went beyond a mere response to the economic needs of small dairy farmers. It is to these roots that we now turn.

Towns and rural weigh houses: trade networks or competition

There are no indications whatsoever that in late 14th-century Holland towns undertook coordinated political attempts to curtail the activities of village scales, as they were to do two centuries later. Indeed, there is very little to suggest that they objected to the presence of the rural weigh houses at all. Part of the explanation is probably that dairy products did not belong to the categories of essential food stuffs in short supply, or raw materials vital to the urban industries, which never failed to arouse urban interest. A second reason could be that possibilities to compel the people in the district to visit the urban market, or, in this case, the urban weigh house, were limited anyway. Under normal circumstances urban authorities could do little more than enforce the use of the

¹¹⁷ Zupko, *British weights and measures*, 34-70, esp. 42-45, 63-64. A more detailed discussion of differences between the English and the continental systems for weighing (and measuring) follows in chapter 6.

¹¹⁸ Farmer, 'Marketing', 401-403.

¹¹⁹ Mitchell, 'Changing role of fairs', 557-558.

¹²⁰ Personal communication by prof. Christopher Dyer.

town's weigh house (and the payment that went along with it) for transactions taking place within the boundaries of the freedom.¹²¹

To be sure, this did to some extent put village weigh houses at a disadvantage: a farmer taking his dairy to town to sell it, would choose to have it weighed just once, in town, and not bother with the village scales. Village authorities and lessees of rural weigh houses were clearly aware of the danger: they tried to counter it by imposing an obligation on villagers to use the local weigh house. In early 15th-century Grootebroek, for example, it was not allowed to take butter or cheese to the nearby town of Enkhuizen unless the products had first been weighed at the village scales. The customs actually added that weighing in Enkhuizen was prohibited, which must have placed Grootebroek dairy farmers who wished to sell their products in Enkhuizen in dire straits: they were either to disobey the rules of their own village or those of the Enkhuizen authorities.¹²² In other villages the imposition for weighing had to be paid even if no use was made of the weighing facilities, as in Schellinkhout.¹²³ Regulations like this are not found in the late 14th and early 15th-century by-laws of Hoorn, Enkhuizen, Haarlem or Amsterdam, although in Amsterdam they do show up about a century later.¹²⁴ This once more suggests that around 1400 towns did not feel much threatened by the presence of rural weigh houses; if anything it was the other way around.

There is a third explanation for the fact that towns did little to oppose the rise of rural weigh houses. Even if urban consumers and town authorities would have preferred a monopoly on the dairy trade, the presence of rural weigh houses offered important advantages to a specific group in urban society: merchants. To be sure, most likely some of the traders who frequented the countryside weigh houses to buy cheese and butter were shipmasters of local origin. In the Kampen toll register, for each of the four villages shipping large quantities of dairy to the IJssel region a few names keep coming up. In the course of the almost two years covered by the register, Jan Auwels, Lourens Gerijtsz. and Jan Jacobsz. made the trip from Purmerend to Kampen seven times or more; they were never recorded bringing dairy from any of the other three villages. The same is true for Symon Claesz. from Bumma, Hasse Claesz. and Florijs Remboltsz. from Akersloot and Ysebrant Barentz. from Westzaan. From each of the villages a much larger number of shipmasters made the trip less often, but here too local connections are strong: they invariably came from the same village each time they sailed.¹²⁵ Probably many of these men were not full time traders and shipmasters: they may

¹²¹ E.g. in Leiden in 1406: Hamaker, ed., *Middeleeuwse keurboeken Leiden*, 52-53. Other towns probably had similar rules, although in most cases we do not find them in the by-laws until later, e.g. in Amsterdam around 1500: Breen, *Rechtsbronnen Amsterdam*, 314.

¹²² Pols, ed., *Westfriesche stadrechten* II, 275.

¹²³ Ibid. II, 287. Cf. the privilege granted by Jacoba of Bavaria to the people of Kennemerland in 1426 freeing them from this evidently resented kind of taxation-in-disguise: Van Mieris, ed., *Groot charterboek* IV, 837-839.

¹²⁴ Breen, *Rechtsbronnen Amsterdam*, 467. In the early 15th century the Amsterdam authorities did prohibit the use of the urban butter measure outside the town (Ibid., 21).

¹²⁵ There is only one exception: a Jan Claesz. is recorded coming from Purmerend and from Bumma, but this may well regard two men with the same, very common name.

well have been fishermen, or perhaps they combined dairy farming with some trading activities.

However, not all dairy traders frequenting the rural weigh houses were locals: others came from one of the towns in the region. The Kampen toll register only once refers to an Amsterdam merchant arriving in Kampen with dairy from Westzaan,¹²⁶ but we know that in the course of the 15th century the influence of Amsterdam merchant capital was increasingly felt in Waterland. Towards the end of the century Amsterdam ship owners recruited sailors in the Waterland villages and Amsterdam drapers had wool for the town's textile industry spun there.¹²⁷

Economic relations between Amsterdam and Waterland probably go back to at least the middle of the 14th century. In 1351 the count of Holland intervened in a conflict between lord Persijn of Waterland and the burgesses of Amsterdam. The Amsterdammers received guarantees they could freely come and go to Waterland with their goods.¹²⁸ The document that records these guarantees does not literally say so, but as by this time Amsterdam merchants regularly sailed to Deventer and other IJssel towns with dairy products,¹²⁹ it seems safe to assume one of the reasons traders from Amsterdam came to Waterland was to buy cheese and butter from the local farmers.¹³⁰

Forays of urban traders into the countryside to buy agricultural products were common in England as well. Considering the competition from other towns and from rural merchants, an active quest for markets was necessary to guarantee a regular supply of victuals and raw materials for the urban industry. The merchants who engaged in it were certainly not all petty traders buying up small surpluses at individual farmhouses. Rather, they concentrated on the larger rural markets in the region: these had a wider range of supplies and better facilities to offer.¹³¹

The rural weigh houses in Waterland and Kennemerland fulfilled much the same role for the merchants of Amsterdam who wanted to buy dairy in the countryside. Although evidence is lacking, merchants from Monnickendam and Edam probably acted in a similar way. Competition from Amsterdam and from the Waterland traders must have forced them to buy dairy in the countryside as well, and where better to do it than at a weigh house? The suggestion that the weigh houses suited the needs of urban merchants is supported by the geographical location of the village scales: many of them were situated within easy reach of Amsterdam or one of the smaller towns.

It can be concluded that the attitude of towns in the late 14th century was very different from their policies two centuries later, when they were pressing for

¹²⁶ Dirc Claesz. van Aemsterdamme: Smit, 'Kamper pondtolregister', 220.

¹²⁷ Jansma, 'Economisch overzicht', 43-44; Jansma, 'Scheepvaartpolitiek', 11-14.

¹²⁸ Van der Laan, ed., *Oorkondenboek van Amsterdam*, nr. 98.

¹²⁹ Boekel, *Zuivelexport*, 26; Kaptein, 'Poort van Holland', 115.

¹³⁰ Cf. Boschma-Aarnoudse, *Tot verbeteringe*, 124, who concludes that in the middle of the 15th century part of the dairy trade from Waterland was probably channelled via Amsterdam.

¹³¹ Masschaele, *Peasants, merchants, and markets*, 129-131, 136-144; Cf. Hilton, 'Medieval market towns and simple commodity production', 10.

prohibitions of rural weighing. In chapter 3 we saw that around the end of the 15th century towns started to introduce new restrictions on retailing by non-burgesses. Successful urban resistance to rural trade also dates from the end of the Middle Ages; in fact it was mainly a 16th-century phenomenon. In the 15th century towns did increasingly manage to establish 'ban miles' around their walls: zones where their authority was recognised and activities considered an urban prerogative were banned. Haarlem is a good example. The town made use of the fact that in the late 14th century duke Albrecht had allowed the town to extend the limits of its freedom to a radius of 100 *roeden* (400 metres) outside the walls for defensive purposes: in this area new buildings were not allowed.¹³² In 1409 the urban authorities translated the privilege into a prohibition to live in this zone, to engage in any industrial activities here (an exception was made for shipbuilding, one of Haarlem's main industries), or to buy or sell 'bread, beer, metalwork, wood, butter, cheese or any other product' there.¹³³ Two years later duke Willem VI allowed Haarlem to levy excises within a radius of 300 *roeden* (some 1200 metres) from the walls, in order to enable the town to finance a loan it had promised him.¹³⁴ Most likely this was directed against the alehouses in the vicinity of the town: their duty-free pricing drew large numbers of clients. The authorities lost no time in extending the zone in which industry was not allowed as well.¹³⁵

'Beer miles', zones where taverns were banned or alternatively subjected to urban excises, were common around other towns as well.¹³⁶ The same is probably true for attempts to extend restrictions to other products and activities. But these ban miles usually covered a very limited area: a radius of 300 *roeden*, as in Haarlem, was common. There were attempts to go further. In 1471 the Amsterdam authorities for instance prohibited ships that were partly owned by Amsterdammers and returned from the Baltic region to unload in one of the villages in nearby Waterland; they were expected to come to the Amsterdam harbour instead. In order to effectuate this rule, burgesses were not allowed to operate as co-owners of ships unless the other owners had promised beforehand to bring back their cargo to Amsterdam.¹³⁷ Perhaps the complicated nature of this arrangement reveals better than anything else the limitations of urban extraterritorial authority.

There is in fact only one exception, one 15th-century town that went much further in repressing rural trade: Dordrecht. In many respects the attitude of Dordrecht towards rural trade resembled that of the Flemish towns described in chapter 3, with one major difference: whereas in Flanders urban control over rural trade was at its height in the middle of the 14th century, in Dordrecht it did not fully develop until about a century later. Dordrecht started out in 1422 with a

¹³² *Handvesten Haerlem*, 46.

¹³³ Huizinga, ed., *Rechtsbronnen Haarlem*, 85-86.

¹³⁴ *Handvesten Haerlem*, 68.

¹³⁵ Huizinga, ed., *Rechtsbronnen Haarlem*, 93.

¹³⁶ Unger, *A history of brewing*, 182-183; Jansma, 'Economisch overwicht', 43.

¹³⁷ Jansma, 'Scheepvaartpolitiek', 6-7.

prohibition to sell fish along the dikes near the town.¹³⁸ In itself that was innocent enough: the regulation was no different from what Leiden was doing. But from 1440 onwards the urban authorities issued a series of proclamations ordering that an increasing number of agricultural products grown or produced in Zuidholland (the rural region around Dordrecht) had to be brought to the urban market; dairy was among these products.¹³⁹ The end result was that by the early 16th century some 25 villages in the region were forced to market all their products in Dordrecht; another 15 or so were only left in peace if they paid the urban excises.¹⁴⁰

There are several reasons why these policies were implemented in Dordrecht and not in other towns. For one, owing to its early rise and its wealth, Dordrecht had gained some extraterritorial privileges the other towns in Holland did not have, for example the right to have debtors in the countryside arrested by the count's bailiff for debts registered at the Dordrecht court.¹⁴¹ Even though these privileges were not as extensive as the administrative control of the Flemish towns over their quarters, the townspeople of Dordrecht did regard the surrounding region of Zuidholland as 'their' district. Extending this concept to rural trade must have seemed only a small step.

Also, like the Flemish cities Dordrecht had a history of trade privileges, most of them not in regional but in international trade: the staple privilege on the river trade had brought the town great prosperity. The staple right was originally confined to grain, wine, wood and salt, but partially extending it to other products was, once again, just a small step. In 1401 for example Dordrecht acquired a privilege prohibiting the sale of beer on the river within two miles of the town.¹⁴² Moreover urban institutions were tuned to the requirements of enforcement. The guards that patrolled the river for trespassers of the staple privilege could keep out an eye for transgressions of the rules on regional trade at the same time. Several 16th-century documents, among them an enquiry initiated by the Habsburg government in 1553 after complaints had been filed by the towns of Rotterdam, Schoonhoven and Gorinchem, testify that this is indeed what happened: villagers on their way to the markets of other towns than Dordrecht were arrested, their goods were taken from them and they were fined.¹⁴³

Thirdly, at the end of the 14th century the Dordrecht guilds had gained access to urban government. Dordrecht was the only town in Holland where they had been able to do so. As a result, commercial policies acquired a more protectionist character.¹⁴⁴ Finally, there was probably also a very pragmatic drive behind Dordrecht's increasingly restrictive policies: the catastrophic flood of November

¹³⁸ Fruin, ed., *Oudste rechten Dordrecht* I, 259.

¹³⁹ Dairy: *Ibid.* I, 282; other products 259, 278-279, 284, 322.

¹⁴⁰ Hoppenbrouwers, 'Town and country in Holland', 66.

¹⁴¹ *OHZ* IV, nr. 2154. For a more detailed discussion of rules on debt litigation see chapter 7.

¹⁴² Van de Wall, ed., *Handvesten Dordrecht* II, 374.

¹⁴³ Noordegraaf, 'Internal Trade', 15-16; Beulink, 'Dordrecht en Schoonhoven', 70, 72, 77-78.

¹⁴⁴ Niermeyer, 'Dordrecht als handelsstad' V, 90-94.

1421, the St. Elizabeth's flood, had wiped away a large part of Dordrecht's hinterland and isolated the city.

Most of the Dordrecht restrictions were not based on privileges granted by the count: the town initiated them without prior authorisation. That caused tensions with the Burgundian rulers, who followed an inconsistent course of sometimes supporting Dordrecht and at other times resisting it, but in 1520 Charles V granted the town the *Groot Octrooi* that legalised its regional trade privileges for a period of ten years. Despite protests of other towns and of the villages in Zuidholland the *Groot Octrooi* was renewed time and again.¹⁴⁵ The fact that Dordrecht was able to carry its schemes through testifies to the continuing influence of its wealthy elite.

In the rest of Holland comparable attempts to restrain commercial activities in the countryside beyond the usual ban mile did not take shape until the early 16th century. The dairy trade in fact provides a good example. In 1516 Habsburg central government, apparently reacting to complaints about farmers who sold casks of butter from their house, prohibited the sale of butter in the countryside and ordered farmers to visit the nearest market town instead.¹⁴⁶ Ordinances against forestalling were also issued in 1544 and in 1556, always with an appeal to dearth.¹⁴⁷

The prohibitions of dairy sales in the countryside are closely related to general developments on rural trade taking place in the early 16th century. In 1515 the towns began pressuring the Habsburg government into banning *buitenmeringen* (rural trades and industries) and sixteen years later, in 1531, Charles V issued an ordinance to this effect. But the towns' victory was far from complete. The *Order op de Buitenmeringen* only prohibited new activities in the countryside; existing trades and industries were left in peace.¹⁴⁸

Moreover, the regime was never watertight, as the following example shows. In 1525 the Estates of Holland discussed the option of allowing farmers in distant or isolated villages somewhat more breathing space: the Estates graciously admitted that especially if villages did not have much that was worth selling anyway, there would perhaps be no need to force them to come to an urban market.¹⁴⁹ In the same year the people of Westzaan, Krommenie and Krommeniedijk, three neighbouring villages in Kennemerland, referred to this discussion when they requested to be allowed to sell their dairy products in their own village to local dairy merchants. The villagers claimed distance, the tide and weather conditions (they had to cross the IJ to visit Haarlem or Amsterdam)

¹⁴⁵ Fruin, ed., *Informacie*, xviii, xxxiii; Brünner, *Order op de buitennering*, 80-81, 192-193; Hoppenbrouwers, 'Town and country in Holland', 66-67.

¹⁴⁶ Noordegraaf, 'Internal Trade', 16; Cau, ed., *Groot Placaet-boeck* II, 2053.

¹⁴⁷ 1544: Andries *et al.*, *Inventaris en beschrijving Noord-Nederlandse processtukken beroepen uit Holland* V, files 460 and 463. 1556: Regionaal Archief Alkmaar, Gemeentebestuur Alkmaar (oud archief 1325-1815), inv. nr. 2877; Noordegraaf, 'Platteland', 13-14.

¹⁴⁸ Brünner, *Order op de buitennering*; for a concise summary see Hoppenbrouwers, 'Town and country in Holland', 64-66.

¹⁴⁹ Boekel, *Zuivelexport*, 15-16; Van der Goes, *Register* I, 15-16.

prevented them from frequenting an urban market on a regular basis. They also stated the dairy merchants were paying them a normal price and had no intention of exporting the dairy: it would all end up in the market of Haarlem or another nearby town anyway. They added that they badly needed the income from the dairy sales to catch up with their payments of taxes and rents.¹⁵⁰ Perhaps that was a convincing argument; in any case the Habsburg government granted the villages what they had asked for.

It is against this background of an increasingly restrictive policy against rural trade that the late 16th-century attempts of the Estates of Holland to prohibit rural weighing should be seen. In fact, the first official prohibition of illegal weighing dates from 1526. In that year Habsburg central government explicitly forbade weighing merchandise in quantities of 25 pounds or more anywhere but in the official weigh houses in Kennemerland, West-Friesland, Amstelland, Waterland and Gooiland. The proclamation stated that weighing facilities set up in private homes not only used incorrect weights, but also cheated the government out of its revenues.¹⁵¹ The ordinance was repeated almost literally in 1541 and in 1563.¹⁵² Although the ordinances recognised the existence of official rural weigh houses as well as urban ones, it is clear that they paved the way for the repressive actions of the Estates in the years to come.

Exactly why urban resistance against rural trade became so much stronger at the end of the Middle Ages is hard to say without more detailed research concentrating on the late 15th and 16th centuries, but the long-term perspective presented above does make it possible to formulate a hypothesis. For a start, it is unlikely that the change of attitude was caused merely by a sudden rise of rural trade venues; as we saw, that process had begun much earlier. In his study of the *Order op de Buitenning*, E. Brünner pointed to the economic problems towns were facing as a result of this economic crisis, followed by several wars in the first decades of the 16th century. The towns tried to alleviate the increasing financial pressure by a combination of protectionist measures and higher taxes, but as trade and industry moved to the countryside to escape taxation, more and more coercion was needed.¹⁵³

Urgent financial needs may well explain why restrictions on rural trade were imposed, but the fact that towns did not relent when at the end of the 16th century the economy revived, suggests that besides acute financial considerations more structural developments played a part. They can be found in a shift in the balance of powers between the towns and central government. The harsh regime of Charles the Bold had reinforced the towns' aspirations for more regional autonomy; when Charles died in 1477 leaving only his daughter Maria to succeed him, they took their chances. In addition the economic crisis made the new

¹⁵⁰ *Besondere privilegien Westzaanden en Crommenie*, 86-89.

¹⁵¹ Enklaar, ed., *Middeleeuwse rechtsbronnen Gooiland*, 262-265.

¹⁵² *Generale privilegien Kennemer-landt*, 58-61; Cau, *Groot Placaet-boeck* II, 2091-2094. The proclamations of 1541 and 1563 also refer to a version of 1529.

¹⁵³ Brünner, *Order op de buitenning*, 72-73, 81-82.

Habsburg rulers Maximilian and Philip more dependent on the support of wealthy and influential towns like Amsterdam.¹⁵⁴ Towns now not only had a motive for trying to restrict economic activities in the countryside, they also had the strength to make their wishes come true.

Rural weigh houses now became the object of urban protest, as 16th-century events show. That despite resistance their number probably grew, testifies to the vitality of village communities, who continued to install scales when they needed them. This brings us to a last element that deserves attention: the role of these rural communities in the rise of village weigh houses. As we shall see, in the north of Holland, where these weigh houses first emerged, this role was of importance.

Rural community organisation

From the 10th or 11th century onward, and possibly even earlier, in many places in Europe rural *communitates* developed: local bodies of free men, with some degree of self-government and with public tasks in jurisdiction, the upkeep of roads and waterways, and the use of common lands and collective rights. These communities challenged the existing feudal order and in the long run their existence drastically changed rural life.¹⁵⁵ The formation of these communities was stimulated by population growth and the need to share resources, intensify agriculture and colonise more land, but on the other hand it was also a reaction against the seignorial regime and in particular the rise of banal lordship: peasants closed ranks in an attempt to resist violation of traditional rights and customs by lords. The process is in many respects comparable to the urban communal movement, the struggle of the towns for self-government that started around the same time. Peasant communities able to attain a bargaining position could negotiate privileges with their lords: acknowledgement of their traditional rights, mitigation of their duties, self-government in some respects. Often, but not always, these privileges were put in writing in a charter of liberties.¹⁵⁶

England diverged from the European pattern. The manorial system, including villeinage, was confirmed and strengthened in the 13th century; charters of liberties as contracts between rural communities and lords were unknown.¹⁵⁷ It is true that the difference should not be exaggerated. Lords sometimes did put existing local customs into writing, and via the tithing system, the frankpledge and the manorial court, peasants were involved in local jurisdiction. Villages sometimes even acted as tenants of a demesne or a fishery.¹⁵⁸ Still, there obviously was a difference and it was closely related to the persistence of villeinage and feudal structures in England.

¹⁵⁴ Tracy, *Holland under Habsburg rule*, 2-3, 31-32.

¹⁵⁵ Hoppenbrouwers, 'Op zoek', 225-226; cf. De Moor, who describes the emergence of corporative collective action, both in towns and in the countryside, as a 'silent revolution' transforming the society of late medieval Europe (De Moor, 'Silent revolution').

¹⁵⁶ Genicot, *Rural communities*, 72-79; Wunder, 'Peasant communities', 24-27.

¹⁵⁷ Britnell, *Commercialisation*, 140-147.

¹⁵⁸ Reynolds, 'Government and communities', 103; Britnell, 'Eastern England', 623.

H. van der Linden linked the development of strong rural communities in Holland to the reclamations of the vast peat marshes in the centre of the country, and indeed peasant communities often emerged in newly cultivated lands.¹⁵⁹ Still, the first time the sources inform us of the existence of something that looks like a rural communal movement, it is in the north of Holland, and in the oldest inhabited part of it at that: Kennemerland. In 1274 and 1275 the Kennemers rebelled; soon they were joined by the Waterlanders and the West-Frisians. The rebels demanded a better organisation of local administration and justice, more self-governing powers, and more equality in the duties of common men and those of high birth. They protested against the growing power of noblemen, who used the lands and rights they had acquired from the count to strengthen their position and in this way undermined the rights of villages and frustrated their attempts to gain more autonomy. The rebellion ended in 1275, when count Floris V granted a charter to the Kennemers. The charter had the character of a peace treaty. Many of the rebels' demands had been met with, such as the installation of courts of aldermen with well-defined judicial and administrative powers in all communities and the restriction of the fiscal privileges of the well-born. Afterwards, the Kennemer charter was granted in slightly changed versions to the people of Waterland and West-Friesland.¹⁶⁰

It is not a coincidence that the process of formation of rural communities found this early and forceful expression in the north of Holland. The reasons can be retraced to the region's early medieval history. In the 11th century the counts of Holland (at the time their entire territory was referred to as 'Frisia') lost much of their control in the north of their lands. Their power base shifted to the south: to the Rhineland region around Leiden and the river delta of Rhine and Meuse. It was this region that in the second half of the 11th century came to be called 'Holland'. With the exception of some domains in the coastal strip of Kennemerland that the counts managed to hold on to, in the region north of the IJ central authority was largely absent, as it was in the linguistically and culturally related Frisian lands east of the Vlie.¹⁶¹

The counts of Holland tried very hard to regain control in the north: they waged war after war in the 12th and 13th centuries. First the remainder of Kennemerland and finally, at the end of the 13th century, Waterland and West-Friesland were conquered. However, the region was never entirely subdued: rebellions and risings were frequent, especially at times when the count's power was at a low.¹⁶²

Despite the legendary 'Frisian freedom', medieval Friesland was not the egalitarian, democratic state it has sometimes been made out to be.¹⁶³ Frisian society knew important inequalities in wealth and social status, based on birth and

¹⁵⁹ Van der Linden, 'Platteland in het noordwesten', esp. 75-78; Wunder, 'Peasant communities', 17-28.

¹⁶⁰ Allan, *Kennemer landrecht*, 11-12, 73-76.

¹⁶¹ Blok, 'Holland und Westfriesland', cf. Burgers, 'Holland omstreeks 1100', who situates the emergence of the name 'Holland' a little earlier than Blok does.

¹⁶² For example in 1274/75, 1347 and 1426: Jansen, 'Holland, Zeeland en het Sticht', 301, 309, 322.

¹⁶³ Breuker and Janse, 'Beelden', 31. The same is true for West-Friesland: De Goede, *Swannotsrecht*, 236-239.

especially on landownership, but in two interrelated respects it did diverge from most of its neighbours. Firstly, Friesland was not feudalised. Frisian noblemen were not vassals, holding lands or rights granted to them by a territorial lord, and banal lordship did not develop.¹⁶⁴ Secondly, Frisian rural communities functioned more or less as autonomous communes. Administrative and jurisdictional authority on the local level was not in the hands of a lord, but rested with the (land-owning) villagers themselves.¹⁶⁵

This was also the situation in 12th and 13th-century West-Friesland and Waterland, and to a lesser extent in Kennemerland as well. The conquest by the count of Holland brought changes. For one, a sheriff now embodied the count's authority at the local level. For another, boards of aldermen were introduced, taking over part of the jurisdictional and administrative duties that had previously been shared by a larger group of villagers.¹⁶⁶ Still, much of the characteristics of rural communalism and a considerable degree of autonomy were preserved. The main administrative body at the local level was the *banne* or *buurschap*. It was dominated by the collectivity of the 'neighbours', that is, those villagers who owned land: participation and influence strongly depended on the extent of one's landed property. They organised the maintenance of dikes and roads and regulated the use of common lands.¹⁶⁷ Elsewhere in Holland, local water management tasks were often brought under the control of separate water boards, but in the north of Holland they remained in the hands of the *buurschap*, which no doubt reinforced the position of this body.¹⁶⁸ Each *banne* had its tri-annual *gading*, the session of the local court of justice where neighbours were required to be present and actively participate.¹⁶⁹ Significantly, the neighbours had considerable influence on the election of the aldermen, even if in some cases it was the count's sheriff who officially appointed them.¹⁷⁰

In Kennemerland, brought under control before West-Friesland or Waterland, the counts managed to introduce more elements of seignorial lordship and a hierarchical power structure. A *baljuw* (bailiff) was appointed to take care of regional administration and high jurisdiction on behalf of the count. Local noblemen were persuaded to accept the count's authority in return for land, banal rights and the privilege to participate in the *baljuwsgericht*, the administrative and jurisdictional court presided over by the bailiff.¹⁷¹

In Waterland similar attempts were successful only in a few locations, resulting in a blotched pattern of 'free' and 'seignorial' villages. In West-Friesland

¹⁶⁴ De Monté Ver Loren, *Hoofdlijnen*, 109-110.

¹⁶⁵ Kottnerus, 'Bauernfreiheit', 387-392.

¹⁶⁶ Koene, Morren, and Schweitzer, *Midden-Kennemerland*, 49-50; Allan, *Kennemer landrecht*, 106.

¹⁶⁷ On the *banne* and its tasks: De Goede, *Swannotsrecht*, 16-22, 272. On the importance of landownership: Ibid., 182-183.

¹⁶⁸ Van de Ven, *Man-made lowlands*, 67, 78. Cf. Hoppenbrouwers, 'Op zoek', 237, who points out that the water boards, although in themselves institutions capable of community building, at the same time eroded the existing 'general' community bodies.

¹⁶⁹ De Goede, *Swannotsrecht*, 346, 357-362; Allan, *Kennemer landrecht*, 137-138.

¹⁷⁰ De Goede, *Swannotsrecht*, 205-209; De Vries, 'On the modernity', 196; Allan, *Kennemer landrecht*, 111-112.

¹⁷¹ De Goede, *Swannotsrecht*, 239-244.

endeavours to introduce elements of banal lordship and a centralised power structure mostly met with failure.¹⁷² Complaints about malfunctioning government officials were ubiquitous. It is hard to believe these people were behaving much more reprehensibly here than elsewhere: it seems more likely that problems arose because their presence was considered a break with tradition. In the end an inventive and radical solution was found. Clusters of rural communities were proclaimed to be towns, which –once again– gave them the right to govern themselves.¹⁷³

Considering the self-governing powers of rural communities in the north of Holland, it is not surprising to find some of them actively promoting their commercial interests in the outside world at an early stage. The villages of Akersloot, Uitgeest and Wormer, with their toll exemptions, are good examples. It is tempting to think that rural communities like this, used to taking care of their own business and not subjected to lordly power or urban domination, would not hesitate to install weighing facilities as soon as opportunities opened up for the marketing of dairy.

Some support for this hypothesis can be found in the fact that in the part of Holland north of the IJ hunting, fishing and milling were not, or only very partially, considered to be comital rights, as happened elsewhere. Instead, Waterlanders and West-Frisians claimed these rights as the traditional and unalienable property of the local community.¹⁷⁴ When in 1393 duke Albrecht of Bavaria encroached upon these rights (most likely he had been trying to lease them out to a third party), he met with resistance. The duke was forced to retract and once more guarantee the local communities the rights to hunt, fish and mill they had always enjoyed.¹⁷⁵ In West-Friesland, although not in Waterland, the community did pay an annual rent for these rights, but as the count was not free to choose another lessee, this rent should be seen as no more than a token of the recognition of the count's sovereignty.¹⁷⁶ The data collected from the Gousset index confirm the special position of the northern part of Holland in this respect. The index provides several examples of rural communities in this region leasing fishing waters, grain mills, locks and sluices.¹⁷⁷ No such examples were found south of the IJ.

With weighing rights the situation was not quite the same, as the references to rural weigh houses collected from the Gousset index show (see appendix B). In most cases the count granted the exploitation of the weighing facilities to an

¹⁷² Ibid., 72-82; De Goede, *Waterland*, 128-130.

¹⁷³ De Goede, *Swannotsrecht*, 75, 83-84, 137; De Goede, *Waterland*, 142-161. On the reasons for the grants of urban status opinions differ. Pols believed problems with the traditional system of jurisdiction by neighbours, which was prone to abuse, were the main reason (*Westfriesche stadrechten* I, xxiv-xxv). Dekker, 'Stadsrecht voor het platteland', does stress the problems with *baljuws* and *baljuwsgerichten*, but does not refer to the legacy of autonomy.

¹⁷⁴ De Goede, *Waterland*, 286-289, 322-323, 367-368.

¹⁷⁵ Van Mieris, *Groot charterboek* III, 597, 599.

¹⁷⁶ De Goede, *Waterland*, 336-338; cf. De Monté Ver Loren, *Bezit en eigendom*, 347-350.

¹⁷⁷ E.g. mill, locks, tiths and fishing rights in Graft (NA LLRK, inv. nr. 212 f 139, 139-139v, 140v-141); tiths in Grootebroek (inv. nr. 212 f 238v), locks and fishing waters in Niedorp (inv. nr. 221 f 93v) and mill, locks, fishing rights in Wieringen (inv. nr. 231, f 25, 25v, 26).

individual, much as he did in other parts of the country. Even if this individual was a (well-to-do) member of the rural community, which he probably usually was, this is not the same as granting the privilege to the community as such.

There are, however, a few exceptions, and they are significant. In the West-Frisian village of Niedorp duke Albrecht did grant the right to install scales to the local community, which had apparently requested this, in March 1391.¹⁷⁸ Clearly the organisation of weighing was based on the existing model for renting out rights to the community. However, only eight months later, in November of the same year, the duke rented out the scales to a certain Henrick Dirksz. for a period of four years.¹⁷⁹ At some point in time the villagers had probably voiced their discontent with the situation, because when the four years of Dirksz.' term had almost passed, the duke gave the people of the district Niedorperambacht and Schagerambacht permission to sell their dairy wherever they wanted, thus allowing them to bypass Dirksz. and his scales.¹⁸⁰

In order to interpret these events it should be kept in mind that weighing facilities, since they were connected to the recent rise of dairy farming, were not part of the traditional West-Frisian community rights, even if villagers were inclined to think they should be. Since elsewhere in Holland (and abroad) weighing facilities were controlled by the count or by a lord,¹⁸¹ duke Albrecht probably saw the introduction and renting out of weigh houses in the north of Holland to members of the local elite as a good opportunity for reinforcement of his position in the region. But as this did not agree with the expectations of the rural population, conflicts were inevitable, especially if people like Henrick Dirksz. abused their position. It was exactly this kind of situation that shortly afterwards was to lead to the grant of urban status to many West-Frisian rural communities. Niedorp was one of them: it acquired a charter of urban privileges in 1415.¹⁸²

Niedorp is the only example from this period we know so much about: detailed information on the genesis of other late 14th or early 15th-century weighing facilities is simply lacking. The data from the Gousset index suggest that at least some of the village scales were rented out to well-to-do individuals. However, the example of Niedorp shows that even if a weigh house was eventually rented out in this way, it could still originate from a community initiative. Significantly, community action was also at the basis of the weigh house granted to the villages of Sloten and Osdorp by Philip of Burgundy in 1466. The charter stating the privilege is very clear: the villagers requested they should be

¹⁷⁸ NA AGH, inv. nr. 228 f6v.

¹⁷⁹ NA AGH, inv. nr. 198 f30.

¹⁸⁰ NA AGH, inv. nr. 198, f134. The interpretation of Beenakker that Albrecht gave the people of Niedorperambacht and Schagerambacht permission to engage in dairy trade misses the point: they did not need permission to trade, only to bypass their local weigh house in doing so (Beenakker, *Van Rentersluze tot strijkmolen*, 112).

¹⁸¹ Noordegraaf, 'Waag', 14-15.

¹⁸² Pols, *Westfriesche stadrechten* I, 33-36.

allowed to install scales in their village and were given permission to do so, in return for an annual payment to the count's steward.¹⁸³

In Kennemerland seignorial influence was stronger than in West-Friesland, as is shown by the fact that the 15th-century weigh house of Assendelft belonged to the lords of Assendelft. Still, Assendelft is exactly the example given by Enno van Gelder to demonstrate that rural communities in this region were in many respects similar to those in West-Friesland: even if there was a seignorial lord, his role in the organisation of village life was limited and the community largely governed itself.¹⁸⁴ Two events related to the Assendelft weigh house in the 15th and 16th century may illustrate this.

At the end of the 15th century the lord of Assendelft permitted his people to bring their dairy to markets elsewhere, without weighing it in Assendelft first. Obviously this was not to his advantage. Most likely it was the answer to a request of the villagers: it meant they were able to avoid paying twice.¹⁸⁵ And can it be a coincidence that in the late 16th century, less than three weeks before the proclamation against illegal rural scales by the Estates of Holland in 1597, the lord of Assendelft transferred the scales to the local community?¹⁸⁶ The act gave the villagers a clear title to their weigh house: just what they needed to substantiate its legal basis. They would have had to pay for the favour, but the fact that they were able and willing to do so, demonstrates their initiative and organisational capacities.

Strong rural communities did not only exist in the north of Holland. They also developed in the rest of the county, with its free colonists and its need for cooperation in water management. Still, their forceful presence in the north, supported by a legacy of autonomy, no doubt contributed to the early rise of village weigh houses in this region.

4.4 Conclusions

At the end of the 14th and the beginning of the 15th century a new category of trade venues emerged in the Holland countryside. By focusing on just one commodity in an expanding sector of the economy and by providing direct links with interregional trade networks, these new trade venues offered farmers and fishermen opportunities to market the products of a specialising rural economy.

Their emergence was certainly stimulated by the growth of urban demand and the rise of interregional trade, but it can only be fully understood if the balance of powers between towns, the count, lords and rural communities is taken into account. In Holland seignorial control over rural trade was light in comparison to England; towns were unable to dominate the rural economy to the

¹⁸³ *Generale privilegien Kennemer-landt*, 176-177.

¹⁸⁴ Enno van Gelder, *Nederlandse dorpen*, 21-28.

¹⁸⁵ *Handvesten Assendelft*, 76-77.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 150-151.

extent they did in Flanders. At an earlier stage that may have been a disadvantage: English seignorial competition for one, by giving rise to a dense network of fairs and markets at an early stage, may have been able to stimulate rural commercialisation in ways that were lacking in Holland. But Holland's tradition of informal rural trade suited economic conditions in the late 14th century: it facilitated flexible and adequate reactions to new opportunities for trade.

Along the Holland North Sea coast a string of seaside fish markets developed, situated at sites convenient to fishermen. These markets were usually not heavily burdened by seignorial exactions, nor were they completely controlled by urban merchants. Moreover none of the coastal villages was able to develop into a compulsory fish market, and staples for the interregional sea fish trade established in the towns of Heusden and Naarden were probably short-lived. Some fishing communities were able to negotiate favourable trade conditions: Katwijk and Scheveningen acquired exemptions from the count's river tolls.

Village weigh houses for butter and cheese first appeared in the north of Holland. Here rural communities traditionally had a strong position, rooted in what might be called a Frisian legacy of autonomy. Rural aspirations were increasingly frustrated by the ever more persistent attempts of towns to concentrate trade at the urban market. In the end it did not prevent rural weigh houses from developing elsewhere in Holland too, but it probably did slow down their rise and it also meant they emerged as unauthorised institutions.

Whereas in many parts of Europe –Flanders is a good example– more opportunities for rural trade opened up as an increasingly strong central state was able to overcome trade barriers raised by the towns,¹⁸⁷ Holland seems to have moved in the opposite direction. Urban coercion became more pronounced over time, not less so. However, the foundations for an institutional framework favourable to rural trade that had been laid in the 14th and early 15th century were in many cases strong enough to overcome 16th-century urban restrictions. Many rural trade venues were by then firmly established, supported by privileges and tradition. As a result rural communities maintained at least part of their ability to resist urban intrusion.

The region around Dordrecht is an exception. Hardly any rural weigh houses were established here; urban control seems to have been too strong. But then Dordrecht had a history of trade privileges, most of them not in regional but in international trade. This history is the subject of the next chapter.

¹⁸⁷ Epstein, *Freedom and growth*, 84-85.

5. The Dordrecht staple

5.1 Introduction

In the summer of 1345 three merchants –two of them came from the Hansa towns Zutphen and Kampen– ran into trouble. They had ignored Dordrecht's staple privilege on the river trade in wine, grain, wood and salt: having entered the river delta from the North Sea they had not proceeded to Dordrecht, as they should have, but sold their cargo elsewhere. Most likely this had happened in Brielle, since it was lady Machteld of Voorne, the seignory in which Brielle was situated, who pleaded with count Willem IV on behalf of the three merchants. Her intercession met with partial success: the count forgave the merchants their transgression, but only after they had promised to compensate all damages to himself or to any other party.¹

Medieval staple privileges come in two kinds. The first type has already been discussed in chapter 3: towns could claim a monopoly on trade in certain commodities within a district of limited dimensions, usually with the intention of guaranteeing the provisioning of the urban population with basic foodstuffs or raw materials for the local industry. In Flanders these regional trade monopolies were a very common phenomenon; in Holland and also in England much less so. The second type of staple privileges related to interregional or international trade. A staple of this type was 'the right of a certain centre to act as an exclusive depot for one or more commodities which are in transit through a given area, not necessarily the territory appertaining to the town, but destined either for consumption within the town or, more frequently, for reshipment'.²

Staple rights of the second type were much coveted, but seldom granted. In Flanders only Bruges and Ghent managed to acquire substantial privileges of this kind; in England the one equivalent of comparable dimensions is the wool staple system. In Holland Dordrecht was the only town that possessed important staple privileges regarding international trade. The fish staples of Naarden and Heusden discussed in chapter 4 did have some characteristics that looked like a monopoly on interregional trade, but these staples were limited in scope and short-lived. The same is true for the monopoly on the trade in imported beer granted to Amsterdam in 1351.³ Dordrecht's privileges were not only far more extensive, but also survived, at least partially, into the pre-modern era.

Bernard van Rijswijk, who in 1900 published his dissertation on the staple right of Dordrecht, did not try to hide his unfavourable judgment on the subject

¹ Van de Wall, ed., *Handvesten Dordrecht*, 195.

² The distinction between the two types is outlined by David Nicholas. The definition is also his: Nicholas, *Town and countryside*, 118.

³ The role of the Amsterdam 'beer toll' in the rise of this town has been the subject of debate in the past. For a summary and a recent contribution: Kaptein, 'Poort van Holland', 117-121.

of his research. He argued, firstly, that the 'artificial' position of Dordrecht as the compulsory market for the river trade in wine, grain, wood and salt had had more disadvantages than benefits: the obligation to buy and sell in Dordrecht had raised transport and transaction costs and it had, moreover, posed serious obstacles to the development of trade elsewhere. In addition Van Rijswijk suggested that the staple right was atypical for Holland's development as a country of free trade: he compared Dordrecht's indolence, induced by its privileged position, with the vigorous and daring spirit of enterprise of towns like Amsterdam, to which Dordrecht eventually had given way.⁴

Van Rijswijk's suggestions are coloured by late 19th-century patriotism and liberal ideology, but when the rhetoric is overlooked, he does have a point that needs attention. If, as has been argued in the previous chapters, Holland's history of occupation and settlement had given rise to a society in which non-economic constraints on trade were almost absent and rent-seeking was kept in check by a balance of powers, then how to explain that Dordrecht not only managed to acquire its staple privilege, but also to extend and consolidate it afterwards? Van Rijswijk's notions on the effects of the staple give rise to another question. Dordrecht's privileges reached their widest legal scope in the middle of the 14th century and the city flourished in the second half of this century.⁵ Yet we have seen that at that very time Holland as a whole experienced a phase of strong economic growth. In contrast to the gloomy picture presented by Van Rijswijk, the staple right apparently did not prevent or stifle this development.

This chapter focuses mainly on the late 13th and 14th centuries and thus covers the period of rise, expansion and consolidation of the Dordrecht staple. First the origins of the staple are investigated and compared to the factors that gave rise to the staples of Bruges and Ghent in Flanders, and to the English wool staple system. It will be shown that in each case local circumstances and political relations affected the organisation of the staple and through the organisation also its effects in the long run.

The remainder of the chapter focuses on the Holland river region. It is devoted to an analysis of the 14th-century conflicts of Dordrecht with two smaller towns. Brielle is one of them; the other is Schoonhoven. Both towns were involved, or aspired to be so, in commercial activities that did not agree with Dordrecht's trade monopoly. The many conflicts between Dordrecht and the other towns in the river region have been researched, although not always in depth, for the late 15th and early 16th centuries.⁶ Much less attention has been paid to events in the crucial 14th century. The confrontations between Schoonhoven and Brielle on the one hand and Dordrecht on the other illustrate not only the mechanisms that created and sustained the existence of the Dordrecht staple, but

⁴ Van Rijswijk, *Geschiedenis Dordtse stapelrecht*, 24-25., 44-45, 78. Van Rijswijk's opinions were echoed by, amongst others, Smit, *Opkomst*, 33-35.

⁵ Niermeyer, 'Dordrecht als handelsstad' I, 1.

⁶ E.g.: Sneller, 'Handel en verkeer', 365-371; Moquette, 'Strijd op economisch gebied'; Beulink, 'Dordrecht en Schoonhoven'.

also show why the staple did not seriously damage the development of trade elsewhere in the river region.

5.2 The Dordrecht staple in an international perspective

Origins

When in 1299 the staple privilege was granted, Dordrecht cannot have had much more than 5,000 inhabitants,⁷ but even so it already was a thriving commercial centre. Originally an agrarian settlement in a reclamation area, it began developing into a small town from the middle of the 12th century. By the beginning of the 13th century Dordrecht merchants were probably already involved in long-distance trade: when in 1204 the town was taken by force during a succession conflict, large stocks of wine and grain were captured.⁸ The river trade in wood, grain, salt, but most of all wine intensified in the 13th century and brought the town great wealth.⁹

Two mutually reinforcing factors had contributed to Dordrecht's rise to prominence. The first was the town's favourable location on a crossroads of waterways, which allowed its inhabitants to fully profit from the east-west interregional river trade and from the development, in the 13th century, of a north-south trade route through Holland's network of inland waterways (see figure 5.1). The second was the favour of the count, who actively promoted Dordrecht as a trade settlement, by making it the centre of his system of river delta tolls and granting privileges to foreign merchants visiting the town.¹⁰

Gradually elements of coercion crept in. When in 1273 the count set new rules for the measuring of salt and wine in Dordrecht, he promised that the comital salt measure would not be established anywhere but in the Dordrecht toll house; the intention was clearly to concentrate the salt trade there.¹¹ The grant of the staple right in 1299 must therefore be seen as one step, albeit an important one, in a process that had started much earlier.

After Dordrecht had been declared the compulsory market for the river trade in oats in February 1299, in November of the same year a comital charter ordained that henceforth 'all goods' transported down the Lek and Merwede had to be sold in Dordrecht. Since wine, wood and grain were mentioned specifically, Dordrecht's position as a compulsory depot was most likely restricted to these commodities.¹² The 1299 charter does not refer to salt, transported upstream, but in view of the history of Dordrecht's salt trade, and the fact that salt is mentioned

⁷ Visser, 'Dichtheid en bevolking', 19.

⁸ Gumbert-Hepp and Gumbert, eds., *Annalen van Egmond*, 328-329.

⁹ Van Herwaarden *et al.*, *Geschiedenis van Dordrecht*, 19-20, 43-44.

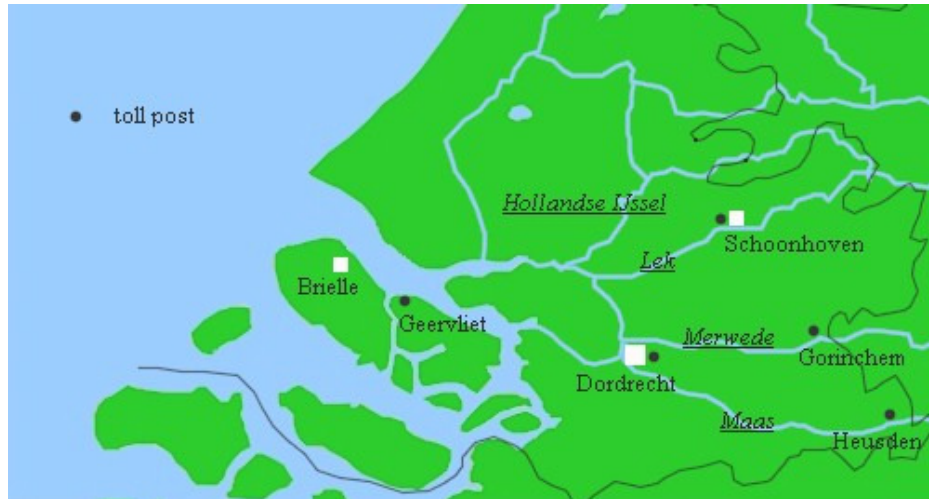
¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 34-37.

¹¹ *OHZ* III, nr. 1637.

¹² *OHZ* V, nrs 3443 and 3532.

in later documents, it is safe to assume this was a staple commodity as well.¹³ The charter also granted visiting merchants a safeguard: the count guaranteed their safety on the journey to and from Dordrecht and in the town they had the same rights as the local merchants, including immunity from arrest for debts.

Figure 5.1 Geographical situation of Dordrecht, Schoonhoven and Brielle



Dordrecht's position as a compulsory depot implied that every ship carrying wine, grain, wood or salt had to stop in Dordrecht and offer its cargo for sale there during a specified number of days (at first fourteen, later eight). This was done by commissioning a local broker to find a buyer. Unloading was not always necessary or compulsory; there were also brokers 'at sea', who accepted commissions for commodities still on board. However, if wine, grain or salt were unloaded and sold in the city, measuring was compulsory. If the cargo had not been sold at the end of the prescribed number of days, the ship could continue its journey. If a transaction was concluded, it had to be recorded at the Dordrecht exchange. Here the buyer received a token, to be shown at the toll posts elsewhere along the rivers as proof that the merchandise was indeed bought in Dordrecht.¹⁴ Over time other elements were added, such as a transport monopoly for local shipmasters. Around the middle of the 15th century the practice of buying off part of the obligations was introduced. By the late 16th century merchants were mostly allowed to pass Dordrecht without further ado, as long as they consented to paying a tax for

¹³ Niermeyer, 'Dordrecht als handelsstad' III, 177-178.

¹⁴ Ibid. II, 26. For the exchange: Ibid. I, 12-14.

'brokerage' (even if no such thing had taken place). However, they were always dependent on the grace of the Dordrecht officials, which could be withdrawn without warning for no apparent reason.¹⁵

The early history of the staple of Bruges resembles that of the Dordrecht staple in more than one respect. In the 12th and 13th century Bruges had developed into an important interregional trade centre, with English wool, Flemish cloth and French wine as the main commodities being traded. As in Dordrecht this function was supported by a series of privileges to foreign merchants.¹⁶ In 1323 the count of Flanders granted Bruges a monopoly on the trade in all imports entering the Zwin estuary. An exception was made for bulk commodities like wine, herring and other merchandise loaded in barrels, which had to be unloaded in Damme, Bruges' outpost situated on the Zwin a few kilometres seaward from Bruges; dried fish, grain and shipping equipment went to the small towns of Hoeke and Monnikerede, also in the Zwin estuary. All other goods were to be taken to Bruges in order to be stored and sold there.¹⁷

Ghent presents a slightly different case. The city emerged as a grain trade centre because of its location at the confluence of Scheldt and Lys, the two main rivers connecting the rich grain fields of Artois and Hainault to the towns of Flanders. The first reference to a compulsion to sell grain in Ghent dates from 1351: an urban by-law issued in this year compelled all merchants bringing grain to Ghent to sell half of it in the city. The obligation regarded only wheat and rye transported downstream on the Scheldt and Lys; oats and barley were free. The share of the grain that was subjected to the staple (originally half, at the end of the 15th century one sixth) was to be unloaded, measured, registered, stored and then sold; at the sale the bakers, brewers and private burgesses of Ghent were given priority over foreigners. The rest of the grain had to be transferred to a Ghent vessel, after which it could be transported further downstream.¹⁸

Unlike Bruges, Ghent was not promoted as an interregional trade centre by the Flemish count. The grain staple was initiated and originally also enforced by the city itself. That was feasible as long as the staple only concerned grain that was brought to Ghent anyway, but when in the early 15th century the urban authorities began to object to grain being unloaded before it reached the city, authorisation of the position of Ghent as a compulsory depot by central government became important. Indirectly it was granted in 1424, when duke Philip the Good prohibited the transit grain trade through Warneton (on the Lys) and Ypres: this act effectively gave Ghent the monopoly it desired.¹⁹

¹⁵ Moquette, 'Strijd op economisch gebied', 57; Van Rijswijk, *Geschiedenis Dordtse stapelrecht*, 99-101; Jansma, 'Economisch leven van Dordrecht', 53; Jansma, 'Waarden en makelaars', 224.

¹⁶ Van Houtte, *Geschiedenis van Brugge*, 89-99, 167-168.

¹⁷ Ibid., 112; Craeybeckx, *Un grand commerce*, 93; for the privilege Gilliodts-van Severen, ed., *Cartulaire de l'ancienne estaple* I, 158-159.

¹⁸ Bigwood, 'Gand et la circulation', 404, 423-426, 428-437; Nicholas, *Town and countryside*, 122-124.

¹⁹ Bigwood, 'Gand et la circulation', 404. The conflict between Ghent and Ypres over this issue will be discussed in more detail below.

In 1313, fourteen years after Dordrecht acquired its staple privilege and ten years before Bruges did so, the first compulsory English wool staple on the continent was established by royal ordinance in Saint Omer.²⁰ In the late 13th century several continental towns in a row – Dordrecht was actually one of them, for a short period – had functioned as the centre of the English wool trade, but none of them bore the character of a compulsory depot. The 1313 ordinance not only prescribed the compulsory market for all merchants exporting English wool to the Low Countries, it also superimposed a corporative organisation of merchants later referred to as the Company of the Staple. Each merchant was to dispatch his wool to the staple, which was administered by the commonalty of merchants.

In 1326 the continental staple was temporarily replaced by a series of domestic staples. These were towns in England where the wool was to be stored, weighed and registered, and then sold to foreign merchants; Englishmen were no longer allowed to export wool. Only two years later the domestic staples were abolished and a continental staple was re-established, this time in Bruges. In the following decades policy shifted frequently between the two alternatives of the continental staple on the one hand, and the home staples (combined with prohibitions on exports for denizens) on the other. An important step was taken in 1363, when the staple was transferred from Bruges to Calais. At the same time a syndicate of 26 merchants was created which was to govern the town on the king's behalf. Although the syndicate did not have a formal monopoly, its members came to dominate the wool trade at the staple.

It has been suggested that Dordrecht's staple right was the inevitable sequel to the town's development as a centre of interregional trade.²¹ However, the erratic course of events in England makes it very clear that there is nothing automatic about compulsory staples. The English wool staple system was obviously based on a set of conscious decisions, shaped by interests of groups and individuals. In Dordrecht these decisions and interests are perhaps not as visible, but all the same they were the driving force behind the Dordrecht staple privileges. A comparison between Flanders, England and Holland brings out more clearly the power struggles that went on in the background, and in that way bring us closer to an explanation for the rise of the Dordrecht staple.

The compulsory staples of Bruges and Ghent were both initiated by urban pressure groups with the objective of limiting outside competition. The Bruges commercial elite had had some experience in this field when on three occasions in the late 13th and early 14th century foreign merchants, frustrated by arbitrary exactions in Bruges, had moved their activities to the small town of Aardenburg, about twenty kilometres east of the city. Their actions had been supported by the Flemish count, who saw them as an opportunity to curb the power of the Bruges

²⁰ The history of the English wool staple is described in detail by Lloyd, *English wool trade*, chapters 3 and 6; this summary is mainly based on pages 101-102, 115, 210-212, and on Ormrod, *Reign of Edward III*, 190-194.

²¹ Van Herwaarden *et al.*, *Geschiedenis van Dordrecht*, 45.

elite. But Aardenburg had not become a dangerous competitor; each time the merchants had returned to Bruges after promises were made to correct the evils they had complained about. In the end the Brugeois had even managed to pressure the count into curtailing opportunities for wholesale trade in Aardenburg by imposing limits on the size of the weights that could be used there.²²

A more serious threat was posed by the aspirations of the small port towns in the Zwin estuary, and particularly by Bruges' outport Sluis. Due to silting of the Zwin, in the course of the 13th century seagoing vessels found it increasingly difficult to reach Damme, Bruges' original outport. By the end of the century Sluis, situated close to the mouth of the Zwin, had begun to take over part of Damme's functions.²³ The Bruges authorities had always managed to keep Damme on a tight rein; Bruges had originally financed the dam to which Damme owed its name and was also the owner of Damme's locks and quays.²⁴ However, because of its location, closer to sea and further from Bruges, Sluis was much more dangerous as a potential competitor.

The problem became acute when in 1322 count Robert of Bethune died. He was succeeded by his grandson Louis of Nevers, who relied heavily on the support of his great-uncle Jean of Namur, the late count's brother. Jean of Namur already held the seignory of Sluis and now persuaded the young count to also grant him the function of *waterbaljuw* (water bailiff) of Sluis. That gave him jurisdictional authority in the entire Zwin estuary; in this capacity he would have the instruments to obstruct transports to and from Bruges. The Bruges authorities were quick to react to imminent danger: they cajoled the count into granting the city the staple privilege that was to direct all trade towards the city or the small towns under its control. Sluis was subjected to severe restrictions: money changing and scales for weights over 60 pounds were no longer allowed, the construction of fortifications was forbidden. When Jean of Namur refused to comply, the Brugeois took Sluis by force.²⁵

In Ghent the initiative behind the rise of the staple also came from within the town, although not from the same mercantile elite. According to G. Bigwood, Ghent simply needed a monopoly position in order to guarantee a plentiful supply of grain for the urban population.²⁶ To be sure, the fact that the region around Ghent produced but little grain and that the city consequently depended on grain imports probably did play a part: the fact that, as we saw, the burgesses of Ghent had pre-emptive rights at the purchase of staple grain suggests as much. Still, before the 14th century Ghent had apparently been able to do without a compulsory staple, even though the city had become dependent on grain imports from France as early as the 12th century.²⁷ That makes it hard to believe that

²² Nicholas, *Town and countryside*, 118; Van Houtte, *Geschiedenis van Brugge*, 99, 168; Wyffels, 'Nieuwe gegevens', 54-59, 88-90.

²³ De Smet, 'L'origine des ports du Zwin', 140-141.

²⁴ Ibid., 129-130.

²⁵ Van Houtte, *Geschiedenis van Brugge*, 111-112.

²⁶ Bigwood, 'Gand et la circulation', 397-398.

²⁷ Nicholas, 'Of poverty and primacy', 32; Nicholas, 'Settlement patterns', 7-8.

concern for the urban food supply was the sole reason for the development of the compulsory staple.

Of greater significance was probably the rise of the guild of 'free skippers', a corporative organisation that from the second half of the 14th century onwards gradually came to dominate water transport on the Scheldt, Lys and Lieve (the Lieve was a canal constructed in the 13th century to connect Ghent and Bruges). Step by step the guild succeeded in monopolising shipping on these waterways. Dominance did not come without a struggle. In the middle of the 14th century Ghent clashed with Douai, which claimed much the same grain trade privileges as Ghent. The two towns came to an agreement: Douai skippers could bring grain to Ghent in their own ships, but upon arrival had to transfer it to a Ghent ship for further transport. It is easy to see how the staple, with its obligation to unload and register, suited the interests of the skippers' guild; in fact staple obligations can be seen as part of the guild's overall transport monopoly. The privileged position of the Ghent skippers' guild was officially recognised by central government in the late 14th century, and again in 1436 and in 1475 in a more extended form.²⁸

In Bruges the commercial elite was the driving force; in Ghent it was the skippers' guild. Nonetheless a common element stands out: in both towns the role of the central authorities in the creation of the compulsory staple was restricted to formally sanctioning the *fait accompli* they were faced with. The creation of the English wool staple system on the other hand does bear the marks of royal initiative. It is true that the installation of the first compulsory wool staple in 1313 was not simply forced onto unwilling merchants by an all-powerful crown. Growing enmities between England and Flanders had made the Flemish cities a dangerous place to visit for English merchants. If the English wanted to hold on to their newly acquired dominance in the wool trade -until the late 13th century wool had mainly been exported by foreign merchants- a staple in the relatively safe environment of Saint Omer was an attractive option.²⁹ Moreover, although little is known about the opinions of merchants at this stage, it is certain that later in the 14th century the great wool merchants usually supported the continental wool staple: to them it offered opportunities to control exports and monopolise the wool trade.³⁰

Yet events in the 14th century also show that the wool merchants could not dictate conditions. The installation of the home staples in 1326 was forced upon them; many of the new staple towns were inland towns and of the four main wool ports only London was constituted a staple. The Ordinance of the Staple issued in 1353, which re-established the home staples and forbade exports by English merchants, was also a top-down arrangement. So was the move of the staple to

²⁸ Nicholas, *Town and countryside*, 124-125; Bigwood, 'Gand et la circulation', 411-413; Corryn, 'Schippersambacht', 197-203.

²⁹ Lloyd, *English wool trade*, 106-107. For an earlier contribution that downplays royal initiative and sees the establishment of the staple purely as a concession to the English merchants: Baker, 'Establishment'.

³⁰ Ormrod, *Reign of Edward III*, 191.

Calais in 1363; in this case merchants had not even been consulted.³¹ In all of these instances the main agent behind the changes was the Crown.

On the one hand, the staple served a political goal: it could be used as an instrument to put pressure on the authorities on the other side of the Channel. This partly explains the frequent shifts of the staple from one place to another. The shift to a series of home staples in 1353 for instance was partly motivated by the fact that the location of the staple in Bruges had outlived its purpose of forging an alliance with the Flemish cities, which were now increasingly under French influence; the transfer of the staple to Calais was stimulated by the wish to give this frontier town an independent source of income and thus the means to maintain its garrison and defences.³² The staple, in any form, also had important fiscal advantages. Through the staple the riches of the wool trade could be taxed profitably and easily; when levied via the Company of the Staple the custom revenues could moreover be used as sureties on loans the Crown might wish to raise.³³ In short, until the late 14th century, when the influence of Parliament, and particularly of the merchant representation in Parliament increased markedly, staple policy was to a large extent determined by the interests and actions of the Crown.³⁴

Notably, Dordrecht received the privilege that made it a compulsory and exclusive depot more than two decades before Bruges did; the Dordrecht staple right also preceded the installation of the first compulsory English wool staple in 1313. The staple as a compulsory depot for the interregional trade was not a Holland invention. Cologne for instance, having attempted to monopolise the transit trade on the Rhine from at least the late 12th century onward, in 1259 became the first town in the German empire to obtain a formal staple privilege, granted by the archbishop.³⁵ Still, in view of the late rise of towns and trade in Holland and even more of the lack of a tradition of political constraints on trade, the early date of the grant to Dordrecht is surprising.

In the past the search for the origins of the Dordrecht staple right has given rise to several theories. H.J. Smit has stressed the role of Jan of Avesnes, count of Hainault and sworn enemy to count Guy de Dampierre of Flanders. During the troubled and chaotic years after the death of count Floris V in 1296, Dordrecht had supported the claims of Avesnes to the guardianship of Floris' young son Jan I. Only weeks after Avesnes had finally assumed the role of regent, he and his ward together granted Dordrecht the staple right, according to Smit as a reward for the town's support to the Avesnes cause.³⁶

³¹ Lloyd, *English wool trade*, 115-116, 205-207; Ormrod, *Reign of Edward III*, 193.

³² Lloyd, *English wool trade*, 202-203, 211. Cf. Reid, 'The Scots', who links the establishment of the staple in 1313 to the struggles of Edward II with the Scots: the staple could be used to pressure the Flemish into ending their support to the Scots.

³³ Power, *Wool trade*, 88.

³⁴ Lloyd, *English wool trade*, 218-219, 223-224, 256.

³⁵ Gönnerwein, *Stapel- und Niederlagsrecht*, 18-21.

³⁶ Smit, 'Begin', 50-51.

Although the genesis of the staples in Flanders and England has shown that political events might act as a catalyst, it is also clear that in both cases the way had already been paved by structural factors. In Dordrecht it was no different. Firstly, just as the English wool staple was advantageous for the king from a fiscal point of view, a compulsory depot for the river trade was in the interest of the count of Holland because it increased the efficiency of the comital river tolls. The close connection between the staple and the river tolls can only be fully understood if the specific characteristics of the Holland toll system are taken into account. The foundations of this system have been outlined before.³⁷ From the 11th century onwards a system of toll posts had developed, with Dordrecht as its centre, which allowed the counts of Holland to control shipping in the delta of Rhine and Meuse. In the 15th century toll payments were due only upon leaving or entering the county, but in the 14th century the toll post in Dordrecht still had an important function. At an early stage the counts had begun to grant toll exemptions to the towns of Holland and Zeeland. Before the end of the 13th century all major towns, many smaller ones and also a few villages were the lucky owners of privileges guaranteeing them toll exemption. Although some foreign merchants enjoyed toll reductions, merchants from the Hansa towns first and foremost among them, few were completely exempted.³⁸

This contrast between the toll status of Holland merchants on the one hand and foreigners on the other provided opportunities for evasion of the tolls. J.F. Niermeyer has pointed out that the toll exemptions to the towns of Holland and Zeeland usually included the condition that the merchandise had to be bought at the 'highest market': Cologne on the Rhine or Venlo on the Meuse. This was to prevent merchants from the Rhineland or Guelders to sell, or even transfer *pro forma*, their cargo to Holland merchants before arriving at the easternmost toll post, thus robbing the count of the revenues he was entitled to. The staple right was supposed to discourage this kind of toll evasion. It forced ships to stop in Dordrecht and have their cargo checked for commodities subject to the staple. If at that point a merchant was unable to prove -by way of a token or note issued by the proper authorities- that he had indeed bought his merchandise at the highest market, he had to pay the river tolls as well. The staple, Niermeyer concluded, was an instrument in the count's continuous efforts to increase revenues.³⁹

On one point Smit and Niermeyer agreed: although neither denied the interests of the Dordrecht elite were at stake as well, both assumed the staple right was primarily based on an active and conscious policy of the count of Holland. However, recent research has shown that in other respects the Dordrecht elite did not merely react to the count's actions, but was a driving agent in its own right. For the reign of Floris V, E.C. Dijkhof has shown that many of the privileges

³⁷ See chapter 4.

³⁸ Smit, ed., *Rekeningen Hollandse tollén*, x-xiv, xlv-xlvi and appendix.

³⁹ Niermeyer, 'Dordrecht als handelsstad' I, 6-8. Extant toll accounts, for instance those of the toll at Gorinchem over the years 1478 tot 1481, indeed record many entries for goods bought at a 'lower' market (*ter nedermerct gekocht*) (Smit, ed., *Rekeningen Hollandse tollén*, 62 ff).

granted to Dordrecht were probably initiated by the Dordrecht elite. Dordrecht was in good position to bargain, because the town lent support to Floris' financial transactions: it had provided security for many of the count's loans.⁴⁰ In the autumn of 1299 Dordrecht's influence was probably greater than ever: Jan of Avesnes needed to consolidate his new position and the cooperation of Dordrecht was necessary to achieve that goal. It therefore makes sense to assume that the grant of the staple privilege is partly owed to pressure exerted by the Dordrecht elite.

Still, Dordrecht was not Bruges. Around the year 1300 the latter was a metropolis with a flourishing interregional trade and with enough clout to stand up to the Flemish count. In comparison Dordrecht, although on the rise, was but a secondary trading centre. It is hard to believe that mere pressure from the Dordrecht merchants would have been enough to cajole the count of Holland into granting the town a privilege as far-reaching as the 1299 staple right. Dordrecht can only have been able to achieve its goal because two other factors helped its cause along. One is the political situation of the moment: the accession of a new ruler who badly needed the support of the Dordrecht elite and could easily be persuaded to anything that might challenge the hegemony of Flanders as the focus of international trade. The other, more fundamental factor is the unique connection between the river toll system and the staple. Even if the staple right was not his idea to begin with, it must have been clear to the count that he stood to gain from it as much as the Dordrecht merchants.

The toll system contributed greatly to what makes the Dordrecht staple stand out from its counterparts in England and Flanders. In England the interests of the king and those of the large wool merchants frequently coincided, but there were also intervals when this was not the case and, at least until the end of the 14th century, on those occasions the demands of the Crown usually prevailed. In Flanders the urban elite and the count were mostly on opposing sides. To be sure, the Flemish count did levy tolls in the Zwin estuary; in fact the Damme wine toll was the most profitable part of the Flemish river toll system, and its revenues must have benefited from the establishment of a compulsory staple. However, the toll in Bruges itself did not belong to the count: it was enfeoffed to the lords of Gistel.⁴¹ Moreover, any advantages a compulsory staple in Bruges might have offered to the count were probably overshadowed by the dangers of making the city even more powerful than it already was. In Dordrecht, on the other hand, the interests of the count and that of the urban elite ran parallel from the start and, as we will see, largely continued to do so.

⁴⁰ Dijkhof, 'Economische en fiscale politiek', 11.

⁴¹ Toll Damme: Van Nieuwenhuysen, *Les finances, Économie*, 182-183; Soens, *Rentmeesters*, 265-266; Toll Bruges: Soens, *Rentmeesters*, 260-261; Van Houtte, *Geschiedenis van Brugge*, 198-201.

Influenced perhaps by the never-ending protests against the Dordrecht staple in the Middle Ages and the early modern period, the negative effects of the Dordrecht staple right have drawn far more attention than the potential benefits. Still, even Van Rijswijk, certainly no friend of the staple policy, believed that in its early stages the staple made a positive contribution to the development of trade. The Dordrecht staple linked up regional trade patterns to interregional networks and provided buyers and sellers with a fixed meeting point, and with the services and facilities they needed.⁴² The positive side is also stressed by Dick de Boer. He sees the Dordrecht staple as a catalyst of the emerging market economies of Holland and Zeeland, at least during the first decades of the 14th century: the combination of tolls and market rights on the one hand and well-chosen exemptions on the other provided structure and direction.⁴³

There is no doubt that a certain degree of concentration of trade had advantages in an age when aggregate trade volumes were small. Like fairs, staple markets helped to reduce the costs of matching supply and demand. They allowed buyers to come into contact with a large group of sellers at the same time and vice versa. Economies of scale also allowed for the development of a number of market services that were not readily available elsewhere. Fourteenth-century Bruges is a perfect example. The city provided a physical infrastructure in the shape of quays, cranes, carriers and storage space, and it guaranteed reliable weighing and measuring. Foreign merchants could make use of the services of money changers who offered banking services and short-term credit, brokers who provided mediation, and hostellers who did all of these things and in addition offered storage space and acted as local agents for absent merchants.⁴⁴ Since Dordrecht was a much smaller trade centre than Bruges the level of the services provided was probably more modest. Still, a system of standardised measures, carrying services and storage capacity, brokerage and money changers were all in operation by the end of the 13th century.⁴⁵

But it does not necessarily follow that coercion, in the form of a staple privilege, was needed to achieve all this. As long as value for money was offered, concentration and the services coming with it could surely be depended upon to develop of their own accord: merchants would be willing to pay for facilities that materially improved trading conditions. A positive contribution of coercion is conceivable only in two situations. Firstly, at least in theory it could help solve free-riding problems. However, it is doubtful if in practice this carried much weight. For most, if not all, facilities offered by staple towns it is hard to see how

⁴² Van Rijswijk, *Geschiedenis Dordtse stapelrecht*, 27-28

⁴³ De Boer, 'Hongher' naar meer', 133.

⁴⁴ The financial and commercial infrastructure of Bruges is well documented. A valuable analysis is provided by Murray, *Bruges*, esp. chapters 4, 5 and 6. For a comparison with Antwerp and Amsterdam: Gelderblom, *Violence, opportunism*, esp. chapter 5 (The exchange of goods).

⁴⁵ Van Herwaarden *et al.*, *Geschiedenis van Dordrecht*, 44-45 (storage and handling); OHZ II nr. 787 (brokerage), IV nrs. 1637, 1997 (measuring) and 2154 (again brokerage), V nr. 3250 (exchange).

anybody could have profited from them without actually doing business at the staple and paying for the services provided. Secondly a staple privilege may have stimulated investments in the physical infrastructure or in the institutional framework that might not have been made without the guarantee of a good return.⁴⁶ Again some doubts are justified: in Bruges for instance the foundations of the institutions just mentioned were already in place before a formal staple came into existence.

In other words: while voluntary concentration can be explained as an efficient response to the economic needs of an age of 'thin' trade, compulsion must have other roots. It is clear where to look: as we saw, staple rights were very much the result of political power-play. By implication these rights were, on the whole, beneficial to some, while for others the negative effects dominated. In judging their impact it is easy to be misled by the litany of protests; complaints were of course part of the game. A more realistic impression of the effects of the Dordrecht staple requires us to look behind this façade. Two kinds of potentially negative effects can be distinguished: firstly coercion could facilitate and support surplus extraction at the staple, and secondly it could have suppressed the development of trade elsewhere.

Surplus extraction at the staple covered more than just the tolls, customs and dues that were demanded: the effects of a trade monopoly on price formation for instance cannot be captured in this way. Still, the rate of taxation does provide an indication of possibilities for rent-seeking by those in power, even if it is only a partial one.

Impositions at the Dordrecht staple consisted of several components. First of all there was the comital toll, levied at the Dordrecht toll house, on transactions taking place at the staple. The toll had to be paid by both the buyer and the seller, unless they enjoyed toll exemption. The Dordrecht toll accounts over the years 1380 to 1385, the only ones that have been preserved, mention rates of less than 1% for wine and grain purchased in Dordrecht.⁴⁷ The toll payment probably included a fee for the (compulsory) use of the Dordrecht exchange, which as we saw served as a registration office for all transactions.⁴⁸ For goods not sold in Dordrecht, rates payable at the Dordrecht toll were negligible. Of course it should be remembered that the owners did have to pay a transit toll when entering and leaving the county. The rates for these transit tolls varied widely. The standard rate

⁴⁶ This line of reasoning is derived from Epstein, 'Town and country', 14, who uses it to explain the potentially beneficial effects of regional monopolies; it can be applied to transit staples just as well.

⁴⁷ For wine the rate was 1d *Hollands* per *mark* of 24s *Hollands* or 0.3% (Niermeyer, ed., *Bronnen Beneden-Maasgebied*, 403; Niermeyer, 'Dordrecht als handelsstad' I, 10-11). For wheat the tariff was 6 or 7d per *boed* of approximately 1003 litres. (Niermeyer, ed., *Bronnen Beneden-Maasgebied*, 421, 479, 453). At an estimated price of 11.5 *g* *Hollands* per *boed* this results in a rate of 0.2 to 0.3%. This price estimate is based on the average retail price of wheat of 10.8 *groot* (of 8d) per *achtendeel* of 34.2 litres paid by St. Catherine's hospital in Leiden in the 1390s (see appendix D for the exact figures and references). However wholesale prices were lower than retail prices and rye was normally about 30% cheaper than wheat. Therefore in reality the rates were probably higher, but they cannot have exceeded the 1% level.

⁴⁸ Niermeyer, 'Dordrecht als handelsstad' I, 12-15.

was 5%, but whenever tolls were expressed as a fixed sum per product or unit, rates tended to be much lower as a consequence of the gradual depreciation of currency and probably also of the resistance to changing what was regarded as a given right. Moreover, in many cases exemptions or reductions eased the burden considerably.⁴⁹

The other dues to be paid were related to the services provided by the town and its burgesses. The earliest Dordrecht by-laws, dating from 1401, mention the official tariffs for brokerage and measuring. For wheat and rye the brokerage fee was 6d *Hollands* per *hoed* (for broker and seller together); the due for measuring the grain was 4d *Hollands* per *hoed*. Together this came down to 1% of the value at most.⁵⁰ The brokerage fee for wine was set at 24 *groot* per *roede* of just over 2,000 litres when the purchase took place on the water and 4 *groot* per *aam* (one tenth of a *roede*) when it took place in the town: a rate of 1 to 2%.⁵¹ Scattered account data confirm the impression that tariffs were moderate. In 1284/85 the Dordrecht authorities bought a large amount of rye from a Rostock merchant; on this occasion the brokerage fee was 0.4% of the value of the grain.⁵² Another example comes from the purchase of wheat for the count's household in 1355/56; in this case the brokerage fee was 0.8% of the price, while another 0.8% was spent on dues for measuring.⁵³ In addition dues had to be paid for handling: wine barrels had to be rolled or dragged to and from the ships, grain sacs had to be carried. The wine account of Egmond abbey over the year 1344/45 gives a clue to the level: over each of its purchases of wine in Dordrecht the abbey paid 0.4 to 0.5% for the handling of the wine barrels.⁵⁴ Finally there were the urban excises. No 14th-century excise tariffs are extant, but if the late 13th-century situation is any guide, these were moderate as well: the sum paid as excise over the rye transaction with the Rostock merchant amounted to 1.3% of the value.

To sum up: merchants who traded at the Dordrecht staple officially paid around 5% of the value of their cargo on dues. The sum is certainly not negligible, but at these rates impositions hardly qualify as extortionate either. In practice there were no doubt situations where costs rose to higher levels. For one, officials must have had opportunities for exactions over and above the official rates. In the

⁴⁹ The only general tariff list for the Holland river tolls dates from 1357 or 1358 (Niermeyer, ed., *Bronnen Beneden-Maasgebied*, nr. 441; for the dating see Smit, ed., *Rekeningen Hollandse tollén*, xlv). This 'codification' of existing practice gives a variety of tariffs for a large number of products at the main toll posts and also mentions special rates or (partial) exemptions for various privileged groups of merchants.

⁵⁰ Tariffs: Fruin, ed., *Oudste rechten Dordrecht*, 42-43, 46. Based on the same price estimate of 11.5 £ *Hollands* per *hoed* as used above this results in a brokerage fee of 0.2% and measuring dues of 0.1%.

⁵¹ Tariffs: Ibid., 38. The tariffs are in '*groot payments*', which probably means *grooten Vlaams*. The rates have been calculated from a price estimate of 8 to 12 £ *grooten Vlaams* per *roede*, which is the wholesale price level for wine mentioned in the Dordrecht toll accounts over the years 1380-1385 (Niermeyer, ed., *Bronnen Beneden-Maasgebied*, 403-408, 432-438, 460-464, 488-491, 505-508, 557-560). This results in rates of 0.8 to 1.3% for transactions on the water and 1.4 to 2.1% for transactions on land.

⁵² Burgers and Dijkhof, eds., *Oudste stadsrekeningen Dordrecht*, f 17.1, 18.17). The purchase was part of a financial arrangement called *fineren*: the town borrowed money by buying the rye on credit and selling it immediately for cash (Zuijderduijn, *Medieval capital markets*, 74, 143-144).

⁵³ Niermeyer, ed., *Bronnen Beneden-Maasgebied*, nr. 426.

⁵⁴ Hof, ed., *Egmondse kloosterrekeningen*, 44-45.

1270s and 1280s for instance count Floris V had to intervene after complaints about the impositions on the measuring of salt and the handling of wine barrels. The count fixed the tariffs for both activities and set additional rules on how they had to be conducted, but the fact that his orders had to be repeated more than once suggests that these rules were not readily obeyed.⁵⁵ A more subtle example of exaction is provided by the toll registers for the Dordrecht toll for the years 1380 to 1385. They show that toll payments had to be made in gold *écus* or some other stable currency according to the official conversion rate, which implied that at times of rapid depreciation of the Holland coinage –and these were frequent in the late 14th and early 15th century– the actual toll rates could be much higher than the tariffs suggest.⁵⁶

Still, even if these factors are taken into account, it is clear that the English wool trade presents a far more extreme case of surplus extraction via taxation. The total level of customs and additional subsidy on wool exports for English merchants rose steeply from a moderate 5% of the value of the wool in the beginning of the 14th century to around 50% by 1350. In the late 14th and early 15th century it mostly fluctuated between 35 and 50%; at that stage there was also a small additional due to be paid for the defence of Calais. During the intervals when alien merchants were allowed to export wool, they paid rates that were even higher.⁵⁷ To be sure, the customs system and the staple system were not identical. The first predated the last, and customs were also levied on other products than wool. However, customs and staple did support and reinforce each other. Moreover, the staple provided additional means for exactions. As indicated before, the king heavily relied on the Company of the Staple for loans; repayment was frequently problematic. In addition, at the end of the 14th century the Crown frequently issued licenses that allowed individual merchants to bypass staple obligations: of course these had to be paid for as well.⁵⁸

A tax burden of these proportions was made possible by a combination of two factors. The superior power of the Crown is one of them: particularly during the first half of the 14th century the king's attempts to tap the wealth of the wool trade were not kept in check by countervailing powers. Around the middle of the 14th century Parliament did gain the right to authorise the wool subsidy. However, the Commons, rather than agree to a direct taxation, used this right not to abolish the subsidy, but to grant it in an almost uninterrupted sequence.⁵⁹ Secondly, until the late 14th century the monopoly position of English wool was not challenged. Here the staple helped: by the simple expedient of raising sales prices in Calais, the

⁵⁵ Burgers and Dijkhof, eds., *Oudste stadsrekeningen*, xxvi-xxviii; OHZ III, nr. 1637; (partly) repeated in 1281 (OHZ IV nr. 1974), 1280/1282 (OHZ IV, nr. 1974) and 1284 (OHZ IV, nr. 2181).

⁵⁶ Niermeyer, 'Dordrecht als handelsstad' I, 18-19. To give an example of how this worked in practice, based on the figures mentioned by Niermeyer: a cargo worth, say, 100 *écu* in the market would be valued at the toll post at 3200 *grooten* (actual course 1:32); at an official toll rate of, say, 0.5% this would result in a due of 16 *grooten*, which would then be converted back into *écus* at the official course of 1:18. The real toll payment would at 0.9 *ecu* therefore be almost twice as high as the tariff suggests.

⁵⁷ Munro, 'English 'backwardness'', 110-111, 164-165.

⁵⁸ Lloyd, *English wool trade*, 144, 199, 203, 226 (loans), 218-220, 227-228, 233 (licenses).

⁵⁹ Ormrod, 'England', 32; Harriss, *King, Parliament and public finance*, 469-470.

only market for high quality wool accessible to Low Country clothiers, English wool merchants were able to pay the customs and still make a profit.⁶⁰

In the late 14th century English wool exports began to fall. Although internal problems in the cities of Flanders and Brabant may have played a part, it is clear that much of the decline can be attributed to the taxes on wool exports, in combination with rigid staple regulations. High duties affected the position of English wool on the continental market, particularly that of medium quality wool; Low Countries manufacturers could buy Spanish or other wools of similar quality for a lower price.⁶¹ The bullion ordinances of 1429, enforcing cash payment and prohibiting credit at the staple in Calais, made matters worse by confronting buyers with almost insurmountable barriers.⁶² As an unintentional side-effect of the heavy taxes on wool exports, the English cloth industry and cloth exports developed rapidly from the late 14th century onwards. Unlike English wool, English cloth did not have a monopoly position on the continental market. Moreover, by the end of the 14th century mercantile influence in Parliament was powerful enough to block royal attempts to raise export duties and repeat the earlier cycle of events. In the 15th century cloth exports, which by this time surpassed wool exports, were taxed, but relatively lightly: the tax rate was between 2 and 6% of the value.⁶³ Still, this does not detract from the conclusion that during a century or more heavy exactions, created and maintained by the inability of merchants to resist rent-seeking by the Crown, seriously disadvantaged the English wool trade.

Seen from this perspective it is hardly surprising that in Flanders impositions on staple trade were no higher than in Dordrecht. The Bruges wine trade provides an example. Just as the Dordrecht wine trade it was taxed in several ways. Firstly there was the comital toll of Damme, levied on all merchandise entering the Zwin. According to a mid 13th-century tariff list the toll for a barrel of wine was 4d, but since price data for this period are not available it is impossible to translate this into a percentage of the value.⁶⁴ However, we do know that in 1368 at the toll of Dendermonde, which taxed the interregional trade on the Scheldt between Ghent and Antwerp, the tariff for the better wines was 3s 2d *parisis* Fl. per *queue* of approximately 457 litres, which implies a rate of less than 1%.⁶⁵ It is unlikely that the Zwin toll was much higher than that. In addition there was a comital toll on

⁶⁰ Harriss, *King, Parliament and public finance*, 421-422.

⁶¹ Lloyd, *English wool trade*, 241-242, 314-317.

⁶² Munro, *Wool, cloth and gold*, 88-90.

⁶³ Ormrod, 'England', 41-43.

⁶⁴ The tariff is given by Gilliodts-van Severen, ed., *Cartulaire de l'ancienne tonlieu* I, 9. For grain, where the toll is expressed as a share of the volume, the rate is between 1 and 2% (Ibid., 10).

⁶⁵ The tariff can be deduced from the account of the Dendermonde toll published by David Nicholas, e.g. lines 3 and 4 (Nicholas, 'Scheldt trade', 291). A rate can be calculated by using a price estimate of 690 to 1090 *gros* Fl. or 2.9 to 4.5 *£ gros* Fl. per *queue*. This is based on the retail prices of wine in Ghent between 1370 and 1380, which were between 3.5 and 5.5 *gros* Fl. per *lot* of 2.301 liters (Craeybeckx, *Un grand commerce*, 204; for the content of the *lot* and the *queue* pp. 5 and 284). The resulting rate is 0.5 to 0.7%; but as wholesale prices were lower than retail prices, the actual rate was probably somewhat higher. The ratio of the *£*, s and d *parisis* Fl. to the *£*, s and d *gros* Fl. was 12 to 1 (Spufford, *Handbook of medieval exchange*, xxiv).

wine sold in Damme, but it was negligible: in the late 14th century only the trade in the popular Poitou wines was taxed, at a rate of 8d *parisis* Fl. per barrel.⁶⁶ Brokerage fees were usually no higher than 1% of the value and in some cases even considerably lower.⁶⁷ Somewhat more substantial were the dues for the use of the crane and the dragging of the wine barrels, which added another 2% or so.⁶⁸ Still, the end result was a level of impositions comparable to what was customary in Dordrecht. The impression receives support from the calculations made by German cloth merchants in the early 15th century. In a complaint to the Bruges authorities they estimated their expenditure on brokerage, handling, tolls and other dues in Bruges at 6 to 8% of the price of the cloth. Considering the source of the information, this is likely to have been the upper limit.⁶⁹

However, Bruges does provide a very clear example of the second way in which staples could have detrimental effects: via the suppression of trade elsewhere. After the official instatement of the Bruges staple in 1323, the Bruges merchant elite continued to look upon the Zwin towns as a potential threat to the city's own trade. Bruges' extraterritorial powers were used to keep competition in check: from the middle of the 14th century the city used its position as court of appeal (*chef de sens*) for the other towns in the quarter to administratively and financially subordinate the Zwin towns.⁷⁰ The Bruges staple imposed a veritable stranglehold on the Sluis economy, which was only very partially relieved by the rise of a vivid black market, used mainly by local people and individual merchants who could not fall back on networks and trade privileges in Bruges.⁷¹ For the smaller Zwin towns the situation was even worse. Jean-Pierre Sosson has argued convincingly that their total dependency on the Bruges trade cut off all possibilities for an independent development, and in the end was responsible for the towns' economic and demographic decline in the 15th century.⁷²

Ghent's attempts to monopolise the transit grain trade were closely connected to the aspirations of the city (that is, of its skippers) to dominate the waterways. The confrontation with Douai mentioned above is an early example. Another demonstration of the link between the grain trade and domination of the rivers is provided by a prolonged conflict with Ypres in early 15th century. With the permission of duke Philip the Bold the city of Ypres had undertaken the improvement and extension of the Ieperleet, a waterway that connected Ypres to Nieuport and Bruges. This meant that a route that had previously been used only for the grain provisioning of the Ypres district, now also offered attractive opportunities for the interregional grain trade. Grain from northern France was

⁶⁶ Craeybeckx, *Un grand commerce*, 22-24.

⁶⁷ Gelderblom, *Violence, opportunism*, Ch 5 (The exchange of goods).

⁶⁸ Crane: Van Houtte, *Geschiedenis van Brugge*, 201 (2 *grooten* per barrel). Transport of the wine barrels: Gilliodts-van Severen, ed., *Cartulaire de l'ancienne tonlieu* II, 52-53 (4-6 *grooten* per barrel, for Hansa merchants). Based on a (retail) wine price estimate of 2.9 to 4.5 £ *grooten* Fl this results in a rate (for crane plus handling) of 0.7 to 1.2%; again the actual rate was probably higher because wholesale wine prices were lower than retail prices.

⁶⁹ Abraham-Thisse, 'Lakenhandel', 68.

⁷⁰ Nicholas, *Town and countryside*, 144-147.

⁷¹ Lambert, 'Merchants on the margin?'

⁷² Sosson, 'Les "petites villes" du Zwin'.

transported up the Lys to Warneton; from there it was taken to Ypres, less than 15 kilometres off, by road. Once in Ypres the grain could easily be re-exported via Nieuport or Bruges. In 1424 Ghent managed to persuade duke Philip the Bold to issue a prohibition on the use of this route for grain exports; this meant that the Ghent skippers acquired a virtual monopoly on the interregional transit grain trade. A vicious conflict with Ypres erupted: Ghent militias even tried to physically block the waterway between Ypres and Nieuport by putting stakes in the water. In 1432 the duke did have the stakes removed, but he maintained the prohibition to export grain via Ypres; even an appeal to the Parliament of Paris, as supreme court, could not change that. Although by the middle of the 15th century the Ieperleet was heavily used, Ypres had missed out on a chance to link up to the interregional grain trade network.⁷³

Ypres was not the only victim of Ghent's attempts to control the waterways. Ghent also clashed with various other towns. Until the late 15th century, when the city was unable to stop the advance of Antwerp, Ghent successfully suppressed the emergence of competitive river trade centres in Flanders.⁷⁴ The two case studies in the next section will show why Dordrecht, despite comital support for the staple, did not have the same hold on commercial activities in the towns of the Holland river region.

5.3 Two case studies

Almost immediately after Dordrecht had received its staple privilege, protests arose from other towns. In 1304 the Zeeland towns Zierikzee and Middelburg received the explicit permission of the count to bypass Dordrecht with their cargoes of oats and wine.⁷⁵ It is not a coincidence the first protests came from Zeeland and not from Holland. Trade and industry were only just beginning to develop in the towns of Holland, but the Zeeland towns, favourably situated with respect to Flanders, had already built up a flourishing wine trade. Their wealth, and probably also the fact that sovereignty over Zeeland was contested by the counts of Holland and Flanders, gave the Zeeland towns a negotiating position that the emerging towns of Holland simply did not yet have. Admittedly, Middelburg and Zierikzee did not get everything they wished for: wine transports

⁷³ For a detailed description and analysis of the conflict, including references to older literature: Sortor, 'The Ieperleet affair'.

⁷⁴ Corryn, 'Schippersambacht', 202-204.

⁷⁵ Niermeyer, ed., *Bronnen Beneden-Maasgebied*, nr. 169. The charter leaves room for multiple interpretations: besides references to Middelburg and Zierikzee it also mentions 'the other towns of our lands'. This induced Smit and Niermeyer to assume that all towns of Holland and Zeeland were exempt from the staple from 1304 onwards when transporting wine and oats for their own use (Smit, 'Begin', 50; Niermeyer, 'Dordrecht als handelsstad', I, 6-7). However, the later charters on the upkeep of Dordrecht's staple privileges make it perfectly clear there was no general exemption for all towns; in fact the entire history of conflicts on the staple would make no sense at all if there had been such a thing. Therefore the interpretation of Van Rijswijk and Van Herwaarden *et al.* is preferable: they claim that the charter of 1304 implied a more precise delimitation and at most a very limited reduction of the staple rather than a major change (Van Rijswijk, *Geschiedenis Dordtse stapelrecht*, 30-31; Van Herwaarden *et al.*, *Geschiedenis van Dordrecht*, 81-82).

were only allowed if the wine was meant for consumption in the towns. However, the provisions made in the 1304 charter to make sure this restriction was adhered to (in case of doubt a toll official was to accompany the ship to Zeeland to keep an eye on the proceedings), suggests that the towns made use of this loophole to develop their own wine trade with Flanders.

Schoonhoven

Two decades later protests against the Dordrecht staple arose from another direction: now the towns of Holland raised their voices as well. The first among them to do so was the small town of Schoonhoven. Situated on the Rhine near the Utrecht border, Schoonhoven belonged to the counts of Blois, the descendants of Jan of Beaumont. Beaumont, brother to count Willem III of Holland, had received Schoonhoven in the early 14th century as part of his *apanage* (the fief granted to a ruler's younger son) and had made it his main residence in Holland. Schoonhoven was a small and relatively young settlement. It had first developed in the second quarter of the 13th century around a newly constructed harbour that connected the peat stream Vlist to the river Rhine. In the early 14th century Schoonhoven may have had around 500 inhabitants.⁷⁶

At first sight it seems unlikely that an inconsequential settlement like this should feel the Dordrecht staple right as a burden. However, there is good reason to believe that even at this stage the Schoonhoven townspeople participated in the interregional river trade. In 1280 they acquired exemption from the river tolls in Holland as part of a charter of urban liberties; one year later they received a similar privilege for the tolls in Utrecht.⁷⁷ In addition, thanks to its location Schoonhoven was in a good position to attract foreign merchants. Situated east of the easternmost Holland river toll post in Ammers, it was one of those places that offered tempting opportunities for toll evasion to merchants from Guelders or the Rhineland. If they succeeded in selling their merchandise to Hollanders here, they cut expenses on tolls and moreover shortened their journey. That the townspeople profited from this opportunity is suggested by the fact that the count of Holland moved the toll post of Ammers to Schoonhoven in 1398, immediately after the last count of Blois had died and the Blois territories came to resort directly under comital rule.⁷⁸

In 1321 Schoonhoven ships, according to the complaints of the urban authorities, were suddenly confronted with demands to pay tolls and comply with staple obligations in Dordrecht, even though in the past they had been free from both. The townspeople probably realised that on their own they were no match for Dordrecht, and therefore looked for support: they requested the help of their lord Jan of Beaumont. Twenty years later Beaumont was to back the fishermen of

⁷⁶ Visser, *Schoonhoven*, 70-72, 78-79; Visser, 'Dichtheid en bevolking', 20.

⁷⁷ OHZ IV, nrs. 1901 and 1939.

⁷⁸ Smit, ed., *Rekeningen Hollandse tollén*, xxxii; cf. the toll of Niemandsvriend that was probably moved to Woudrichem in 1354 for the same reason (Niermeyer, 'Dordrecht als handelsstad' I, 7-8).

Noordwijk in their attempts to fight the claims of Katwijk to a monopoly in the sea fish trade;⁷⁹ in 1321 we witness him as champion for Schoonhoven in its struggle against Dordrecht. In November of that year Beaumont informed the Schoonhoven authorities that he had talked things over with his brother, who had promised to look into the matter. It seems the count kept his promise, because a few weeks later statements were recorded from (amongst others) the magistrates of Gouda, Oudewater and Nieuwpoort and the lords of Vianen, Montfoort and IJsselstein. In view of the fact that the interests of these towns, all situated in the river region, would be served best if Dordrecht's economic power was not allowed to grow unchecked, it is not surprising that all were perfectly willing to testify Schoonhoven had never paid tolls and had never been subjected to the staple of Dordrecht. The result was at least a partial victory for Schoonhoven: in May 1322 count Willem III issued a charter that granted the town toll exemption, although it does not explicitly state that this also implied exemption from the Dordrecht staple.⁸⁰

But matters did not end here, as the events of a few years later show. There are at least two versions of what happened. The story told by the chronicler Willem Procurator is straightforward enough. According to the chronicle, Dordrecht had received new privileges and this had evoked a reaction from the other towns of Holland, up to the point where goods from Dordrecht merchants had been confiscated. In turn, Dordrecht abused its position by exacting tribute from the burgesses of other towns. The count regarded this as an insubordination and ordered an armed expedition. On the mere rumour of an approaching army Dordrecht retracted and begged for the count's forgiveness, but without success: the staple privilege was withdrawn.⁸¹ The story certainly has the advantage of a strong morale, but it is not necessarily true: for one, there is no indication Dordrecht received new privileges around this time.⁸²

Contemporary administrative sources confirm that Dordrecht's staple privilege was withdrawn in 1326, but allow for a different interpretation of the events leading up to the revocation. Maybe the partial success of Schoonhoven's earlier protests had raised hopes in other towns, or perhaps they had triggered a more determined enforcement of the staple right by Dordrecht officials. Quite possibly it was a combination of both. In any case, in 1325 six towns (Delft, Gouda, Haarlem, Leiden, Alkmaar and –once more– Schoonhoven) and three villages (Akersloot, Uitgeest and Wormer) argued that since their toll privileges were older than Dordrecht's staple rights, they did not feel obliged to buy, sell or unload at Dordrecht.⁸³ To be sure, Dordrecht's privilege of 1299 explicitly stated that staple obligations also applied to those who were exempt from the river tolls, but the towns obviously did not agree. The relation between toll exemption and

⁷⁹ See chapter 4.

⁸⁰ Prevenier and Smit, eds., *Bronnen dagvaarten*, I-2, nr. 38; Waller Zeper, *Jan van Henegouwen*, 206-207; Niermeyer, ed., *Bronnen Beneden-Maasgebied*, nr. 228.

⁸¹ Willem Procurator, *Kroniek*, 362-367.

⁸² Van Riemsdijk, 'Registers van Gerard Alewijnsz.', 172.

⁸³ Van de Wall, ed., *Handvesten Dordrecht*, 159-160.

exemption from the staple was to become a recurrent theme in later years, with each party interpreting the rules to its best interests.

The protest against the Dordrecht staple probably marks the first attempt of the towns of Holland to join forces in order to influence economic policy. It is worth noting that towns and villages from the north of the county were just as much involved as towns in the river delta, a clear indication of the increasing integration of the northern part of Holland in the interregional trade network.⁸⁴ The involvement of three Kennemerland villages is not as surprising as it may seem. As we saw earlier, they had all received exemption from the river tolls around 1280.⁸⁵ This gave them reason to partake in the protest and since the seniority of toll privileges was the argument on which the entire case rested, they would have made a welcome addition to the party. The fact that Schoonhoven was again going through the trouble of putting up a fight raises more questions: it suggests that if in 1322 freedom of staple obligations had been implied in the ruling of the count, it had not been observed by Dordrecht.

Asked for advice in the matter, the count's council recommended upholding the oldest privileges, thus lending its support to the claims of the alliance of towns of Holland. Most likely the same mechanism was at work as four years earlier in the region around Schoonhoven: many council members were lords of seignories in the river delta and therefore hoped to benefit from a containment of Dordrecht's trade monopolies. Count Willem III, it seems, did not decide immediately. The advice was recorded in the registers of the chancellery in 1325, but a final decision was not proclaimed until a year later: Dordrecht's staple right was withdrawn altogether.⁸⁶

It is tempting to speculate on the reasons for the delay. Did the count realise he could not possibly satisfy both parties? Did he waver between the familiar connection between Dordrecht's staple right and river toll revenues on the one hand, and the as yet unfulfilled promise of commercial development in other towns? Apart from the time lapse, there is another reason to believe the decision may have been a hard one. In the 1326 register of chancellery clerk Gerard Alewijnsz. a comment is included, clearly formulated by a jurist trained in Roman law, about the conditions allowing a ruler to withdraw privileges granted by his predecessors. Dordrecht and the staple privilege are not mentioned: the comment is in fact based on a case, probably a fictitious one, of a market privilege granted by the count of Flanders. However, because of the place of the document in the register and the remarkable resemblance to the conflict on Dordrecht's staple, Van Riemsdijk has argued the comment was probably used to defend the revocation of the staple privilege in June 1326.⁸⁷ The comment states that revocation is allowed if a privilege is abused and turns out to be detrimental to the common good, or if it detracts from privileges granted to others before. Both

⁸⁴ Hoppenbrouwers, 'Town and country in Holland', 61.

⁸⁵ See chapter 3.

⁸⁶ Niermeyer, ed., *Bronnen Beneden-Maasgebied*, nrs. 247 and 252.

⁸⁷ Van Riemsdijk, 'Registers van Gerard Alewijnsz.', 178-179.

arguments can be said to be relevant here; in fact the second argument is identical to the claim about the seniority of the toll privileges made by the towns of Holland. If Van Riemsdijk's conclusion is correct, it is acknowledged here for the first time that a trading privilege granted to one town can be obstructive to the economic development of others. Also, it is suggested the ruler is in a position to remedy this.

But the situation did not hold for long. Step by step Dordrecht's staple privileges were restored; ten years later they were almost back to where they had been in 1325. This restoration has been attributed to the need to restore the count's toll revenues,⁸⁸ but again we may safely assume a combination of factors. At least as much was at stake for Dordrecht. No doubt the Dordrecht elite did not hesitate to use its influence with the count to have the staple right reinstalled. However, the protests of the other towns did have some lasting effects. In 1335 the towns of Holland received an exemption from the staple for salt for local use.⁸⁹ Seven years later a similar exemption was granted for wine, but only if this was bought at the 'highest market': in Cologne. The number of days the wine had to remain at the staple before it could be taken elsewhere was reduced from fourteen to eight.⁹⁰ It proves the towns of Holland had gained strength: Dordrecht was no longer able to dictate conditions. The exemptions left the towns some room for manoeuvring: wine and salt said to be meant for local consumption could be resold upon arrival, even if this was illegal.

It is time to return to Schoonhoven and find out what the restoration of the staple privilege meant for this town. According to an 18th-century local author, the burgesses of Schoonhoven made their town into a 'staple town, more free than Dordrecht'.⁹¹ This rosy picture of Schoonhoven's role in commerce must be exaggerated. However, there is reason to believe Schoonhoven continued to play a part in interregional trade. The late 14th-century accounts of the Meuse river toll near Heusden occasionally refer to merchants or shipmasters from Schoonhoven transporting products like grain, flax, woad or wool. A certain Coenraet Heinricxz. for instance turns up several times in the accounts in relation to payments for transports of wine (and occasionally fish).⁹² We do not know how and where he sold his cargo, but it is useful to have a look at the options.

First of all Heinricxz. could play it by the rules: he could bring the wine to Dordrecht and offer it for sale there. This would mean he had to pay the regular dues, but as we saw they were not outrageously high. More problematic was probably the fact that if Heinricxz. could not find a buyer, he would have to wait

⁸⁸ Van Rijswijk, *Geschiedenis Dordtse stapelrecht*, 34; Van Herwaarden *et al.*, *Geschiedenis van Dordrecht*, 83.

⁸⁹ Niermeyer, ed., *Bronnen Beneden-Maasgebied*, nr. 291. It is not quite clear if this exemption regarded all the towns in Holland or only some of them.

⁹⁰ Van Mieris, ed., *Groot charterboek II*, 665-666.

⁹¹ Van Berkum, *Beschrijving Schoonhoven*, 332.

⁹² On Conraet Heinricxz.: Niermeyer, ed., *Bronnen Beneden-Maasgebied*, 624 (fish), 631, 632, 653, 654 (wine); on other merchants or shipmasters from Schoonhoven in the Heusden toll accounts: Ibidem, 620, 624, 625, 644, 653, 664. Heinricxz. had probably bought the wine in Venlo or Roermond, or perhaps in Den Bosch.

for eight days before he could continue his journey. If he did find one, he had to face another problem: it might be difficult to find a return cargo. This was directly related to the guild revolution that had taken place in Dordrecht in 1367. Against the background of continuous faction conflicts, the guilds had finally managed to gain a foothold in the town's government. As a result, attempts were made to introduce some protectionist elements into the organisation of trade. The Dordrecht skippers' guild for one claimed a monopoly on all transports beginning in Dordrecht, similar to the privilege of the Ghent skippers' guild. Count Albrecht did not consent, but complaints from foreign shipmasters suggest that the skippers' guild was not overly concerned with the refusal. Around 1390 the count intervened more than once and admonished the Dordrecht skippers to respect the rights of competitors, but the early 15th-century bylaws of the town still mention the guild monopoly on shipping.⁹³

Heinricxz. did have a few other options. He might pretend the wine he transported was for local use in his home town and upon arrival in Schoonhoven sell it to another merchant anyway. For the transports via Heusden this is not a very likely option; if this was Heinricxz.' intention he would probably have chosen a more northerly route. However, for other transports it was certainly a possibility. If Heinricxz. was believed by the toll officials, which probably depended on the quantity of wine he was carrying and perhaps also on his reputation, he would be free from staple obligations. However, Schoonhoven did not have a good connection by water to the northern part of Holland, so it may not have been that easy to find a customer.

Alternatively, Heinricxz. could try to sell the wine between Heusden and Dordrecht, somewhere on the river, or in one of the small towns or villages on its banks. This was illegal and it involved a risk of being caught. It is hard to estimate how big this risk was, but it was certainly not negligible. We have seen that even in 1304 ships were sometimes accompanied by officials to ensure that no transactions took place along the river. In the early 15th century -but probably the practice began earlier than that- Dordrecht officials actually patrolled the rivers: if necessary transgressors were taken to Dordrecht by force.⁹⁴ Moreover, it might have been difficult to find a buyer who was prepared to take the risk of being caught at some toll post without being able to show the compulsory token of the Dordrecht exchange. Still, commerce along the river did take place. The accounts of the count for Zuidholland over the year 1331 mention two fines for transgressions against the staple privilege, but repeated exhortations to the toll officials to watch out for this kind of 'abuse' indicate that they were much more frequent than that.⁹⁵

The conclusion seems to be that the staple right severely curtailed Schoonhoven's options. On the other hand, Schoonhoven experienced its strongest growth in the

⁹³ Niermeyer, 'Dordrecht als handelsstad' V, 93-94; VI, 149-150, 164-165.

⁹⁴ Van Rijswijk, *Geschiedenis Dordtse stapelrecht*, 57-58.

⁹⁵ Hamaker, ed., *Rekeningen grafelijkeheid I*, 135.

late 13th and the first three quarters of the 14th century,⁹⁶ which suggests that at least at this stage its economic base was not eroded by the Dordrecht staple. At the end of the 14th century the tide did turn: the revenues from the Schoonhoven *botermaat* (an imposition on the measuring of butter) and the town's weigh house, which had been rising gradually since at least the middle of the 14th century, dropped sharply around 1380.⁹⁷ However, this can hardly have been the effect of the Dordrecht staple: dairy and cloth were not subjected to it. For that matter, it is equally unlikely the decline was the effect of Dordrecht's regional monopoly: as explained in chapter 4 the city did not force the rural population of Zuidholland to offer their products for sale at the Dordrecht market until the middle of the 15th century. A more credible explanation is provided by De Boer, who believes that the decline may have been caused by a shift of the administrative centre of the Blois territories from Schoonhoven to Gouda in the late 14th century.⁹⁸

The fact that Schoonhoven experienced its strongest growth exactly in the century when the staple of Dordrecht flourished, seems a paradox. One way to solve it has been presented by Visser in his study of the physical structure of medieval Schoonhoven. Visser concludes that the town owed its prosperity mainly to its position as a market centre for the surrounding district.⁹⁹ It is certainly true that Schoonhoven had a well-developed regional market function at an early stage. Market tolls are mentioned in the 1280 charter of liberties; by the middle of the 14th century the town had a weigh house and cloth hall and it hosted three fairs every year.¹⁰⁰ However, the references to Coenraet Heinricxz. and his fellow burgesses in the late 14th-century river toll accounts suggest that Schoonhoven merchants were active in interregional trade as well.

What is more, Schoonhoven merchants continued to be involved in the river trade in the 15th century. At the end of the century Schoonhoven merchants were actively engaged in long-distance trade; they visited Flanders and Guelders and they participated in the grain trade with the Somme region. Visser acknowledges this fact, but he seems to underestimate the extent of the activities.¹⁰¹ Testimonies recorded in a series of conflicts between Schoonhoven and Dordrecht on the staple privilege illustrate that in the late 15th and early 16th century Schoonhoven had trade relations with many towns in Holland and Brabant.¹⁰²

In addition, Schoonhoven never gave up its ambition to develop a depot function. In the middle of the 15th century the town took advantage of a conflict that had arisen between Dordrecht and the towns of Guelders and the Rhineland: when these towns boycotted Dordrecht, Schoonhoven did not hesitate to welcome their merchants. The report in the Dordrecht urban records is revealing.

⁹⁶ Visser, *Schoonhoven*, 182.

⁹⁷ De Boer, *Graaf en grafiek*, 262-263, 309-311

⁹⁸ Ibid., 262, 311.

⁹⁹ Visser, *Schoonhoven*, 182-184.

¹⁰⁰ Charter of liberties: OHZ IV, nr. 1901. Weigh house and cloth hall: Ibid., 153. Fairs: see chapter 2 and appendix A.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 92; Fruin, ed., *Enquête*, 188.

¹⁰² Beulink, 'Dordrecht en Schoonhoven', 72.

Schoonhoven skippers had tried to bypass Dordrecht with cargoes of chalk and wood purchased in or near Schoonhoven from foreign merchants. The Dordrecht authorities were clearly afraid that Schoonhoven was going to take over as a leading trade centre. Pressed by Dordrecht, central government prohibited all contact between Schoonhoven and the eastern towns, but the people of Schoonhoven did not obey. On the contrary, they started work on a new set of locks in the Vlist which would give the town direct access to the north of Holland over water. The Dordrecht authorities did not wait for the construction works to be finished: they sent out an armed expedition to destroy the locks and thus forced Schoonhoven to at least temporarily give in.¹⁰³

Still, there are indications that in the second half of the 15th century Schoonhoven did serve as a trade centre for foreign merchants who wished to exchange up-river commodities for the products of specialised agriculture for sale at the Schoonhoven market. In 1496 Schoonhoven joined forces with Arnhem to plead the continuation of the mutual toll exemption the two towns had always enjoyed, stating that as long as they could remember Arnhem merchants had been visiting Schoonhoven freely to sell wood, coal and grain and to buy fish, dairy and hemp.¹⁰⁴ Significantly, the relation with Arnhem seems to go back to the late 14th century: Schoonhoven merchants were granted toll exemption in Arnhem in 1372 by count Jan of Blois, son-in-law to the duke of Guelders.¹⁰⁵

In short, there can be no doubt that the Dordrecht staple did limit Schoonhoven's options, but the small town was never entirely pushed out of the interregional river trade: Dordrecht did not succeed in imposing a watertight monopoly. Schoonhoven had two pillars to build on, both dating back to the 14th century. One was the aid of an influential lord who helped to open up new opportunities. The other was the town's regional market function, not as an alternative to a role as river trade centre but as a way to diversify and sustain this role.

Brielle

Brielle, situated on the island of Oostvoorne near the mouth of the Meuse, was the main town of the seignory of Voorne; the lords of Voorne were officially vassals of the count of Holland, but they enjoyed a considerable degree of autonomy and in most respects ruled their lands as sovereign lords.¹⁰⁶ Brielle does not come into focus in relation to Dordrecht until the 1340s. With good reason: around this time the *Maasrecht*, the right to control trade on the Meuse as well as on the Lek and Merwede, was added to Dordrecht's privileges. This happened in two steps. In 1338 Hansa merchants entering the Meuse from the North Sea were

¹⁰³ Niermeyer, 'Vijftiende-eeuwse handelsoorlog', 10-13, 30-31, 52-53.

¹⁰⁴ Van Hasselt, ed., *Arnhemse oudheden* II, 74-80; Van Berkum, *Beschrijving Schoonhoven*, 332.

¹⁰⁵ Visser, *Schoonhoven*, 80. Visser believes Schoonhoven did not profit from this privilege, but the late 15th-century joint request of Schoonhoven and Arnhem suggests otherwise.

¹⁰⁶ De Monté Ver Loren, *Hoofdlijnen*, 105.

ordered to unload and sell only in Dordrecht. In 1344 the clause was broadened to include other ships following the same route. Only vessels that used the Meuse estuary as an entrance to Flanders were allowed to pass undisturbed, as long as they did not sell part of their cargo in Holland or Zeeland.¹⁰⁷

It is clear why the *Maasrecht* was causing problems for Brielle. The town had emerged as a modest fishing and trading settlement in the second half of the 13th century. In 1280 the people of Brielle had received toll exemption in Holland, suggesting that by that time they were already engaged in trading activities.¹⁰⁸ By the early 14th century a flourishing herring fishery seems to have developed: Brielle's two charters of urban liberties, dating from 1330 and 1343, and an urban by-law from 1346, repeatedly refer to the herring industry and herring trade.¹⁰⁹ At this stage herring was still cured on land, either by smoking the fish or by salting it, with the latter method gradually gaining ground.¹¹⁰ This explains why Brielle also became a market for salt: around 1330 the salt trade was large enough to warrant regulation of the tariffs and conditions for measuring the salt.¹¹¹ However, the *Maasrecht* implied that salt traders entering the Meuse were no longer allowed to unload and sell in Brielle: they had to proceed to the Dordrecht staple. The Brielle fishermen and fish merchants were therefore obliged to go to Dordrecht to buy this indispensable commodity. Even if we leave the costs of the impositions at the staple aside –after all, measuring and possibly also brokerage would have had to be paid for in Brielle as well– this implied an unwelcome loss of time and extra expenses on transport costs.

Count Willem IV, as we have seen before, was easily persuaded into granting economic privileges in return for a sum of money. It is not clear if the count received payment for the 1338 version of the *Maasrecht*, but for the extension in 1344 the Dordrecht authorities paid the very considerable sum of 800 *écus*.¹¹² Still, there was a more fundamental reason for the grant and it had everything to do with Brielle. The town of Brielle was a threat to Dordrecht's position as a trade centre and therefore to the interests of both the Dordrecht elite and the count.¹¹³ A first example of what this could lead to is the case mentioned at the beginning of this chapter: the predicament of the three foreign merchants who in 1345 required the intercession of lady Machteld of Voorne to be acquitted for their transgression of the Dordrecht staple privilege. And there was more to come.

After the death of Willem IV in 1345, his sister, Margaretha of Bavaria, assumed sovereignty. Her position was not strong. Dordrecht probably had little trouble having its existing privileges confirmed, including the *Maasrecht* in the

¹⁰⁷ Van de Wall, ed., *Handvesten Dordrecht*, 182-183 and 193-194. Van de Wall convincingly argues that the exception for ships on their way to Flanders was made because otherwise they would probably have chosen the sea route, thus reducing the revenues of the tolls of Geervliet and Iersekeroord.

¹⁰⁸ OHZ IV, nr. 1931; Klok, *Brielle*, 5-7, 14.

¹⁰⁹ Cappon and Van Engen, 'Stadsrechtsoorkonden van Brielle', 142-146 and 146-162; De Jager, ed., *Middeleeuwse keuren Brielle*, 23-34.

¹¹⁰ Boelmans Kranenburg, 'Visserijbedrijf Zijdenaars', 322-326.

¹¹¹ Niermeyer, ed., *Bronnen Beneden-Maasgebied*, nr. 276.

¹¹² Hamaker, ed., *Rekeningen grafelijkheid III*, 311.

¹¹³ Niermeyer, 'Dordrecht als handelsstad' IV, 194-195.

extended version. One exception was made: the towns of Holland and Zeeland received exemption from the *Maasrecht* for products for their own use.¹¹⁴ In this, the *Maasrecht* followed the changes that had taken place for the transport of wine and salt on the Lek and Merwede in previous years. But Brielle, it seems, was treated more harshly than the other towns of Holland. Margaretha explicitly forbade the salt trade in Brielle; she ordered the toll officials to prevent ships from sailing to Brielle to unload salt unless this had been bought, measured and trans-shipped in Dordrecht.¹¹⁵ The exemption granted to other towns to freely transport salt for local use was therefore denied to Brielle, no doubt because it was considered too much of a risk to the Dordrecht monopoly.

The succession conflict between Margaretha and her son Willem that erupted soon afterwards made matters even worse. In 1351 Margaretha, in urgent need of assistance because Willem was raising armed forces all over the county, granted Dordrecht a greatly extended version of the staple right. It covered all products, transported both upstream and downstream, on Lek, Merwede and Meuse and also on the Hollandse IJssel.¹¹⁶ With indignation Niermeyer describes the consequences of this 'immoderate and totally unnatural' extension of Dordrecht's staple rights, based on purely political considerations and not on economic grounds. Dordrecht was now proclaimed the compulsory market for commodities until then not sold there in quantities of significance, like dairy from the north of Holland, beer from Delft, cloth from Leiden, or, we may add, fish from Brielle.¹¹⁷ The burgesses of Dordrecht itself were exempted from their own town's staple obligations; if anything, this shows how much the Dordrecht elite was able to dictate conditions.

In 1355/56, when Willem had been established in full power as duke Willem V, he revoked all privileges granted for political reasons by his mother and himself during the succession conflict.¹¹⁸ Although the treatise *De cura reipublicae et sorte principantis* by Philip of Leyden, at the time the count's principal legal adviser, was probably not written in direct defence of this action – a first draft was ready years before the revocation took place – it is clear the revocation and the treatise were inspired by the same considerations.¹¹⁹ The treatise discusses the nature of sovereignty and stresses that a ruler has a moral obligation to carefully preserve his inheritance, his authority and his fiscal base. He not only has the right but the duty to revoke any privileges that weaken the state. In this Philip of Leyden went one step further than the anonymous author of the note found in the 1326 registers of Philip's predecessor Gerard Alewijnsz., who had merely pointed this out as a possibility.

The extended staple right granted to Dordrecht in 1351 was handed in in May 1355: this is not surprising, for if there ever was a privilege granted for purely

¹¹⁴ Van de Wall, ed., *Handvesten Dordrecht*, 208; Niermeyer, 'Dordrecht als handelsstad' IV, 194.

¹¹⁵ Van de Wall, ed., *Handvesten Dordrecht*, 209.

¹¹⁶ Niermeyer, *Bronnen Beneden-Maasgebied*, nr. 383.

¹¹⁷ Niermeyer, 'Dordrecht als handelsstad' IV, 201.

¹¹⁸ See chapter 3.

¹¹⁹ Leupen, *Philip of Leyden*, 103.

political reasons, this surely was it. The surprise is in what happened next: the exact same privilege was re-issued immediately afterwards.¹²⁰ The duke may have felt that granting such a far-reaching privilege to Dordrecht might anger the other towns of Holland, but did not threaten his own power or his fiscal base. More importantly, accommodating the Dordrecht elite was essential in order to obtain the substantial loans and guarantees needed to realise Willem's political and military ambitions.

In reality Dordrecht never managed to develop a staple for beer, cheese or fish. It was one thing to have the count promise such a thing, but something entirely different to actually make it work. That would have required an enormous control effort, which the central authorities were obviously not prepared to make. However, Dordrecht did use the 1355 charter to maintain its traditional staple privileges for salt and for products from the Rhineland and the upper Meuse region.

Brielle was not left untouched. On the same day that Willem V re-issued Dordrecht's extended staple privilege, he also repeated the order given by his mother nine years earlier: no salt was to be unloaded or loaded in Brielle.¹²¹ Moreover, it looks as if around 1370 Dordrecht tried to gain control of the market in herring, Brielle's main trade commodity. It is possible there is a relation with the guild revolution that had recently taken place in Dordrecht. As we have seen, this had resulted in the introduction of some protectionist elements in the organisation of trade. The guilds probably also strove to maintain more strictly than before Dordrecht's privileges in the river trade, including the *Maasrecht*.¹²²

A letter from Machteld of Voorne to the authorities in Dordrecht, most likely dating from 1369 and clearly one in a long row, shows how the lady of Voorne once more put up a fight to protect the Brielle herring market, including her own revenues from the fish tolls that were levied there.¹²³ She used a combination of tactical delays, firmness and diplomacy. After apologising profusely to her 'dear friends' for not answering sooner, Machteld insisted that her subjects were free to sell their herring in Brielle instead of in Dordrecht. She did not see why Dordrecht should object to this: nobody was going to be forced to engage in any sort of transaction, but all, including the burgesses of Dordrecht, were welcome to do so: 'If they sell here, we do not interfere. If they don't, they can go anywhere they want to, and may God guide them.'¹²⁴ This of course was not what Dordrecht wanted to hear. In the end duke Albrecht had to intervene.¹²⁵

¹²⁰ Van de Wall, ed., *Handvesten Dordrecht*, 235-237.

¹²¹ Van de Wall, ed., *Handvesten Dordrecht*, 240-241.

¹²² Niermeyer, 'Dordrecht als handelsstad' V, 93-97.

¹²³ The fish tolls are mentioned in the Brielle charter of liberties of 1330 (Cappon and Van Engen, 'Stadsrechtsoorkonden van Brielle', 142-146). In the late 14th century Voorne lost its position as an independent seignory; from that moment onwards the fish toll revenues are recorded in the comital accounts (De Boer, Faber, and Jansen, eds., *Rekeningen grafelijkheid II*, 200-201 and 262-263).

¹²⁴ Van de Wall, ed., *Handvesten Dordrecht*, 195-196; see for the date of this charter Niermeyer, *Bronnen Beneden-Maasgebied*, nr. 541.

¹²⁵ Van de Wall, ed., *Handvesten Dordrecht*, 300: prolongation of a truce between lady Machteld of Voorne and the Dordrecht authorities while awaiting the arrival of the duke.

The verdict of Albrecht has not been preserved, but we can be sure about the outcome: herring remained free of staple obligations.¹²⁶ This was a new line of trade, carried by the coastal towns; Dordrecht could not fall back on ancient privileges. Albrecht's decision was probably also eased by the fact that at the end of 1369 the guild regime was accused of rising against the duke's authority.¹²⁷

Between 1391 and 1394 a large alliance of towns once more opposed the Dordrecht staple privilege. Relations between Dordrecht and duke Albrecht had cooled because of political controversies between the rival factions of *Hoeken*, in control in Dordrecht, and *Kabeljaunen*, at the time dominating central government. Moreover, Jan of Arkel, who as lord of the river town of Gorinchem was much opposed to the Dordrecht staple, had just been appointed chancellor. Almost all towns of Holland participated in the protest; so did Brielle. It resulted in a treaty forced upon Dordrecht by duke Albrecht, compelling the Dordrecht authorities to acknowledge the freedom of the allied towns from the staple.¹²⁸ Dordrecht probably lost this battle because its strategies were outdated. This time there was no succession conflict to exploit, and the influence of the other towns of Holland had increased considerably since 1355. Internal conflicts within the Dordrecht elite and between elite and guilds did not help either.¹²⁹

However, once more the staple revived in due time. Dordrecht unilaterally denounced the treaty one year later. Reconciliation with the duke took longer, but in 1401 Albrecht restored the staple privilege.¹³⁰ During his long reign duke Albrecht had had every chance to realise the importance of the Dordrecht staple for his own position. Around 1370 for example a succession conflict in Guelders had seriously damaged the river trade and therefore also the toll revenues in Holland. In order to restore them when the war was over, Albrecht had given orders for a strict implementation of the Dordrecht staple privilege. It had worked.¹³¹ At the end of the 14th century, the alliance between Dordrecht and central government had not lost it value. In the heat of political turmoil it might have slipped temporarily, but the bond was still too advantageous to both to be severed permanently.

Still, the *Maasrecht* and the attempts of Dordrecht to include other products in the staple privilege appear to have left Brielle's role in the herring industry and herring trade largely untouched. In the second half of the century Brielle flourished and in the 15th century the town developed into Holland's largest interregional herring market. The fact that in 1423 duke Willem VI ordained that in the interest of the

¹²⁶ Sneller, 'Handel en verkeer', 360.

¹²⁷ Niermeyer, 'Dordrecht als handelsstad' V, 97.

¹²⁸ Van Rijswijk, *Geschiedenis Dordtse stapelrecht* 50-54; Niermeyer, *Bronnen Beneden-Maasgebied*, nr. 677; Prevenier and Smit, eds., *Bronnen dagvaarten* I-2, nrs. 524 and 527. Schoonhoven was one of the few towns that did not participate in the alliance, possibly because of its *Hoek* sympathies (Niermeyer, 'Dordrecht als handelsstad' VI, 152).

¹²⁹ Niermeyer, 'Dordrecht als handelsstad' VI, 152-153.

¹³⁰ Van de Wall, ed., *Handvesten Dordrecht*, 374, 375-376; Niermeyer, 'Dordrecht als handelsstad' VI, 163.

¹³¹ Van de Wall, ed., *Handvesten Dordrecht*, 308-309; Niermeyer, 'Dordrecht als handelsstad' V, 104-105.

herring export the Brielle herring tons were to be the standard for the rest of Holland is a telling sign.¹³² It is not surprising then that we find burgesses of Brielle transporting herring to Guelders and the Rhineland in the late 14th century. In the year 1387/1388 Brielle shipmasters passed the toll at the Guelders town of Tiel with a total of 92 *last* of herring. This easily exceeded the amount of herring transported by burgesses of Dordrecht, whereas only forty years before it had been the other way around.¹³³ In 1394 the shipment of herring by people from Brielle even reached a total of 153 *last*.¹³⁴

Because of the herring industry the salt trade had always been of major importance to Brielle. As we saw, it had been at the heart of the clashes with Dordrecht in the middle of the 14th century. But despite Dordrecht's attempts to prevent salt merchants from unloading their cargo in Brielle, it is doubtful if this was ever a real possibility. In 1377 duke Albrecht ordered his toll officials to stop the illegal sale of salt to merchants from the east on the Dieze, a small stream entering the Meuse east of Heusden.¹³⁵ If salt could be brought this far inland, an experienced and determined shipmaster could surely manage to escape the Dordrecht patrol ships on the short stretch from the mouth of the Meuse to the harbour of Brielle. Moreover, until the second decade of the 15th century Brielle had a second entrance to the sea: the Goote, cutting through the island of Oostvoorne, connected the town to the Haringvliet. Ships entering the Haringvliet were not subjected to the Dordrecht staple. Large vessels would probably have had trouble using this route, but small ships could pass. This 'back entrance' must have been of vital importance in times when Dordrecht was taking the enforcement of the *Maasrecht* seriously.¹³⁶ It is not surprising that in the early 15th century Brielle tried to stop attempts to dam the Goote.¹³⁷

Of secondary importance for Brielle was the wine trade. Still, the Tiel toll accounts of 1394/1395 show a few ships from Brielle transporting wine. In some cases this may have been an independent line of trade.¹³⁸ In others wine was probably taken in by herring traders as a return cargo. At the end of September 1394 Jan Vranckensz. from Brielle paid tolls for the herring he transported. A few days later he passed the toll again, this time with wine. In November Ael Hugensz. made a similar trip. Vranckensz. and Hugensz. are in the toll accounts many times, but these are the only times they carry wine; usually it is just herring. This, and the relatively small quantities of wine the two were taking with them (some 500 and 1000 litres respectively) suggest they were not experienced wine traders. It is

¹³² Haak, 'Brielle', 35-36; Van Mieris, ed., *Groot charterboek* IV, 688-689

¹³³ Niermeyer, 'Dordrecht als handelsstad' III, 185.

¹³⁴ Westermann, ed., *Rekeningen riviertollen Gelderland*, 57-90. The figure of 153 *last* relates to the herring transported between March and December 1394.

¹³⁵ Van de Wall, ed., *Handvesten Dordrecht*, 316-317.

¹³⁶ Jansma points to a similar effect for other towns in the lower Meuse region: the Bernisse, the water separating the islands of Oostvoorne and Putten, provided them with a staple free route crossing the river delta from north to south (Jansma, 'Betekenis van Dordrecht en Rotterdam', 150-151).

¹³⁷ Klok, *Brielle*, 18-19.

¹³⁸ Westermann, ed., *Rekeningen riviertollen Gelderland*, 49, 51 and 54: three shipments of wine by three men carrying the surname Bloc: Gherit, Coppen and Jacop. A family of wine merchants perhaps?

possible they profited from the temporary withdrawal of the staple privilege in 1394 by trying their hand at something new.¹³⁹ This suggestion receives some support from indications in other towns that the opportunities offered by these years of respite were not overlooked. In the early 1390s the authorities of the river towns of Heusden and Gorinchem issued new tariffs for the use of the cranes in the towns' harbours. The lists mention, among various other commodities, wine, wood, and barley: products Dordrecht claimed to have a monopoly on.¹⁴⁰

But Brielle did not focus on the river trade, as Gorinchem and Heusden did. First and foremost it looked towards the sea. As a side effect of the salt trade, Brielle had probably developed some trade in products from the Baltic as early as the middle of the 14th century.¹⁴¹ Around 1370 Brielle merchants were actively involved in the Baltic trade. The Swedish king allowed them to establish a *vitte* (a temporary trade settlement) in Skania in 1368 and one year later Brielle co-signed a trade agreement between Denmark, the German Hansa towns and a group of towns in Holland and Zeeland.¹⁴² Brielle merchants also frequented the east coast of England: they show up in the customs account of King's Lynn over the year 1392/1393, exporting cloth and corn.¹⁴³ Moreover, in the codification of Brielle's laws and customs recorded in the first years of the 15th century the town clerk Jan Matthijssen stressed Brielle's character as a *vrye coopstede*, a 'free trading town', where all merchants were welcome and could go about their business in freedom and safety. It is as if we hear Machteld of Voorne speaking again. In fact, Matthijssen did argue the foundations for Brielle's free status were laid during her reign and that of her predecessors: as independent lords, so he claimed, they had had absolute authority and were not bound by any actions of the counts of Holland.¹⁴⁴

The late 15th and early 16th centuries witnessed a new series of conflicts between Brielle and Dordrecht. In the documents relating to these conflicts 15th-century Brielle appears as a flourishing centre of international trade, visited by merchants from Scandinavia, the Baltic region, England, France and even Spain.¹⁴⁵ However, Brielle's prosperity began to decline at the end of the 15th century. Considering the fact that previously the Dordrecht staple privilege had not stopped Brielle's ambitions, it is hard to believe that the staple was the cause. A general economic crisis and reclamation activities which cut off direct access to sea are more likely to have been the reasons.¹⁴⁶ That it was Dordrecht, of all places, that in the early 16th century took over as a regional centre for the herring trade,

¹³⁹ Ibid. 65, 70.

¹⁴⁰ Niermeyer, *Bronnen Beneden-Maasgebied*, nrs. 659 and 694.

¹⁴¹ Niermeyer, 'Dordrecht als handelsstad' IV, p. 195.

¹⁴² Klok, *Brielle*, 14-15.

¹⁴³ Gras, *Early English customs system*, 526-553.

¹⁴⁴ Matthijssen, *Rechtsboek van Den Briel*, 153, 174.

¹⁴⁵ Haak, 'Brielle', 40-46.

¹⁴⁶ Klok, *Brielle*, 30; Haak, 'Brielle', 59-63.

this time not based on any kind of privilege, must have been hard to digest for the people of Brielle.¹⁴⁷

The Dordrecht staple did not stop Brielle's 14th-century economic development. That is not to say it did not cause problems: it probably prevented Brielle from developing its river trade more fully and it certainly meant an obstruction for the salt trade. But just as in Schoonhoven the burgesses of Brielle, with the full support of their lady, found ways around these obstacles, by concentrating on the staple free herring trade, taking advantage of a secondary access to the sea and possibly also by using the periods the staple right was lifted to expand their trade.

5.4 Conclusions

In medieval Holland, characterised by the near absence of non-economic constraints on trade, the Dordrecht staple privilege appears to be an anomaly. Its origins can be found in a combination of two circumstances. One is Dordrecht's early rise in comparison to the other towns of Holland and the superiority in wealth and power of its elite that resulted from it. The second element is the connection between the staple and the river toll system which was vital to comital finances. The power of the Dordrecht elite remained an influential factor throughout the 14th century: in times of political tensions or financial problems the count could not do without its support. The connection between the tolls and the staple was probably even more fundamental. It continued to reinforce the alliance between the count and Dordrecht, despite occasional lapses.

Yet this alliance did not lead to unchecked extractions in the form of taxation on trade. There no doubt were excesses, but in general impositions at the Dordrecht staple were modest. They certainly compared favourably to the dues on English wool exports, which rose to unprecedented heights in the middle of the 14th century. The two factors that contributed to this increase were absent in Dordrecht and also in Bruges: a monopoly position that allowed the tax burden to be shifted to the buyers, and a ruler with the authority to overcome resistance against substantial tax increases.

Although the Dordrecht staple did limit commercial opportunities for the smaller and younger towns in the Holland river region, here too the effect of the staple was not as devastating as has sometimes been assumed. Dordrecht did not stifle all growth elsewhere; in this respect it compares favourably to Bruges and Ghent, who, thanks to their political clout and extraterritorial powers, managed to suppress unwelcome competition more effectively.

The causes are partly to be found in exogenous circumstances. Towns like Brielle and Schoonhoven were able to profit from the rise of trade in products like dairy and herring. These new lines of trade were not subject to the staple: they did

¹⁴⁷ Van Herwaarden *et al.*, *Geschiedenis van Dordrecht*, 204-205.

not emerge until Dordrecht had lost at least part of its superiority and was no longer able to bend the institutional framework to its will. Trade in these commodities did not so much replace the traditional river trade as supplement and support it: in Brielle for instance the herring industry stimulated the salt trade and the Schoonhoven dairy products seem to have been an attractive return cargo for merchants from Guelders and the Rhineland carrying grain, wood and wine.

But endogenous factors played a part as well. The fact that Brielle and Schoonhoven were both under the protection of lords (or ladies) with a relatively autonomous position turned out to be an advantage: at crucial moments they were able to counterbalance the combined demands of Dordrecht and the count. It was probably their own interests that drove these lords, but the result, in the form of temporary withdrawals, partial exemptions or at the least a check on further extensions of Dordrecht's privileges, also benefited the burgesses of Schoonhoven and Brielle.

Fairly soon the towns of Holland developed a second technique of opposing Dordrecht's hegemony: they formed alliances. The structure of the urban network in Holland probably played an important part here: it consisted of a large number of small towns, each with enough autonomy to put up a fight but none of them strong enough to win it without allies. The technique of forming alliances was effective: it did not end Dordrecht's privileged position, but it did mitigate it. Opportunities for illegal trading were materially enlarged by the exemptions of the staple granted to towns for wine and salt for local use. The years the staple privilege was temporarily withdrawn offered another loophole: towns could use the respite to build up new trade networks, to be used to advantage later on.

Just as the staple privilege and the conflicts evolving around it seem to have contributed to the articulation of an ideology of the role of the ruler and the unity of the state, it also made towns aware of the necessity to cooperate on economic issues. As we will see in the next chapter, this was going to prove a useful strategy in other respects as well.

Part II

The institutional framework: rules and practices

6. Weighing and measuring

6.1 Introduction

The earliest by-laws of Amsterdam, dating from 1413, give detailed instructions for the measuring of salt, which had to be done by sworn measurers, with measures verified by the town and kept by the warden of the guild of Our Lady, the measurers' guild. When the measurers picked up a measure before starting work, they also had to check the straightness of the strickle. Measuring was to be done with great care: the measure should be positioned on a level surface and it had to be emptied by carefully turning it upside down instead of just knocking it over. If the crew of a ship with a cargo of salt did not want to cooperate with these rules, the measurers were supposed to stop measuring, leave the ship and report the matter to the local court.¹ Rules like this underline the importance attached by urban authorities in Holland to correct weighing and measuring, but also the difficulties they faced in this area.

In the first part of this book three types of trade venues were discussed, each with different institutional characteristics: annual fairs, rural trade venues and the Dordrecht staple. The second part of the book adopts a different, complementary approach. The aim remains the same: to show if and how social and political relations in medieval Holland, in turn related to the county's history of settlement and reclamation, affected the organisation and thus ultimately the efficiency of commodity markets. But instead of departing from a division in types of trade venues, this chapter and the next focus on two clusters of institutions that cannot be pinpointed in time and place. Here, in chapter 6, the organisation of weighing and measuring is studied as a reflection of a larger set of rules and enforcement mechanisms that affected the matching of supply and demand.

In the Middle Ages public authorities often tried to regulate commodity trade by subjecting it to various rules and decrees. In part market regulation was motivated by the medieval ideal of justice in trade.² This ideal did not imply equal opportunities for all: as we have seen, trade privileges like tax reductions or priority access to markets granted to local burgesses, guild members, or merchants from a certain town or country were nothing out of the ordinary. Rather, it referred to a balanced, equal relation between buyer and seller. Monopolies in basic necessities, and related offences like forestalling and regrating (the purchase of products before market time or the interception of products on their way to the market with the intention of reselling them at a profit), disturbed this balance, because they created artificial scarcities and thus forced 'unjust' prices upon

¹ Breen, *Rechtsbronnen Amsterdam*, 19-20.

² For a summary of medieval thought on the concept of justice in trade: Wood, *Medieval economic thought*, 132-144, 89-91. Wood stresses the aversion to monopolies and also points out the link between the concept of justice and the correct use of weights and measures, but does not mention quality control.

society. This explains why fixed market hours and prohibitions of forestalling and regrating were common, in Holland as much as elsewhere.³ Incomplete or faulty information regarding the quantity and quality of commodities also violated the notion of a fair and just exchange. Therefore, the control of quantity and quality was often considered the object of public care as well. Concern for product quality speaks, for instance, from the inspections of perishable foodstuffs for sale at the market as described in several urban by-laws, and from the elaborate systems of quality prescriptions imposed by many towns with export industries, particularly cloth, on producers.⁴ However, we should be alert to the fact that authorities may also have been led by less elevated motives: after all, regulated and formalised markets were much easier to control, and therefore also to exploit, than private trade. The organisation of weighing and measuring demonstrates this aspect quite clearly; that is why it takes centre stage in this chapter.

In his seminal book on the effects of power on metrological systems Witold Kula argues that rulers strove to impose their weights and measures in their territories because it symbolised and conversely ultimately reinforced their authority. He also pays full attention to the continuous pressure exerted by the nobility to increase the measures used for collecting land rents in kind.⁵ But in a highly urbanised and commercialised society like late medieval Holland something else was at stake as well: weighing and measuring mattered from a fiscal point of view because it provided an ideal opportunity for the taxation of trade. For one, dues could be imposed on the compulsory use of standardised weights and measures. In addition other taxes on exchange, for instance the urban excises on a wide range of products that in the late Middle Ages became the main source of revenues of many towns in the Low Countries, were frequently linked to the weight, size or volume of the commodities that changed hands.⁶ This was only possible if weighing and measuring took place under the control of the authorities.

This chapter compares the organisation of weighing and measuring in Holland to the situation in England and in the southern Low Countries. Although there were many similarities between the three countries in rules and practices, significant differences existed as well; differences that were related to a diverging balance of powers between central and local authorities, and also between local authorities and guilds. In the next section we begin by mapping the official roles of central government, urban authorities and local lords in the organisation of weighing and measuring for Holland, England and the southern Low Countries. The two sections that follow assess the effects of formal structures on the actual development of standard weights and measures and on the functioning of enforcement mechanisms respectively.

³ For Holland: Unger, *Levensmiddelenvoorziening*, 7-9. For Flanders: Stabel, 'Markets and retail', 808-811. For England: Britnell, *Commercialisation*, 91-93.

⁴ For Holland: Posthumus, *Leidsche lakenindustrie* I, 83-94, 152-164, 171-175. For the southern Low Countries: Munro, 'Medieval woollens', 247-248.

⁵ Kula, *Measures and men*, 18-19, 54-60.

⁶ Zevenboom and Wittop Koning, *Nederlandse gewichten*, 30, 32.

6.2 Control over measures and weights

One of the ways in which the early rise of central power in England made itself felt, was through the control the Crown attempted to assert even at an early stage over weights and measures. It is unlikely that under the Anglo-Saxon and Norman kings these attempts were very successful. At that stage they were mainly restricted to the issuance of laws prescribing the use of correct and uniform measures throughout the realm; as the measures to be used were not accurately specified and moreover the enforcement apparatus to back up the decrees was lacking, many communities probably continued to use local measures evolved from, and suited to, everyday practice. Under Angevin rule royal control over measures and weights reached firmer ground. Between the late 12th and the middle of the 15th century standard measures and weights for just about every commercial commodity were specified.⁷ By implication the role of local authorities in England in weighing and measuring was not as prominent as in the Low Countries. As we will see, English towns did acquire a role in the enforcement of the royal standards, but they usually did not issue legislation of their own making, nor did they provide public weighing or measuring facilities: that was the prerogative of the king.

Even in late medieval England royal authority over measuring and weighing was not absolute. The efforts of the Crown concentrated mostly on the towns as centres of trade. In the countryside control over measures and weights was an essential part of lordship; here the effects of national legislation and national enforcement policies were much less pervasive.⁸ Still, in comparison to much of continental Europe, a considerable degree of metrological centralisation was achieved at an early stage. Here a parallel can be drawn with other aspects of market regulation. In England, forestalling prohibitions, for instance, were incorporated in royal statutes, binding in the entire kingdom, as early as the late 13th or early 14th century.⁹ In Holland these prohibitions were at that stage purely local in character; central ordinances against forestalling did not become a regular phenomenon until the 16th century.¹⁰

Exactly what moved the Angevin kings to tighten control over weights and measures is not quite clear. Part of the explanation can perhaps be found in Kula's argument about the role of a unified system of weights and measures as an expression and confirmation of central power. However, it is clear that economic considerations contributed as well. Richard Britnell suggests that the Crown's growing interest in the enforcement of a unified system of weights and measures

⁷ Britnell, *Commercialisation*, 25.

⁸ Zupko, *British weights and measures*, 16-70; for more detailed references see below.

⁹ Britnell, 'Forstall', 95-96, 99.

¹⁰ Forestalling prohibitions were issued in 1544 (Andries *et al.*, *Inventaris en beschrijving Noord-Nederlandse processtukken beroepen uit Holland* V, files 460 and 463) and in 1556 (Regionaal Archief Alkmaar, Gemeentebestuur Alkmaar (oud archief, 1325-1815), inv. nr. 2877); a reference in the proceedings of the Estates of Holland in 1525 suggests that there had been similar proclamations before (Van der Goes, *Register*, 15-16). Cf. Noordegraaf, 'Platteland', 13-14.

in late 12th-century England may have been related to the court's position as a buyer of provisions in a wide region: royal purveyors had an easier job if measures were the same everywhere.¹¹ In addition, the efficiency of taxation, in the 18th century one of the main reasons for the creation of universal standards for weighing and measuring in many European countries,¹² must have provided a powerful motive. The customs system as it developed in England from the late 13th century onwards allowed for an efficient taxation of international trade by the Crown. During the reign of Edward I a number of duties on overseas trade were introduced, a custom on the export of wool, fells and hides first and foremost among them. More subsidies on a wide range of import and export commodities were added in the course of the 14th century. In order to collect the customs, the coastline was divided into customs jurisdictions, each managed from a designated customs head port.¹³ Since many customs were levied by weight or volume, control of weights and measures was of vital importance to custom revenues.

It is therefore not surprising that in 1350 Edward III took action to correct false weighing practices in the ports. The issue at stake here was most likely the weighing of wool; irregularities might jeopardise the very profitable wool customs. Likewise, it is not a coincidence that in 1421 custom duties for coal were set on the chalders, a measure of fixed proportions, instead of on the total load of a ship: the tendency to build larger ships was threatening to reduce custom revenues.¹⁴ In short, the desire of the English kings to control measures and weights can at least in part be explained by the relation with royal taxation of international trade.

At first sight the organisation of metrological control in Flanders and Brabant seems to have followed a course that was almost diametrically opposed to events in England. The early medieval starting point was not very different: just as their Anglo-Saxon counterparts, the Carolingian kings prescribed uniform weights and measures. In fact in many parts of Europe the memory of a golden age of Carolingian standardisation lived on until the modern era, even though it is unlikely that royal Carolingian measures and weights were adopted for commercial use throughout the empire; the Carolingian rulers were no more able to enforce uniformity than the early medieval English kings.¹⁵

In the high and late Middle Ages, however, authority over measures and weights in the southern Low Countries had largely become a matter of the individual towns. For 13th-century Brabant, Herman Van der Wee has suggested that control over weighing and measuring passed, together with other aspects of the regulation of economic life, from the duke to the urban authorities via the *bannum* (originally the ruler's right to command, elements of which could be

¹¹ Britnell, *Commercialisation*, 90.

¹² Ashworth, 'Metrology and the state', 1314.

¹³ The English customs system and its development are described in detail by Gras, *Early English customs system*. For a concise summary see Kowaleski, 'Port towns', 472; or Ormrod, 'England', 31-32.

¹⁴ Zupko, *British weights and measures*, 63, 29.

¹⁵ Kula, *Measures and men*, 161-163.

transferred to lower lords, officials or, as in this case, urban communities).¹⁶ Van der Wee does not explain exactly how the transition took place; we will return to that question shortly.

In Flanders urban authority over weights and measures probably dates back to an even earlier stage: the existence of urban standards is mentioned in a charter granted by count Philip of the Alsace to the castellany of Bruges around 1190.¹⁷ Urban control was also more complete than in Brabant. Whereas the duke of Brabant was able to hold on to certain profitable elements, such as the Antwerp scales,¹⁸ by the end of the 14th century the count of Flanders possessed only the weigh houses in the small towns of Aalst, Sint-Anna-ter-Muiden and Veurne and the measures for madder in Aardenburg and Oostburg. What this in practice came down to was the right to collect the revenues for the (compulsory) use of these small town facilities.¹⁹ In the larger towns and certainly in Flanders' three main cities, by that time rights like this usually belonged to the urban authorities.²⁰

The main exception was the Bruges weigh house, which had been enfeoffed to the lords of Ghistel, together with the Bruges toll. Here, because of his position as liege, the Flemish count could at least try to act in a regulatory capacity, which he actually did around 1280. After vehement complaints of foreign merchants about irregularities and arbitrary exactions at the Bruges scales, count Guy of Dampierre together with lord Jan of Ghistel and the Bruges authorities ordered that the traditional *auncel*, a one-legged instrument which was notoriously unreliable and could easily be tampered with, was to be replaced by a number of modern even-legged balances and that these balances were moreover to be operated by a team of sworn (urban) officials.²¹ Still, the fact that the count required the cooperation of the lord of Ghistel and the Bruges aldermen to carry through these reforms, demonstrates that his powers were limited.

The situation in Holland, where just as in Flanders and Brabant much of the control over weighing and measuring ended up with the urban authorities, reveals more about the underlying process. It appears to have been anything but a neat transfer of rights from the sovereign to the emerging towns. The count of Holland (at that time referred to as the count of the Frisians) was one of the territorial lords that assumed sovereign power after the decline of the Carolingian empire, but the scarce information that we have about the 10th and 11th-century counts reveals nothing about an involvement with weighing and measuring. It is quite possible that, with the contraction of long-distance trade after the 9th century, the need for central regulation was no longer felt. For the collection of rents in

¹⁶ Van der Wee, *Growth of the Antwerp market* I, 66.

¹⁷ Gilliodts-van Severen, ed., *Coutume du Franc de Bruges* II, 14, 33.

¹⁸ Van der Wee, *Growth of the Antwerp market* I, 75.

¹⁹ Soens, *Rentmeesters*, 249, 250, 301, 312, 325.

²⁰ Cf. Boone, *Geld en macht*, 167-168, on the usurpation of the weighing revenues in Ghent by the Ghent authorities.

²¹ Van Houtte, *Geschiedenis van Brugge*, 198, 200; Wyffels, 'Nieuwe gegevens', 53-56, 88-90.

kind and for local exchange local measures sufficed: customary measures, in the case of a manorial organisation formalised by the lord.²²

The very first reference to any kind of measure in Holland supports this suggestion. As so often, it comes from the sources of Egmond abbey. In the early 12th century the abbey collected rents in grain, measured in ‘the measure of Alkmaar’ (*Alcmerensem modium*) in various nearby villages. This was probably originally a local customary measure, adopted for use in the management of some of the abbey’s possessions.²³ A document from the middle of the 13th century mentions the abbot of Egmond as the owner of this measure, that is, the abbot was entitled to the imposition on its use (the *muddepenning*). The document arranges for the transfer of the *muddepenning*, together with other rights and property in Alkmaar, to the count. In return the abbot received considerable properties on the island of Texel.²⁴ This exchange was at least partly motivated by expansionist considerations: as the grant of urban liberties to Alkmaar a few years later shows, Willem II took pains to re-establish his power in this strategically situated settlement on the border with rebellious West-Friesland.²⁵ Still, the inclusion of the *muddepenning* in the exchange may have had another reason as well: it suggests that by this time there was money to be made out of weighing and measuring, which in turn may have aroused comital interest.

This hypothesis receives support from the fact that around the middle of the 13th century the count also owned measures in other emerging trade centres: the butter measure in Delft and the measures of salt and wine in Dordrecht.²⁶ The Delft butter measure was only important in a local context, but ownership of the Dordrecht salt and wine measures had much wider implications: it gave the count full control over the measuring of these two vital commodities of the international river trade.

However, there is no evidence that at this stage the rights to measures and weights were seen as sovereign rights on principle. The Alkmaar example in fact suggests otherwise: here the count had to offer compensation to get hold of the grain measure. Moreover, even before the count makes his appearance as the owner of measures, the first signs of urban claims to control over measures and weights are already there. The Geertruidenberg charter of liberties of 1213 and the Haarlem charter of 1245 prescribe the use of correct weights and measures. The Haarlem charter, following the ’s-Hertogenbosch example on which it was based, moreover states that offenders will be punished by the local court. A draft version of the Haarlem charter in turn served as model for the charters of Delft (1246) and Alkmaar (1256), which have the same clause.²⁷ Clearly the urban authorities in

²² Cf. Zupko, *British weights and measures*, 9-10.

²³ Opperman, *Fontes Egmondenses*, 75-76.

²⁴ OHZ II, nr. 786.

²⁵ Henderikx, ‘Graaf en stad’, 49-54; Kruisheer, *Stadsrechtsoorkonden van Haarlem, Delft en Alkmaar*, 56.

²⁶ OHZ II, nr. 635; III, nr. 1637.

²⁷ OHZ II, nrs. 672-673 (Haarlem), 680 (Delft), 1009 (Alkmaar); for a translation of and comment on the Haarlem charter: Hoogewerf, *Haarlemse stadsrecht*; for a diplomatic analysis of the three charters: Kruisheer, *Stadsrechtsoorkonden van Haarlem, Delft en Alkmaar*.

these young towns claimed the enforcement of metrological rules as their responsibility almost from the start.

In chapter 2 it has been argued that the counts of Holland did not begin to regularly grant market licenses until about 1270; before that time they were simply unable to effectuate their authority over markets and fairs. For weighing and measuring the course of events appears to have been similar: the extension of comital control over measures and weights coincided with the establishment of effective sovereign power.²⁸ Still, even in the middle of the 14th century weights and measures were probably not seen as sovereign rights on principle: Philip of Leyden, staunch defender of the public powers of the count, does not mention them in so many words among the *regalia*.²⁹

In some of the places where the count had obtained the rights to weights and measures, he held on to them for centuries. In Rotterdam, for instance, the revenues from weighing and measuring were reserved for the count in the charter of urban privileges of 1340; these revenues are still recorded in the comital accounts at the end of the Middle Ages.³⁰ Hoorn presents a similar case.³¹ In other towns the count retained only part of the business of weighing and measuring; just as the duke of Brabant, but in contrast to the count of Flanders, he frequently managed to hold on to some of the more profitable elements. The important Dordrecht salt measure, for instance, was still part of the comital domain in the 15th century; so was the weigh house in Gouda, a lively regional trade centre for dairy and hemp.³²

In many other towns all or most of the rights to weighing and measuring over time came to be acknowledged as urban possessions. Officially the count gave or sold them to the town, but the grant probably frequently came down to comital authorisation of *de facto* urban control. Where this process can be traced in any detail, it appears to have been part of a broader recognition of rights related to trade. Schiedam provides a good illustration. In 1339 the count granted the beer toll, the scales, the corn measure and the *muddepenning* to the townspeople, 'in the manner as they had always held and used them'. In 1346 the town also received the rights to brokerage, followed five years later by those to changing money.³³

²⁸ Cf. Wood, *Medieval economic thought*, 92.

²⁹ Leupen, *Philip of Leyden*, 223; Philips de Leyden, *De cura reipublicae*, 154-156 (case about tolls and imposts) and 167 (enumeration of the *regalia*).

³⁰ For the charter of liberties Van Mieris, ed., *Groot charterboek* II, 638-640 (art. 31); for the comital accounts over the year 1500: NA GRRek, inv. nr. 334 f83v-84v. To be sure, the 15th-century Rotterdam urban accounts also show revenues from measuring, presumably from the use of standard measures on other products introduced at a later stage (Unger and Bezemer, eds., *Oudste stadsrekeningen Rotterdam*, e.g. 131 (account over 1459/60: revenues for the *meterie* ('measuring'), the *oofmaet* (measuring of fruit) and *tonnen te ycken* (verifying the tons).

³¹ For the charter of liberties Van Mieris, ed., *Groot charterboek* II, 865-866; for the comital accounts NA GRRek, inv. nr. 1129 f44.

³² For Dordrecht the 15th-century comital registers contain numerous references to grants of the salt measure: Gousset Index, NA LLRK, inv. nr. 209 f54 ff. For Gouda: comital accounts over the year 1448/49 and 1500, NA GRRek, inv. nr. 1708 f2, inv. nr. 1743 f5.

³³ Van Mieris, *Groot charterboek* II, 619, 715-716, 806-807; Van der Feijst, *Geschiedenis van Schiedam*, 22. For a similar stepwise transfer of rights to Delft between 1280 and 1342: OHZ IV nr. 1902, V nr. 3047; Van Mieris, *Groot charterboek* II, 483, 666.

Elsewhere, the recipients were occasionally urban institutions such as a hospital or a militia, but in most cases the rights to weighing and measuring ended up with the urban authorities.³⁴

Towns certainly had good reason to pursue these rights. For one, merchant-dominated town governments were no doubt well aware that a reliable system of weights and measures in the end paid off. It saved individual merchants a great deal of costs and trouble, and ensured conditions able to attract trade and compete with other commercial centres. However, fiscal motives were probably at least as important. This was not because of the impositions levied on weighing and measuring itself; Cornelisse's research on transaction costs at peat markets in late medieval central Holland suggests that measuring costs remained at very modest levels until the end of the 15th century.³⁵ Excises, however, were a different matter.

Just as in England the Crown's ambition to enforce royal weights and measures was partly driven by taxation policy, in Holland urban governments depended on a correct assessment of quantities for the levying of excises. First introduced in the second half of the 13th century, excises on the production and sale of a wide range of commodities developed in the late Middle Ages into the single most important source of urban revenues for Holland's rapidly expanding towns.³⁶ Weighing and measuring, as long as it took place under the control of the authorities, provided an easy opportunity for fixing and levying the excises. In early 16th-century Gouda for instance the measurers of peat were expected to accompany the seller to the collector of the excises in order to inform this functionary of the quantity being sold. The corn measurers in Amsterdam had the same responsibility towards the collector of the corn excise.³⁷

Most town governments in Holland did not have to compete with a local lord for control over weights and measures. Some of the relatively autonomous lords in Holland's periphery controlled weighing and measuring in their territories, including the small towns that were situated in them. The lord of Voorne for instance owned the salt measure in Brielle; in a 1330 ordinance he set rules for the way in which the measuring was to take place. The lord of IJsselstein, near the Utrecht border, was still in possession of the measures in this small town in the second quarter of the 15th century.³⁸

In the larger towns in the central part of Holland, however, the only case of a local lord holding the rights to weighing and measuring in a town was the

³⁴ For a transfer to a hospital: the *ellemaat* (cloth measure) in The Hague, 1385: Enno van Gelder, *'s-Gravenhage in zeven eeuwen*, 72; and the weigh house in Monnickendam in 1382: Van Mieris, ed., *Groot charterboek* III, 390. To a militia: the weigh house in Grootebroek in 1423: Van Mieris, ed., *Groot charterboek* IV, 713; and the weigh house in Alkmaar around 1500: NA GRRek, 1129 f40v.

³⁵ Cornelisse, *Energie markten*, 164-168.

³⁶ Ibid., 98-102; Marsilje, *Het financiële beleid van Leiden*, 114-119; Unger and Bezemer, eds., *Oudste stadsrekeningen Rotterdam*, xix-xxii. For the southern Low Countries Van Werveke, *Gentsche stadsfinanciën*, 27-29, 197-220, and Van Uytven, *Stadsfinanciën*, 6-9, 112-130.

³⁷ Cornelisse, *Energie markten*, 118-119; Breen, *Rechtsbronnen Amsterdam*, 588-589.

³⁸ Brielle: Niermeyer, ed., *Bronnen Beneden-Maasgebied*, nr 276; Fruin, ed., *Middeleeuwse rechtsbronnen kleine steden Nedersticht* 3, 38.

burggraaf (burgrave) of Leiden. The *burggraaf* had originally been a military commander in the service of the count, but by the middle of the 13th century had acquired important administrative and jurisdictional powers, the right to appoint the sheriff and aldermen of Leiden among them.³⁹ Exactly when and how the rights to weighing and measuring were added is not clear; the first information dates from 1333, when count Willem III confirmed the *burggraaf's* claims to them.⁴⁰ In the middle of the 14th century the urban elite took advantage of the succession conflict between the later count Willem V and his mother Margaretha to straighten out some old disputes. With the help of Willem, the Leiden elite robbed the *burggraaf*, who supported Margaretha, not only of the much-resented right to appoint the sheriff and aldermen, but also of the rights to weighing and measuring in the town.⁴¹ With this, Leiden joined the ranks of most other Holland towns, which by this time had largely acquired authority over weighing and measuring within the urban freedom.

It can be concluded that, although the count of Holland was more successful than his Flemish counterpart in his claims to the ownership of weights and measures, he could by no means exert the kind of central control over weighing and measuring imposed by the English king. Basically, this situation remained unchanged until the end of the Middle Ages. In the late 15th and 16th centuries many parts of continental Europe witnessed a 'second wave of standardisation': for the first time since the Carolingian era central governments again tried to impose national standards. However, success was limited.⁴²

The Low Countries, both north and south, were no exception. In the early 16th century the importance of troy weights for coinage did induce the Habsburg government to make the use of these weights compulsory for the trade in gold and silver and even to appoint an official responsible for the verification of the copies used by the goldsmiths' guilds.⁴³ In 1563 the Habsburg authorities also intervened when weigh house officials in the central part of Holland were found to be using weights heavier than the regular Cologne weights in order to attract more customers. The intervention was probably motivated by self-interest: the documents complain of unfair competition to comital weigh houses in towns like Gouda and Rotterdam. Still, here at least an effort to enforce standards was made.⁴⁴

For other units attempts at central regulation failed. Urban authorities were unwilling to go along: they were probably afraid, and considering the link with the

³⁹ Marsilje, ed., *Leiden*, 68-69.

⁴⁰ Van Mieris, ed., *Groot charterboek* II, 533. The suggestion of Fockema Andreae that the *burggraaf* had possessed these rights even before the year 1200 remains unproven (Fockema Andreae, 'Burggrafelijk Leiden', 55-56).

⁴¹ Van Mieris, ed., *Groot charterboek* II, 733, 796-797. The conflict is also described by Blok, *Geschiedenis eener Hollandsche stad* I, 88-91, Marsilje, ed., *Leiden*, 70-72, Van Gent and Janse, 'Van ridders tot baronnen', 17-18 and Van der Vlist, *Burcht van Leiden*, 52.

⁴² Kula, *Measures and men*, 116-117.

⁴³ Zevenboom and Wittop Koning, *Nederlandse gewichten*, 18; Nipper, *18 eeuwen meten en wegen*, 44.

⁴⁴ Cau, ed., *Groot Placaet-boeck* II, 2089-2090; Zevenboom and Wittop Koning, *Nederlandse gewichten*, 21-22. On Cologne weights and troy weights: see below.

urban excises with good reason, that handing over control over weights and measures might endanger their financial autonomy. Around 1530 discussions about the possible introduction of a national system of measures in Holland took place, but in the face of urban resistance they soon petered out.⁴⁵ In 1571 the Habsburg government did order a general inspection of grain measures, which was carried out in the following year. The aim was to facilitate the introduction of a series of new taxes on movable assets and trade. Characteristically however, this action was not directed at the introduction of uniform measures, but merely at the registration of all local grain measures used in the Low Countries and their equivalents in Brussels *gelten*.⁴⁶

6.3 Standards and standardisation

The assumption that the absence of a standardised system of measures and weights obstructed the development of trade is not uncommon or illogical. A lack of uniformity, the argument goes, implies higher costs for ascertaining the quantity of products being exchanged and increases opportunities for fraud.⁴⁷ From this point of view medieval Holland was not in a favourable position. As control over the organisation of weighing and measuring was largely a local affair, the diversity in weights and measures was great. Grain measures provide a good example. Each town had its own set of measures, also used in the surrounding countryside. Between towns, even though measures frequently bore the same name, dimensions varied considerably. The *achtel* for instance was used in many places for measuring grain in retail trade since at least the first half of the 14th century, as is shown by the entries for grain purchases in the earliest comital accounts and the accounts of Egmond abbey.⁴⁸ Yet the inventory of grain measures carried out in 1572 brought to light considerable variations in the size of the *achtel*: in Gorinchem, for instance, it was 14% larger than in Alkmaar, 26% larger than in Delft and even 40% larger than in Dordrecht.⁴⁹ In wholesale trade variation was reduced by the fact that the measures of Delft, which had long been an important grain trade centre, and increasingly also those of Amsterdam, which was rapidly rising to prominence, were widely used; but between themselves these two measures were completely unrelated, the Amsterdam *last* being almost three times as large as the Delft *hoed*.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Blok, *Geschiedenis eener Hollandsche stad* II, 250. cf. Cornelisse, *Energiemarkten*, 82-83, on the unsuccessful attempts to harmonise the size of bricks in 1539.

⁴⁶ Van der Wee, *Growth of the Antwerp market* I, 68-69; Bigwood, 'Notes sur les mesures', 5-6.

⁴⁷ Epstein, *Freedom and growth*, 51, 58-59.

⁴⁸ Hamaker, ed., *Rekeningen grafelijkheid* I, 70-73 (purchases made in 1317, partly in 's-Gravenzande); Ibid. II, 89 (purchases made in 1344, partly in Delft) and 415 (purchases made in 1344, in the north of Holland); Hof, ed., *Egmondse kloosterrekeningen*, 39-42 (purchases made by Egmond abbey in 1343/44, partly in Alkmaar and Warmenhuizen).

⁴⁹ Verhoeff, *Oude Nederlandse maten en gewichten*, 2, 17, 19, 28.

⁵⁰ Ibid., ix, 4, 17. A document from Schiedam, probably from the early 16th century, provides a further illustration of the central role of the Delft grain measure: this document gives the equivalent in Delft *hoeden* for the local

For the southern Low Countries the 1572 investigation comes up with very similar characteristics: here too diversity in measures was great. In some cases, for instance in the Franc of Bruges, secondary towns appear to have adopted the measures of the central city, but elsewhere, for example in the Brussels district, there is no sign of internal convergence whatsoever: even the smallest towns used their own grain measures.⁵¹

In Angevin England, on the other hand, national standards were more than just an ideal. Detailed specification of measures started with a section in Magna Charta (1215) that set the London quarter as the standard measure for grain to be used in all of England. It quickly gained momentum. The Assize of Bread and Ale (1266), for instance, regulated the weight of bread depending on the price of grain. It ordered that bread had to be weighed according to a strictly defined standard pound (the 'tower' pound). The Composition of Yards and Perches (late 13th century) introduced a national system of measures of length and area based on a standard yard, the 'iron ulna'. Several additions and refinements followed in the 14th and early 15th centuries.⁵²

The advance of England over Holland, and over the southern Low Countries, seems undeniable. However, the consequences of fragmentation were probably not as damaging as one may be inclined to think from a modern perspective. Local trade was most likely not much affected. Peasants selling their products at the nearest market and local retailers had few problems: for most of their commercial dealings a reliable system of local measures was all that was needed. Merchants engaged in regional or interregional trade faced greater difficulties, but many of them frequented only a limited number of towns. The books of the mid 15th-century merchant Gerrit Claesz. for instance, engaged in trade in cloth and dairy products, reveals a concentration of transactions in Hoorn and the surrounding villages on the one hand, and in Deventer on the other. Hoorn was Claesz.' home town; in Deventer he frequented the fairs in order to do business with merchants from the eastern Netherlands and the German Rhineland. Surely for a man like Claesz., like many other merchants literate and numerate, conversions between two sets of measures cannot have been an insurmountable obstacle.⁵³

Hardest put were merchants in international trade, but at the same time they were best positioned to cope with problems arising from the existence of multiple systems of weighing and measuring. In the large trade centres they could hire a broker or a local agent to help them find their way in unfamiliar surroundings. In some cases they could also take recourse to manuals. Merchants' manuals that gave information on weights and measures in the Low Countries

grain measures of a large number of Holland towns (Heeringa, ed., *Rechtsbronnen Schiedam*, 391-393; reprinted in Nipper, *18 eeuwen meten en wegen*, 369-371).

⁵¹ Bigwood, 'Notes sur les mesures', tables I-IV, VIII-IX.

⁵² Zupko, *British weights and measures*, 16-30.

⁵³ The books of the Hoorn merchant have been edited by Brünner, 'Hoornsch koopmansboek'.

began to appear in print around the middle of the 16th century.⁵⁴ However, in the main trade centres handwritten documents were in use earlier than that: Pegolotti's *La pratica della mercatura* for instance, dating originally from the middle of the 14th century, listed specifications for the measures and weights used in Bruges and Antwerp and also gave equivalents for some of the measures used in other towns in the southern Low Countries.⁵⁵

Still, it will not do to entirely dismiss the issue. Conversions did not block trade, but they were cumbersome; they might result in extra costs for multiple acts of weighing or measuring and could lead to mistakes and fraud. Still, there are other reasons to doubt if England with its statutory weights and measures really was at an advantage over Holland: in practice uniformity of weights and measures in England was far from complete, while in the Low Countries consistency and coherence were greater than they looked.

In England local measures continued to be used for much longer than the multitude of acts and statutes on weighing and measuring suggests. In Yarmouth for instance, and also in Newcastle and Ipswich, weight and measures for salt were ten times as large as the statutory units.⁵⁶ While this may have been nothing but a simple and logical adaptation to the circumstances of bulk trade, in Exeter we encounter another situation: here all trade was based on a corn bushel that was about 20% larger than the statutory measure. Although no documents to prove it have been recovered, it is very unlikely that Exeter would have been able to consistently use non-statutory measures if it had not had royal permission, explicit or unspoken, to do so. The Exeter bushel remained in common use until 1670, when a royal act enforced conformation to the national standard. Because in the Middle Ages bread prices had to be based, according to the Assize of Bread and Ale, on the grain price per statutory bushel, using a local measure made it more complex to calculate the correct bread price. Still, apparently that was less of an objection than exchanging it for the national standard.⁵⁷ Exeter was not a unique case; in Winchester the local corn bushel was significantly larger than the national standard too.⁵⁸

In fact, in the course of the 14th century several new exceptions were made to the obligation to use the statutory weights and measures. Most were introduced not by the king but by Parliament, thus demonstrating how the growing influence of merchants, but even more so of the landed gentry, was able to at least partly erode the policy of uniformity of weights and measures. First, in 1324, Parliament lifted the obligation to level the shallow measures used for oats, malt and meal: these products could henceforth be sold by heaped measure. This favoured lords collecting rents in kind, who obviously preferred large, heaped measures. It also

⁵⁴ E.g. *Een zeer buerbuertic registre*.

⁵⁵ Pegolotti, *La pratica della mercatura*, 237-239, 244-245, 250-251.

⁵⁶ Bridbury, *England and the salt trade*, 159.

⁵⁷ Beveridge, 'A statistical crime', esp. 526.

⁵⁸ Beveridge, *Prices and wages in England from the twelfth to the nineteenth century*, 12-17. Winchester College used yet another bushel, slightly larger than the local one, for collecting rents in kind, but Beveridge believes this difference may have gone unnoticed until the 18th century.

favoured grain merchants, who could now try to purchase in large local measures and sell in the smaller statutory ones. The Statute of Purveyors of 1351 once more prohibited the use of heaped measures, but it made an exception for manorial lords who at their estates had been using measures that did not conform to the national standards. This amounted to nothing less than a general permit to the landed gentry to use non-statutory as well as heaped measures. The privilege was officially reconfirmed ten years later.⁵⁹ What we see in action here is the ability of power holders to influence measures to their advantage.

It is possible that in England only a minority of lords actually made use of the option of using non-statutory measures: manorial accounts rarely show adjustments for diverging measures.⁶⁰ On the other hand, it is also clear that a multitude of local weights and measures lived on until, and in some cases even after, the introduction of the British Imperial System of weights and measures in 1824.⁶¹ If anything, this demonstrates that despite the Crown's ambitions, uniformity in pre-modern England was far from complete. In Holland evidence of the use of more than one set of weights or measures in one location is scarce, at least in a legalised form. No doubt abuse did take place. A mid 16th-century charter from Assendelft for instance records that some traders in this village had been using different measures for buying than for selling. However, the local authorities stated very clearly that this was not allowed and tried to put a stop to it. Only in one case the use of other measures, besides the regular urban ones, appears to have been accepted as legal: in Brielle merchants were able to purchase locally produced grain in a *landmate* ('rural measure') that was slightly larger than the measure used for retail sales at the urban market.⁶² This system dated back to at least the middle of the 15th century, when the existence of a separate rural measure for grain was confirmed in an ordinance of the bailiff of Voorne.⁶³ The exceptional character of this arrangement can perhaps be attributed to the fact that in this part of Holland, which in many respects followed Zeeland customs, the influence of the nobility was relatively strong. In 1371 Voorne had lost its position as independent seignory with its own lord; from then on the bailiff, as all other bailiffs in Holland, represented the authority of the count. Still, the Voorne bailiff performed his administrative and jurisdictional duties in close conjunction with a group of ten men who held fiefs on the island; the ordinance on weights and measures was issued in cooperation with them. The continued existence of the *landmate* may have been the result of pressure from this group.⁶⁴

Whereas in England the diversity of measures seems to be increasing towards the end of the Middle Ages, in Holland several factors contributed to a mitigation of

⁵⁹ Zupko, *British weights and measures*, 22-26.

⁶⁰ Britnell, *Commercialisation*, 97.

⁶¹ Ashworth, 'Metrology and the state', 1316; Connor, *Weights and measures of England*, 331-336.

⁶² Verhoeff, *Oude Nederlandse maten en gewichten*, 14.

⁶³ De Jager, ed., *Middelieunse keuren Brielle*, 118-121.

⁶⁴ For the peculiarities of the Voorne administration: NA, Bestuursarchieven Land van Voorne 1594-1811, Inventory section 3.2.

the fragmentary character of metrological units. For one, from a very early stage onwards weights displayed far greater uniformity than measures. In the 11th and 12th centuries the mark, originally a Scandinavian weight which, after the Danish conquest of England, became the weight standard for the English coinage, was adopted in large parts of northwestern Europe as the standard unit for a newly emerging monetary system.⁶⁵ In its wake, in the Low Countries Cologne commercial weights derived from the mark rose to prominence: this happened in Brabant and Flanders (although in Ghent a pound with different specifications survived) and also in Holland.⁶⁶

The first conclusive evidence for the dominance of Cologne commercial weights in Holland dates from 1346: in that year the urban authorities in Brielle stipulated that in this town only Cologne weights were to be used. A similar rule can be found in the late 15th and early 16th-century Gouda by-laws.⁶⁷ It is true that by that time Cologne weights had partly begun to give way to troy weights. Troy weights had been introduced for minting and subsequently also for the trade in silver and gold in Flanders and Brabant in the 13th century and in this capacity reached Holland in the 14th century. In Flanders troy weights were by then widely used for general commercial purposes as well, but Brabant and Holland merchants hung on to the traditional Cologne weights for much longer. To be sure, in 14th and early 15th-century Antwerp for some purposes 'Flemish' (troy) weights were used beside 'Brabant' (Cologne) weights, but as in the second half of the 15th century Flemish influence receded and Antwerp asserted its commercial hegemony, Cologne weights regained their dominant position. Shifts between Cologne and troy weights also took place in Amsterdam, about a century later. Here both types were in use for a while, but troy weights ultimately prevailed.⁶⁸ Despite these shifts and the occasional coexistence of the two standards at the same time, diversity in weights was much more limited than diversity in measures.

In addition, a tendency to adopt the units of a major trade centre can be discerned for the measures of content for some of the most important import and export commodities. Commercial practice was the driving force here. We already saw that at the end of the Middle Ages the Delft *hoed* and increasingly also the Amsterdam *last* were widely used in the wholesale grain trade. On a smaller scale similar developments took place for other measures. In the middle of the 16th century Hoorn, for instance, voluntarily adopted the Delft *vat* as the standard measure for beer.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Hilliger, 'Studien', 172-177; Nightingale, 'Evolution of weight-standards', 194-198.

⁶⁶ Zevenboom and Wittop Koning, *Nederlandse gewichten*, 15-17, 27; Van der Wee, *Growth of the Antwerp market* I, 72-73.

⁶⁷ De Jager, ed., *Middeleeuwse keuren Brielle*, 31-32; repeated in 1445, *Ibid.*, 117; Rollin Couquerque and Meerkamp van Embden, eds., *Rechtsbronnen Gouda*, 111.

⁶⁸ Zevenboom and Wittop Koning, *Nederlandse gewichten*, 17-19. For the temporary coexistence of Cologne and local (troy) weights in Amsterdam: Breen, *Rechtsbronnen Amsterdam*, 105-108; and in Antwerp: Van der Wee, *Growth of the Antwerp market* I, 72-74.

⁶⁹ Unger, *A history of brewing*, 62-63; Pols, ed., *Westfriesche stadrechten* II, 134-135. However many other towns continued to use their own beer casks, see for instance the ordinance on the beer casks of Haarlem dating from the same period (Huizinga, ed., *Rechtsbronnen Haarlem*, 270-274).

Holland was certainly not unique in this respect. Convergence of measures for important wholesale trade commodities also took place in the southern Low Countries. Although each town maintained its own rules for the length and the width of locally produced cloth, both in Flanders and in Brabant a standard ell developed which, with minor variations, was in common use. As far as we know the development of the standard ell was not a top-down process, initiated and enforced by central government. Instead, pressure from the customers may have been instrumental. In the late 14th and early 15th century the Hansa *Kontor* in Bruges, for instance, compelled its members to check, at every purchase, the dimensions of the cloth against a rope with a length of exactly ten Flemish ell.⁷⁰

The early and mid 15th-century attempts to standardise measures for one of Holland's vital export commodities show that here too buyers' preferences played a part, but they also suggest that what turned the scale was urban initiative and cooperation between towns. As explained in an earlier chapter, in late 14th- and 15th-century Holland a rapidly expanding large-scale herring fishery and a flourishing herring export trade developed. Soon problems arose with the size of the herring casks. In the year 1423 duke Jan of Bavaria issued an ordinance that in severe terms condemned the 'perfidy and deviousness' of the construction of herring casks of incorrect dimensions: foreign merchants had been duped and as a result the reputation abroad of the Holland towns had been seriously damaged. The ordinance proclaimed that henceforth all herring casks in Holland and Zeeland had to be constructed according to the standard of Brielle, Holland's main herring port. Local authorities were to prescribe the Brielle measurements to the coopers in their town and to inspect and verify all casks by marking them with the urban stamp. Central or urban functionaries that came upon an unmarked barrel, for instance at one of the comital toll posts, were to confiscate and destroy it.⁷¹ Although the ordinance does not literally say so, it was most likely based on a request of at least some of the herring ports, with Brielle as their leader. We find Brielle actively involved in the implementation of the new rules: a year later the Brielle authorities sent a copy of the iron hoop that encircled the Brielle casks to Cologne in order to allow for a check on the casks that arrived in that city.⁷²

The 1423 ordinance did not put an end to all problems. One year later the towns of Holland informed the duke that something had been overlooked: casks were not only produced in the cities but also in the countryside, where, the urban authorities claimed, the new rules were not obeyed. The duke now ordered that casks made in the countryside would have to be marked with the stamp of the nearest town.⁷³ Exactly how this was to be organised remains unclear: the charter only stated that all comital officials were to confiscate casks that did not bear a mark. Considering the limited extraterritorial powers of the Holland towns it is

⁷⁰ Abraham-Thisse, 'Lakenhandel', 66-67. For the Brabant ell: Van der Wee, *Growth of the Antwerp market* I, 103. For the 18th-century specifications of the Flanders and the Brabant ell plus local variations: Vandewalle, *Oude maten*, table III.

⁷¹ Van Mieris, ed., *Groot charterboek* IV, 688-689.

⁷² Haak, 'Brielle'. 36.

⁷³ Van Mieris, ed., *Groot charterboek* IV, 728.

hardly surprising that this time urban officials were not included in the enforcement effort. However, since the herring industry was largely an urban industry, the casks at some point must have arrived in town, where a check on their dimensions was at least possible.

The charters of 1423 and 1424 show that the herring towns joined forces and were able to convince the duke to support their case by issuing rules for the county as a whole. Precedents for comital involvement in measuring in the international river trade, via the salt measure and wine measure of Dordrecht, may have been helpful: at least they showed that central regulation was an option. Still, harmonisation of the herring casks, produced in many places, was a much more complex challenge than enforcing the use of a standard measure in just one trade centre. Therefore another factor was probably of greater importance. The Holland towns had already shown themselves capable of successfully mounting a collective lobby in another field of economic policy: the resistance to the Dordrecht staple. They had joined forces because no town was strong enough on its own: only by forming alliances the small towns that constituted the Holland urban network were able to achieve their goals. It was probably this kind of experience that they built on in their attempts to harmonise the dimensions of the herring casks.

The ultimate effects of these attempts are hard to assess. When in 1456 and 1457 the authorities in Cologne addressed Brielle and the other herring ports in Holland with complaints about their export herring, they focused on the way of packing the herring and did not refer to the dimensions of the casks.⁷⁴ That suggests problems with size were more or less under control. On the other hand, afterwards the dimensions of the casks did once again become an issue. Around 1470 Frankfurt, with its international fairs an important centre for the export trade to southern Germany, complained to Brielle, Vlaardingen, Schiedam and a number of Zeeland towns about the herring casks.⁷⁵ Eleven years later the Estates of Holland issued a lengthy ordinance that not only gave detailed instructions on the origins and quantity of the salt to be used for preserving the herring, the sorting of the herring according to quality, and the method of packing the fish into the casks, but also confirmed the compulsory use of standardised casks for the export trade. In 1494 a revised version of this ordinance prescribed the Dordrecht cask as the standard for all of Holland instead of the Brielle version. Casks had to be marked with three stamps, the first identifying the cooper who had made them, the second identifying the shipmaster on whose ship they had been filled with herring and the third identifying the port where the herring had been brought ashore. The authorities in these towns had to appoint officials to supervise the stamping and address any conflicts that might arise.⁷⁶

As far as we know, the herring ports in 15th-century Flanders did not try to harmonise the dimensions of the herring casks, although Flanders did have a

⁷⁴ Höhlbaum, ed., *Hansisches Urkundenbuch* VIII, nrs. 490 and 586.

⁷⁵ Van Uytven, 'Oudheid en Middeleeuwen', 35.

⁷⁶ Kokken, *Steden en staten*, 262-264; Höhlbaum, ed., *Hansisches Urkundenbuch* X, nr. 916; Kuske, ed., *Quellen* II, nr. 1395.

flourishing herring fishery. However, when in the early 16th century competition between the herring industries of Holland and Flanders was at its peak, the Habsburg government intervened with an ordinance that covered both countries. It included rules for the sale of herring caught before and after the actual herring season and prescribed an even more elaborate system of markings, including the introduction of a register recording coopers' marks.⁷⁷ This 1519 ordinance is often seen as the beginning of national regulation of the herring fishery in the Dutch Republic.⁷⁸ The fact that it was built on foundations laid in Holland at an earlier stage has received much less recognition. Still there can be no doubt that the ordinances of the 15th century had paved the way.

It has to be admitted that attempts to harmonise other measures were not nearly as successful. This is illustrated by the problems that arose around the middle of the 15th century with the casks for another important export commodity: butter. Apparently butter casks were sometimes deliberately made of thicker and heavier wood than usual: when full, these casks had the correct weight, but too much of it consisted of wood instead of butter. Complaints from Cologne and pressure from the authorities in Deventer, where much of the dairy trade with German merchants took place, did induce Holland towns to try and put a stop to this practice. Each town, it was agreed, was to issue the same set of rules regarding the weight of the casks, not just in the town itself but also in the surrounding district; in addition a coordinated system of verification and marking of the casks was to be introduced.⁷⁹ However, as far as can be established no local ordinances were issued and in the following years complaints from Cologne continued to come in.⁸⁰ Moreover, there was no follow-up in the shape of central regulation. Possibly the fact that dairy was produced by a large number of small farmers living in the countryside contributed to the failure. The inspection and verification of the butter casks they used may simply have been beyond the powers of the towns, especially since, as chapter 4 has shown, in contrast to the herring trade a significant part of the dairy trade bypassed urban markets altogether.

We will return to the maintenance of standard weights and measures in the countryside in the next section. Here it can be concluded that if economic interests required it and the task at hand did not exceed their competence, Holland towns were prepared and able to harmonise measures. In contrast to England, central legislation was a complementary factor in this process of harmonisation, not the driving force behind it.

⁷⁷ Degryse, 'Gemeenschappelijke grote visserij', 33-38; Beaujon, *Overzicht geschiedenis Nederlandsche zeevisserijen*, 9-12.

⁷⁸ By both authors mentioned above; cf. also Boelmans Kranenburg, 'Visserij Noordnederlanders', 293.

⁷⁹ Kuske, ed., *Quellen* I, nr. 1036; Sneller, *Deventer*, 75-76. The Hollanders were moreover accused of filling the casks with rancid butter unfit to be sold, except for a fresh top layer.

⁸⁰ Höhlbaum, ed., *Hansisches Urkundenbuch* VIII, nr. 489; IX, nr. 4.

6.4 Enforcement

Prescribing standards, however well defined, was of little value if it was not combined with mechanisms to promote and enforce their use. The first step was to make copies of the standards available to those who needed them. In addition it was necessary to make sure the standards were used in the right way. This could be done by giving directives about the handling of measures, weights or equipment; the use of the standards could also be entrusted to one or more qualified functionaries. Next, there was the regular inspection and verification of measures and weights and the persecution of offenders that tried to enrich themselves by using units that deviated from the standards. A body of officials was needed to carry out these tasks. Recurrent complaints about false weights and measures make it clear that enforcement was never easy.

In England distribution of models was organised on a national scale. Copies of the royal standards were sent to all urban centres, where more copies were made for both public and private use.⁸¹ The frequent inspection and verification of all weights and measures was necessary to keep the system in working order. The main functionary active in this field was a royal official, the ‘clerk of the market’. From at least the late 13th century onward the clerk, with a staff of assistants, was responsible for the supervision of the king’s standards; he had to see to it that local weights and measures conformed to them. In the middle of the 14th century the activities of the clerk of the market were limited to an area with a radius of 12 leagues (just under 60 kilometres) from the royal court; since the court travelled, this implied an annual inspection tour that covered large parts of the country.⁸² The clerk of the market was by no means the only functionary engaged in inspection and enforcement of weights and measures on behalf of the king. In his survey of the British metrological system Zupko spends many pages on a detailed description of all the other officials active in this field, varying from country court coroners and royal justices to manorial lords, religious institutions, and local commissioners appointed by the Crown with the specific aim of inspecting weights and measures in their home town. For some of these functionaries metrological duties belonged to their regular tasks, but others were appointed on an ad hoc basis, in return for services rendered or in order to ensure support. These men were probably more interested in the financial rewards of their office than in the benefits of a reliable system of weights and measures. Moreover, in many cases duties were poorly defined, let alone demarcated. The result was a complex situation characterised by overlapping jurisdictions, rivalries and plenty of opportunities for corruption and abuse.⁸³ Recent research suggests that many

⁸¹ Zupko, *British weights and measures*, 30-31.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 65-70

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 34-52, esp. 35

officials were indeed engaged in the very offenses that they were supposed to be preventing, either by intent or due to a lack of expertise.⁸⁴

From a continental point of view the most striking element in the English enforcement system is the apparent lack of involvement of town governments and urban officials until the 1320s. Only then, and probably at least partly out of dissatisfaction with the existing situation, urban authorities were given the right to inspect and verify the weights and measures used within the urban freedom. For an increasing number of towns the power to persecute and punish offenders was added later in the 14th or in the 15th century.⁸⁵

In Holland, and also in the southern Low Countries, enforcement was first and foremost an urban responsibility. Admittedly, in the cases where the count of Holland was the owner of one or more local measures, he too was involved. In the late 13th century for instance the count repeatedly issued instructions for the measuring of salt and wine in Dordrecht. They mainly concerned the tariffs of the impositions that were levied, but it was also stipulated that the salt measure had to stand upright on a level surface when it was being filled.⁸⁶ Also, the comital accounts of the middle of the 14th century show expenses for the construction of 26 new *achtels* and of 100 pounds of lead for making weights, all to be used in Rotterdam, where the count owned the grain measure and the weigh house.⁸⁷ Yet since most weights and measures were owned by the towns, the count's role in maintaining the standards was limited in comparison to the tasks of the urban authorities.

For a start, the provision of physical models for the large number of urban measures and weights was the responsibility of the towns themselves. The urban authorities also gave instructions on how to use these standards. The Amsterdam by-laws of 1413 for instance describe in detail exactly how the salt measure was to be filled and levelled and the Dordrecht by-laws of 1401 do the same, not just for salt but also for hops.⁸⁸ In addition, several towns employed sworn officials to do the measuring and weighing of important wholesale commodities. Sometimes the restrictions were only partial: in early 15th-century Amsterdam, for instance, foreigners were allowed to do their own measuring on Monday, the day of the weekly market, but not on other days of the week.⁸⁹

The active role that the towns took upon themselves is perfectly understandable in the light of the importance of weighing and measuring, via the urban excises, for urban revenues. It is true that the right to use the standard measures and weights and to collect the fees that came with it were usually leased out to the highest bidder. In Leiden for instance this was common practice at the

⁸⁴ Casson, 'A comparative study of prosecutions for forgery', section 3.4.2.2.

⁸⁵ Zupko, *British weights and measures*, 42-45.

⁸⁶ OHZ III nr. 1637; IV nrs. 1974 and 1997.

⁸⁷ Hamaker, ed., *Rekeningen grafelijkeheid* II, 131. Accounts for the late 14th century include similar expenses for repairs and replacements of the Dordrecht salt and grain measures (De Boer, Faber, and Jansen, eds., *Rekeningen grafelijkeheid*, II-1, 306, 326).

⁸⁸ Breen, *Rechtsbronnen Amsterdam*, 19-20; Fruin, ed., *Oudste rechten Dordrecht* I, 47, 49.

⁸⁹ Breen, *Rechtsbronnen Amsterdam*, 19.

end of the 14th century; only when the bidding process had not rendered an acceptable result the authorities took the exploitation into their own hands.⁹⁰ However, the lessee would still have to make use of the services of the town's sworn measurers or the urban weigh master.

The presence of a corps of sworn measurers limited the risk of metrological fraud by merchants, but the officials themselves might still turn out to be unreliable. Checks on that eventuality therefore had to be provided as well. In the early 15th century both in Amsterdam and in Dordrecht fraudulent measurers were not only fined, but also (temporarily) expelled from office.⁹¹ The Dordrecht authorities moreover fixed tariffs for all types of measuring and also ordered that for grain transactions the buyer and the seller should each appoint a measurer.⁹² None of this could entirely ban fraud by measurers, as is shown by the examples of fraudulent peat measurers in early 16th-century Gouda and Leiden referred to by Cornelisse.⁹³ Still, it did reduce risks.

We know that around the year 1300 London also had a corps of 'meters' for corn and for salt.⁹⁴ Likewise, in 1319 a royal charter gave London control over the weights and scales used in the city: from that time onwards the officials operating the king's great beam (for heavy goods) and the small beam (for luxury products like silk) were appointed by the urban authorities, or later by the members of one of the city's companies.⁹⁵ However, for other English towns evidence of urban officials of this type seems to be absent. In the major port towns alnagers, measurers and weighers were at work, but these were royal, not urban functionaries; they assessed weight and dimensions of imported cloth, imported wine and exported wool as a basis for levying the national custom duties.⁹⁶ That urban measurers and weighers were not more common is no doubt related to the limited autonomy of especially the smaller seignorial towns.

Holland town governments were involved in the maintenance of standards in another way as well. From a very early stage urban authorities actively enforced the use of the local standards by inspection and verification.⁹⁷ The Dordrecht accounts of the early 1280s (the oldest urban accounts extant in Holland) mention expenses for the forging of a stamp by a local goldsmith and for the bread, cheese and wine consumed by the aldermen and council members while supervising the verification and branding of the wine vessels.⁹⁸ It is not quite clear if at that stage inspection and verification were already recurrent activities, but a century later they most likely were. Although the Dordrecht by-laws of 1401 do not specify the

⁹⁰ Marsilje, *Het financiële beleid van Leiden*, 114.

⁹¹ Breen, *Rechtsbronnen Amsterdam*, 20; Fruin, ed., *Oudste rechten Dordrecht I*, 28.

⁹² Fruin, ed., *Oudste rechten Dordrecht I*, 45, 46-47, 49.

⁹³ Cornelisse, *Energie markten*, 160-161.

⁹⁴ Bridbury, *England and the salt trade*, 139-140.

⁹⁵ Barron, *London*, 39.

⁹⁶ Zupko, *British weights and measures*, 59-64.

⁹⁷ For a contrasting opinion: Nipper, *18 eeuwen meten en wegen*, 47. Nipper claims that towns only began to verify measures of content in the 15th century and that regular inspections were largely a 16th-century innovation. However the author offers virtually no information to support this thesis.

⁹⁸ Burgers and Dijkhof, eds., *Oudste stadsrekeningen Dordrecht*, 30.7, 31.22, 31.23.

procedure for the verification of measures and weights, they do state that the strickles used for rasing the grain and salt measures had to be checked every two months. Likewise, the Leiden by-laws of 1406 order innkeepers to serve beer in recently verified measures.⁹⁹ Over time, verification by the aldermen in person made way for lease contracts: like weighing and measuring, the verification of weights and measures could be leased out. This implied the introduction of impositions on verification; there are indications that this process largely took place in the 15th century.¹⁰⁰

The persecution and punishment of offenders was also an urban responsibility; as mentioned earlier, even the oldest charters of urban liberties are very clear about the duties of the urban court in this respect. Inspection, verification and enforcement remained an urban activity until the end of the Middle Ages (and in fact for a long time after that). As we saw, even when, as in the case of the herring casks, standards were coordinated at a supra-local level, the towns were in the end still responsible for inspecting and verifying the casks.

For Holland a lack of accurate medieval information puts hard proof beyond our reach, but Van der Wee has been able to show that the grain measures of Antwerp and Brussels remained constant in the 14th and 15th centuries; that is, if variations due to technological limitations of production and measurement are taken into account.¹⁰¹ This suggests that a system based on local enforcement mechanisms could work well: measures may not have been uniform, but they were stable and reliable.

While the differences in mechanisms for maintaining standards between Holland and England were considerable, those between Holland and the southern Low Countries were small. Just as in Holland, urban authorities in Flanders and in Brabant actively inspected and verified weights and measures; as in Holland, they frequently employed sworn officials to do the weighing and measuring.¹⁰²

There was one difference though: in the southern Low Countries guild involvement in metrological control appears to have been more prominent than in the north. Admittedly, sworn measurers were frequently organised in guilds in Holland as well, and these guilds did share in the responsibility of maintaining the standards. In early 15th-century Amsterdam, for instance, the urban measures for corn and salt were held in custody by the wardens of the measurers' guild and in later years the verification of these measures usually took place in the guild's chapel.¹⁰³ There were other cases of guild involvement, but they are restricted to a

⁹⁹ Fruin, ed., *Oudste rechten Dordrecht* I, 45; Hamaker, ed., *Middeleeuwsche keurboeken Leiden*, 53 ('...bi ghebrander maet van den lesten brande...').

¹⁰⁰ In Rotterdam for instance the urban accounts from the second half of the 15th century mention revenues for the verification of casks; the accounts from the first half of the century do not (Unger and Bezemer, eds., *Oudste stadsrekeningen Rotterdam*, esp. 131).

¹⁰¹ Van der Wee, *Growth of the Antwerp market* I, 84-89; cf. Tits-Dieuaide, 'Conversion', esp. 64.

¹⁰² For Brabant: Van der Wee, *Growth of the Antwerp market* I, 66-68. For Bruges: Van Houtte, *Geschiedenis van Brugge*, 202. For the measuring of grain in Ghent: Bigwood, 'Gand et la circulation', 421-423.

¹⁰³ Breen, *Rechtsbronnen Amsterdam*, 19, 143, 379, 412, 445, 465.

few specialised guilds with a very direct connection to weighing and measuring. In mid 15th-century Haarlem for example the four wardens of the coopers' guild were entrusted with verifying the vessels made by the guild members.¹⁰⁴

Other guilds of craftsmen and retailers, however, appear to have had few responsibilities with regard to the enforcement of measures and weights. This was different in the southern Low Countries, where in the important cloth industry enforcement of local regulations on length and width of the cloth was usually left to the local cloth guilds.¹⁰⁵ In Holland the urban authorities took this upon themselves. Inspection and verification of the dimensions of the cloth were largely the responsibility of the *waardijns*, urban officials who, in Leiden at least, were forbidden to actively engage in the production of, or trade in cloth for the duration of their term of office. If guild officials were involved, as was the case in Haarlem, they acted as aids of the *waardijns*. Offenses had to be reported to the local court, which then called the culprit to justice.¹⁰⁶ No doubt there is a relation with the fact that in Holland craft guilds were almost never represented in local government and therefore could not be expected to fulfil public tasks. Notably, after 1500 the role of the craft guilds in the enforcement of weights and measures appears to have increased. The 1510 ordinance on the use of troy weights in the silver and gold trade for instance does indicate a supervisory responsibility for the wardens of the goldsmiths' guilds.¹⁰⁷

The difference between Holland and the southern Low Countries confronts us once again with an interesting parallel with another aspect of market regulation: quality control. In the cloth industries of the southern Low Countries quality control also rested in part on the active cooperation and internal modes of enforcement of the cloth guilds.¹⁰⁸ In Holland, however, it firmly remained in the hands of the urban authorities, who did not allow the guilds to set the rules, supervise compliance or punish transgressions.¹⁰⁹

In chapter 3 it has been argued that guild domination of urban markets disadvantaged outsiders, who were faced with extra costs to get access. With regard to the enforcement of standards, however, the contribution of guilds deserves a different assessment: by providing reliable guarantees on quantity and quality of the products to customers, guilds were probably able to reduce transaction costs related to information asymmetries.¹¹⁰ Still, the Holland system of government-based control seems to have done exactly the same. Urban authorities were well aware of the vital importance for the urban economy of a good reputation of the urban export industries. In late 14th-century Leiden for

¹⁰⁴ Huizinga, ed., *Rechtsbronnen Haarlem*, 127.

¹⁰⁵ Van der Wee, *Growth of the Antwerp market* I, 103.

¹⁰⁶ Posthumus, *Leidsche lakenindustrie* I, 152-154; Kaptein, *Hollandse textielnijverheid*, 149.

¹⁰⁷ Nipper, *18 eenwen meten en wegen*, 44. Nipper's claim that in Amsterdam verification was guild-dominated (276-277) is probably based on the situation in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries; it cannot be upheld for 14th or 15th centuries.

¹⁰⁸ Munro, 'Symbiosis of towns and textiles', 55.

¹⁰⁹ Kaptein, *Hollandse textielnijverheid*, 148-149; Posthumus, *Leidsche lakenindustrie* I, 164, 176-177.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Epstein and Prak, 'Introduction: Guilds', 13.

instance the authorities ordered that cloth produced for export to the Hansa towns had to have a standard length of 19 ells; all cloth was to be measured by the urban officials, who saw to it that this standard was maintained. Hansa merchants did at times still protest that cloth from Leiden fell short, but then similar complaints were voiced at the Flemish cloth staple in Bruges.¹¹¹ Detailed research might tell more about the benefits and disadvantages of both systems; but this transcends the scope of this book.

So far this analysis has focused on the mechanisms for inspection, verification and enforcement of standards in towns. For the southern Low Countries this covers the bulk of interregional trade anyway, because the towns monopolised virtually all exchange above the mere local level. To be sure, there were problems with the dimensions of rural canvas and linen offered for sale at the urban markets. Still, urban authorities could at least partially address these problems by fixing the minimum length and width of rural cloth that could be marketed, as Antwerp did in the early 16th century.¹¹² In England rural trade was of greater importance: in the wool trade for instance village fairs and markets served as a marketing channel for small-scale producers. The lord who owned the market or fair was responsible for the maintenance of standard weights and measures. The abbot of Bury St. Edmunds, for instance, provided supervision on weighing and measuring at the market of Botesdale, for which he held the market rights.¹¹³

In Holland rural trade was important too, but as chapter 4 has shown a significant amount of trade took place at informal trade venues, which moreover had direct links with interregional trade networks. Seignorial control over seaside fish markets was usually weak; although the count did own some of the village scales for dairy and could thus regulate weighing practices at these scales, an increasing number of unofficial rural weighing facilities emerged as well. The 15th-century problems with the casks for herring and butter suggest that although the countryside was expected to follow the standards of the nearest town, enforcement of these standards was not always easy. As we saw in chapter 4, informal, small-scale rural trade venues offered easily accessible marketing options to farmers and fishermen; but did they perhaps, exactly because of their informal character, also increase the risk of fraud with weights and measures?

To make a long story short: they probably did, but in the course of time solutions were found to reduce these risks. Events in the twin villages of Westzaan and Krommenie in the year 1526 illustrate what these solutions looked like. Apparently the aldermen of the two villages had refused to take the measures and weights used locally to the bailiff for inspection and verification. The matter was brought before the bailiff's court in Beverwijk. The verdict of the four members of the court, all well-born men from the district, suggests an attempt at reconciliation. In future verification of the local weights and measures was to take

¹¹¹ Leiden: Posthumus, *Leidsche lakenindustrie*, 97; Bruges: Abraham-Thisse, 'Lakenhandel', 66.

¹¹² Van der Wee, *Growth of the Antwerp market* I, 103.

¹¹³ Smith, 'A periodic market', 465.

place in the sheriff's house in Westzaan, under the supervision of the sheriff, two aldermen and a representative of the bailiff. The revenues were to be spent in food and drink on the spot, and if there was a surplus, this was to be divided between all parties.¹¹⁴

Two elements stand out: the coordinating and law-enforcing role of the bailiff and the involvement of local representatives in the actual inspection and verification of measures. There is reason to believe that they were relatively new innovations. Bailiffs were probably introduced in Holland in the 13th century, based on the Flemish example. They represented the count's supreme jurisdictional authority in the countryside. In his district the bailiff presided the high court and executed its verdicts; he usually also appointed the village sheriffs and frequently had a say in the selection of the village aldermen. In addition, bailiffs had administrative duties, for instance in water management and in military matters.¹¹⁵ However, late 14th-century bailiffs' accounts do not mention revenues from verification of weights and measures. In itself that is not conclusive: after all the bailiffs received a fixed salary for their work.¹¹⁶ But in addition the 1424 ordinance on beer casks made in the countryside in no way refers to a legislative or supervisory role of the bailiffs. Surely if at that stage inspection, verification and enforcement of rural measures had been part of the bailiffs' regular duties, the logical choice would have been to order them to deal with the problem.

The first reference to involvement of the bailiffs comes from the mid 15th-century Voorne ordinance just mentioned. With this document the Voorne bailiff gave directives for the inspection and verification of weights and measures in his district. Privately owned measures had to be stamped with the bailiff's mark as proof of their correctness; the sheriff and the village aldermen were to regularly inspect if all measures bore the required mark.¹¹⁷ The chronology suggests that the coordinating duties of the bailiff with regard to the enforcement of weights and measures in the countryside developed in the first half of the 15th century, as a response to the needs that arose from the expansion of rural trade in this period.

However, the system probably also had its disadvantages. It is not quite clear exactly why the Westzaan aldermen did not want the bailiff to inspect the village weights and measures, but they were clearly prepared to go to some lengths to avoid the obligation. Abuse of power by bailiffs was a recurrent problem throughout the Middle Ages.¹¹⁸ The solution proposed by the bailiff's court in the Westzaan case suggests that it played a part here too. We saw earlier that in England centralised enforcement structures gave room to fraud and rent-seeking: unlike local magistrates functionaries appointed by the Crown were frequently more interested in the revenues of their duties than in the result for the maintenance of standards.

¹¹⁴ *Besondere privilegien Westzaanden en Crommenie*, 89-90.

¹¹⁵ De Boer, Faber, and Jansen, eds., *Rekeningen grafelijkeheid* II-1, vii-viii; cf. on the introduction of the bailiffs in Holland also Van den Arend, *Zeven lokale baljuwschappen*, 91-107.

¹¹⁶ De Boer, Faber, and Jansen, eds., *Rekeningen grafelijkeheid* II-1, esp. xx-xxiii.

¹¹⁷ De Jager, ed., *Middeleeuwse keuren Brielle*, 118-121.

¹¹⁸ Van den Arend, *Zeven lokale baljuwschappen*, 234-243.

From this perspective it is not at all surprising that the Westzaan aldermen did not trust the bailiff. However, a charter granted a few years later to two other villages in the north of Holland, Wormer and Jisp, suggests that other considerations played a part as well. The charter stipulated that taverners, bakers, petty traders and sellers of cloth in Wormer and Jisp had to use the measures and weights of the town of Haarlem and that all measures and weights were to be inspected and verified by the village aldermen. The charter was granted by emperor Charles V in response to a request of these aldermen, who, the text states, wanted a firm basis for the regulation of commercial practices in Wormer and Jisp.¹¹⁹ It is unlikely that this desire was related to the levying of excises: like the great majority of villages in Holland, Wormer and Jisp did not impose excises on the sale of beer, wine, bread or any other commodity.¹²⁰ Instead, the growing involvement of the villages in shipping seems to have spurred the village authorities into action. The charter states that the welfare of the villages depended upon their role in the provisioning of merchant vessels: this was why regulation was deemed a necessity.

The aldermen of Wormer and Jisp obviously reacted to changing economic circumstances that were not of their own making. However, the fact that they were able to react adequately is significant. It takes us back to the relatively strong position of villages in Holland, especially in the north of the country, discussed in chapter 4. Once it became clear that there was a growing need for a system that guaranteed the upkeep of standard measures and weights, the village authorities in Wormer and Jisp, just as their colleagues in Westzaan and Krommenie, felt quite capable of organising it themselves and had no need for the strong arm of the bailiff.

Actually there is an earlier, albeit indirect indication that village authorities were involved in the maintenance of standards as soon as the needs of trade required it. We have seen that in the middle of the 15th century the authorities in Cologne complained to Deventer and the other IJssel towns about the butter casks used by Hollanders. That was not all they did. In 1447 Cologne also directly addressed the main dairy exporting communities in Holland: the towns of Haarlem, Amsterdam, Alkmaar and Hoorn, and the village of Akersloot.¹²¹ Obviously the Cologne magistrate assumed that the village authorities in Akersloot could and should take action just as well as their urban colleagues.

In short, whereas in the early 15th century the maintenance of standards in the countryside probably did cause problems, gradually a combination of central coordination and local initiative brought improvement. The changes were no doubt triggered by the growing involvement of the countryside in interregional trade networks. However, the prior existence of rural communities experienced in governing themselves and defending their own economic interests provided the basis for a flexible and adequate response to newly arising needs.

¹¹⁹ *Generale privilegien Kennemer-landt*, 107-111.

¹²⁰ Fruin, ed., *Informacie*, 64.

¹²¹ Kuske, ed., *Quellen* I, nr. 1159.

6.5 Conclusions

In itself, there is nothing remarkable about the development of a reliable system of weighing and measuring in late medieval Holland. Metrological systems that reduced information asymmetries also developed in the southern Low Countries and in England, and for that matter in many other European countries as well. However, the organisation of weighing and measuring did not take the same shape everywhere. Besides similarities there were also significant variations, related to the underlying balance of powers.

Differences between Holland and England are best explained from the diverging positions of central and local authorities. Both were bent on gaining control over measures and weights, not just as a symbol of their authority or from a desire to accommodate merchants, but also because this served their fiscal interests. In England the early rise of central power was accompanied by the development of national standard weights and measures and of a centralised enforcement system that contributed to an efficient royal taxation of imports and exports. In Holland on the other hand, and even more so in the southern Low Countries, urban authorities successfully claimed control over measures and weights at an early stage and thus helped to create a system that allowed them to levy the urban excises that were essential to their fiscal autonomy.

Whether the early centralisation of metrological control really put England at an advantage is questionable. Firstly, in practice the differences between England and Holland were less impressive than they looked in theory. English uniformity was eroded by changes in the balance of powers: Parliament used its growing influence to authorise exemptions from the national standards that benefited local interests, in particular those of the landed gentry. Conversely, in Holland measures used in wholesale trade tended to converge under the influence of interregional commerce. Secondly and more fundamentally, the disadvantages of a lack of uniformity were probably counterbalanced by a reduced risk of fraud and abuse: local enforcement mechanisms were not as complex as national enforcement systems and local authorities, instead of just being in it for the money, had good reason to be genuinely concerned about maintaining the standards.

Differences between Holland and the southern Low Countries were more subtle. It is true that the urban authorities in the south shared their responsibilities in enforcing standard weights and measures with craft guilds to a greater extent than they did in the north, but evidence that this made a significant difference to the maintenance of standards is lacking. More important was probably the specific pattern of urbanisation in Holland, where in contrast to the southern Low Countries urban giants were absent. The effects are highlighted in the process of standardisation of herring casks in the early 15th century, initiated by the Holland herring towns; as far as we know a similar process did not take place in Flanders. The driving force in Holland was clearly economic necessity: customers abroad demanded uniformity. But an adequate response to economic requirements was facilitated by the fact that none of the herring towns was big and powerful enough

to set the agenda on its own. The alternative, which had proved its value before, was to form an alliance.

There is one other element in the organisation of weighing and measuring in Holland that deserves attention and this too is closely related to the specific balance of powers that characterised Holland's society: the improvement in the enforcement of weights and measures in the countryside in the 15th and early 16th centuries and the role village authorities had in this improvement. Again, stricter regulation of rural weights and measures was in the first place a reaction to economic circumstances: rural trade had expanded and direct links with interregional trade networks had developed. However, a tradition of vigorous rural communities with self-governing powers did make it easier to accommodate these changes. Local control mechanisms could simply be embedded in existing administrative structures; they thus provided a complement to and at the same time an effective check on central control mechanisms.

This chapter has focused on one aspect of market regulation, but a few parallels have been drawn with rules and practices on other issues that affect the matching of supply and demand, such as quality control and the prevention of monopolies. It seems that in these areas mechanisms similar to those governing the organisation of weighing and measuring were at work. Here too differences are clearly related to social and political relations. The next chapter investigates if the explanatory value of these relations also holds true for another cluster of institutions: those that relate to the enforceability of contracts.

7. Contract enforcement

7.1 Introduction

One of the paragraphs in the charter of urban liberties granted to the Holland town of Haarlem in the year 1245 –it was copied from the charter of the Brabant town of Den Bosch that served as model for the Haarlem document– deals with debts incurred by women vendors. It states that husbands of women selling beer, bread or yarn were liable for the risks of their wives' commercial transactions up to (the equivalent of) one oven of bread, one brewing tub of beer, or one *steen* (a substantial weight) of yarn. For husbands of women not engaged in commerce liability was more restricted: they could lose at most 4 pence through actions of their wives. The paragraph has to be seen in the light of the legal status of married women in the Middle Ages, who were considered to be under their husbands' guardianship and did not have full legal capacity. In the case of women vendors this may well have caused problems: if a married woman could not be called to justice, creditors risked standing empty-handed. A husband partly answerable for the debts contracted by his wife may have provided at least some sort of solution.¹

Non-simultaneous trade –trade that involves a time lapse between payment and delivery– involves risks that do not exist in spot transactions: the party that has entered into an obligation to pay or to deliver at a later date may renege on the agreement afterwards. This 'fundamental problem of exchange' and the institutional arrangements that developed to keep it under control take centre stage in this chapter.² Non-simultaneous exchange and the problems related to it are sometimes seen exclusively in connection to the rise of interregional trade between merchants not personally known to each other.³ This chapter takes a wider perspective and takes contract enforcement in local and regional trade into consideration as well. As the example from the Haarlem charter of liberties suggest, many transactions in local trade, even very small ones, also involved deferred payments or advances for future delivery. It is hardly surprising: in medieval trade credit was omnipresent at every level, and consequently problems of shirking were too.⁴

Most mechanisms that were used to deal with defaulting were probably of an informal nature, relying on long-lasting personal contacts and reputation. If even in international trade amicable settlement was the preferred method of handling commercial conflicts, this would certainly have been the case within the small

¹ OHZ II, nr. 672-673 (hereafter: 'Haarlem 1245'), article 43; Hoogewerf, *Haarlemse stadsrecht*, 224-226. In the 16th and 17th centuries the legal capacity of women vendors was enlarged (Van der Heuvel, 'Openbaar koopvrouw').

² The expression 'the fundamental problem of exchange' comes from Greif, 'Fundamental problem of exchange'.

³ Explicitly in: Volckart and Mangels, 'Are the roots'.

⁴ For the ubiquity of credit in medieval trade: Postan, 'Credit in medieval trade'.

circle of villagers or fellow-townsmen.⁵ Still, more formal institutional arrangements played a part as well. They provided a last resort, as such constituted a strong incentive to settle the matter, and helped to define norms and rules.

Here two of these institutional arrangements will be discussed: merchant guilds as a form of self-organisation based on a community responsibility model, and debt litigation as an exponent of a government-dominated system of law enforcement centred on individual responsibilities. According to Greif the emergence, in the 13th century, of more powerful states heralded the transition from a communal to an individual responsibility system and thus the decline of the merchant guild.⁶ But as Gelderblom and Grafe have shown, various types of merchant organisations continued to exist throughout the Middle Ages. Gelderblom and Grafe state that the degree to which merchants were able to delegate control to a collective body depended on economic and political circumstances.⁷ Against this background medieval Holland presents an interesting case. As we will see merchant guilds were rare, whereas mechanisms for individual contract enforcement through the local court were in place at an early stage and maintained their dominant position afterwards.

As before, a comparison is made to Flanders and England. First we turn to the role of merchant guilds. In order to bring out regional differences more clearly, the analysis is restricted to indigenous merchant guilds; these may have been active in local and regional or in international trade, or, as was frequently the case, in both. Organisations of foreign merchants operating in Holland, Flanders and England, like the German hansa, are not discussed. The three sections that follow deal with the organisation of debt litigation through courts of justice; they respectively discuss the transition from traditional methods of proof based on a belief in divine intervention to fact-finding, the development of sureties and public registration of debts.⁸

Much of the content of this chapter deals with developments that took place before the middle of the 14th century. The charters of liberties of Holland towns provide an important source of information on the organisation of contract enforcement in this period. Other sources (such as urban by-laws or court records) are only rarely available until the late 14th or early 15th century. In Holland the best known and largest ‘family’ of charters is the Brabant-Holland filiation; the Haarlem charter of liberties belongs to this family. A large part of the Haarlem charter was based on the liberties of the Brabant town of Den Bosch. In turn, a draft version of the Haarlem charter served as a model for several other towns in Holland. In this chapter a great deal of attention goes to the liberties of this Brabant-Holland filiation, which, because of their detailed character and stress on what we would now call civil justice, offer the best clues for an analysis of contract

⁵ On amicable settlement in international trade: Gelderblom, *Violence, opportunism*, Ch 7 (The courts).

⁶ For a concise explanation: Greif, ‘Institutions and impersonal exchange’.

⁷ Gelderblom and Grafe, ‘Rise, persistence and decline of merchant guilds’.

⁸ These three sections (7.3 to 7.5) were first presented as a paper at the GEHN-conference ‘Law and economic development’, Utrecht 2007 (Dijkman, ‘Debt litigation’).

enforcement. Elements from other charters are used to complement the information. Appendix C lists the charters that have been used, explains the methodological problems attached to working with them, and briefly reviews the historiography.

7.2 Merchant guilds

Merchant guilds in northwestern Europe (Germany, the Low Countries and England) are documented from the late 10th or early 11th century onward.⁹ These guilds were, to all appearances, multi-purpose institutions: they provided protection against violence and cheating, negotiated favourable trade conditions, and catered for social and religious needs.¹⁰ One of the earliest (and most frequently cited) references comes from the writings of the cleric Alpertus of Metz. It dates from around the year 1020 and deals with the merchant guild of Tiel, situated in the Guelders river area and heiress of the early medieval trade *emporium* Dorestad. In his description of the Tiel merchants Alpertus expressed his disapproval of their unruly and impious ways. He was reluctant to accept that they really possessed a charter from the emperor allowing them to administer justice according to rules of their own device, as they claimed.¹¹

With this last remark Alpertus hits on an essential aspect of merchant guilds: their self-governing powers. In this sense merchant guilds can be seen as a representation of a much wider development that drastically transformed society from the 10th century onwards. To be sure, associations with a corporative identity cemented by an oath already existed in the early Middle Ages. In the Carolingian period, for instance, village guilds united laymen and clerics and men and women alike: they organised collective meals and provided assistance for impoverished or sick members. Still, the role of corporative associations became much more pronounced after the decline of the Carolingian empire and the break-down of central authority that accompanied it. The 10th to 13th centuries witnessed the emergence of corporative bodies of various kinds: urban communes, rural commons, religious confraternities of laymen and finally craft guilds acquired a certain degree of autonomy.¹²

⁹ Elementary studies on the merchant guilds in each of the three regions date from the late 19th and the first half of the 20th century. For England: Gross, *The Guild Merchant*. For Germany: Planitz, 'Kaufmannsgilde'; Planitz, 'Frühgeschichte'. For the Low Countries: Van der Linden, *Gildes marchandes*.

¹⁰ Gelderblom and Grafe, 'Rise, persistence and decline of merchant guilds', 7-9. For a contrasting opinion: Dessì and Ogilvie, 'Social capital and collusion'. Dessì and Ogilvie state that guilds served only one purpose: they were rent-seeking institutions, who owed their existence to the monopoly privileges granted to them by a ruler in exchange for financial support.

¹¹ Alpertus Mettensis, *De diversitate temporum*, 81. Alpertus does not literally mention a guild, but the description makes it perfectly clear the merchants he refers to had formed a corporative organisation. Cf. Akkerman, 'Koopmansgilde Tiel', 414-417.

¹² Here it is not possible to do justice to the impressive bodies of literature on each of these subjects. The role of the sworn association as the form that many corporative bodies took is highlighted in the German literature, e.g. Oexle, 'Conjuratio und Gilde', and Dilcher, 'Genossenschaftliche Struktur'. For a recent contribution that

Corporative institutions sometimes clashed with sovereign, lordly or ecclesiastical authorities. The prohibition of guilds -whatever their exact nature may have been- in the Carolingian era is a clear sign of conflict. When in 852 bishop Hincmar of Reims advised to reform all village guilds into religious associations supervised by the parish priest, indignation about the vulgarity of collective meals and the participation of women and clerics in them were probably only part of the problem. More important was the fact that the village guilds were not under the control of the regular secular and ecclesiastical authorities: the same objection as Alpertus voiced with regard to the Tiel merchant guild.¹³

The revolutionary character of corporative institutions should not be overrated: in many cases their relation with the authorities is better characterised in terms of interaction and cooperation than of conflict. The urban communal movement for one only rarely led to a radical overthrow of lordly authority. Townspeople were more likely to achieve their goals by negotiating compromises that suited both them and their lord.¹⁴ Similarly, many religious confraternities initially developed under the patronage of a monastery: religious institutions encouraged the participation of laymen in their community of prayers as a way to attract additional funding. Only gradually the confraternities developed into independent bodies.¹⁵ Likewise the early merchant guilds of the Low Countries and Germany probably owed part of their special status to the habit of Carolingian and Ottonian rulers to allow merchants certain liberties (for instance the right to travel freely) not given to others.¹⁶

The first evidence for the existence of merchant guilds in the southern Low Countries dates from the second half of the 11th century. The best documented case is Saint-Omer.¹⁷ The late 11th- or early 12th-century customs of Saint-Omer's merchant guild deal with all of the elements essential to sworn associations: the organisation of collective meals (or, more to the point, drinking bouts) and of collective religious activities (mention is made of prayers at the chapter house and of relics being borrowed), but also the obligation to assist each other in case of illness and, of greater relevance here, in case of a commercial dispute abroad. The customs state that if a merchant from Saint-Omer has refused to join the guild and is arrested somewhere, or finds his goods seized, or is challenged to a duel, he will receive no help. This does indeed suggest a role of the collectivity of the guild in contract enforcement. The customs also define the trading privileges guild members had in their home town: they enjoyed pre-emptive rights in all

stresses the role of corporative collection action in the resolution of social dilemmas in a changing world: De Moor, 'Silent revolution'.

¹³ Oexle, 'Conjuratio und Gilde', 155-164; Akkerman, 'Koopmansgilde Tiel', 422-4243.

¹⁴ Nicholas, *Growth of the Medieval City*, 146-150; Ennen, *Europäische Stadt*, 105-124.

¹⁵ Trio and Bijsterveld, 'Van gebedsverbroedering naar broederschap II'.

¹⁶ Dilcher, 'Genossenschaftliche Struktur', 98.

¹⁷ Other archival data come from Valenciennes (customs partly dating back to the middle of the 11th century), Malines (late 13th-century customs) and Bruges (see below). For a full description and sources: Van Ommeren, *Koopmansgilderen Deventer*, 30-32. Van Ommeren also lists the archival data available for merchant guilds in the northern Low Countries and in Germany.

commercial transactions.¹⁸ The count of Flanders officially recognised the Saint-Omer guild when he granted the town a charter of liberties in 1127: on this occasion the members received toll privileges elsewhere in Flanders.¹⁹

It is not quite clear if the Saint-Omer hansa mentioned in the first half of the 13th century was the direct successor of the earlier merchant guild or a newly founded corporation.²⁰ By this time Saint-Omer had developed as a flourishing international trade centre for wine, grain, cloth and sea fish.²¹ The hansa customs claim a monopoly on this international trade for guild members. The exclusivity of the Saint-Omer hansa, and in its wake of other Flemish merchant guilds, has been an issue of debate. Alain Derville, following a tradition that goes back to the writings of Henri Pirenne, envisages the hansa as an elitist club. He stresses the formal restrictions: entrance fees for others than the sons of members were high and craftsmen who did manual work, retailers or brokers could not join at all. Membership was thus limited to men of substantial wealth and to merchants active in long-distance trade.²²

A contrasting approach is presented by Wyffels, who points out that the 1241 membership list of the Saint Omer guild mentions more than 500 members and that many of them were not descended from ancient merchant families. For the Flemish hansa of London, an association of international wool merchants from several Flemish towns led by Bruges, Wyffels arrives at similar conclusions. The official rules suggest exclusivity, but the new admissions recorded in the Bruges city accounts for the last two decades of the 13th century mention several men from more humble origins: craftsmen or retailers who had acquired enough wealth to purchase membership in order to engage in international trade.²³ No membership lists of other merchant guilds in the southern Low Countries have survived, but the late 13th- and 14th-century register of the merchant guild of Deventer, in the eastern part of the present-day Netherlands, indicates the same discrepancy between official regulations and practice.²⁴

These findings do show that the demarcation between elite and middle class was permeable. Lineage was not as important as wealth; the 'new rich' could buy their way in. Still, in Deventer the majority of guild members did belong to upper layer of society, even though not all of them were merchants: the Deventer merchant guild, at least at this stage in time, probably also served as a social club for the local elite, regardless of their occupation.²⁵ Likewise, for Bruges Wyffels

¹⁸ For the customs: Espinas and Pirenne, 'Coutumes de la gilde marchande'. For a description and a translation in French: Derville, *Histoire de Saint-Omer*, 45, 267-269. For the characteristics of sworn associations in general: Dilcher, 'Genossenschaftliche Struktur', 103-106.

¹⁹ Derville, *Histoire de Saint-Omer*, 46, 269-271.

²⁰ For a discussion of both points of view: Van Ommeren, *Koopmansgilderol Deventer*, 34. For the hansa customs (translation in modern French): Derville, *Histoire de Saint-Omer*, 271-272. The dating of this document is uncertain: Derville dates it to around 1210, Carlos Wyffels to about 1240, even though he states the customs themselves may date back to the 12th century (Wyffels, 'Vlaamse hanzen opnieuw belicht', 6).

²¹ Derville, *Histoire de Saint-Omer*, 38-44.

²² Ibid., 56-57; cf. Pirenne, 'La Hanse Flamande de Londres', 173-174; cf. also Van Werveke, 'Wesen', 14, 16.

²³ Wyffels, 'Vlaamse hanze van Londen', esp. 17-18; Wyffels, 'Vlaamse hanzen opnieuw belicht', 8-13.

²⁴ Van Ommeren, *Koopmansgilderol Deventer*, 60-65.

²⁵ Ibid., 66, 73-74.

admits that the Flemish hansa did exclude traders with insufficient financial means and that its members monopolised the international trade.²⁶ Moreover, instead of a 'democratisation' of merchant guilds in the late 13th century, as Wyffels initially assumed, or of relative openness throughout the 13th century, as he advocated afterwards,²⁷ for Saint-Omer at least there are clear signs that exclusivity was increasing. In 1263 the entrance fee for others than children of members was raised enormously; membership fell to 200 to 300 individuals afterwards.²⁸ Even if the decline was also related to the reduced role of the Flemish in the English wool trade, the nature of the reaction does show that the elite used the hansa as an instrument to exclude outsiders.

After the revolts of the early 14th century Flemish merchant guilds disappeared. They did leave a legacy however, partly in the shape of the influential 14th-century guilds of butchers, bakers and brewers and the like, but in Bruges also in the powerful guild of the brokers and hostellers that dominated the city's international trade. There were links on an individual level as well: many of the early 14th-century Bruges hostellers had been members of the Flemish hansa of London before 1300.²⁹

Sources on merchant guilds in the British isles are, as so often, more abundant than on the continent. Charles Gross collected evidence for the existence of merchant guilds in 129 towns in England and Wales. These guilds were actively engaged in the regulation of the local market, for instance by prohibiting retailing for outsiders and reserving toll privileges and pre-emptive rights for members.³⁰ The exceptionally rich archives of the merchant guild in Leicester show that in this town guild members who engaged in dishonest dealings (for instance in selling sub-quality products) could be disciplined in the meeting of the guild members, the morningspeech. Notably this institution also provided guild members with a way to recover debts owed to them by fellow guildsmen. This means that here too we find guilds involved in contract enforcement, although apparently exclusively in conflicts between guild members and in a manner that has little to do with collective liability.³¹

Just as on the other side of the North Sea royal, seignorial and ecclesiastical authorities were frequently suspicious of the guilds' ambitions at self-regulation. The powerful English crown was rather successful in its attempts to control guilds. By the 13th century the right to establish a guild had become a privilege that had to be paid for; occasionally royal enquiries were initiated in order to uncover and prosecute illegal guilds.³²

²⁶ Wyffels, 'Vlaamse hanzen opnieuw belicht', 13-17.

²⁷ Ibid., 13.

²⁸ Derville, *Histoire de Saint-Omer*, 57.

²⁹ Murray, *Bruges*, 113, 188. On the revolts in Saint-Omer and the abolition of the merchant guild in that town: Derville, *Histoire de Saint-Omer*, 67-71.

³⁰ Gross, *The Gild Merchant* I, 9-18, 43-49.

³¹ Bateson, ed., *Records of the borough of Leicester* I, xxxiii, xxxiv.

³² Fryde, 'Gilds in England', 222-224.

However, there were also instances of cooperation between authorities and guilds. As we just saw the merchant guild of Leicester was given wide discretion to regulate local commerce; this included the power to levy entrance fees and possibly also to collect the earl's tolls. The situation benefited the merchants, who gained the right to organise trade much as they wanted to. But the earl profited as well. The guild freed him from all kinds of executive tasks, gathered his revenues for him and cost him nothing: in fact the guild was probably prepared to pay for the favours granted.³³ It should be remembered that English towns, and certainly seignorial towns like Leicester, lacked the autonomy of their continental counterparts. In this situation the merchant guild provided the townspeople with a way to realise a least a modicum of self-determination. It is therefore not surprising that in the towns that received self-governing powers in the late 12th or 13th century merchant guilds often disappeared (or were transformed into social or religious fraternities), while in seignorial or ecclesiastical boroughs they tended to survive for much longer.³⁴

The fact that guilds served as the communal organisation of the townspeople also helps to explain a significant difference between the English guilds and their Flemish counterparts: even if for the latter the discrepancy between theory and practice is taken into account, English merchant guilds were more comprehensive. Guild membership was usually open to all urban traders, large, middling or small. Whereas in Flanders craftsmen who worked with their hands were not welcome or at least had to pay a much higher entrance fee, such restrictions usually did not exist in England. Craftsmen who were also active in retailing were freely admitted; in some towns it looked as if almost every adult male was a guild member. In addition villagers from the surrounding countryside could frequently join as well. Where merchant guilds continued to exist after the 12th century, there is no sign that they became more exclusive afterwards.³⁵

Merchant guilds were known in the towns in the northern Low Countries as well. Two cases have already been mentioned: Tiel and Deventer. Others can be added: in the 13th century merchant guilds existed in Groningen, in Utrecht and in Middelburg.³⁶ In the county of Holland, however, references to merchant guilds from the 12th or 13th century are extremely scarce; in fact there is only one. In 1200 the count of Holland ordained that the sale of cloth in Dordrecht was to be restricted to the cloth merchants (*wantsnijders*), who had to be members of the Dordrecht *fraternitas et ansa*.³⁷ Nothing is known about a role of the Dordrecht

³³ Bateson, ed., *Records of the borough of Leicester* I, xxxi-xxxviii; Martin, 'The English borough', 133-134; Miller and Hatcher, *Towns, commerce and crafts*, 294-295.

³⁴ Miller and Hatcher, *Towns, commerce and crafts*, 296-297.

³⁵ Gross, *The Guild Merchant* I, 107-109; Fryde, 'Guilds in England', 220-221; cf. Van Ommeren, *Koopmansgilderen Deventer*, 38, 76.

³⁶ Utrecht: De Bruin, ed., *Paradijs vol weelde*, 87. Groningen: Bos, *Groningsche gild- en stapelrecht*, 42-68, esp. 61-62. Middelburg: OHZ III, nr. 1554 (translation in Dutch: Luzac, *Holland's Rijkedom* III, 31-36 (second paging)). In his survey of 12th- and 13th-century merchant guilds Van Ommeren mentions Groningen and Middelburg, but not Utrecht (Van Ommeren, *Koopmansgilderen Deventer*, 30-32).

³⁷ OHZ I, nr. 241.

guild in the resolution of commercial conflicts. The guild does not appear to have been long-lived. There are no references to its existence after 1200: it is not mentioned in Dordrecht's charters of liberties of 1220/1221 and 1252 or in any of the other extant documents. That probably means the guild disappeared at some point in the 13th century, most likely in the first half of that century.

In the other towns of Holland there is no sign of a 13th-century merchant guild either.³⁸ It is unlikely that this is simply a matter of a scarcity of sources. The Haarlem *Accijnsbrief* of 1274, a comital charter allowing the Haarlem authorities to levy excises on trade in, and production of various goods, stipulates that merchants (and artisans) are to pay these dues individually. Likewise, the 1273 charter of liberties of Vlaardingen states that anybody engaged in commerce in the town has to contribute to the expenses for the town's defences in proportion to his income.³⁹ Apparently in these towns the authorities addressed merchants as individuals and not as members of a corporative body.

How to explain the early demise of the Dordrecht guild and the absence of merchant guilds in the other towns of Holland? Based on comparative research in four major European towns between the middle of the 13th and the end of the 18th century, Gelderblom and Grafe argue that the main factor that determined the degree to which merchants were willing to give up individual freedom and delegate control to a corporative organisation was market size. The larger the market, the less likely merchants were to form a corporative body, possibly because in such an environment the costs of establishing a guild were too high or because in large markets alternatives -either private solutions such as insurance, or public goods such as courts- were more readily available.⁴⁰

Yet in the case of 13th-century Holland it is highly unlikely that market size was the main determinant. Although Dordrecht did grow significantly in the 13th century, by 1300 it was still a small town: by no means too large for a merchant guild. Other towns in Holland were even smaller and apparently did without a guild altogether. Another factor seems to have carried greater weight: the overlap in activities between guild and local government.

The possible link between merchant guilds and local authorities has been the subject of debate ever since Pirenne postulated his hypothesis about the emergence of towns in northwestern Europe in the high Middle Ages. Pirenne and his followers believed that travelling merchants organised in guilds established new trading suburbs near existing fortified strongholds. These guilds became the

³⁸ In the late 15th and 16th centuries many towns in Holland did have local retailers' guilds and shipmasters' guilds, but merchant guilds engaged in foreign trade were very unusual. Dordrecht had a guild of wood merchants and a guild of wholesalers which was referred to as the 'great guild' (*grote gilde*); the members probably had dealings with foreign merchants coming to Dordrecht, but did not venture out themselves (Van Herwaarden *et al.*, *Geschiedenis van Dordrecht*, 115, 119). To my knowledge the only organisations that did organise trade expeditions abroad were the Haarlem *Schonenvaarders*, the Gouda *Schonenvaarders* and the Amsterdam *Bergenvaarders*, three guilds of merchants engaged in trade with Scandinavia. The best documented case is that of the Haarlem *Schonenvaarders*: Van den Bosch-Nord Thomson, 'Haarlems Schonenvaardersgilde'.

³⁹ OHZ III, nr. 1681 and nr. 1632.

⁴⁰ Gelderblom and Grafe, 'Rise, persistence and decline of merchant guilds', 29-30.

predecessors of urban communities and the driving force behind the urban communal movement. As guild customs acquired a territorial character, 'merchant law' became the prime source of urban law.⁴¹ Later research has uncovered several flaws in Pirenne's theories. The hypothesis of travelling merchants settling down could not be upheld in the face of empirical evidence; industry and local trade turned out to have been more important as motors of urban development than long-distance trade.⁴²

Still, even if urban institutions were not the direct offspring of merchant guilds, the English situation described earlier does suggest that local merchant guilds were no longer needed where and when urban self-government took shape. In towns that acquired administrative and judicial powers, the urban authorities took upon themselves duties that elsewhere, in the absence of a viable alternative, were executed by the guilds. In towns like this, mechanisms for the settlement of commercial disputes evolved from a 'club good', available primarily for guild members, to a public good: local government provided a basic set of rules and enforcement mechanisms binding to everybody who did business within the limits of the urban jurisdiction.⁴³

At first sight this seems to take us back to Avner Greif's argument that merchant guilds disappeared when their role in contract enforcement was taken over by a new mechanism. However, two important comments need to be made. Firstly, as argued by Gelderblom and Grafe, the transformation was not automatic: it did not take place everywhere. And secondly, the new mechanism that replaced the merchant guild appears to have had little to do with the rise of a strong central state, as Greif claims; instead developments at the local level were decisive.

For the southern Low Countries an early role of urban authorities and urban institutions in the settlement of commercial disputes is irrefutable. As we saw in chapter 2, the 13th-century international fairs of Bruges and Ypres did not have a special fair court, as was common in England and in the Champagne region. It was the local court of aldermen that administered justice when conflicts arose between visiting merchants. Holland was probably not far behind. In a treaty concluded by the count of Holland and the duke of Brabant in the year 1200, the two rulers agreed that a creditor in one county who wanted to collect a debt from a debtor in the other county should first apply to the authorities in the debtor's place of residence. Only if they refused to administer justice he was allowed to seize any property of the debtor he could lay his hands on.⁴⁴ The treaty thus demonstrates the elementary role of local courts, even at this early stage, in the settlement of debts; in the southern Low Countries, but also in Holland.

⁴¹ Pirenne, *Villes du moyen âge*, 103-104, 135-139; cf. Planitz, 'Kaufmannsgilde', 103, 111-113, and Dilcher, 'Personale und lokale Strukturen', 74-76.

⁴² For an overview of the criticism: Reynolds, *Introduction*, 19-21; Verhulst, 'Zur Entstehung der Städte'; Van Uytven, 'Origines des villes'.

⁴³ Volckart and Mangels, 'Are the roots', esp. 437-444.

⁴⁴ *OHZ* I, nr. 245.

Notably, by this time the towns of Holland were only just beginning to emerge. Their late rise, in combination with the early demise of the manorial system, implied that the young towns usually did not have to deal with a powerful local lord on their way to self-government. From the 13th century onward the count of Holland was a force to be reckoned with, but he seems to have been fully prepared to grant the towns administrative and jurisdictional powers in return for financial and military support. Of course by then the concept of urban self-government was well known in neighbouring countries. More importantly perhaps, contracts that defined relations between sovereign and subjects in terms of a voluntary exchange of duties and rights were common in Holland as well: the reclamations of the Holland peat district between the 11th and 13th centuries were based on agreements between groups of colonists and the count that departed from much the same notions. The result was that the towns of Holland possessed self-governing powers almost from the moment they emerged. The Dordrecht town charter (1220 or 1221) for one shows that by that time the Dordrecht court of aldermen already had the authority to issue by-laws and to administer justice.⁴⁵

In itself this rapid and smooth development of urban self-government, urban law and urban enforcement mechanisms may well explain the early disappearance of the Dordrecht merchant guild: at a very early stage it had become redundant. However, a comparison with Flanders reveals that another factor contributed as well. The Flemish towns acquired self-government in the course of the 12th century, before the Holland towns, but in Flanders merchant guilds were active until the end of the 13th century. Admittedly, the Flemish guilds did change character. In the 13th century they were no longer private associations of merchants; they became public institutions, controlled by the local authorities.⁴⁶ As we just saw, 13th-century Flemish merchant guilds tended to defend the economic interests of the local merchant elite, even if that elite was not as narrow as previously thought. In other words: to a certain extent in Flanders petrification of merchant guilds took place, whereas in Holland this did not happen.

Probably part of the explanation can be found in the fact that in the 13th century Dordrecht was a young town without significant urban industries: craftsmen simply did not pose much of a threat to the position of the urban elite. In addition the balance of powers between the count and the urban elite most likely played a part. As was shown in chapter 5 the 13th-century Dordrecht merchant elite, although increasingly wealthy and influential, was not in the same position as the well-established elites of the much older Flemish cities. Dordrecht owed its prosperity to its close cooperation with the count of Holland. Although the count usually went along with the Dordrecht elite if it suited his own interests, he did not allow the elite's powers to grow unchecked. The Dordrecht elite had

⁴⁵ OHZ I, nr. 406; hereafter 'Dordrecht 1220/21'. The charter is badly damaged and partly illegible, but most of its substance (though not always the exact wording) was restored with the help of a new version of the charter dating from 1252 (OHZ II, nr. 910; hereafter 'Dordrecht 1252').

⁴⁶ About the transformation from private to public institution: Van der Linden, *Gildes marchandes*, 37; Wyffels, 'Vlaamse hanzen opnieuw belicht', 6.

therefore much more to gain by playing along than by opposing the count, as the ambitions of a powerful guild could easily have been construed. In short, once the Dordrecht merchant guild had outlived its initial function, the town's merchants had probably neither the inclination nor the possibility to turn it into a rent-seeking institution.

In the other towns of Holland the factors that in Dordrecht contributed to the early demise of the merchant guild carried even more weight. These towns were younger than Dordrecht: therefore development of urban self-government did not much lag behind the rise of urban trade. Moreover, the 13th-century traders of Haarlem, Leiden or Delft were certainly not in the same league as the Dordrecht merchants. If in these towns merchant guilds ever existed, they must have been very short-lived.

The late rise of towns and trade and the absence of pre-existing merchant organisations connected to it, implied that from the moment they emerged urban courts were the obvious bodies to take up the regulation of trade conflicts within their jurisdiction. What remains to be seen is how they carried out these tasks and how this affected the enforceability of contract. In order to answer these questions the following sections focus on the role of courts of justice in debt litigation.

7.3 From divine judgement to the 'truth of the aldermen'

It is tempting to think that individual debt litigation by definition implies the use of modes of proof comparable to the modern ones, but the facts show that this was not necessarily the case. In the high Middle Ages a process of change of judicial procedures did indeed take place all over Europe: modes of proof based on the belief in a revelation of divine judgement disappeared, and procedures resting on fact-finding gained ground. However, remnants of the ordeal, in some form or another, lingered for a long time.

In keeping with the stress placed by Pirenne and his followers on the role of merchant settlements in the rise of medieval towns, the disappearance of the judicial duel has often been attributed directly to the needs of a rising merchant class. Huizinga, for instance, argued that the prohibition of the judicial duel in the Haarlem charter of liberties (1245) demonstrates the influence of mercantile customs on urban law: merchants had no wish to jeopardise their life and their profits by duelling over every trade conflict.⁴⁷ Huizinga's opinion is echoed in the view of later historians who explain the turn away from the traditional modes of proof by pointing to the profound economic, social and mental changes that northwestern Europe experienced in the 12th century.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Huizinga, 'Opkomst Haarlem', 29. For a similar statement regarding the English boroughs: Stephenson, *Borough and town*, 138.

⁴⁸ Hyams, 'Trial by ordeal', 99-106; Van Caenegem, 'Methods of proof', 111.

It is true that this point of view is open to discussion. Recently scholars have shown a renewed interest in the role of the Church: the ordeal was condemned by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215.⁴⁹ Others point out that urban hostility to the judicial duel does not necessarily have to be an expression of the rational and progressive outlook of merchants: it may also have been an attempt to prevent fighting in the urban community or to protect urban autonomy by making sure outsiders could not challenge burgesses.⁵⁰

Still, there can be no doubt that from the 12th century onward trial by combat did decline and it is also clear that towns were in the vanguard everywhere. In Holland, Haarlem was by no means the only town with a prohibition of the duel. Similar paragraphs can be found not only in the charters of the Brabant-Holland family, but also in the unrelated charters of Dordrecht, Leiden, Vlaardingen, Schiedam, Rotterdam and Amsterdam, all dating from the 13th or early 14th century.⁵¹ With this clause these Holland towns joined their counterparts abroad that had obtained a privilege to the same effect, some of them at a much earlier date, for instance Ypres (1116), Saint-Omer (1127) and London (c. 1130).⁵² In the Holland countryside trial by combat was more resilient, but for commercial conflicts this most likely had little relevance. At the end of the 14th century bailiffs' courts still occasionally resorted to a judicial duel as a way to decide about guilt or innocence; comital accounts from this period mention expenses for the services of champions.⁵³ However, these were exceptions rather than everyday practice: trial by combat had become a voluntary option applied only in criminal justice, and moreover one which was probably mainly used by the nobility.⁵⁴

Wager of law, however, is a different matter. The purgatory oath, often taken together with a number of oath-helpers or compurgators prepared to vouch for the trustworthiness of the accused, was closely related to the ordeal in its reliance on divine intervention –perjurers knew that eventually they would not be able to escape God's vengeance– and in the demand of correct pronunciation of the oath formula in the smallest detail: almost a physical test in its own right.⁵⁵ Wager of law gave way to more modern methods of proof only very gradually. It certainly figures prominently in the mid 13th-century Haarlem charter of liberties, including the demand of correct pronunciation and adherence to the ritual.⁵⁶ Moreover, whereas Huizinga assumed that the requirement of correct

⁴⁹ An evaluation of this hypothesis is given by Bartlett, *Trial by fire and water*, 99-102. For a recent contribution in keeping with this line of thought: McAuley, 'Canon law'.

⁵⁰ Bartlett, *Trial by fire and water*, 53-62.

⁵¹ Leiden: 1266, OHZ III nr. 1433; Schiedam: 1270, OHZ III nr. 1524; Vlaardingen: 1273, OHZ III nr. 1632; Rotterdam: 1340, Van Mieris, ed., *Groot charterboek* II, 638-640; Amsterdam: 1342, Van der Laan, ed., *Oorkondenboek van Amsterdam*, nr. 49.

⁵² Ypres: Vercauteren, ed., *Actes des comtes de Flandres*, nr. 79; Saint-Omer: Derville, *Histoire de Saint-Omer*, 269-271; London: Stephenson, *Borough and town*, 129.

⁵³ De Boer, Faber, and Jansen, eds., *Rekeningen grafelijkheid* III, xix.

⁵⁴ Fruin, 'Over waarheid, kenning en zeventuig', 333-338, esp. 337. Fruin's sources do not mention the nobility as such, but the choice of weaponry does suggest that among noblemen trial by combat remained in use longest: combat with the sword survived combat with sticks.

⁵⁵ Hyams, 'Trial by ordeal', 92; Bartlett, *Trial by fire and water*, 30-33.

⁵⁶ Haarlem 1245, par. 16; Hoogewerf, *Haarlemse stadsrecht*, 146-148.

pronunciation of the oath would soon disappear from daily legal practice, the early 15th-century law code of Brielle, put in writing by the town clerk Jan Matthijssen, still refers to it in very explicit terms.⁵⁷ This persistence of wager of law is not unique for Holland. Both in England and in Flanders remnants of the purgatory oath in civil cases outlasted the Middle Ages.⁵⁸

The replacement of traditional modes of proof by new ones was, it can be concluded, a very gradual process, in Holland no less than in the neighbouring regions. Still, in the 13th century a transition was taking shape, as is illustrated by the same Haarlem charter of liberties. A Haarlem burgess who was being sued for a debt could only demonstrate his innocence by oath if the claimant had merely uttered a complaint without coming up with any proof. However, if the claimant offered documents or testimony from witnesses to support his case, compurgation was not accepted. In that case the court would base its verdict on an investigation of the evidence. For this purpose a special session was organised which did not observe the rigid ritual of the traditional court sessions and which took place behind closed doors.⁵⁹

What we witness here, is a procedure that in Flanders was called the *veritas scabinorum* or ‘truth of the aldermen’; in sources from 15th-century Holland it is referred to as *schepenenkenning*. When a case was brought before the local court of aldermen, two or three of them were to investigate the matter by consulting witnesses or other sources and using their own experience and expertise. Subsequently, they pronounced a verdict that was binding to the court as a whole. The ‘truth of the aldermen’ was probably used both in criminal and in civil cases. Its introduction in Flanders took place just after the middle of the 12th century, when it first appeared in the charters granted to several towns by count Philip of Alsace.⁶⁰

Several varieties of ‘truths’, in the sense of inquests, developed in north-western Europe. Their common feature is the effort to uncover the truth by seeking the opinion of well-informed locals.⁶¹ The English jury system is one of these ‘truths of the countryside’. It probably developed from the royal inquisition, an administrative device aiming at establishing the Crown’s rights to lands and rents, and also made available, as a royal favour, to individuals who wished to have their rights ascertained. As is well known, from this point onwards England, under the influence of an increasing control of the Crown over the judicial system, followed a course of its own. The Angevin reforms carried through in the second half of the 12th century brought an extension and formalisation of the jury system,

⁵⁷ Huizinga, ‘Opkomst Haarlem’, 22-23; Hoogewerf, *Haarlemse stadsrecht*, 147-148; Matthijssen, *Rechtsboek van Den Briel*, 161.

⁵⁸ Van Caenegem, *Geschiedenis strafprocesrecht*, 160-161; Pollock and Maitland, *History of English law* II, 631-632.

⁵⁹ Haarlem 1245, par. 14, 58; Hoogewerf, *Haarlemse stadsrecht*, 140-141, 66-71; cf. Fruin, ‘Over waarheid, kenning en zeventuig’, 344-352.

⁶⁰ Hoogewerf, *Haarlemse stadsrecht*, 66-70; Van Caenegem, ‘Methods of proof’, 96; Van Caenegem, ‘La preuve’, 394-395; Nortier, *Bijdrage kennis burgerlijk procesrecht*, 48-54.

⁶¹ Van Caenegem, ‘Methods of proof’, 95-97.

both in criminal and in civil justice. The jury members were ordinary men from the surrounding area, but the juries as such functioned as part of the developing system of royal justice and royal courts.⁶²

In Flanders, on the other hand, the introduction of inquests led by comital functionaries evoked hostile reactions from the powerful towns, who saw them as an attack on their judicial autonomy. As with trial by battle they tried to acquire an exemption or, alternatively, they claimed the right of inquest for their own magistrates. It was this development that gave rise to the ‘truth of the aldermen’.⁶³

Other parts of the southern Low Countries adopted the Flemish model, although in Brabant the duke’s officials retained a greater degree of control over inquisitorial procedures than in Flanders.⁶⁴ It is tempting to conclude that the Holland towns also simply followed the Flemish example, but Holland did have its own variety of the inquest. From at least the last quarter of the 13th century, in the north of Holland, and also in a few other places in the county, a variety of the inquest, the so-called *zeventuig* or *landsage*, was in use for conflicts over real estate: seven neighbours were asked to investigate the claims of both parties to a disputed plot of land. A little later we also encounter the *zeventuig* in water management throughout the county and in other parts of the northern Netherlands as well: here its task was to investigate who was responsible for the maintenance of a stretch of dike.⁶⁵

To be sure, the origins of the *zeventuig* are disputed. A.J. Allan, the author of a recent study on the *Kennemer landrecht*, the 1274 law code for Kennemerland, suggests that it was newly introduced as part of this code because there was a need for more modern methods of proof.⁶⁶ Consequently the introduction of the *zeventuig* would have taken place several decades after that of the ‘truth of the aldermen’. With this statement Allan contradicts the sometimes overly romantic views of earlier generations who were convinced that the *zeventuig* was an ancient Germanic institution, deeply embedded in tradition.⁶⁷

Allan is probably correct in his interpretation that the incorporation of the *zeventuig* in the Kennemer law code should be seen in the light of a general tendency towards rationalisation of justice in the 12th and 13th centuries. Even so, there is little support for the hypothesis that it was only then introduced as a new institution. The code itself does not offer any clues that this was the case. Rather the wording of the text seems to indicate that the *zeventuig* already existed. In fact a charter dating from just one year later suggests that Holland was perfectly familiar with the institution: it refers to the *zeventuig* as the ‘right that in the common

⁶² For a description of the development and nature of the English jury: Plucknett, *Concise history*, 106-131.

⁶³ Van Caenegem, ‘La preuve’, 396-397.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 395 note 2 ; De Vries, *Bijdrage kennis strafprocesrecht*, 202-207.

⁶⁵ Fruin, ‘Over waarheid, kenning en zeventuig’, 353-366; Joosting, *Zeventuigrecht*, iii-xiv; De Goede, *Seventuig*.

⁶⁶ Allan, *Kennemer landrecht*, 119-127.

⁶⁷ E.g. Fruin, ‘Over waarheid, kenning en zeventuig’, 357; De Monté Ver Loren, *Bezit en eigendom*, 118-120; and in particular De Goede, *Seventuig*, esp. 275-278.

language is called the *lantsaghe*.⁶⁸ Moreover, late 12th and early 13th-century law codes from Friesland proper, on the other side of the Zuiderzee, also mention bodies of seven men with the same role as the Kennemer *zeventuig*: to assess the facts relating to ownership of real estate.⁶⁹ The kinship of legal institutions in Holland with those in Friesland confirms the impression that the Holland *zeventuig* was not a late 13th-century innovation. Therefore, the incorporation of the *zeventuig* in the Kennemerland law code most likely did not imply the creation of a new institution, but merely a more detailed definition of the role and functioning of an existing one.

The similarities between the *zeventuig* and the ‘truth of the aldermen’ have been pointed out long ago by Fruin: the institutions are obviously related. However, as Fruin explains there are also significant differences. The *zeventuig* was an ad hoc committee consisting of common local people, probably direct neighbours of the parcel of land under dispute; it thus closely resembled the English jury.⁷⁰ The ‘truth of the aldermen’ as it took shape in the Holland towns resembled the Flanders version much more closely: it was conducted by the local authorities themselves. In short, Holland towns probably did copy the Flanders model of the inquest, but because of a familiarity with other fact-finding mechanisms, the innovation fell on fertile ground and could be implemented quickly and easily.

7.4 Sureties

The introduction of methods of proof based on fact-finding was an important step towards a more efficient institutional framework for debt litigation, but the process did not stop there. Between the late 12th and the middle of the 14th century a wide range of additional instruments developed that facilitated the recovery of commercial debts through legal proceedings.

Again, to a considerable extent the rules on debt recovery mentioned in the charters of liberties of Haarlem and the other members of the Brabant-Holland filiation reflect practices common in neighbouring countries as well. For a start there is the procedure of distraint in case of reneging on obligations: the seizure of the debtor’s property as security, or his arrest in person, with the aim of inducing him to appear in a court of law.⁷¹ The Haarlem charter states that a defaulting debtor was first to be held in arrest by the authorities for two weeks. Afterwards he should be handed over to the creditor, who could keep him in custody until payment of the debt had been arranged. Most likely the cumbersome and costly arrest was normally preceded, and hopefully for both parties prevented, by seizure

⁶⁸ OHZ IV, nr. 1685: ‘... *ius sive dictum quod lantsaghe vulgariter appellatur*..’. The charter grants Rijnsburg abbey immunity from the *zeventuig*.

⁶⁹ Immink, ‘“Getuigen” in het oude Friese recht’, 443-454; cf. Algra, *Oudfries recht*, 217-219.

⁷⁰ Fruin, ‘Over waarheid, kenning en zeventuig’, 353, 365.

⁷¹ For a more detailed discussion of the instruments of seizure and arrest: De Blécourt and Fischer, *Kort begrip*, 262-263; Zijderduijn, *Medieval capital markets*, 119-124.

of property: even though the Haarlem charter does not explicitly refer to it, *panding* (seizure) is mentioned in the 13th-century liberties of Dordrecht and in many later charters.⁷²

Distrain was also in common use in the southern Low Countries, under almost identical conditions; here the prevalence of seizure of property over arrest in person is explicitly recorded in urban by-laws and privileges from the late 12th century onwards.⁷³ A striking instance of distrain in England was the power of a lord to distrain a tenant for rents or services in arrear, usually by taking cattle. This power was exercised extra-judicially: no court order was needed to seize the goods. Still, the lord's rights were limited: he could not sell or use the beasts but had to give them up again when the arrears were paid.⁷⁴ In the English towns creditors who found their debtors unwilling or unable to pay could also resort to distrain, but here safeguards against abuse had been introduced at an early stage. The debtor first had to be summoned three times, and if that failed, permission from the authorities was needed to distrain the debtor's goods. Extra-judicial distrain was only allowed against foreigners.⁷⁵

Likewise, from the 12th century onwards several towns in Flanders and Brabant acquired formal privileges that gave their burgesses freedom from seizure and arrest unless they had previously been tried and found guilty by the local court of aldermen, thus putting an end to extra-judicial distrain. Here too foreigners did not enjoy the same privilege. On the contrary, the entire urban community was expected to collaborate in the arrest of a foreign debtor, who after all might think it best not to appear in court when summoned and instead might decide to simply leave town.⁷⁶ The charters of the Brabant-Holland filiation do not have a paragraph to guarantee their burgesses freedom from seizure and arrest, but there is one in the Dordrecht charters of 1220/21 and 1252, and in the Vlaardingen charter of 1273: they state that seizure of a the property of a burgess cannot take place unless the aldermen have allowed it.⁷⁷

As with the introduction of the 'truth of the aldermen', the chronology suggests that Dordrecht, and other Holland towns at a later stage, copied a successful institution developed in the southern Low Countries. The treaty between Holland and Brabant from the year 1200 indicates how this may have happened. The paragraph on the recovery of debts in this treaty must have been inserted primarily in the interest of Brabant merchants, who at the time no doubt had a large share in the trade between the two countries. It therefore makes sense

⁷² Haarlem 1245 art. 33; Hoogewerf, *Haarlemse stadsrecht*, 196; Dordrecht 1220/1221 and 1252.

⁷³ Godding, *Droit privé*, 510-511.

⁷⁴ Pollock and Maitland, *History of English law* II, 572-576. Probably a similar right existed in Holland: *panding* is mentioned as compensation for a failure to perform labour services in an early 12th century document from Egmond abbey (Meilink, *Archief abdij van Egmond*, 62).

⁷⁵ Bateson, ed., *Borough customs* II, xlv-xlv; cf. the early 12th-century customs of Newcastle: Alsford, *Florilegium Urbanum*, available from <http://www.trytel.com/~tristan/towns/florilegium/flor04.html>.

⁷⁶ Godding, *Droit privé*, 507, 509; Gilissen, *Statut des étrangers*, 296-297.

⁷⁷ Dordrecht 1220/21 and 1252; Vlaardingen: *OHZ* III, nr. 1632

to assume that when Holland's trade began to develop, regulations were adapted to those of the southern neighbours under the influence of commercial relations.

Guarantees of this kind may have provided protection from unlawful confiscations, but for creditors trying to recover their money they brought serious disadvantages: proving the existence of a debt was often difficult and debtors could easily obstruct the course of justice by fleeing or alienating their goods.⁷⁸ In reaction, a series of instruments developed that reinforced the position of the creditor by offering additional securities to ensure its repayment. A tendency for change in favour of the creditor seems to have been a general phenomenon: it can be observed in England as well.⁷⁹ Even the ways in which it was achieved were often the same - but not always, as we will see.

Personal sureties, pledges who in case of defaulting by the original debtor assumed liability, were frequently asked to secure repayment of all kinds of debts, including commercial ones, throughout the Middle Ages. Frequent references to the use of pledges make it clear that this was common practice in Holland as well as elsewhere. The Vlaardingen charter of liberties (1273) for instance states that debts could be claimed from a pledge after three unsuccessful exhortations to the debtor; and in 1396 the Amsterdam burgess Pieter Smit Claessoen insisted on a pledge to ensure the timely repayment of a debt of £ 10 *Hollands* owed to him by a fellow townsman.⁸⁰

Gaging of movables or immovables as (non-possessory) collateral was another widely used way to improve security: the creditor acquired a right to a specific property of the debtor, to be claimed if the debt was not repaid when scheduled. The extent to which mortgaging of real estate could be used for raising commercial credit partly depended on land ownership structures. Local merchants and craftsmen were almost by definition in a much better position to make use of the credit-raising possibilities offered by local land ownership than foreign merchants, who usually did not own much real estate. Likewise in the countryside of the Low Countries, where freeholding was common, mortgaging of land probably offered wider opportunities to peasants and farmers than in England, where many peasants did not possess full ownership rights to their land. This may well explain why in rural England security for loans was often based on movables, usually agricultural produce.⁸¹

In the Low Countries, on the other hand, mortgaging of land, tenements or land rents was very common.⁸² In Flanders and Brabant this practice was known even in the 11th century, although it seems it was but rarely used until the early 13th century.⁸³ The Haarlem charter also refers to collaterals.⁸⁴ Chronology suggests

⁷⁸ Zijderduijn, *Medieval capital markets*, 119.

⁷⁹ Brand, 'Aspects of the Law of Debt', 34.

⁸⁰ OHZ III, nr. 1632, art. 4 (Vlaardingen charter of liberties); Van der Laan, ed., *Oorkondenboek van Amsterdam*, nr. 746 (case of Pieter Smit Claessoen). For pledging in England: Brand, 'Aspects of the Law of Debt', 20, 28-29; Kowaleski, *Local markets*, 208.

⁸¹ Schofield, 'Access to credit', 119.

⁸² Zijderduijn, *Medieval capital markets*, 217.

⁸³ Godding, *Droit privé*, 215-216.

that here too a model may have been introduced that had already proved its value elsewhere. On the other hand this is one of the very few instances where the Haarlem charter gives customary law explicit preference over the Den Bosch rules and regulations: it states that with regard to pawns and collaterals the local customs will be respected. Moreover, this paragraph was not incorporated in the Delft charter of 1246,⁸⁵ although it was included in the charters of all towns in the northern part of Holland that belong to the Brabant-Holland filiation. This suggests that a system of mortgages may have existed in customary law in this part of the county.

It should not be forgotten that besides legal procedures, informal pressure based on the necessity to avoid reputational damage continued to play a part in debt recovery throughout the Middle Ages. An example is the system of *leisting* (voluntary custody) that was in use in Holland in the 14th and 15th centuries. Upon contracting a loan, the debtor promised that if he should not fulfil his obligations, he (or somebody else in his name) would go to an inn, usually in the place of residence of the creditor, where he would lodge at his own expenses until the loan was repaid. The high costs of the arrangement were to spur the debtor into doing everything possible to pay. Moreover, if he failed to turn up at the inn the creditor was free to make his dishonourable behaviour publicly known. In 1319 *leisting* was prohibited by comital orders; perhaps because it interfered with the monopoly of formal law enforcing institutions?⁸⁶ *Leisting* continued to be widely practised all the same; in a society that held the concept of honour in high esteem this is hardly surprising. However, the fact that over time it lost its character as a voluntary arrangement and developed into a system of involuntary custody of debtors by the authorities, does indicate, once again, that in the long run informal mechanisms alone were insufficient to secure repayment.

7.5 Public registration of debts

Until now we have mainly observed similarities in the organisation of debt litigation in the three countries. However, in one area there was an important difference: the recognizance of debts. In itself, the introduction of ratification and registration of debts by the authorities was a development of international dimensions, but there were significant variations in the way it took shape.

Of course there were other, easier and less costly mechanisms of making sure the existence of a commercial debt could be substantiated than having it officially registered: witness testimony for instance, or the tally. In local trade in particular people continued to rely on these simple but often effective strategies throughout the Middle Ages and beyond. Holland was certainly no exception. The Brielle and Goedereede charters of liberties for instance make it clear that the

⁸⁴ Haarlem 1245 art. 62; Hoogewerf, *Haarlemse stadsrecht*, 278-280.

⁸⁵ *OHZ* II, nr. 680.

⁸⁶ De Blécourt and Fischer, *Kort begrip*, 281-282; Zijderduijn, *Medieval capital markets*, 121-122. For the prohibition in 1319: Van Mieris, ed., *Groot charterboek* II, 231.

testimony of three reliable burgesses or merchants was considered valid proof that a transaction had taken place.⁸⁷ Witness testimony was often combined with the practice of *wijnkoop* (also referred to as *lijfkoop*): in order to consolidate a deal the buyer was expected to lay out a small sum, to be spent on drinks for the seller and the witnesses. If afterwards a conflict arose about payment or delivery, the testimony of these witnesses (the *wijnkoopsliden*) was accepted by the local court as evidence.⁸⁸ Expenses for *wijnkoop* over various purchases are repeatedly mentioned in the comital accounts of the middle of the 14th century and in the accounts of Egmond abbey from around 1390.⁸⁹

Tallies were used all over medieval Europe from at least the 11th century onwards. In its simplest form (a squared stick on which notches were carved) the tally was not much more than a counting aid. The more complex split tally (here the stick was split lengthwise in what came to be called the 'stock' and the 'foil') also allowed for a registration of obligations between two parties: the two halves bore the same notches and each party received one half as proof. Tallies could be used for many purposes, for instance for the registration of payments in kind or labour in a manorial context, or for the recording of tax payments, as in England where the Exchequer habitually used tallies to record the tax revenues brought in by the sheriffs. Tallies also provided a practical instrument for recording commercial debts. In this capacity they were widely used in local retailing in the 13th and 14th centuries and sometimes also in international trade, for instance by late 13th-century Flemish merchants doing business in England.⁹⁰ Medieval Holland provides examples of both. Around 1390 Egmond abbey purchased large quantities of nails and other metalwork for building purposes; the local smith kept a record of what the abbey owed him on a tally.⁹¹ Likewise the Hoorn merchant Gerrit Claesz. sometimes used a tally to record postponed payments related to his transactions at the Deventer fairs in the middle of the 15th century.⁹²

In the early modern period tallies were widely accepted as valid proof of the existence of a debt in legal procedures.⁹³ It is questionable if this was also common practice in the Middle Ages. Tallies were after all private records, and in the Low Countries private documents do not appear to have been accepted as legal proof before the 15th century. By the middle of that century accounts of shipmasters were accepted as proof in commercial disputes, followed in the 16th

⁸⁷ Pols, 'Bevestiging handvesten Goedereede', 331-340 par. 5; Cappon and Van Engen, 'Stadsrechttoorkonden van Brielle', 142-146 par. 10, 146-162 par. 32.

⁸⁸ De Blécourt and Fischer, *Kort begrip*, 276; Zuijderduijn, *Medieval capital markets*, 201-202.

⁸⁹ E.g. Hamaker, ed., *Rekeningen grafelijkheid II*, 420-424; Hof, ed., *Egmondse kloosterrekeningen*, 60, 73, 78, 101, 110, 119, 133, 135.

⁹⁰ For an overview and summary of the research on tallies: Kuchenbuch, 'Pragmatische Rechenhaftigkeit?' For the Low Countries the most important study is Wyffels, 'Kerfstok'; the example of the Flemish merchants is on p. 29.

⁹¹ Hof, ed., *Egmondse kloosterrekeningen*: e.g. 63-64, 73, 75-76.

⁹² Brünner, 'Hoornsch koopmansboek', 54 (entry nr. 23).

⁹³ Wyffels, 'Kerfstok', 37-38.

century, after the introduction of double entry bookkeeping, by merchant account books and documents like promissory notes and bills of exchange.⁹⁴

Long before, however, the possibility to have debts resulting from deferred payment or delivery ratified by the authorities had emerged, presumably mainly to be used under high-risk conditions. Formal recognizance offered material advantages: it was considered to be absolute proof of the existence of the debt. A creditor who possessed a document issued by the proper authorities stating a debt had been incurred and was to be repaid at a certain date, could, if payment was not forthcoming, demand summary execution: immediate distraint of the debtor's property -that is, of enough of it to cover the debt- without a lawsuit preceding it.⁹⁵ Notably, the principle of formal recognizance of debts was much the same in England, Flanders and Holland. The difference was in the public bodies that assumed the leading role in non-contentious jurisdiction.

In the Low Countries local courts were pivotal. Simple written contracts stating the indebtedness of one person to another were issued by aldermen's courts in Flanders as early as the 12th century.⁹⁶ Among these contracts were the well known *lettres de foire* issued by the local court of Ypres in the late 13th century. Just as at the Champagne fairs, where similar documents were issued by the special fair courts, these letters were used to register agreements between merchants to postpone payment or delivery from one fair to the next.⁹⁷

Local courts in Holland also had a vital role in non-contentious jurisdiction. In the Meuse delta, where Frankish influence had been strong, these courts were, from the start, courts of aldermen, as in the southern Low Countries. The rest of Holland, however, originally followed Frisian customs. Aldermen were unknown; instead the assembly of the *buren* ('neighbours') adjudicated, sometimes assisted by a travelling judge with a thorough knowledge of customary law, the *asige*. Over time the general assembly made way for representation: courts were staffed by a limited number of locals (*gezworenen* or *beemraden*) and functioned in much the same way as the aldermen's courts in the south. Both aldermen's courts and neighbours' courts were presided by a comital functionary, the *schout*, who also executed the sentences; judgement, however, was pronounced by the aldermen or by the neighbours. The transition of courts of neighbours to aldermen's courts, which took place in the emerging towns around the middle of the 13th century, in the countryside in the north of Holland at the end of the 13th century and in the rest of the county more gradually between the 14th and 16th century, was in many cases probably little more than a change of name.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Gelderblom, *Violence, opportunism*, Ch 8 (The law of merchants).

⁹⁵ *Zuijderduijn, Medieval capital markets*, 202-207, 218-220. For the summary execution (*parate executie*): Fockema Andreae, *Oud-Nederlandsch burgerlijk recht* II, 103-105. For Flanders: Godding, *Droit privé*, 435-437, 509-510.

⁹⁶ Murray, *Notaries public*, 34-36.

⁹⁷ Dubois, 'Institutions des foires médiévales', 178-179. Before the Ypres archives were destroyed in World War I, a sample of the *lettres de foire* was published by Des Marez, *Lettre de foire*.

⁹⁸ Gosses, *Welgeborenen en huislieden*, 82-86; Blok, 'Opmerkingen over het aasdom', 244-248; 268-269.

All Holland courts, that is, both aldermen's courts and neighbours' courts, had a central position in voluntary jurisdiction. This was an outcome of the role of the courts in monitoring land transactions. Customary law prescribed that land transfers had to take place in public; this evolved into ratification by the local court. Ratification was not mandatory, but it provided extra legal security. For the same reason people had mortgages and *renten* (annuities secured on land) registered; thus local courts also acquired a crucial position role in the capital market.⁹⁹ Although ratification did not have the same significance for commodity markets, the advantages it offered were available to anybody who entered into a commercial contract. The first evidence of registration of debts by local courts in Holland dates from the second half of the 13th century,¹⁰⁰ but ratification by the local court took place earlier than that, even if it was not yet put in writing. The Dordrecht charter of liberties of 1220/21 explicitly states that the existence of a debt had to be known to the court of aldermen to allow the creditor to take action.¹⁰¹ The Haarlem charter, although not in the same clear words, refers to the ratification of debts as well.¹⁰²

In England registration of commercial debts was organised in a different way, in keeping with the superior degree of control of the Crown over the judicial system. For one, a growing number of cases could only be initiated through a writ, to be obtained from the royal Chancery. In the late 13th century a royal writ came to be required for all litigation concerning debts over 40 shilling. Secondly, a system of royal courts was introduced. These courts did not replace the pre-existing manor and borough courts, which retained a prominent place in the adjudication of debt conflicts throughout the Middle Ages.¹⁰³ However, the royal courts did offer certain advantages for creditors attempting to collect a debt, one of them being the possibility of summary execution for debts recorded on the plea rolls of the royal courts or on the rolls of the Chancery.¹⁰⁴

In the late 13th century a new system for the registration of commercial debts was introduced, which, although it did involve the urban authorities in the larger towns, had a marked national component as well. The Statute of Acton Burnell of 1283, and the Statute of Merchants succeeding it in 1285, allowed merchants to have debts they incurred recognised by the mayors of a limited number of cities and towns. If such a debt was not repaid in time, the creditor could present the document that had been made up by the mayor and demand summary execution, as in Holland and Flanders. Moreover, if the debtor lived elsewhere, the mayor would forward the documents to the Chancellor, who could then issue a writ to the sheriff of the debtor's county of residence, ordering him to pursue execution. Judging from the number of certificates issued to non-

⁹⁹ *Zuijderland, Medieval capital markets*, 184-187.

¹⁰⁰ Burgers, Dijkhof, and Kruisheer, 'Doordringing van het schrift', 199, 201.

¹⁰¹ Dordrecht 1220/21.

¹⁰² Haarlem 1245, art. 22.

¹⁰³ For an example of the role of a manor court in debt litigation: Clark, 'Debt litigation'; for an example of a borough court: Kowaleski, *Local markets*, 212-220.

¹⁰⁴ Brand, 'Formation of the English legal system', esp. 107-108.

merchants and to people from out of town, the system was a success, and not just for commercial debts. While the two Statutes did not outlaw pre-existing forms of registration – apart from the rolls of the royal courts and the Chancery registries we know that in some towns registers were kept as well – these earlier methods seem to have lost much of their function to the statutory bonds.¹⁰⁵

English statutory registration differed from debt registration as it took place in Holland in two respects. For one, although statutory registration soon became possible in more towns than at the initial introduction, it was still limited to the larger commercial centres. The system was not extended to small town courts and certainly not to manor courts. In Holland, on the other hand, ratification of debts could take place at all urban courts and also at rural courts, although in the countryside it probably did take longer before oral testimony was replaced with written statements.

Secondly, with the possibility of recourse to central bodies and their powers of enforcement, the statutory registers provided England with a solution for the coordination problem towns in Holland, and indeed in Flanders, were struggling with: how to cope with debts owed by someone living in another town or in the countryside. As trade grew this must have been an increasingly frequent problem, and one for which a good remedy was not readily available. To be sure, in Holland the beginnings of a system of central justice (adjudication by the count and his council) did develop from the late 13th century onward. Comital justice was not as much bound by customary law and tradition as local justice, and therefore constituted an innovative force: it contributed significantly to, for instance, the replacement of traditional by modern methods of proof, the introduction of less formal court proceedings and the introduction of the concepts of equity and fairness as cornerstones for justice. However, central justice was limited in its range. The comital council functioned as court of the first instance only for public bodies and for specific groups such as noblemen, strangers and clerics, while its role as court of appeal was, until the Burgundian era, restricted to the countryside: towns anxiously guarded their jurisdictional autonomy.¹⁰⁶ It is therefore not surprising that although the comital council did adjudicate in conflicts about land and also about credit secured on land, up until the early 15th century very few cases involving commercial debts appear to have been brought before it.¹⁰⁷

Let us have a closer look at the organisation of debt collection in the towns of Holland. The procedure indicated in the Haarlem charter of liberties, partly of Den Bosch origin and partly newly added, clearly originates in a tradition of collective responsibility. When a foreigner reneged on an obligation ratified by the court, he would be called to justice three times. If he did not show up, he would

¹⁰⁵ McNall, 'Business of statutory debt registries'; Kowaleski, *Local markets*, 212-215; Postan, 'Credit in medieval trade', 236.

¹⁰⁶ De Monté Ver Loren, *Bezjt en eigendom*, esp. 212-220, 697-702.

¹⁰⁷ For an early 15th-century example, not incidentally involving a foreign merchant: Van Riemsdijk, *Rechtspraak* I, 66-67.

be convicted, which in this case implied that as soon as he re-entered the city he was to be arrested and forced to pay not only his debt but also a compensation for damages and a fine. This was of course hardly an encouragement to fulfil one's obligations and probably many debtors decided to stay away. In that case the sheriff, joined by the entire community, was to go to the debtor's place of residence and seize his property. This procedure was called *bannen*.¹⁰⁸

What this in fact came down to was the right of the urban community, acting in defence of its members' interests, to take justice into its own hands. At an earlier stage this custom was probably wide-spread: almost exactly the same procedure is outlined in the early 12th century charter of liberties of Saint-Omer.¹⁰⁹ But even then it was most likely regarded as a custom that ought to be abolished, or at least regulated. As the Haarlem charter in fact indicates it was a last resort, to be turned to only if attempts to reclaim the debt through the regular judicial channels had failed. In an increasingly complex and regulated society this kind of self-help must have become more and more problematic. The mid 15th-century 's-Gravenzande law code is enlightening in this respect. Although the author of this codification accepted most of the regulations from the Haarlem charter of liberties as still valid, he explicitly warned against the use of the procedure of *bannen*, especially if the debtor was the burgess of another town: it could damage relations and cause trouble.¹¹⁰

The alternative that developed in the southern Low Countries was in keeping with the dominant position of the towns in the region: it involved the extension of the urban enforcement mechanisms over the surrounding countryside. In Brabant in particular the role of urban courts in debt ratification was much reinforced by privileges which the duke granted to the large towns. In the late 13th century Louvain and Brussels received a privilege that later came to be known as the right of *ingebod*. It gave the courts of aldermen of these towns the right to call to justice all defaulting debtors who had registered their obligations at the court, even if they did not live in town. The practice was afterwards known in Antwerp and Den Bosch as well.¹¹¹ The right of *ingebod* offered the creditor a substantial advantage: he no longer had to go through the trouble of applying to the court of the debtor's place of residence. But there was a reverse side to it: the towns were able to use this privilege to increase their dominance over the surrounding countryside.¹¹²

In Holland arrangements like this were known only in the south, near the Brabant border. Dordrecht and Geertruidenberg both managed in the late 13th century to have the validity of their aldermen's charters extended to the surrounding countryside. The small towns of Heusden and Woudrichem claimed

¹⁰⁸ Haarlem 1245, art. 3, 22, 23, 63. The early 14th-century charter of liberties of Amsterdam possibly refers to the same principle when it states that a burgess who leaves town in order to damage or seize some property will be punished unless he has official permission to do so (Van der Laan, ed., *Oorkondenboek van Amsterdam*, nr. 6).

¹⁰⁹ Derville, *Histoire de Saint-Omer*, 269-271.

¹¹⁰ Telting, 'Oude rechten van 's-Gravenzande', 371-372, 380.

¹¹¹ Godding, 'Conflits lettres echevinales', 314-315.

¹¹² Godding, *Droit privé*, 437.

the same rights, although for Woudrichem these were successfully contested by the rural communities and their lords in the 15th century.¹¹³

In the rest of Holland urban courts were unable to usurp the rights to voluntary jurisdiction in the countryside. There is a direct relation to the structure of the Holland society. When in the 11th to 13th centuries Holland's extensive central peat district was reclaimed, the emerging pioneer communities were placed directly under comital authority. As we saw, voluntary jurisdiction was the responsibility of a local court in which both the local population (the 'neighbours' or the aldermen) and a government agent, the sheriff, were represented. These courts formed the relatively homogeneous bottom layer of the public jurisdictional system; with only a few exceptions, private courts comparable to the English manorial courts were non-existent. Admittedly, the count frequently granted lower jurisdiction and the revenues it rendered to an *ambachtsheer* (village lord), who then appointed a sheriff to do the work; but these courts operated as part of the regular system of public justice and did not compete with it.¹¹⁴ Consequently, once towns began to emerge, the foundations for the role of local rural courts in non-contentious jurisdiction were already established.

The strong position of urban and rural courts in voluntary justice never became an absolute monopoly. Ecclesiastical courts were a potential competitor. They were active in non-contentious as well as contentious jurisdiction and had some attractive advantages to offer to litigants in debt conflicts, the possibility of penitence or even excommunication as punishment among them. Moreover, in Holland the districts of the lower ecclesiastical courts usually included several parishes, which may have provided at least a partial solution to the problem of debt recovery across local boundaries. However, after the 13th century the lower ecclesiastical courts in the diocese Utrecht, to which Holland belonged, lost much ground to the secular courts. The position of the ecclesiastical courts probably suffered from the drawn-out struggles between the bishop and the powerful archdeacon, and by the continuous efforts of the counts of Holland to reduce the worldly power of the bishop in their territories. Meanwhile the competence of the *officialis* (the highest ecclesiastical judge in the diocese) in voluntary justice was restricted to contracts and deeds that involved a religious institution as one of the parties.¹¹⁵

In theory public notaries provided another alternative, but notaries were an Italian invention that did not reach the Low Countries until relatively late. Around the year 1300 public notaries did make their appearance in the southern Low Countries, but they found a forceful competitor in the local courts: with the exception of Bruges, where notaries were frequently employed by Italian merchants in commercial matters, their role in voluntary jurisdiction was usually

¹¹³ Zijlenderdijn, *Medieval capital markets*, 189-190. Privilege to Geertruidenberg: OHZ III, nr. 1815; to Dordrecht: OHZ IV, nr 2154. Heusden: Hoppenbrouwers, *Heusden II*, 610-612. Woudrichem: Korteweg, ed., *Rechtsbronnen Woudrichem I*, 68-70.

¹¹⁴ De Monté Ver Loren, *Hoofdlijnen*, 146-147; Hoppenbrouwers, 'Op zoek', 230-232.

¹¹⁵ Jongkees, *Staat en kerk*, 17; Kuys, *Kerkelijke organisatie*, 130-134, 137-141, 147-148, 152-153, 155-157.

limited to the recording of wills and marriage arrangements. In Holland the position of notaries in the recording of contracts and debts was even more marginal. Public notaries only appeared in the Holland towns in the second half of the 14th century; by then the monopoly of the local courts in non-contentious litigation was too well established to be easily budged. Until the end of the Middle Ages the activities of public notaries in Holland remained narrowly linked to the church and to canon law. Almost all notaries were clergymen and most of their clients were religious institutions or laymen who were involved in a law suit before an ecclesiastical court.¹¹⁶

In short, whereas in England contract enforcement beyond the limits of the town's freedom was ultimately ensured through the intervention of the Crown, and in the southern Low Countries through the courts of the large cities, in Holland the position of local courts in towns and villages remained intact. On the one hand this was the Achilles' heel of Holland's system of debt litigation. It meant that there was no easy way to get hold of evasive debtors. A creditor had no other option but to travel to the debtor's place of residence and file his claim with the local court. In a small country like Holland travelling expenses were perhaps not decisive; since the habit of adopting successful practices developed elsewhere had led to convergence of regulations, differences in legal systems can hardly have posed insurmountable problems either. Still, aldermen were likely to give the interests of a fellow-townsmen greater weight than those of a mere stranger. In addition there was a formal complication: local courts did not simply accept registration before another local court as proof of the existence of a debt.¹¹⁷

The consequences are illustrated by a case from late 15th-century Leiden.¹¹⁸ Two Leiden burgesses, a father and son, had closed a deal about the purchase of a loom in neighbouring Noordwijk; the deal and the obligations that it created were registered with the court of aldermen in that village. When the loom was delivered in Leiden, the buyers claimed it was of an inferior quality; they refused to pay and wanted to undo the purchase. The Noordwijk seller filed a claim with the Leiden court: he demanded payment. He stated the buyers had promised him to have the Noordwijk charter ratified in Leiden, but the buyers maintained they had made no such promise. In the end the Leiden court decided the buyers had to swear that they had never promised to have the Noordwijk charter ratified in Leiden; if they refused to do so the court would accept the claim of the seller and therefore also the existence of a debt. The case shows that the fact that a Leiden charter did not exist was a serious complication for the claimant. Even though he did have a

¹¹⁶ Kuys, *Kerkelijke organisatie*, 157-160; Cappon, 'Notariaat in de late Middeleeuwen', 10-14, 25; Oosterbosch *et al.*, 'Notariaat', 23-24, 85-87.

¹¹⁷ This follows from the principle that if a debt has been registered with a certain court, it is this court that is competent to judge in any conflicts that may arise from the debt (Hoogewerf, *Haarlemse stadsrecht*, 167-168). For a general discussion of the problems of jurisdictional authority over foreigners in medieval and early modern Holland: Kusters, 'Rechtsmacht over vreemdelingen'.

¹¹⁸ Blok, *Leidsche rechtsbronnen*, nr. 325.

Noordwijk charter, summary execution was not an option if this charter had not been ratified in Leiden.

Yet in other ways the equal position of both urban and rural courts in voluntary jurisdiction was an advantage. For one, it implied the absence of overlapping jurisdictions and the endless legal fights that could result from them. Moreover, it prevented the systematic bias in favour of burgesses that was almost inevitable if urban courts dealt with all conflicts between burgesses and villagers from the nearby countryside. Finally, the absence of a central corrective mechanism, even if it made debt collection across local borders more difficult, seems to have had positive effects as well: left to their own devices local courts were stimulated to take an active role in debt collection.

This is perhaps best illustrated by the way the court of Brielle dealt with debt cases, as is documented in both the charter of liberties and Jan Matthijssen's early 15th-century law code.¹¹⁹ In this small town the sheriff, on the request of the aldermen, made a tour through the streets of the town three times a year, collecting complaints about unpaid debts. Upon arrival at a debtor's house the sheriff would 'administer justice', meaning that if the debtor admitted he had not fulfilled his obligations, an arrangement was concluded to ensure that payment would be forthcoming within two weeks. A clerk would write down the details and the debtor would hand over a collateral to the creditor, either to be redeemed within two weeks or to be left in the creditor's hands as compensation.¹²⁰ The system is reminiscent of the *poortgedingen* held in 15th-century Leiden, special court sessions almost completely devoted to problems with debts.¹²¹ The *ommegangen* in the Brielle charter seem to have had the same function, but here the authorities did not merely wait for creditors to file their complaints: they also took steps to actively trace unpaid debts.

In Holland central jurisdiction in commercial conflicts was of little significance before the middle of the 15th century. Only after the incorporation in the Burgundian empire, and in conjunction with the growing power of the state, central judiciary institutions acquired a position as courts of appeal against the verdict of urban courts. In the second half of the 15th and the early 16th century the Court of Holland (*Hof van Holland*), the highest court in Holland, and the Great Council (*Grote Raad*) in Malines, supreme court for the Low Countries as a whole, quickly gained in popularity. Plaintiffs were apparently attracted by the objectivity and sophistication of the central courts, which were soon almost entirely staffed by university trained jurists.¹²²

In theory these bodies did create new possibilities for debt recovery across local borders: it now became possible to take cases against others than fellow

¹¹⁹ Matthijssen, *Rechtsboek van Den Briel*, 150-153.

¹²⁰ Cappon and Van Engen, 'Stadsrechtsoorkonden van Brielle', 146-162, par. 52; Matthijssen, *Rechtsboek van Den Briel*, 150-153.

¹²¹ Nortier, *Bijdrage kennis burgerlijke procesrecht*, 37-46.

¹²² De Schepper and Cauchies, 'Legal tools', 250-258.

townsmen to the central level. In practice, however, the role of central courts in the settlement of commercial disputes remained very limited: court records reveal only very modest numbers of business conflicts. Merchants were probably deterred by the expenses and the time-consuming nature of procedures: it might take years before a decision was reached.¹²³ Also, expertise in business disputes was most likely better represented at the local level. In short, for the resolution of commercial conflicts the development of central judiciary bodies from the middle of the 15th century onwards had little to add to Holland's pre-existing solid foundation of local debt litigation and debt registration, based on a homogeneous and well-functioning network of rural and urban courts.

7.6 Conclusions

The previous chapter discussed the organisation of weighing and measuring as a representative of institutions that primarily affected the meeting of supply and demand; this one deals with institutions that in the first place relate to security. It focuses on what Greif has termed 'the fundamental problem of exchange'. The ubiquity of credit in medieval trade, not just in long-distance trade but in local trade as well, gave rise to problems of shirking that could not always be solved by mechanisms based on trust and personal relations. The chapter discusses the contribution of two complementary solutions frequently stressed in the literature to contract enforcement in medieval Holland: merchant guilds as a form of self-organisation based on a communal responsibility model and debt litigation as an exponent of a government-dominated system of law enforcement centred on individual responsibilities.

The only reference to an indigenous merchant guild in Holland dates from Dordrecht in the year 1200. Market size could not possibly explain the near absence of merchant guilds: Holland's medieval towns were small even by contemporary standards. It is more likely that, in keeping with Greif's views, a new mechanism developed that made merchant guilds redundant at an early stage because it achieved the same goals in a different way. This mechanism was not embodied in the rise of a strong central government, but in a prominent role of local courts. In Holland these courts assumed a role in debt recovery almost from the moment they emerged. There is a link with Holland's history of urbanisation: towns did not emerge until late and once they did, they very soon acquired self-governing powers, including the right to administer justice in commercial conflicts.

The second mechanism, debt litigation via courts of justice, was well established at an early stage. The late rise of the Holland towns was working in their favour: models that had proved to work elsewhere could be easily adopted. The details of some of the legal procedures for debt recovery used in the towns of medieval Holland were probably copied from the southern Low Countries, most

¹²³ Gelderblom, *Violence, opportunism*, Ch 7 (The courts).

likely under the influence of trade contacts. In fact, it seems quite possible that the Den Bosch charter of liberties appealed to the Haarlemmers exactly because it contained a set of detailed rules well suited to the needs of a rapidly developing economy. Still, the impact of the local context was vital. Local courts with a role in monitoring land transfers already existed, and the people of Haarlem were probably familiar with issues like mortgages, ratification of debts and fact-finding methods of proof. This prepared the way for the adoption of rules like those in the Den Bosch charter.

The importance of local circumstances becomes clear when we focus on the one important aspect in which debt litigation procedures in Holland, England and the southern Low Countries diverged. This aspect is closely related to the social and political characteristics of society. It regards the central position of Holland's local courts, both urban and rural, in voluntary jurisdiction, as opposed to the dominance of the large cities in the southern Low Countries and that of the registries acknowledged under the Statute of Acton Burnell and the Statute of Merchants in England. On the one hand the judicial autonomy of these local courts reveals a weak spot in the system of debt litigation in Holland: the recovery of debts across administrative borders remained cumbersome. On the other hand, the fact that local courts, urban and rural alike, virtually had a local monopoly in voluntary jurisdiction helped to prevent urban domination of the countryside and thus reduced opportunities for rent-seeking. It also appears to have stimulated an active role of local authorities in debt recovery, thus providing reliable and easily accessible mechanisms for debt litigation and debt registration at the local level. In short, in medieval Holland a solid foundation for a locally-based system of contract enforcement grounded on individual responsibilities was laid at an early stage. This arrangement had potential for future development: in later years Amsterdam, for instance, built on it to create a much more elaborate system of local justice in commercial conflicts.¹²⁴ It thus contributed significantly to the creation of favourable conditions for market exchange in the long run.

¹²⁴ Ibid., Ch 7 (The courts).

Part III

Market performance: quantitative tests

8. Market integration

8.1 Introduction

In December 1438, after more than a year of grain shortages, the Council of Holland renewed the trade restrictions that had been introduced in the year before; they included export prohibitions for grain and beer and a strict supervision of the internal grain trade. The words that were used on this occasion betray despair: the Council ‘could not think of anything better to provide our poor community with grain’.¹ Apparently Holland grain markets were unable to cope with circumstances of extreme scarcity. This is perhaps not surprising: between 1437 and 1439 dearth was causing serious problems in much of northwestern Europe. It is hardly realistic to expect that Holland commodity markets would have been efficient enough to allow the county to escape these problems altogether. The question is: did Holland markets do a better job than markets elsewhere, not just during this crisis but also in normal years?

The preceding chapters have shown that in late medieval Holland a framework of commodity market institutions developed that can be expected to have lowered transaction costs and facilitated exchange. It now remains to be seen if these expectations came true; in other words if quantitative measures support the hypothesis that commodity markets in Holland performed well when compared to markets elsewhere. This subject is addressed in this and in the following chapter. The present chapter focuses on market integration: the underlying assumption, derived from New Institutional Economics, is that favourable institutions, by reducing transaction costs, promote the rise of well-integrated markets. The next chapter studies market orientation: departing from the view that efficient market institutions and low transaction costs will encourage and facilitate participation in market transactions, an attempt is made to estimate the degree of commercialisation of late medieval society in Holland.

Market integration and market orientation have been selected because they can be seen as general indicators of market performance. In this way they provide a valuable addition to the earlier chapters, which each focused on just a part of the institutional framework. Market integration and market orientation have the advantage of reflecting the impact of the institutional framework as a whole for the economy at large. However, exactly because of the general nature of the two indicators they cannot be expected to provide absolute proof of a causal relation between certain institutions on the one hand and market performance on the other. Therefore, the quantitative approach in this and the following chapter should be seen as complementary to the qualitative but much more detailed information presented earlier: only by combining the results of both a fair

¹ Unger, ‘Hollandsche graanhandel’, 492-493 (‘... niet beters en connen gevonden om onse arme gemeynte gesustineert te worden van koorne’).

assessment of the relation between institutions and market performance is possible.

The links between institutions and market integration are not uncontested. Some of the discussions on this issue are linked to the debate on the Great Divergence. They evolve around the question if greater market efficiency, supported by more favourable institutions, was one of the elements that gave pre-modern Europe an advance over the rest of world. Carol Shiue and Wolfgang Keller for instance, who are critical of this assumption, argue that on the eve of the Industrial Revolution grain markets in China's Yangtze delta were just as integrated as grain markets on the European continent. They stress that market integration in Europe only improved suddenly and dramatically in the early 19th century and conclude that market integration was a reflection of accelerated economic growth rather than a pre-condition for it. The opposing view is reflected in a recent analysis of 18th-century Indian grain markets by Roman Studer: the author does not deny that market integration in Europe increased substantially in the 19th century, but demonstrates that nevertheless late 18th-century grain markets in Europe showed much more coherence than those in India.²

If this is true, then the next question is when and how Europe had obtained its lead. Opinions diverge on the development of European market integration during the early modern era and on the role of institutions in this process. One group of scholars sees signs of increasing integration, supported by institutional improvements. Karl Gunnar Persson, for instance, claims that the leap in the 19th century was preceded by a gradual process of increasing integration on a much lower level: he states that by the middle of the 18th century the contours of a European wheat market were beginning to show and attributes this to the gradual emergence of robust trading and information networks.³ Similar conclusions have been recently been drawn for the North Sea and Baltic region in particular,⁴ and for rural England it has been argued that regional specialisation combined with interregional integration made significant progress in the course of the 17th century.⁵ Others, however, deny that the early modern era brought significant improvement. A recent contribution by Victoria Bateman claims that early modern market integration levels followed a U-shaped trend, dropping off in the late 16th and 17th centuries (mainly due to warfare) but recovering afterwards. As a result market integration in 1800 was at about the same level as in 1500.⁶

This shifts the rise of market integration back to the Middle Ages. Once again opinions differ on scope, intensity and progress. Johan Söderberg for one has demonstrated important similarities in grain price movements in the late 14th and 15th centuries within a cluster of cities and towns in north-western Europe,

² Shiue and Keller, 'Markets in China and Europe'; Studer, 'India and the Great Divergence'. Studer believes the Yangtze delta studied by Shiue and Keller was an exception rather than the rule.

³ Persson, *Grain markets*, 91-113, esp. 100.

⁴ Jacks, 'Market integration'; Van Bochove, *Economic consequences*, 30-55.

⁵ Kusssmaul, *A general view*, esp. 111-113.

⁶ Bateman, 'Evolution of markets'.

both on the North Sea coasts and further inland: in the southern Low Countries, the north of France, the present-day Netherlands, and the south of England.⁷ Richard Unger on the other hand stresses that even at the end of the Middle Ages most grain consumed in the cities of northwestern Europe came from nearby: only in years of dearth large volumes of grain were brought in from further afield. Unger concludes that interregional integration in the North Sea region was weak in the 14th and 15th centuries and only gradually became stronger in the 16th century, although he does admit that at least in the southern Low Countries a well-integrated regional market had already formed before that date.⁸ On this last issue Unger follows the conclusions of Van der Wee in his study of the Antwerp market and Marie-Jeanne Tits-Dieuaide in her analysis of grain prices in Brabant, who both conclude that an integrated regional market was in existence in the 15th century.⁹

This strongly suggests that on a regional level a considerable degree of market integration had been reached by the end of the Middle Ages, but it is still unclear when this process took off. For England, with its abundance of early price data, Gregory Clark claims that an efficient and coherent market for grains on a national level, with only limited price differentials between locations, had emerged as early as the beginning of the 13th century.¹⁰ To be sure, it has been argued that England was a special case. James Galloway, linking market integration to England's institutional framework, believes strong central government emerging at an early stage had helped reduce transaction costs through ensuring a stable currency, imposing national standards for weights and measures, removing internal fiscal or political barriers to trade, and providing legal means for contract enforcement.¹¹ However, whether this really gave England an advance with regard to market integration is doubtful; since 13th-century price data for continental northwestern Europe are lacking, a comparison for this period cannot be made.

Therefore, this chapter focuses on the late 14th and early 15th century, when data become more abundant. It compares levels of market integration, regional and interregional, for Holland, England and the southern Low Countries at that moment in time, and tries to relate the findings to some of the characteristics of the organisation of markets outlined in the previous chapters. The analysis focuses on wheat prices for two very practical reasons: firstly the availability of more and earlier price data than for any other commodity (although in Holland they are by no means abundant), and secondly the possibilities for interpretation and comparison offered by the literature: the integration of markets for wheat is a well-researched subject. It is true that wheat markets may not in every respect be representative for grain markets in general, or for commodity markets in a wider sense at that. Wheat was more expensive than rye, barley or oats, and therefore

⁷ Söderberg, 'Prices in the medieval Near East and Europe', 9-13.

⁸ Unger, 'Thresholds for market integration', esp. 350-352. Cf. Unger, 'Feeding Low Countries towns', 336-338, where the author voices a more optimistic view on the degree of market integration.

⁹ Van der Wee, *Growth of the Antwerp market* I, 23-24; Tits-Dieuaide, *Formation des prix céréalières*, 36-44.

¹⁰ Clark, 'Markets and economic growth', 8-13. Cf. Farmer, 'Prices and wages', 742-744.

¹¹ Galloway, 'One market or many?', 23.

better able to bear the costs of transport than the cheaper grains. More importantly, Holland was dependent on the import of bread grains: this may have brought some specific elements to the grain trade. On the other hand, this also means that wheat market integration probably demonstrates the limits of the possibilities provided by the framework of market institutions and in this sense can be seen as an indicator of the efficiency of that framework.

The theory is simple. Institutional economists link market integration to institutional efficiency: institutions that provide security and facilitate the meeting of supply and demand reduce transaction costs and thus promote the rise of integrated markets. However, in practice a given set of institutions may affect market integration in different and sometimes contradictory ways. What is more, non-institutional factors such as transport costs can have a profound impact on market integration as well. That is why this chapter first outlines in what ways both institutional and non-institutional factors to market integration can be expected to have affected market integration in medieval Holland. Next, after an explanatory note on the methods and data that have been used, price volatility is discussed: the fluctuation of prices in time. Well integrated markets are usually less volatile because highs and lows are more easily levelled out by grain transports from surplus to shortage regions: in that sense volatility can be seen as the result of market integration. Subsequently attention is paid to the underlying integration across space: not primarily price convergence, as transport costs will always cause price differentials, but rather the co-movement of prices in different locations.

8.2 The impact of institutional and non-institutional factors

The debate on the benefits of integrated markets goes back to the second half of the 18th century, when the French *économistes* attacked the traditional regulation of food provisioning practised by urban and central authorities. Export prohibitions, forestalling prohibitions, compulsory staples, checks on private grain stocks, public granaries and bread price regulation, they claimed, ultimately did not have the desired effect of stabilising prices. They actually aggravated problems, in two ways: in the short run they hampered the free flow of goods that could have evened out local shortages, and in the long run they discouraged competition between producers and thus blocked investments in production. Regulation of the type criticised by the *économistes* was indeed common practice on Europe's pre-modern grain markets. The exact nature, scale and intensity varied, but authorities everywhere tried to ensure the transparency of markets and ban collusion and speculation. It should be added, however, that rules were usually only rigidly enforced in periods of dearth; moreover, authorities only very rarely tried to directly control prices by setting a maximum.¹²

¹² Persson, *Grain markets*, 1-10, 72-78; Gras, *Evolution of the English corn market*, 68-69.

The effects of regulation on grain prices are not quite clear. According to Persson there is no evidence that the *économistes* were right in their claim that regulation made matters worse, whereas there are indications that strict regulation did contribute to the goal of softening extreme price fluctuations.¹³ The Ghent grain staple, for instance, is thought to have provided the urban population with a stable supply of cheap grain (even though Ghent's privileged position did imply that other towns could not enjoy the same advantage, as we saw earlier).¹⁴ Yet Persson has also shown that in the early modern era the effects of regulation were limited: even in the most rigidly controlled markets price volatility did not fall below a certain threshold level.¹⁵

Looking at the organisation of Holland's medieval grain markets from the perspective of this discussion, elements reflecting both sides of the argument can be discerned. The previous chapters have shown that Holland markets were relatively open and informal, which should have enhanced market integration. Urban markets were usually easily accessible: outside traders and merchants (people from out of town, non-burgesses or non-guild members) faced few restrictions. Coercion was not common: urban market districts remained flexible and there were few restrictions to informal trade in the countryside. In addition, the balance of powers provided checks on excessive taxation of trade by count, lords or towns: tolls and impositions were moderate. The absence of uniformity in weights and measures and the weakness of cross-boundary mechanisms for contract enforcement did work in the opposite direction, but as argued earlier the effects were probably mild.

On the other hand, exactly the grain trade was, in some respects, an exception: practices and regulations did not diverge as much from those in the neighbouring countries as for many other commodities. For one, urban authorities in Holland, as their counterparts elsewhere in Europe, did intervene in the grain trade in the interest of urban food provisioning. Bread was probably their first concern: bakers were subjected to a series of regulations on weight and quality of the bread, and bread price regulation is found in Holland towns from at least the early 15th century onwards.¹⁶ But town governments also regulated the grain trade in their attempts to promote transparency and prevent speculation.¹⁷ The early 15th-century Leiden by-laws illustrate this. Grain sales on Saturday, the day of the weekly market, were restricted to market hours and had to take place in public; during the rest of the week grain could only be sold for the price it had made on the previous Saturday. The resale of grain purchased at the market was prohibited and exports of this grain were restricted to two *achtendeel*. Forward transactions and the financial obligations ensuing from them had to be officially registered with the court of aldermen and the term for such transactions was limited to six weeks

¹³ Persson, *Grain markets*, 86-90.

¹⁴ Boone, *Gent en de Bourgondische hertogen*, 21-23.

¹⁵ Persson, *Grain markets*, 106-113.

¹⁶ Unger, *Levensmiddelenvoorziening*, 105-109. The only late 14th-century case that Unger mentions comes from Dordrecht, which may very well, as so often, have been an exception.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 56-61.

at most.¹⁸ Secondly, as discussed in chapter 3 some of the towns in Holland's few grain producing regions possessed a regional grain trade monopoly, despite the absence of a tradition of coercion. Goedereede and Naarden enjoyed such a regional staple privilege even in the 14th century; Brielle may have been in the same position.

However, strict enforcement of urban grain trade regulation was probably limited to times of dearth; in fact some of the Leiden rules, such as the export restriction, may well have been intended as crisis interventions in the first place. Moreover, Leiden regulations are modest in comparison to the very elaborate set of rules that structured the retail grain trade in Ghent.¹⁹ Ghent, admittedly a very outspoken case, expected all grain trade to take place at one of the officially designated market places, strictly prohibited all forestalling, and to protect consumers issued rules determining precisely when and where bakers, brewers, millers and merchants could buy grain. In times of dearth merchants were, moreover, obliged to daily sell part of their stocks, consumers could buy only limited amounts, and all exports were prohibited.²⁰

Likewise, even though in Holland some regional grain trade monopolies did exist, it was not a general pattern. As discussed in chapter 3 Alkmaar, also a market centre for a grain-growing district, failed in its attempts to establish a monopoly for its weekly market. Delft forbade its own burgesses to buy grain in the direct vicinity of the town, but apparently did not try to impose a similar prohibition on others.²¹ As we will shortly see the *Catharinagasthuis* (St. Catherine's hospital) and Leeuwenhorst abbey, two religious institutions in the Leiden region, had no trouble buying grain directly from producers in the Delft region.

Saying that there were no differences at all would therefore stretch the argument too far. Despite nuances the hypothesis that the organisation of Holland grain markets facilitated market integration is still a valid point of departure, although this does not seem to have taken away the desire to reduce price fluctuations through regulation.

Other factors besides the institutional framework may also have had an impact on the level of market integration in Holland. The most important of these factors is the exceptional position of Holland with regard to bread grain provisioning. Holland imported more grain, in relative and perhaps even in absolute terms, than any of its neighbours. In this respect Holland was very unlike England, which at least until the early 14th century was quite able to sustain its own population. England only imported grains on a significant scale in years of dearth: for London there is evidence of occasional grain shipments from Germany, Flanders and even

¹⁸ Leiden by-law: Hamaker, ed., *Middeleeuwse keurboeken Leiden*, 4, 234, 494-495.

¹⁹ The retail trade served the local consumers; the grain staple regulated only the wholesale trade.

²⁰ Bigwood, 'Gand et la circulation', 439-443.

²¹ Fruin, 'Oudste der tot dusver bekende keurboeken van Delft', 313 (probably early 15th century); Soutendam, 'Oudste keurboek van Delft', 518 (probably late 15th century).

the Mediterranean.²² Exports were probably much more frequent, although they still involved only a tiny fraction of the country's cereal production.²³

With the subsistence crises of the first half of the 14th century grain exports declined significantly. Exports were tied to a system of royal licenses; the restrictions on trade this system embodied were supported by the Commons, fearful of shortages. Only at the end of the century the grain trade revived. The lifting of export restrictions in 1394 was probably both a reflection of, and a stimulus for this revival: Englishmen no longer needed a license to ship cereals overseas as long as they paid the regular custom duties and did not take their cargo to an enemy nation. In 1437 a condition was added: the grain price had to be below a certain level for export to be allowed. From the port towns on the coasts of Norfolk and Suffolk grain was transported to Flanders and Holland on a regular basis. Quantities were usually modest, but in times of dearth and high prices on the continent England could be an important source of supply to the Low Countries.²⁴

Unlike England, Flanders was unable to feed its growing population. This may have been the case even in the 12th century, but it became an increasingly pressing problem with the progress of urbanisation in the 13th and 14th centuries, a problem that could only be solved by large imports of bread grains.²⁵ By far the most important external supplier was the north of France. Wheat from Hainault, Artois and the region around Lille, Douai and Cambrai was transported north over the rivers Scheldt and Lys to be consumed in the towns of Flanders.²⁶ At the same time Flanders continued to produce grain on its own soil. For the Oudenaarde region it has been estimated that around 1550 more than half of the arable land was used for bread grain cultivation, with much of the produce consumed by the smallholders themselves.²⁷

By that time in large parts of Holland the cultivation of wheat and rye had become almost impossible. The peat lands that had been rendering a satisfactory crop of bread grains for many years after their reclamation, increasingly failed to do so as the drained peat soil gradually subsided. Exactly when wheat and rye cultivation became problematic is still a matter of debate: perhaps as early as 1350, but certainly by the early 15th century.²⁸ With the exception of a few regions with sandy or clay soils, such as the South-Holland islands, the Honterland (the region west of Delft), the Gooiland and parts of West-Friesland, Holland could no longer

²² Campbell *et al.*, *A medieval capital*, 69.

²³ In the first decade of the 14th century 13,000 quarters of grain were exported, whereas the production of the London region alone, according to the most probable estimates, was 800,000 to 1,100,000 quarters. (Export figures from Gras, *Evolution of the English corn market*, 111; production in London region calculated from Campbell *et al.*, *A medieval capital*, 35, 76 (London consumption of 165,000 quarter = 15 to 20% of regional production)).

²⁴ Gras, *Evolution of the English corn market*, 111, 134-138; Kerling, *Commercial relations*, 105-107; for imports of English grain in the southern Low Countries Tits-Dieuaide, *Formation des prix céréalières*, 153-155. Cf. for the grain trade from England to Holland in the late 15th and early 16th century Van Tielhof, *Hollandse graanhandel*, 40-49.

²⁵ Nicholas, 'Of poverty and primacy', 31-32.

²⁶ Tits-Dieuaide, *Formation des prix céréalières*, 144-151.

²⁷ Thoen, *Landbouweconomie*, 706-707, 840-842.

²⁸ Van Bavel and Van Zanden, 'Jump-start', 516-518.

survive without importing bread grains. Even around the year 1400 Holland grain merchants were buying large quantities of grain in the ports of the Somme region. They also frequented the grain markets in the cities of the southern Low Countries.²⁹ French, Flemish and Brabant grain remained important in the 15th century, but Holland also imported substantial quantities of grain from other regions: from the German Rhineland and the upper Meuse region, from nearby Guelders, Utrecht and Zeeland, and from the north of Germany. Only at the end of the century this diversity began to give way to a growing dominance of the rye trade with the Baltic region, although this process was not completed until the middle of the 16th century. By then, Holland probably produced only 10 to 25% of the bread grains it needed, depending on imports for the remainder.³⁰ As will be shown in the following pages this dependence on grain imports had important effects. It probably gave rise to a pattern of price change within the year that deviated from what was customary in other countries and it most likely stimulated interregional market integration.

A second non-institutional factor bound to affect market integration is the cost of transport. Its importance is clear from the fact that market integration in Europe jumped to a much higher level with the innovations in transport technology of the modern era.³¹ The possibility of another jump of this kind in the high Middle Ages cannot be excluded: 12th-century England for one witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of bridges and a transition from traction by oxen to traction by horses that may well have had a similar revolutionary effect. However, quantitative data from this period that would allow us to pick up the consequences of such a jump for price integration are lacking, and from the 14th century onwards, when reliable data are available, transport costs appear to have changed very little.³²

Even if no major revolution in transport costs took place in the late Middle Ages, the costs of transporting grain matter to the analysis in the following pages for another reason: they are linked to the mode of transport. Calculations made by Masschaele on the basis of data from a number of 14th-century English sheriff's accounts show that the ratio of the costs of land transport to river transport to sea transport was about 8:4:1.³³ Medieval Holland, because of its location on the coast and in the delta of Rhine and Meuse, had easy access to transport by sea and by river. Moreover, the county was characterised by an extensive network of smaller inland waterways. This must have helped keeping transport costs for grain low.

Fragmented data on internal transport costs support this assumption. In the year 1388/89 Egmond abbey purchased wheat in Haarlem on several occasions. For three of them the accounts report transport costs to Egmond, a distance of 24 kilometres as the crow flies. These transports added on average 1.8%, or 0.07%

²⁹ Sneller, 'Hollandsche korenhandel', 165-166; Tits-Dieuaide, *Formation des prix céréalières*, 167.

³⁰ Van Tielhof, *Hollandse graanhandel*, 63-75, 122-125; Van Tielhof, 'Grain provision', 203-205.

³¹ Persson, *Grain markets*, 91-113.

³² Masschaele, 'Transport costs', 276-277.

³³ *Ibid.*, 273.

per kilometre, to the price the abbey had paid for the wheat. About 10 years later functionaries of the count organised three large transports of wheat bought in Haarlem to Amsterdam, a distance of 17 kilometres. Each transport added about 1.0% to the average price of wheat in this year, or 0.06% per kilometre. Finally, when in 1432 the *Catharinagasthuis* in Leiden arranged for six small wheat transports between Delft and Leiden, a distance of 19 kilometres, the transport costs added on average 0.1% per kilometre to the price of the wheat.³⁴

Masschaele's calculations of transport costs for wheat in 14th-century England arrive at an addition of 0.25% per kilometre for land transport; for river carriage the addition would be just above 0.1%.³⁵ The Holland rates just mentioned are around or under the latter figure, which is probably a reflection of the density of the network of waterways in Holland.

Both the early dependence on grain imports and low transport costs related to Holland's geographical situation may have stimulated market integration independently from the impact of favourable market institutions. This has to be taken into account when comparing Holland with England or with the southern Low Countries. Here this will be done in general terms only: developing a quantitative model that weighs the effects of institutional versus non-institutional factors is beyond the scope of this study.

8.3 Methods and data

Sophisticated methods for measuring price integration like those used by Persson require (almost) continuous price series, a requirement the data from late 14th and early 15th-century Holland do not meet.³⁶ Therefore the analysis presented here is based on the simplest of methods. Price volatility, both within and between years, is assessed by calculating variation coefficients, in the first case over monthly and in the second over annual prices (the variation coefficient is the standard deviation as a percentage of the mean). Co-movement of prices, both regionally (within Holland) and interregionally (between Holland markets and markets abroad), is measured on the basis of correlation coefficients over annual prices.³⁷ In order to preserve proportionality, prices have been converted to a logarithmic scale; in order to allow for interregional comparisons they have also been converted to grams of silver per hectolitre.

The use of simple measures has disadvantages. Correlation coefficients may be influenced by something more than just market integration. High coefficients may also reflect similarities in weather conditions and thus in yields; likewise low coefficients may, at least in theory, indicate local differences in yields. About the

³⁴ Hof, ed., *Egmondse kloosterrekeningen*, 101; Verwijs, *Oorlogen van hertog Albrecht*, 101, 103, 104; RAL AG inv. nr. 334-41 f 29, 29v, 30.

³⁵ Masschaele, 'Transport costs', 274, 277.

³⁶ Persson, *Grain markets*, 105, 114-115.

³⁷ I am grateful to Christiaan van Bochove for sharing his knowledge on the possibilities and problems involved in measuring market integration with me.

latter we need not worry too much: research results for the late Middle Ages suggest that local weather conditions did not have a strong impact on prices. According to Clark, in medieval England the connection between manorial yields and local prices was weak. For 65 manors Clark compares local yields in the 13th, 14th and early 15th centuries to local prices. He finds that prices were only very marginally influenced by local yields; instead they conformed to a very large extent to a national trend. If local yields were high and prices threatened to fall, the surplus soon flowed out to markets where it fetched a better price, thus restoring local prices to average levels. If yields were low and prices high grain would flow in, with the same effect. Clark estimates that even when local yields doubled, local prices would still fall by only 2.5%.³⁸

The possibility of adverse growing conditions prevailing in a large region over a longer period of time, for instance in the case of a very dry or a very wet summer or even worse a series of consecutive bad years of this type, is another matter.³⁹ In situations like this prices on the whole would no doubt have moved upward even if markets had been isolated, accounting for part of the correlation. Yet prices would not have risen with the same speed and to the same level everywhere: there were bound to be local variations in supply and demand and it would still depend on the degree of market integration if these local variations were evened out or not. Therefore correlation coefficients, if used with caution, can still be a helpful instrument of analysis in situations where more advanced methods are beyond reach.

Price volatility, in whatever way it is measured, may also be influenced by more than just market integration. Softening of extremes through market regulation has already been discussed. In addition there is a second factor that affects liberal markets as well as regulated ones: storage. Stored reserves of grain can level out deficits in much the same way as transports from surplus to shortage regions can. However, there is no reason to think that in Holland storage was either much larger or much smaller than in the neighbouring countries. Carry-over of grain reserves from one year to the next appears to have been a marginal phenomenon everywhere. Although many people may have held on to a small grain reserve for their own use, as a safeguard against famine, grain prices were too unpredictable to induce merchants or farmers to stock large volumes from one year to the next as a profit-maximising strategy. It was by no means certain next year's grain prices would cover the costs of storage for a year.⁴⁰

Producers and merchants did of course store grain after the harvest in order to sell it in the course of the year, but the costs, which included barn rent, the consequences of depreciation of the grain and the opportunity costs of the interest foregone, would have been much the same everywhere.⁴¹ It is true that

³⁸ Clark, 'Markets and economic growth', 8-16.

³⁹ For a discussion of the impact of such events on grain yields and grain prices: Campbell, 'Nature as historical protagonist'.

⁴⁰ Persson, *Grain markets*, 55-62, 67-72.

⁴¹ McCloskey and Nash, 'Corn at interest', 178.

between 1380 and 1440 interest rates in Holland fell from about 10% to around 6.25%, but they did much the same in England and in the southern Low Countries.⁴² In short, as long as measures assessing price fluctuations are used in a comparative approach, there is little reason to fear the results will be biased by differences in storage volumes.

Before the late 14th century, Holland grain price data are fragmentary, unreliable or both. There are some prices in the early 14th century comital accounts, but they are few and far between.⁴³ The year 1344/45 is an exception: thanks to war time preparations there are some references to wheat purchases in the comital accounts; the account of Egmond abbey over the same year, the oldest account in the abbey's archive, renders several more.⁴⁴ The Egmond accounts for the next couple of decades are missing. The comital accounts have been preserved; De Boer has constructed series of wheat, rye and oats prices in the second half of the 14th century based on the comital accounts for the central part of Holland. However, as De Boer himself admits, although these series do indicate long term price movements, they probably do not accurately reflect short term market fluctuations, as they are based on the monetary valuations of annual grants or rents that had originally been in kind.⁴⁵ This effectively rules out their use for a study of market integration.

Only at the end of the 14th and the beginning of the 15th century the accounts of religious institutions begin to render real price series. Unfortunately their geographical distribution is rather unbalanced. From the northern part of Holland there is only a very short series of wheat prices from Egmond abbey covering the years 1387/88 to 1391/92. The only other two price series available before the late 15th or even the early 16th century are from the Rijnland region in the central part of Holland: the prices of the *Catharinagasthuis* in Leiden from the year 1392/93 onwards and the price series of Leeuwenhorst abbey in Noordwijkerhout, about 11 kilometres north of Leiden, beginning in the year 1410/11. Each of these sources is briefly discussed below; appendix D gives more details and also presents the annual average prices the sources render.

Egmond abbey, situated in the north of the county, was Holland's oldest religious institution, but the surviving records give wheat prices for only five years at the end of the 14th century. These prices are usually based on just two or three entries in the accounts. Moreover, it is not entirely clear if these entries reflect market prices. It is not impossible that in years of dearth Egmond abbey could make use of its position as a powerful landowner to obtain grain below market prices. We know that in the middle of the 14th century Egmond abbey still partly relied on its own barley production: the account over the year 1344/45 mentions

⁴² Zuijderduijn, *Medieval capital markets*, 283-285. On interest rates in other countries in Europe: Epstein, *Freedom and growth*, 61-62; Clark, 'Cost of capital', 273-274.

⁴³ Hamaker, ed., *Rekeningen grafelijkeheid* I, 70-72 (1317), 140 (1331), 248 (1342/43); II, 89 (1343/44).

⁴⁴ Ibid. II, 161, 415; Hof, ed., *Egmondse kloosterrekeningen*, 39-42.

⁴⁵ De Boer, *Graaf en grafiek*, 196-200; cf. 192-194.

barley being taken to Egmond from the nearby villages of Ouddorp and Oterleek in West-Friesland (although barley from distant Texel was sold off locally).⁴⁶ The late 14th century accounts no longer mention this kind of grain shipments, but they do show that at least occasionally some of the land rents were paid in kind.⁴⁷ For these reasons the Egmond prices have not been included in the analysis, although for the sake of completeness and future reference the data have been incorporated in appendix D.

The *Catharinagasthuis* and Leeuwenhorst price series span longer periods of time, although both do have gaps. Prices until the year 1439/1440 have been collected anew from the original accounts; this year has been selected as the final year because this will allow for a full analysis of the interesting events during the dearth years 1437 to 1439. For both series checking the originals has led to the correction of several mistakes, some of them rather serious, in the published annual figures.⁴⁸

The (corrected) Leeuwenhorst figures probably reflect market prices most accurately. The abbey frequently made purchases of wheat; added up over the year quantities were sizable. The abbey did own land in some of the parts of Holland where bread grain production was possible: the sandy coastal strip and the Honterland. It had its own farm and may, especially in times of dearth, have produced part of its own rye: that would explain why during latter decades of the 15th and the first of the 16th century the accounts do not mention rye purchases.⁴⁹ For wheat, however, there are no such gaps; even in times of extreme dearth the abbey continued to buy wheat. Until the year 1430/31 the entries in the accounts are usually dated: the dates demonstrate that purchases were distributed fairly evenly over the year. The accounting year begins in August and ends in July, approaching the ideal of an accounting year that coincides with the harvest year.

The *Catharinagasthuis* was an urban hospital that provided food and shelter, originally to poor travellers but in the late 14th and early 15th century mainly to the sick and dying.⁵⁰ The *Catharinagasthuis* series has the advantage of starting almost twenty years earlier than the Leeuwenhorst prices, but on the other hand wheat purchases were less frequent and total volumes were smaller. Still the *Catharinagasthuis* probably bought all its bread grains; it rented out its agrarian land and there is nothing in the accounts to suggest rent payments were ever requested in kind.⁵¹ Unfortunately the accounting year of the *Catharinagasthuis*, beginning and ending at St. Peter ad Cathedram (February 22), covers parts of two harvest years. Conversion to harvest years is not possible because the dates of the transactions

⁴⁶ Hof, ed., *Egmondse kloosterrekeningen*, 20; the shipping costs for bringing grain from Frisia on p. 33 probably refer to the transport from Ouddorp and Oterleek as well.

⁴⁷ Noord-Hollands archief, Archief van de abdij van Egmond, inv. nr. 798, f 105v, 143, 153v.

⁴⁸ For the sources and source editions see appendix D.

⁴⁹ De Moor, ed., *Lonen en prijzen*, 32-33.

⁵⁰ Ligtenberg, *Armezoorg*, 19-20, 31.

⁵¹ The possibility that this did happen cannot be discarded until a satisfactory explanation has been found for the near absence of rye purchases: it is almost beyond belief that a hospital and guesthouse for the poor would have supplied its patients and guests with nothing but wheaten bread.

have almost never been noted, limiting possibilities for a fruitful comparison to other price series.

Despite their large demand for wheat, we can be fairly sure Leeuwenhorst abbey and the *Catharinagasthuis* did not dominate the market to the extent that they were able to dictate prices. Both the abbey and the *Catharinagasthuis* bought some of their wheat on the weekly markets of Leiden (*‘op die grote brugghe’*) and in the case of Leeuwenhorst also in Delft.⁵² Many transactions took place outside official market hours, but these probably conformed to regular market conditions just as well. Leeuwenhorst for one usually did business with a number of merchants all over the region, which makes it unlikely the abbey was able to influence prices.⁵³ In Leiden there is, at first sight, more reason for suspicion. Several of the grain merchants the *Catharinagasthuis* did business with can be identified as members of the Leiden elite and some of them (Dirk Poes Pietersz., Gerrit van Oestgheest and Wermhout Kerstantz.) were, or had been, members of the hospital board as well.⁵⁴ Moreover, in some years the hospital obtained most of its wheat from just one merchant. In theory this kind of relationships could have led to pre-arranged price agreements or other deviations from the market mechanism, but the accounts suggest this was not common.

For one, in only two years the hospital bought literally all of its wheat from one corn monger and both these years data from the 1390s.⁵⁵ Afterwards there were no exclusive monopolies, although between 1414 and 1419 the greater part of the wheat deliveries did come from one merchant: first from Dirk Poes Pietersz., then from Wermhout Kerstantz. Moreover even when there was a preference for a specific merchant, purchases were often valued at different prices, obviously following seasonal fluctuations in market price. The year 1417 is a good example. In this year the *Catharinagasthuis* made several purchases of wheat from Dirk Poes Pietersz., for prices starting at a little over 19 *groot* per *achtendeel* and falling stepwise to just under 12 *groot* at the end of the accounting year.⁵⁶ It is therefore safe to assume that with the possible exception of the first decade the *Catharinagasthuis* price series reflect market prices fairly accurately.

Comparing Leiden and Noordwijkerhout price movements may tell us something about regional market integration, but in order to gain insight in interregional market integration, Holland prices have to be linked to similar price series in neighbouring countries.

Nearby Utrecht renders wheat price series starting in 1370 based on the accounts of the chapters of the Dom church and of the chapter of St. John. The Dom church accounts also provide recordings of market prices per month, used

⁵² E.g. RAL AG inv. nr. 334-6 f 13, 334-27 f 25, 334-37 f 24; NA AAL inv. nr. 23 f 2v, 26 f 2v, 31 f 2.

⁵³ De Moor, ed., *Lonen en prijzen*, 33.

⁵⁴ Poes Pietersz. was *gasthuismeester* in 1413, Van Oestgheest in 1424 and Kerstantz. in 1418-1420 (RAL, AG inv. nr. 334-27/28/30). Cf. Van Kan, *Sleutels tot de macht*, 83, 88, 231, 267-268.

⁵⁵ RAL AG inv. nr. 334-2 f11 (1384) and 334-3 f 9v (1396). However there are a few years in which not all entries mention the name of the seller.

⁵⁶ RAL, AG inv nr. 334-25 f 25v.

to determine the canons' monthly provisioning allowance. In the past, the late 15th and 16th-century Utrecht monthly grain prices have sometimes been used as proxies for Holland grain prices on the argument that the Utrecht and the Holland markets were closely related.⁵⁷ This approach has not been copied here, not only because until the late 15th century these monthly recordings are scarce, but also because of a more fundamental argument: if Holland market institutions really made a difference to the level of market integration, using Utrecht prices will not bring it out. Therefore here the Utrecht prices have been included in the analysis of interregional integration. Appendix D gives more information on the Utrecht price data and on the (rather complicated) conversion of Utrecht currency to silver. For Maastricht, situated at the Meuse in the south-east of the present-day Netherlands, annual wheat prices are available from 1342 onwards. The chapters of St. Servatius and Our Lady jointly recorded the market price in Maastricht around the first of July of each year to use it as a basis for the conversion of rents in kind into cash payments.⁵⁸

In Flanders the earliest wheat price series are those of St. Donatian's chapter in Bruges, starting in 1348/49. For the 15th century we also have an incomplete series of wheat prices from four religious institutions in Ghent starting in 1400/01. For Brabant there are price series of the hospitals of the beguinages in Brussels and Louvain, starting in 1400/01 and 1403/04 respectively. All these prices are institutional prices subject to the same limitations as the *Catharinagasthuis* and Leeuwenhorst price series, but for Louvain and Brussels and to a lesser extent also for Ghent there is an extra handicap: in part the data are based not on market prices but on grain rents converted into cash. Although at least for Louvain there is enough evidence to prove that in normal years these prices closely followed the market, in years of dearth exceptions may have been made.⁵⁹

For England use has been made of two well-known price series. The Exeter prices published by Beveridge are urban market prices, recorded by the Exeter authorities in order to set the Assizes of Bread (that is, to fix the weights of bread to be sold for a certain price). The prices published by Thorold Rogers are often referred to as London prices, but strictly speaking they are not: they are sales prices collected from the accounts of a large number of manors. Still, since most of these manors are situated in the counties around London and since research has shown these counties to have been part of a coherent grain market, the use of

⁵⁷ Noordegraaf, *Hollands welvaren*, 15-17; Van Tielhof, *Hollandse graanhandel*, 31.

⁵⁸ Tijms, ed., *Prijzen van granen*, 25-47. For the conversion of prices into silver I have used table 6 on p. 77. This conversion results in prices that between about 1420 and 1443, when Maastricht currency was revaluated, are consistently higher than elsewhere: clearly the official rate no longer corresponded with the actual value. This may to some extent have influenced results, although the measures that have been used are not very sensitive to this kind of bias.

⁵⁹ For Bruges: Verlinden, ed., *Dokumenten* II, 34-36, also available online (IISH, 'Database of historical prices and wages'). For Ghent: Verlinden, ed., *Dokumenten* I, 36-37; cf. Okunishi, 'Grain price fluctuations', for a critical discussion of the quality of the Ghent data. For Brussels and Louvain: Tits-Dieuaide, *Formation des prix céréalières*, 269-271, 15-16. The accounting year of the Bruges and probably also the Ghent series runs parallel with the harvest year, that of the Brussels and Louvain series begins and ends in May or June. Conversion of the Flemish and Brabant currency into silver has been based on: Van der Wee and Aerts, 'Vlaams-Brabantse muntgeschiedenis', 83-84.

the Rogers series as a representation of wheat prices in the London region is acceptable. Both the London region prices and the Exeter prices are available from a very early date onwards.⁶⁰

8.4 Price volatility

The concept of volatility covers both seasonal price fluctuations and fluctuations of prices from one year to the next. A detailed study of the first requires high-quality data: preferably monthly prices, but at least frequent and dated entries distributed over the year. For early 15th-century Holland data of this kind are very scarce. The entries of grain purchases in the *Catharinagasthuis* accounts are undated; those in the Leeuwenhorst accounts are only dated for the first two (incomplete) decades of the series, that is for a total of 13 years between 1410/11 and 1430/31.

There are two ways in which these Leeuwenhorst data can be used to study the development of wheat prices within the year. The first follows the method devised by McCloskey and Nash: in order to estimate storage costs McCloskey and Nash used pairs of prices to calculate an annual price change rate in late 13th- and 14th-century England. In the absence of reliable series of monthly prices McCloskey and Nash collected a large number of price pairs: prices from two different months in the same year and in the same location. By combining them they arrived at an average seasonal increase of around 30% or more on the September price.⁶¹ This method has been replicated and extended to later time periods by Nicholas Poynder, who has drawn two conclusions from the findings: firstly that after the 14th century a very significant drop in seasonal increase took place (for the 15th and the first half of the 16th century Poynder arrived at a change rate of only 9 %), and secondly that this could not only have been caused by the decline storage costs due to falling interest rates. Poynder claims institutional factors contributed as well: in the 14th century seasonal increase was very high because large scale grain production was inefficient and merchants paid high transaction costs to obtain grain stocks.⁶²

The application of the method of McCloskey and Nash to the Leeuwenhorst prices over the years 1410/11 to 1430/31 leads to a surprising outcome: instead of rising in the course of the year, between September and July wheat prices fell with an average of 0.7% per month or 7.5% over the entire period.⁶³ This may be a coincidence: the sample is of course very small. However, evidence from Bruges

⁶⁰ For Exeter: Beveridge, 'A statistical crime'. For London: Rogers, ed., *History of agriculture and prices*. Both are also available online: Allen and Unger, 'Allen - Unger database European Commodity Prices 1260-1914'. The accounting year of both series runs parallel with the harvest year. Conversion of the English currency into silver has been based on the Allen - Unger database as well (originally derived from Feavearyear, *The pound sterling*). On the London region grain market: Campbell *et al.*, *A medieval capital*.

⁶¹ McCloskey and Nash, 'Corn at interest', 178-179.

⁶² Poynder, 'Grain storage', 6.

⁶³ The month of August has not been included because there are only very few observations in this month. If figures are converted to a logarithmic scale and the change rate is calculated over the entire year, as is done by McCloskey and Nash, the figure is 8.7%.

suggests there is more to it than that. The Bruges series gives prices for three moments in the year: November 11, February 2 and Ascension Day. In the second and third decade of the 15th century a downward trend is visible here as well: in the half year between November 11 and Ascension Day Bruges wheat prices fell on average 2.7 % (or 2.1% if the comparison is restricted to the same 13 years that are covered by the Leeuwenhorst data). In Bruges this is clearly not a temporary phenomenon. A downward seasonal trend can also be demonstrated for the years before 1410 and after 1430, and in fact for the early modern era as well. However, both in Utrecht, which has monthly prices for 23 scattered years between the early 15th and the early 16th century, and in the Brabant town of Lier, with fairly complete monthly prices from 1433 onwards, seasonal fluctuations on average move upward instead of downward, with rates not very different from the change rate for England calculated by Poynder.⁶⁴ The figures are summarised in table 8.1. There is no way to explain price falls in the course of the year from storage costs alone, whatever their level; if anything, this proves that Nicholas Poynder is right in claiming that seasonal fluctuations were not just determined by storage

Table 8.1 Seasonal increase or decrease of wheat prices in selected locations and periods

	Seasonal increase/decrease	Calculated over	Period	Number of years
Noordwijkerhout	- 7.5%	September – July	1410/11 – 1430/31	13
Bruges	- 4.4%	Nov 11 – Ascension Day	1348/49 – 1409/10	56
	- 2.7%	Nov 11 – Ascension Day	1410/11 – 1430/31	19
	- 1.0%	Nov 11 – Ascension Day	1431/32 – 1500/01	67
	- 3.2%	Nov 11 – Ascension Day	1501/02 – 1700/01	180
Utrecht	+ 7.6 %	October – July	1401/02 – 1507/08	23
Lier	+ 5.4%	September – July	1433/34 – 1499/00	43
England	+ 9.1%	Entire harvest year	1400 – 1539	

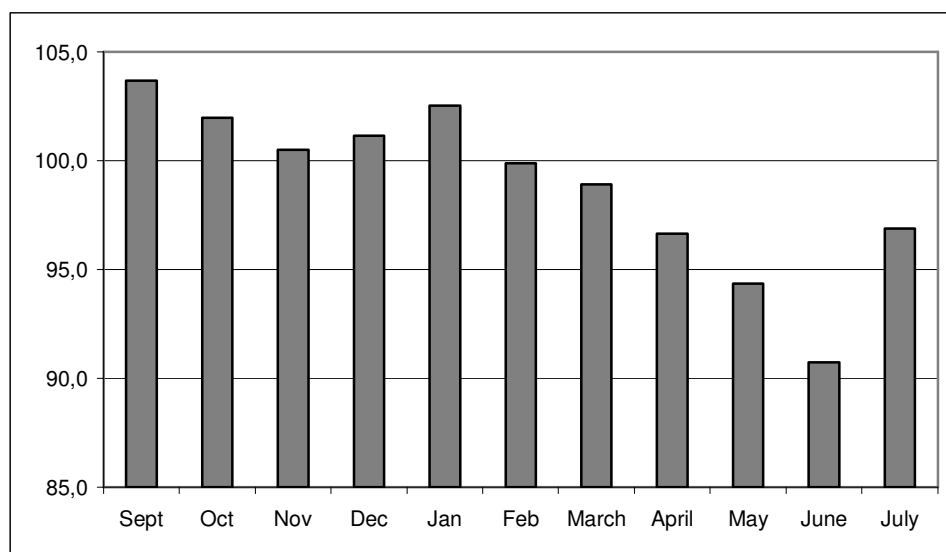
Sources: for Noordwijkerhout, Bruges and Utrecht see appendix D; for Lier Tits-Dieuaide, *Formation des prix céréaliers*, 282-284; for England Poynder, 'Grain storage', 6.

In order to throw some more light on the backgrounds of seasonal grain price fluctuations in Holland, the Leeuwenhorst price data have also been processed in a second way. Figure 8.1 shows the development of wheat prices between September and July as a percentage of the average price in that year. The graph suggests prices fell in autumn, recovered partially in the winter months, and then continued to fall until the summer, when they rose sharply. Without more detailed research it is not possible to come up with a conclusive explanation for this

⁶⁴ The Lier monthly grain prices have been published by Tits-Dieuaide, *Formation des prix céréaliers*, 282-284.

pattern. Here no more than a hypothesis, and a tentative one at that, can be ventured. It links up with the fact that both Bruges and Holland were, to a large extent, dependent on grain imports. Grain supplies may have reached markets only gradually in the course of the year. As a result, prices would not have experienced a sudden drop around harvest time as a result of large quantities of grain arriving on the market simultaneously, as happened in grain producing regions. Instead they declined much more slowly, in parallel with the continuous arrival of grain during the year. In winter this process may have been suspended as shipping temporarily came to a halt because of the weather; in summer merchants may have preferred to postpone their next trip to the production areas until the new harvest was in and prices had fallen.

Figure 8.1 Monthly wheat price between September and July in the accounts of Leeuwenhorst abbey as a percentage of the annual wheat price; averages over the years 1410/11 – 1430/31.



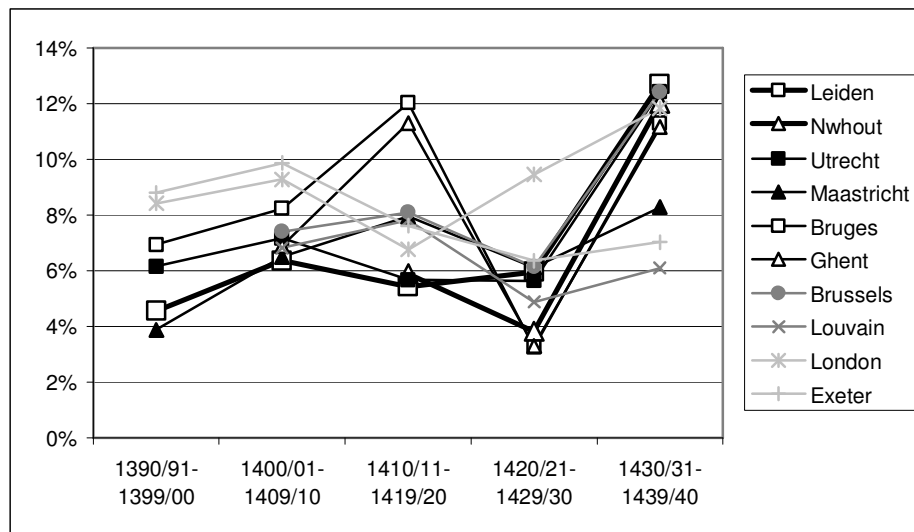
Source: see appendix D

The evidence on seasonal fluctuations remains inconclusive, if only because of the scarcity of detailed price data for the early 15th century. Fortunately requirements for an analysis of price volatility between the years are more manageable: annual averages, or prices recorded on the same date every year, are more widely available.

Figure 8.2 compares the variation coefficients per decade derived from the price series of the *Catharinagasthuis* and Leeuwenhorst abbey with those calculated

for the eastern Low Countries, the southern Low Countries, and England. The results for the *Catharinagasthuis* and Leeuwenhorst abbey, although at the low end of the international spectrum, are within 'normal' range. The figures for the *Catharinagasthuis* may moreover have been underestimated: amplitudes may well have been dampened by the fact that each accounting year covers parts of two consecutive harvest years, and for the first decade perhaps also by pre-arranged price agreements with a single merchant.

Figure 8.2 Variation coefficient of logs of annual average wheat prices (in grams of silver per hectolitre) per decade in Leiden, Noordwijkerhout and eight other locations in the Low Countries and England, 1390-1440.



Sources: see appendix D.

Extreme price fluctuations in the 1430s are directly related to the severe grain shortages in the years 1437 to 1439. These years were marked by rapidly rising grain prices in large parts of Europe, probably caused by widespread harvest failure.⁶⁵ It is worthwhile to study this crisis in some more detail. In these years the authorities in Holland intervened in the grain trade on an unprecedented scale, laying the foundations for increasingly intensive dearth policies in the late 15th and

⁶⁵ Ibid., 224-228. Tits considers the grain export embargo imposed by the Hanse towns to be the major cause even for the crisis of 1437-1439, but later research has shown that at that stage both in Holland and in Flanders Baltic imports were minor in comparison to imports from northern France (Van Tielhof, *Hollandse graanbandel*, 122-125; Dambruyne, *Mensen en centen*, 318-320). Moreover at that time extreme dearth was also reported in France, England and the German lands (Irsigler, 'Getreidepreise', 588-589).

early 16th centuries.⁶⁶ Some of the reactions to the crisis were predictable. In Leiden for instance bakers and grain merchants were forbidden to buy grain on the weekly market and market hours for consumers were narrowed down.⁶⁷ In Brielle we encounter export prohibitions for grain and for beer, prohibitions to buy and sell grain before market hours, and limitations to the amount of grain people could buy per week.⁶⁸ Other towns went further and started buying grain themselves: Gouda sent the town clerk Dirc Sonderdanc to Amsterdam to purchase 100 *last* of grain and Rotterdam bought 15 *last* of 'old' wheat and rye in the same city.⁶⁹

Most striking, however, are the interventions central government decided upon after extensive deliberations with the representatives of the towns. In September 1437 a general export prohibition of grain was proclaimed; beer could only be exported if in return a certain amount of grain was imported. In October even more drastic measures were announced; so drastic in fact that their implementation can hardly have been successful. All grain prices were to be fixed at a certain maximum (for wheat this was 21 to 24 *groot* per *achtendeel*, depending on origin and quality); in addition in every town and village the entire grain trade was to be put into the hands of small groups of corn mongers who were to receive instructions from government officials as to how much grain each of them should buy and sell within a certain period.⁷⁰

The effects of these policies are questionable, to say the least. In the Leeuwenhorst accounts wheat prices of more than twice the official maximum can be found (the highest price recorded is 56 *groot* per *achtendeel*) and there are no signs of the number of suppliers being limited. In fact the opposite is the case: the abbey appears to be buying many small amounts of wheat from a large number of sellers against rapidly mounting prices. Everything suggests distress. Admittedly, this was also the case in the neighbouring countries, but Holland does appear to have been hit hardest. Table 8.2 displays wheat prices in the years 1437/38 and 1438/39 as a percentage of the average wheat price in the ten years preceding the crisis; figure 8.3 shows the actual development of wheat prices in this period in graphic form.⁷¹

⁶⁶ Van Schaik, 'Prijs- en levensmiddelenpolitiek', 247.

⁶⁷ Hamaker, ed., *Middeleeuwse keurboeken Leiden*, 506-507.

⁶⁸ De Jager, ed., *Middeleeuwse keuren Brielle*, 177-180. These regulations are incorporated in a collection of by-laws officially recorded in 1445, but most likely date back to the crisis of the previous decade.

⁶⁹ Gouda: Heinsius, 'Oudst-bewaarde stadsrekening van Gouda', 281; Rotterdam: De Blécourt and Meijers, eds., *Memorialen Rosa II*, nr. 500.

⁷⁰ Van Limburg Brouwer, ed., *Boergoensche charters*, 37-39; Unger, 'Hollandsche graanhandel', 464-465, 490-491; Van Schaik, 'Prijs- en levensmiddelenpolitiek', 227.

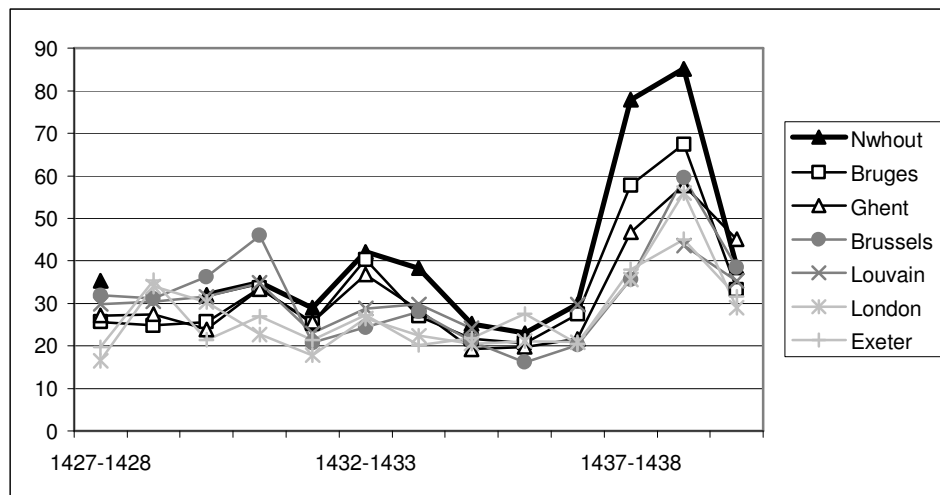
⁷¹ The figures for Leiden, Utrecht and Maastricht have not been included. The Leiden series happens to miss the years 1437/38 and 1438/39; the Utrecht and Maastricht series both miss 1438/39.

Table 8.2 Annual wheat prices in 1437/38, 1438/39 and 1439/40 as a percentage of average annual prices over the years 1427/28 to 1436/37 in Holland, Flanders, Brabant and England

	Price relative to average price 1427/28 – 1436/37	
	In 1437/38:	In 1438/39:
Noordwijkerhout	241.9%	264.6%
Bruges	212.4%	247.8%
Ghent	177.3%	219.4%
Brussels	129.1%	215.8%
Louvain	-	149.7%
London	153.0%	240.2%
Exeter	156.8%	185.9%

Sources: see appendix D.

Figure 8.3 Annual average wheat prices (in gr silver per hectolitre) from 1427/28 to 1439/40 in Holland, Flanders, Brabant and England.



Sources: see appendix D.

The table and the graph suggest that Holland was vulnerable to dearth: of all locations Noordwijkerhout displays the highest price peak. Although for Leiden the years 1437/38 and 1438/39 are missing, the account for 1439/1440, which in the case of Leiden covered spring and summer of the harvest year 1438/39 as well as the autumn and winter following the good harvest of 1439, gives a price that is

204.5% over the level of the preceding ten years. This suggests that Leiden wheat prices during the crisis were also very high.

The fact that Bruges also had serious problems –price rises in Bruges are second to those in Holland only– conforms with a pattern described by Unger: he points out that coastal regions witnessed greater price fluctuations than towns located on rivers that gave them access to a variety of suppliers.⁷² Price increase and price volatility in Ghent, Brussels and particularly in Louvain were indeed more moderate than in Holland or Bruges. Still, that does not necessarily mean, as concluded by Unger, that interregional (i.e. overseas) integration was weak. For one, the figures for the Brabant towns may have been flattered by the fact that prices for these towns, and to a lesser extent also for Ghent, were in part derived from monetary valuations of rents, which in a time like this may very well not have followed the market. For Louvain in particular there is cause for suspicion: it is hard to believe that Louvain market prices during the crisis should have been so much lower than prices elsewhere in the region. In addition Ghent may, as suggested earlier, have profited from its grain staple and the rigid regulation of the grain trade: this may have taken the edge off price extremes.

More fundamentally, the dependence of Holland and also of Bruges on imports probably contributed to higher than average price spikes in years of scarcity. Under these conditions the authorities in exporting regions most likely tried to minimise exports, whereas in the importing regions the effects of actual scarcity may well have been exacerbated by uncertainty and fear about future grain supplies. It is worth noting that in London and especially in Exeter, both also in coastal districts but not nearly as dependent on imports, the crisis of 1437-39 did not hit as hard as in Holland or in Bruges: prices did not rise to the same heights. In itself this does not prove much; harvests in England, or at least in the West Country, may simply not have been quite as disastrous as on the continent. However, it does make clear that we should not jump to conclusions about the level of market integration based on price volatility alone.

8.5 Price integration

Additional information can be gleaned from a study of the integration of prices: the degree to which prices in different locations move in concert. For 16th-century Holland some research on price integration has been done: Cornelisse, for instance, has investigated differences in peat prices in various towns in the central part of Holland and Noordegraaf has compared the trends of Leiden and Utrecht grain prices.⁷³ Both authors come to the conclusion that from at least the middle of the 16th century markets displayed a considerable degree of integration, but their studies lack a comparative perspective and do not cover the period before the 16th century in any detail. Unger's recent attempt to measure market

⁷² Unger, 'Feeding Low Countries towns', 338.

⁷³ Cornelisse, *Energiemarkten*, 205-219; Noordegraaf, *Holland's welvaren*, 15-17.

integration in the North Sea region by studying price correlation focuses on the 15th century and has a clear interregional component, but as far as Holland is concerned the fact that Unger uses only the Leiden price series, with their deviating year of account, diminishes the validity of his conclusions.⁷⁴ The following section also uses the more reliable Leeuwenhorst data to monitor the co-movement of prices in the early 15th century, within Holland and between Holland and the neighbouring countries. First, however, we will take a brief look at some snippets of information from the 14th-century sources.

In May, June and July 1398 the count of Holland sent out two purveyors to purchase large quantities of wheat as provisions for a military campaign against the Frisians. The records of these purchases in combination with the accounts of the *Catharinagasthuis* over the same year provide a first, very cursory glance at price integration within Holland. In total the purveyors bought 914 *hoed* of wheat, most of it in Haarlem, at a price of 9.4 *groot* per *achtendeel* on average.⁷⁵ In the same year the *Catharinagasthuis* paid an average price of 10.3 *groot* per *achtendeel* for its wheat in Leiden.⁷⁶ Taking the difference in measures into account (the Haarlem *achtendeel* was about 6% larger than the Leiden *achtendeel*), the Haarlem price was no more than 3% above the Leiden price.

Of course it is impossible to draw firm conclusions about the level of market integration from this single comparison of prices. However, in combination with the ease with which the count's functionaries were apparently able to buy large quantities of grain in a limited period of time, it does at least suggest that even at the end of the 14th century Holland wheat markets were not isolated or primitive. This suggestion is supported by the analysis De Boer has made of a late 14th-century poem by the moralist poet Willem van Hildegaersberch. The poem deals with the misdemeanours of some Parisian corn mongers who through speculation and even sorcery, tried to corner the market. As De Boer explains, Van Hildegaersberch clearly assumed that his Holland audience was familiar with grain merchants buying up stocks of grain before harvest and with practices like regrating and forestalling.⁷⁷ In fact we already saw that the Leiden by-laws of 1406 tried to regulate forward trading of grain. To be sure, forward transactions in anticipation of the harvest existed even in Antiquity; in the Middle Ages they were known both in southern and in northwestern Europe, and so were attempts to regulate the practice.⁷⁸ Still, the fact that forward trade was practised in Holland as well does indicate that despite the late rise of trade and towns here too a mature grain market had developed by the end of the 14th century.

⁷⁴ Unger, 'Thresholds for market integration'.

⁷⁵ Verwijs, *Oorlogen van hertog Albrecht*, 101-106. Of the 914 *hoed* 100 *hoed* was bought not in Haarlem but in Schoonhoven. However the price of these 100 *hoed* is rendered in combination with costs for measuring and other expenses and can therefore not be used in the calculations.

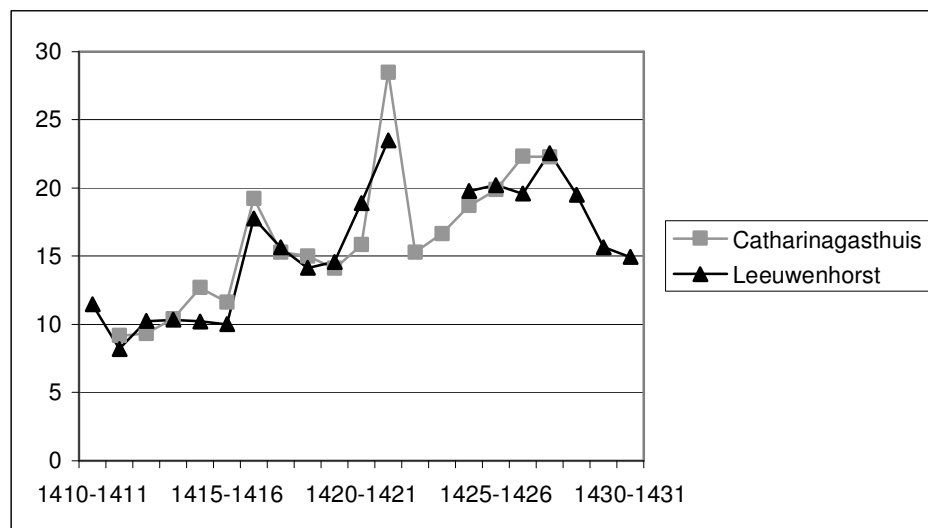
⁷⁶ See appendix D.

⁷⁷ De Boer, 'Vanden Corencopers', esp. 138.

⁷⁸ For Antiquity: Poitras, *Early history of financial economics*; for 13th-century Italy: Peyer, *Zur Getreidepolitik*, 28 (Verona and Parma); for an example from late 14th-century Brabant (Breda): Hermesdorf, *Rechtsspiegel*, 387; on forward trade in 16th-century Amsterdam: Van Tielhof, *Hollandse graanhandel*, 215-222.

As mentioned above early 15th-century data for the northern part of Holland are lacking: all prices we have for this period come from the Rijnland region, the district around Leiden. The accounts of the *Catharinagasthuis* and Leeuwenhorst abbey do provide a fairly detailed perspective of the functioning of the grain market in this region. Since the accounts of the *Catharinagasthuis* run from February 22 to February 22 in the following year and the Leeuwenhorst accounts from August to July, a comparison requires the time lap to be bridged. This has been achieved by using only the dated Leeuwenhorst entries and regrouping them according to the *Catharinagasthuis* accounting year. Two provisos apply. Where the Leeuwenhorst series is discontinuous, as it frequently is between 1410 and 1420, data are concentrated in just a few months of the year. Moreover, after the year 1430/31 regrouping turned out to be impossible because the Leeuwenhorst accounts no longer give dated entries. Figure 8.4 compares the development of average annual prices paid by both institutions in graphic form. It shows that there was indeed a close connection.

Figure 8.4: Annual average wheat prices (in *grooten* per *achtendeel*) paid by the *Catharinagasthuis* and Leeuwenhorst abbey, 1410/11-1430/31



Sources: see appendix D.

The market behaviour of the two institutions further illustrates how the local Leiden market was integrated in a wider regional market and also indicates how it was connected to markets in other parts of Holland and to production areas both in Holland and abroad. Leeuwenhorst abbey bought part of its wheat in nearby

Leiden, or at least from merchants living there. A few names actually come up in both sets of accounts: Gerrit van Oestgeest and Dirk Poes Pietersz. for instance delivered wheat to Leeuwenhorst as well as to the *Catharinagasthuis*.⁷⁹ But whereas, at least until the 1430s, the *Catharinagasthuis* obtained almost all of its wheat in Leiden and most of it from Leiden merchants, the abbey also did business with merchants from various villages in the Rijnland region. Moreover, from the beginning of the price series Leeuwenhorst also regularly purchased wheat from what were presumably farmers in Delfland, more specifically the wheat-growing region west of Delft. In addition, the abbey bought wheat in the town of Delft itself, either from nameless persons at the weekly market (*upt straet*) or from merchants based there.⁸⁰ This was something the *Catharinagasthuis* only began to do in earnest after 1430, perhaps because by that time the amount of wheat the hospital needed had increased sufficiently to make the journey worthwhile.

A significant part of the wheat on sale in Leiden and particularly in Delft probably came from the surrounding countryside. Three purchases by the *Catharinagasthuis* of *Poelscer* or *Poeldijx tarwe* (wheat from Poeldijk, a village near Delft) confirm this.⁸¹ But Leiden was also frequented by merchants from Gouda and Schoonhoven; they are mentioned repeatedly in the accounts of the *Catharinagasthuis*.⁸² References to merchants from the northern part of Holland (i.e. from Haarlem, Amsterdam and Monnickendam) are less frequent and tend to be concentrated in a few years, no doubt years when price differentials were large enough to make the journey worthwhile.⁸³ Although it was of course much smaller, in this respect the Rijnland grain market resembles the grain market in the London region as it has been described by Campbell and his co-authors. In normal years most of the grain London needed came from a core provisioning zone with a radius of 30 to 50 miles, whereas in years of dearth purchases were made a much greater distances.⁸⁴

Apart from a single appearance of an Utrecht merchant and one purchase of 'eastern' wheat the accounts do not directly refer to imports.⁸⁵ Still part of the grain was no doubt imported, for instance by a man like the Leiden merchant Floris Paedse, who frequently sold wheat to the *Catharinagasthuis* and is probably the same person as Florent Page, one of the Holland merchants involved in a conflict about the export of grains from Abbeville in 1409.⁸⁶

Considering the proximity of the *Catharinagasthuis* and Leeuwenhorst abbey – the institutions were a mere eleven kilometres apart – and the fact that they bought

⁷⁹ E.g. NA AAL inv. nr. 19 f 2v-3, 20 f 2v. Nelle Poes, who frequently sold wheat to the abbey from 1418/19 onwards, was probably the widow or daughter of Dirk Poes (De Moor, 'Leveranciers', part 1, AL 320.).

⁸⁰ E.g. NA AAL inv. nr. 23 f 2v, 25 f 2v, 26 f 2.

⁸¹ RAL AG inv. nr. 334-41 f 29 and 29v, inv. nr. 334-43 f 27;

⁸² E.g. RAL AG inv. nr. 334-6 f 13, 334-9 f 13v-14, 334-11 f 14v, 334-12 f 13, 334-17 f 20, 334-31 f 20, 334-34 f 21v.

⁸³ RAL AG inv. nr. 334-17 f 20 (four different Haarlem merchants in 1412), 334-39 f 24 (a 'man from Amsterdam' in 1426), 334-41 f 29 (a merchant from Monnickendam in 1432).

⁸⁴ Campbell *et al.*, *A medieval capital*, 63-76.

⁸⁵ RAL AG inv. nr. 334-10 f 14v; 334-41 f 29v.

⁸⁶ Van Kan, *Sleutels tot de macht*, 88-89.

part of their grain on the same markets and sometimes even from the same merchants, it is not surprising to find that prices were closely linked. Using the same regrouped data as above, the correlation coefficient of the logs of wheat prices in the accounts of the two institutions can be calculated at 0.879. This is high, but that is nothing out of the ordinary. Over the same two decades the correlation coefficients for the markets of Brussels and Louvain, 24 kilometres apart, and for those of Bruges and Ghent, with 40 kilometres between them, were just as high: they can be calculated at 0.829 and 0.889 respectively. In fact, for towns and villages situated this close together similar levels of integration have also been demonstrated for late 18th-century India.⁸⁷ Data that would allow for a study of the correlation between grain markets in the Rijnland region with grain markets in other part of Holland are simply lacking. In order to find out how Holland compared to the neighbouring countries with regard to market integration the horizon therefore has to be broadened: links with markets abroad have to be included in the analysis.

Because of the deviating accounting year of the *Catharinagasthuis*, the Leeuwenhorst figures are the best guide to the position of Holland in the interregional wheat market of northwestern Europe. For the years 1410/11 – 1430/31 correlation coefficients have been calculated for in total 36 pairs of locations: all imaginable combinations between Noordwijkerhout (Leeuwenhorst abbey) in Holland, Utrecht and Maastricht in the eastern Low Countries, Bruges and Ghent in Flanders, Brussels and Louvain in Brabant, and the London region and Exeter in England. Figure 8.5 presents the results: for each location a scatter plot and a (logarithmic) regression line display the correlations with the other eight locations related to distance.

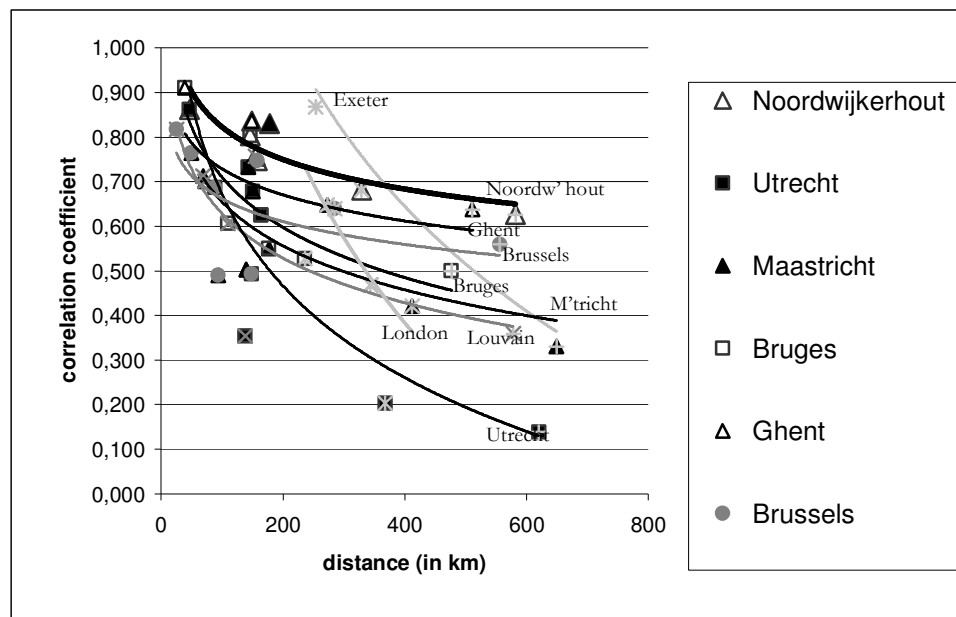
The position of a regression line relative to the other regression lines indicates the overall degree of market integration between a given market and the other markets in the North Sea region. Noordwijkerhout is at the top, suggesting that by the early 15th century wheat markets in Holland, or at least in the central part of Holland, were very well connected to markets in the neighbouring countries. The slopes of the regression lines indicate the degree to which market integration depended on distance. The regression line for Noordwijkerhout is quite flat: this indicates that Holland markets were not only well integrated with foreign markets nearby, but also with those further off. In this Holland is not unique though: the markets in the southern Low Countries display similar flat slopes.

The slopes for London and Exeter and also for Utrecht are much steeper, suggesting a more rapid decline of market integration with distance. For Utrecht this might perhaps be explained by higher transport costs: Utrecht was an inland town and did not have good access to waterways. However, in the case of London and Exeter transport costs can do little to explain the difference with Holland.

⁸⁷ Studer, 'India and the Great Divergence', 402.

Both towns had easy access to the sea. Yet this did not stimulate integration with distant markets to the same degree as in Holland. The English grain market was clearly relatively self-contained: as long as it could sustain its own population there was no need to go further afield.

Figure 8.5 Correlation coefficient of logs of annual average wheat prices (in gr silver per hectolitre) between nine locations in Holland, the eastern and southern Low Countries and England, related to the distance between locations, 1410/11-1439/40.



Sources: see appendix D

The position of Holland can be studied in more detail by looking at the development of wheat prices over time. Table 8.3 shows that even though for the period as a whole correlations are high, fluctuations in time were considerable. In the years between 1410 and 1420, and especially between 1430 and 1440, correlation coefficients were, generally speaking, higher than in the intermediate decade. Between 1420 and 1430 the link between the Leeuwenhorst prices and those in the towns of the southern Low Countries remained fairly strong, but the connections to Utrecht and Maastricht were much weaker than before and the link with England was completely severed.

Table 8.3 Correlation coefficient of logs of annual average wheat prices (in grams of silver per hectolitre) between Noordwijkerhout and seven other locations in the Low Countries and England per decade, 1410/11-1439/40

Noordwijkerhout with:	1410/11 – 1419/20	1420/21- 1429/30	1430/31- 1439/40	Entire period
Utrecht	0.599	0.472	0.985	0.862
Maastricht	0.955	0.558	0.885	0.831
Bruges	0.597	0.682	0.974	0.803
Ghent	0.830		0.902	0.835
Brussels	0.869	0.697	0.776	0.747
Louvain	-0.516	0.759	0.831	0.756
London region	0.907	-0.533	0.911	0.681
Exeter	0.831	0.153	0.807	0.626

Sources: see appendix D.

General dearth in the years 1415/16 and 1437/38 probably explains the high coefficients for the two corresponding decades. To some extent these figures may be flattered: these are two examples of years when widespread harvest failure due to adverse weather conditions in a wide region may have driven up prices everywhere, thus raising correlation coefficients regardless of the actual degree of market integration. However, we saw that in times of dearth prices also tended to move in concert for another reason, one that does reflect a real increase in integration: scarcity induced merchants to search for supplies much further afield than they would normally do. Therefore at least part of the fluctuations is probably real: Holland grain markets were not as well integrated with markets abroad during the 1420s as before and afterwards.⁸⁸

Admittedly, Holland currency was far from stable in this decade, but then it had been highly unstable between 1410 and 1420 as well.⁸⁹ Moreover, the fall in the level of integration was not restricted to Holland alone: except for the links between Leeuwenhorst and the towns in the southern Low Countries in this period almost all connections across national borders were weak. The most likely explanation is simply the absence of years of serious shortages, keeping grain prices at modest levels and thus temporarily taking away the stimulus to international trade.

The findings allow for a reconciliation of two apparently contradictory views on interregional market integration: Söderberg's statement that in the early 15th century an interregional grain market functioned in the northwestern Europe on the one hand, and Unger's denial of the existence of such a market on the other. It

⁸⁸ I can offer no explanation for the negative correlation with Louvain between 1410 and 1420, but it is likely the cause is to be found in local circumstances: for this decade correlations between Louvain wheat prices with all other towns except Brussels are weak or non-existent.

⁸⁹ Grolle, *Muntslag*, 145-147, 158, 179-180.

is clear that there were links, some of them very strong, between grain markets in northwestern Europe. However, the result was anything but a tightly-knit and stable entity. The data indicate a mix of bilateral links of different strength, reflecting trade connections of diverging intensity. They moreover suggest a pattern of -very considerable- upward and downward fluctuations in the level of integration, initiated at least in part by the occurrence or absence of years of dearth.⁹⁰ In other words: an interregional market network did exist, but it was far from homogeneous and tended to contract when and where the need for long-distance grain trade was taken away by abundant harvests.

In this heterogeneous and unstable network Holland was the region with the strongest and most durable links to other markets in the North Sea region. Clearly the explanation for this situation hinges on Holland's dependence on imports. Still, there is good reason to believe market structures, by facilitating these imports, contributed as well. If we follow the route grain imports took, we encounter several elements of the institutional framework discussed in earlier chapters that may have played a part. The first is the rise of sea fishing and of village fish markets. In her study on commercial relations between Holland and England Nelly Kerling argues that in the late 14th and early 15th century the grain trade from Great Yarmouth and King's Lynn to Holland was partly conducted by London fishmongers who frequented the coastal villages of Holland, offering corn in exchange for fish.⁹¹ Even if volumes were modest, as they probably were, this does demonstrate how the near absence of restraints on rural commerce in Holland may have helped to facilitate grain imports.

The second element is the fact that despite Dordrecht's official monopoly on the grain trade in the delta of the Rhine and the Meuse, other towns, by making use of every legal and geographical loophole, but also by lobbying and making alliances, managed to develop profitable trade activities themselves. One of these towns was Brielle. Merchants from Brielle are also found, and in greater numbers than Dordrecht merchants at that, exporting grain (and cloth) from King's Lynn in that city's customs account over the year 1392-1393.⁹² Another new trade centre was Delft. By the middle of the 15th century, and quite possibly earlier than that, Delft had developed beyond a market centre for wheat grown in the region: it had become an important market for 'western' grain as well.⁹³ In Flanders on the other hand Ghent continued to dominate the transit grain trade until the early 16th century, much to its own benefit but at the expense of other towns who were unable to develop their own grain trading activities.⁹⁴

Finally there is the near absence of restrictions on, or taxation of international trade. In this respect Holland compares favourably to England.

⁹⁰ James Galloway arrives at a similar conclusion for England in the 14th century (Galloway, 'One market or many?', 37).

⁹¹ Kerling, *Commercial relations*, 108.

⁹² Gras, *Early English customs system*, 526-553.

⁹³ Van Tielhof, *Hollandse graanbandel*, 16-18.

⁹⁴ Bigwood, 'Gand et la circulation', esp. 401-410, 453-456, 459-460.

Medieval Holland did not know a licensing system for international trade; notably, whereas in the early 16th century export licenses were successfully re-introduced in England, attempts by the Habsburg authorities to do so in Holland for the growing transit grain trade ran into such fierce opposition that the idea had to be abandoned.⁹⁵ Apart from the river tolls, which were levied at low rates and from which most Holland merchants were exempted anyway, grain imports were not taxed. In 14th-century England on the other hand the national customs system expanded to cover a larger range of products, while rates moved upward. Poundage for instance, the imposition on the export of 'general merchandise' including grain, increased from 1.25% in the early 14th century to 5% around 1400.⁹⁶

There can be no doubt that grain imports would have taken place in Holland no matter what the institutional framework looked like: they took place in Flanders as well, under very different conditions, and in England too if the need was there. However, whether they would have developed as strongly as they did, and with the same prolonged success, is another matter.

8.6 Conclusions

This chapter tests one of the central theses of this book: the notion that in late medieval Holland a framework of market institutions developed that raised market performance, measured here by assessing the integration of markets for wheat in the late 14th and early 15th centuries. The results are not as straightforward as this hypothesis suggests.

Whereas theory predicts that in a well integrated market price volatility is relatively low, in Holland prices fluctuated as much as in the neighbouring countries. In fact during the food crisis of the late 1430s wheat prices mounted to higher levels than elsewhere. Moreover, although wheat prices within the county - as far as the scarce data allow for conclusions- moved in close concert, in this Holland was by no means unique: the grain markets of England and of the southern Low Countries were also well integrated. Apparently the presence of a favourable institutional framework did not give Holland an advance. To be sure, grain market institutions in Holland, England and the southern Low Countries did bear a closer resemblance than the institutional frameworks governing exchange in many other commodities: authorities everywhere tried to prevent grain shortages, or at least soften their consequences, through regulation. In the face of the needs of grain provisioning differences in the institutions governing the internal grain trade to some extent disappeared. Still, even when they continued to exist, they apparently did not affect market performance that much.

⁹⁵ For England: Gras, *Evolution of the English corn market*, 225-226. For Holland: Meilink, 'Rapporten en betoogen nopens het congégeld op granen, 1530-1541', 1-21; Van Tielhof, *Hollandse graanhandel*, 132-138.

⁹⁶ Gras, *Early English customs system*, 80-82, 121.

Only when Holland wheat price series are confronted with those in neighbouring countries differences appear. In the early 15th century an interregional grain market in northwestern Europe did exist, but it was far from homogeneous or stable, contracting when and where grain was abundant. Here Holland does stand out: its multilateral interregional links were stronger and more consistent than England's or those of the southern Low Countries. That this did not lead to a reduction of price volatility can be explained by the vulnerability that came with a dependence on imports: in times of dearth, export restrictions in the producing regions could cause acute problems in Holland.

Good access to water transport can at most provide a very partial explanation for Holland's well-established interregional connections: these connections largely depended on sea transport, to which several of the other towns mentioned in this chapter also had good access. Holland's dependence on grain imports, on the other hand, is an important explanatory factor. The driving force behind Holland's interregional grain trade was the demand for bread grains, and no doubt regulations and trading practices were adapted to suit this purpose. But under the influence of pre-existing traditions the direction this process of adaptation took, moving towards easily accessible markets and few restraints on trade, was different from what happened in England or, more to the point perhaps, in the southern Low Countries, where large quantities of grain were also imported, but under very different conditions. If market structures had been less favourable, it is doubtful if Holland would have been able to build up the same robust and wide-flung interregional trade network.

9. Market orientation

9.1 Introduction

The 1514 *Informacie*, an assessment of the economic situation of the towns and villages of Holland made for taxation purposes, paints a vivid picture of the way villagers in early 16th century Holland made a living. In Ouddorp in West-Friesland, for instance, some villagers cultivated the land; others hired themselves out with their carts as transporters, and five or six were employed as sailors on a herring buss. In Aalsmeer, just south of Amsterdam, the population was engaged in peat digging, but also held cows and cut reeds. In Zwammerdam, north of Gouda, the villagers held cows too and they cultivated the land; in addition, the women were engaged in spinning wool and the men mostly in digging. The people of Streefkerk, east of Rotterdam, held cows and grew hemp and some oats; they were moreover engaged in fishing and catching birds, and in digging and diking.¹ The variety of activities is striking; what is more, by their nature the majority of these must have involved the production of goods (or services) for the market.

Even though a growing body of research stresses the importance of markets, both commodity markets and factor markets, for medieval economies, the timing and the extent of commercialisation are still subjects of debate. That is partly due to difficulties with measuring the level of commercialisation: good data are hard to find. Urbanisation is an important element: towns could not exist without markets to provide them with foodstuffs and raw materials. Conversely, a large part of the urban population was engaged in producing commodities for, or providing services through the market. Still, the importance of self-provisioning among townsmen should not be underestimated. For artisanal products and services auto-consumption cannot have taken up more than a very small part of total production, but for agriculture it was another matter: many townspeople grew part of their own food. Early 14th-century tax registers for the English town of Colchester, for instance, show that about half of all households owned substantial grain stocks or livestock. Among them were several well-to-do landowning artisans and merchants, but even townspeople of middling wealth frequently held one or more pigs or cows. Although they probably intended to sell part of the produce – otherwise the beasts would not have been included in the tax register – they no doubt used some of it to supply their own households. In fact, greater self-sufficiency was probably one of the reasons why urban craftsmen and traders held on to landownership.²

More importantly, urban population numbers alone are not enough to establish the level of commercialisation: the rural population also engaged in

¹ Fruin, ed., *Informacie*, 58, 135, 312, 551.

² Britnell, 'Specialization of work', 11-13.

commercial activities, either in the shape of (proto-)industrial production and services, or through market-oriented agricultural production. The idea that peasants were by nature subsistence-oriented and only turned to the market if they were forced to, has proved incorrect:³ the production of foodstuffs and raw materials for the market was an integral part of peasant agriculture. However the neo-classical alternative, of peasants always ready and even eager to engage in specialisation and market-oriented production, is not satisfactory either. It does not explain why in some situations peasant reacted to market opportunities with great alacrity, whereas at other times and in other places they were much more reluctant to do so. Institutional economics offer a fruitful approach to this paradox, by predicting that peasants respond to the institutional framework that shapes the functioning of markets. If market institutions are efficient and transaction costs are low, peasants will be stimulated to produce for the market; if on the other hand markets are difficult to enter or unsafe, creating high barriers to trade, peasants may prefer subsistence as the less costly or less risky alternative.⁴ It is from this point of view that an attempt is made here to compare the pace and timing of the process of commercialisation in Holland with the situation in Flanders and England. If neo-institutionalist theory is correct, the diverging institutional frameworks for commodity markets in the three countries should result in different levels of market orientation.

This hypothesis will be tested by estimating the share of labour input devoted to providing goods or services for the market. In a study focusing on commodity markets this may seem a rather roundabout way to get to the heart of the issue, but alternatives all break down in the face of data problems. The total volume of market transactions can, at least for Holland, not be calculated with any degree of accuracy before the early 16th century: sources that would allow for such a calculation are simply not available. Directly estimating the share of goods produced for the market is difficult, because of the very frequent occurrence of consecutive stages of production. The only way to deal with this would be through a calculation of added value for each stage, but again the source material poses restrictions. An approach via labour input avoids most of these problems, while it is also in keeping with the theoretical starting point outlined above. An additional advantage is that it allows us to use the results of studies on occupational structure and specialisation of labour in the three countries. We will look at three elements: the level of urbanisation (with a correction for self-provisioning agrarian activities of townspeople), non-agricultural activities in the countryside, and the market orientation of (rural) agrarian production.

For each element an attempt is made to arrive at a quantitative estimate of the labour input for two dates: the beginning or middle of the 14th century and the

³ The assumption goes back to the work of the Russian economist Chayanov (*Chayanov, Theory of peasant economy*), but also features in the work of Robert Brenner, e.g. Brenner, 'Agrarian roots', 236. For the involvement of peasants in market exchange: Masschaele, *Peasants, merchants, and markets*, 33-56.

⁴ Hoppenbrouwers and Van Zanden, 'Restyling the transition', 22-26; Epstein, 'Cities, regions and the late medieval crisis', 5-8.

end of the 15th or beginning of the 16th century. Together the estimates for the three elements give an indication of the total proportion of labour input devoted to market-oriented production at those two moments in time. Considering the time frame covered by this book, assessments for the early 13th century and the middle of the 15th century respectively would have been more logical. However, for Holland, but to a lesser extent also for Flanders and England, early 13th-century data simply do not allow for quantification. Moreover, for all three regions detailed information in the form of fiscal documents is available for the late 15th or early 16th century, providing a much needed reliable point of reference for many estimates.

Neither Holland nor Flanders or England were perfectly homogeneous regions, but the degree of intraregional variation diverged. In addition there is the more practical issue of differences in the availability of data. In combination these two facts call for a differentiated approach. Holland was the smallest region and although there were internal differences –urbanisation for instance was lower in the north than in the centre or south of the county– for an analysis of market orientation it is still possible to discuss Holland as one region. In Flanders on the other hand agriculture in the coastal region, with its predominance of large leasehold farms that mainly produced for the market, was radically different from the system of peasant smallholding that prevailed in the rest of county. In order to do justice to this difference the estimates of market orientation of agriculture and of non-agricultural rural activities in inland Flanders will be complemented by separate estimates for the situation in coastal Flanders. England, finally, was of course many times larger than Holland or Flanders and more heterogeneous than either. However, accurate data needed to make calculations for specific regions are largely lacking; in fact even in aggregated form the English data display several uncertainties. Therefore, for England all figures will be presented as ranges. In addition, an attempt is made to establish where, with respect to the indicated ranges, the most urbanised and most densely populated eastern part of England, exemplified by the county of Suffolk, should be positioned.

It will be clear that no more than an indication of the order of magnitude is intended. Indeed the data do not allow for anything else; estimates, and sometimes rather rough ones at that, are all that is to be had. Still, while individual figures are open to discussion, by carefully comparing the information available for Holland, Flanders and England, it is possible to give an impression of the differences in long term developments between the three regions. Linking them to the institutional framework is more difficult. As was shown earlier, other factors besides institutions may also affect market performance. For Holland ecological problems reducing possibilities for bread grain cultivation and a growing demand from the urban middle classes for products like dairy, meat and fresh sea fish have earlier been identified as important elements: they will feature again in this chapter.

Two aspects of methodology need to be clarified in advance. First, in estimating the share of agrarian labour devoted to market-oriented production, the cultivation of fodder and of raw materials to be processed by the farmer himself

has been assessed according to the destination of the finished product. The labour needed to cultivate the flax used for linen production by the farmer and his family for instance has been classed as market-oriented, since the linen was ultimately marketed. The second aspect regards the concept 'labour input'. The analysis will be restricted to labour aimed directly at bringing in cash or commodities; in other words to 'professional' activities. Apart from domestic work this also leaves out all kinds of unpaid services to members of the local community, such as helping out neighbours at harvest time. Of course this kind of labour had an economic value, but a lack of data and the difficulties of distinguishing between economic and social activities put quantification out of reach. However, as the restriction to professional activities applies to Flanders and England as well as to Holland, the comparison will probably not be much affected.

9.2 Holland

Although in the early 13th century Dordrecht was already a modest-sized river trade centre, and places like Leiden, Delft, Haarlem and Alkmaar were beginning to show the first signs of urbanity, Holland was still mostly an agrarian region on the margins of European civilisation. Yet, even then the beginnings of a monetary economy must have been in place, in the countryside as well as in the nascent towns. The reclamation of Holland's peat lands provided the colonists with the means to feed themselves and their families: the original standard size of a peatland farm was 16.5 to 18 *morgen* or around 15 hectares⁵ and at that time grain cultivation would not have been a problem. Still, taxes and fines would have had to be paid in cash. The first references to payments of *schot* or *jaarbede* (a tax to be paid by every household, most likely originating in the dues owed to the count as the owner of all land) date from the early 12th century. Even older (probably late 11th century) is the *botting*, a monetary compensation replacing the duty to house and feed the count (or his representative) when he visited once every three or four years to preside over the sessions of the supreme court.⁶ If peasants were able to pay taxes in cash, they must have sold at least part of their produce. That they did indeed seek out markets is moreover in keeping with the evidence presented in chapter 2 on the existence of 12th-century fairs or markets in the earliest administrative and religious centres of Holland, and of an important cattle trade between the southern part of Holland and the towns of Flanders and Brabant around the year 1200.

In the late 13th century the existing towns began to expand and several new ones emerged. Still, by 1300 only about 30,000 people, or 14% of the total population, lived in towns. Most of these towns were small or very small; even

⁵ Van der Linden, *De cope*, 26-36.

⁶ Schot/jaarbede: Bos-Rops, *Graven op zoek naar geld*, 24; Gosses, *Welgeborenen en huislieden*, 17-18; OHZ I nr. 238.

Botting: Blok, 'Holland sinds Gosses', 18-25; Gosses, *De vorming van het graafschap Holland*, 67-68; Fockema Andreae, 'Bottinge'; Allan, *Kennemer landrecht*, 196-199.

Dordrecht had no more than around 5,000 inhabitants in 1300.⁷ In 1514, when the *Informacie* renders the first reliable general assessment of economic and demographic conditions in the towns and villages of Holland, the situation had changed drastically. The urban population had grown to about 124,000, resulting in an urban ratio of 45%. In the southern half of Holland the ratio was even considerably higher.⁸ To contemporaries this must have been an incredibly high percentage: it surpassed urbanisation levels in Flanders and northern Italy. One thing had remained unchanged though: the size of individual towns was still modest. That even at this stage 40% of the urban population was living in towns with 2,000 to 10,000 inhabitants and another 12% in towns with less than 2,000 inhabitants is perhaps not remarkable: small and very small towns dominated in many other parts of northwestern Europe too. More striking is the fact that large cities (with 20,000 residents or more) were entirely absent: no town that came even remotely near a metropolis developed. The remaining 48% of the urban population of Holland lived in one of five medium-sized towns: in Leiden (about 14,000 inhabitants), Amsterdam, Haarlem, Delft or Dordrecht (each 11,000 to 12,000 inhabitants).⁹

Developments in the second half of the 14th century are particularly striking. The Black Death probably did not take death tolls of up to 50%, as in England or Mediterranean France, but still losses from the echo epidemics of the 1360s to 1380s appear to have been severe.¹⁰ However, they were compensated very quickly: by 1400 the urban population had surpassed its pre-Plague level. Only a very considerable migration to the towns could have accounted for this. For Leiden and Gouda a sizable immigration, mainly from the surrounding countryside, has indeed been demonstrated for the late 14th century; the numbers of registered new burgesses suggest a migration that exceeded, relatively speaking, that to the cities of Flanders in the same period. Besides deteriorating conditions in the Holland central peat district, where arable farming was becoming increasingly difficult, the attractions of the flourishing urban economies probably contributed to this migratory wave.¹¹ In the 15th century towns continued to expand. Only in the last two decades of the century economic malaise triggered a decline in towns like Leiden, Gouda en Haarlem; Amsterdam, however, still experienced some growth.¹²

No doubt the urban population was largely occupied in market-oriented industrial production or in providing services, but the role of agriculture should not be underestimated. It is a telling sign that the urban liberties of the Brabant-

⁷ Visser, 'Dichtheid en bevolking', 19; cf. Van Herwaarden *et al.*, *Geschiedenis van Dordrecht*, 246, who gives an estimate of 6,000 inhabitants in 1325.

⁸ Van Bavel and Van Zanden, 'Jump-start', 511 and 529. For the difference between the northern and the southern part of Holland: De Vries, *Dutch rural economy*, 86-87.

⁹ The distribution of the urban population over very small, small and medium-sized towns has been constructed from the information on town populations in 1514 given by Lourens and Lucassen, *Inwonertallen*, 54-71, 100-123.

¹⁰ Blockmans, 'Social and economic effects', esp. 861-862.

¹¹ De Boer, *Graaf en grafiek*, 139-166, esp. 144, 164.

¹² For Leiden: Van Bavel and Van Zanden, 'Jump-start', 507. For the other towns: Lourens and Lucassen, *Inwonertallen*.

Holland family, adopted by a large number of towns in Holland between the mid 13th and the mid 14th century, contain a section stating the right of each burgess to be absent from town for two weeks during summer to get the harvest in and for another two weeks during autumn to sow next year's crop without jeopardising his burgess status.¹³ Moreover, within the urban freedom the young towns had many open spaces that provided room for stables, paddocks, vegetable gardens, orchards, and even corn fields.¹⁴

The 1514 *Informacie* suggests that in the smallest towns this situation hardly changed. For seven out of the ten towns with less than 2,000 inhabitants for which the *Informacie* gives information on the occupational structure, arable farming or animal husbandry were recorded; in five towns the local authorities actually mentioned agriculture prior to all other activities.¹⁵ The order in which the main occupations are recorded in the *Informacie* has been used by Van Zanden for a reconstruction of the structure of labour input in the countryside at the end of the Middle Ages. Assuming that village authorities reported occupational activities in order of importance, he attributes weights to each of these activities accordingly and thus arrives at an estimate of their share in total rural labour input.¹⁶ We will return to the results of Van Zanden's calculations for the countryside shortly. What matters here is that the data for the smallest towns can be processed in the same way, with one adaptation: more people than in villages would have been engaged in a local retailing and a variety of other professions not included in the 'main occupations' mentioned in the *Informacie*. Depending on the assumptions made on this issue, the share of labour input devoted to agriculture can be calculated at 20 to 35%.¹⁷

In the larger towns the role of agriculture was more modest. With growth, much of the urban open space fell victim to the needs of industry and housing for the urban population, which must have been accompanied by an increase of the proportion of urban labour input in market-oriented manufacture and services. For towns with 2,000 to 10,000 inhabitants a calculation based on the occupational activities mentioned in the *Informacie* renders a share of less than 10% of urban labor input devoted to agrarian activities. However in this category the obvious domination of the industrial and service sectors may easily have given rise to an underestimation of the primary sector. The case of Edam (2,300 inhabitants) illustrates this. For this town the *Informacie* only mentions shipbuilding and

¹³ For instance Haarlem: *OHZ* II, nr. 672-673, art. 5.

¹⁴ Van Herwijnen, 'Stad en land', 20.

¹⁵ Fruin, ed., *Informacie*. The five very small towns that mention agriculture first are Medemblik, Oudewater, 's-Gravenzande, Asperen and Heukelum (104, 263, 350, 599, 601). Muiden and Haastrecht also mention agriculture, but rank it lower (201, 392); Beverwijk, Weesp and Woerden do not mention it at all (17, 197, 248).

¹⁶ Van Zanden, 'Taking the measure', 135.

¹⁷ Van Zanden assumes that in small villages 5% and in large villages 10% of the population was occupied in retailing and local services. Some very small towns were probably hard to distinguish from large villages, but in Beverwijk or Weesp, where the authorities were unable to mention a main occupation, the number of people engaged in retailing and local services may well have been much larger. I have adopted 10 % as the lower and 50% as the upper limit.

shipping as main occupations,¹⁸ but the exceptionally detailed local tax registers display a pattern very similar to that described earlier for Colchester in England. They show that at the end of the 15th and the beginning of the 16th century around half of all Edam households owned one or more cows: the average was 2.3 animals. In many cases the head of the household was a sailor, craftsman or trader; dairying was a by-employment.¹⁹ This strongly suggests that for towns with 2,000 to 10,000 residents the proportion of urban labour input devoted to agriculture was not as marginal as the *Informacie* indicates. A share of 10 to 20% of seems more realistic.

For the five towns with more than 10,000 inhabitants the *Informacie* does not mention agriculture at all. Likewise, Van Zanden's reconstruction of the urban occupational structure of Leiden and Dordrecht around 1500, which uses other sources, shows that in these two towns some two-thirds of urban labour input was engaged in the secondary sector and about one third in trade, transport and other services. The contribution of agriculture was negligible.²⁰ However, the data on which Van Zanden based his calculations refer to primary occupation only; agrarian (or in fact any other) by-employment was not recorded. Therefore here too the importance of agriculture may have been underestimated: a share of 0 to 10% seems a reasonable assumption.

Part of the urban agricultural activity was no doubt intended for auto-consumption, but a substantial share of the produce must have been sold on the market. The Edam case again provides an illustration. Even if the members of the Edam household owning cows should each have consumed 4 kilogram of butter and 8 kilogram of cheese per year (this is twice the average consumption for all Hollanders estimated by Van Bavel and Gelderblom and approaches the consumption per head of the well-to-do occupants of Leeuwenhorst abbey in 1540), auto-consumption would still have been only 40%, leaving the remaining 60% to be sold.²¹ The share of marketable surplus may have been lower for products of arable farming though; therefore here market orientation of urban agricultural activities has been estimated conservatively at 50%. This would result in a share of urban labour devoted to market-oriented activities, non-agrarian and agrarian combined, of 82 to 90% for the towns with less than 2,000 inhabitants, 90 to 95% for the towns with 2,000 to 10,000 inhabitants, and 95 to 100% for the largest towns. The market orientation of the urban sector as a whole can thus be estimated at 88 to 94% in the middle of the 14th century and 92 to 97% around

¹⁸ Fruin, *Informacie*, 187.

¹⁹ Boschma-Aarnoudse, *Tot verbeteringe*, 138-140, 454-455, 470-471. The figure of 2.3 is the unweighted average for 1462 (2.4), 1506 (2.4) and 1514 (2.0).

²⁰ Van Zanden, 'Taking the measure', 136-138. The data have been derived from: Unger, 'Economische en sociale structuur', 981-984 (Dordrecht) and Posthumus, *Leidsche lakenindustrie* I, 400-403.

²¹ Assuming, as Van Bavel and Gelderblom do, that 33 litres of milk render 1 kilogram of butter, that 10 litres of milk render 1 kilogram of cheese, and that the annual yield of a cow is 1,000 litres (Van Bavel and Gelderblom, 'Land of milk and butter', 59 (note 75). Household size in Edam was 4.62 in 1462 and 3.90 in 1514: here the unweighted average of 4.26 has been used (Boschma-Aarnoudse, *Tot verbeteringe*, 423-424).

1500; the modest increase is related to the fact that in the mean time many towns had grown in size.

For the situation in the countryside at the end of the Middle Ages Van Zanden's calculations, reflecting the variety of activities mentioned for each village in the *Informacie*, provide a good point of departure. The results are remarkable: the share of rural input in agriculture was only about 41%, a very low rate in international perspective.²² There obviously is a relationship with the changes rural Holland experienced in the late 14th and early 15th century. The subsiding of the peat soil and the subsequent deterioration of ecological conditions made bread grain cultivation increasingly difficult. As a reaction to the diminishing prospects for subsistence farming, peasants developed a wide range of non-agrarian, market-oriented activities like peat digging, shipping and fishing, spinning and weaving, and the construction and maintenance of dikes and canals.²³

By 1500 not just non-agrarian activities in the Holland countryside were market-oriented, but most agrarian activities were too. This may seem surprising, since this development had not been accompanied, as it was in England, by the rise of large landownership, tenant farming and wage labour. In Holland, for the time being, peasants held on to their land: the structure of small family farms remained in place until at least the middle of the 16th century. By then at most 20% of labour input in agriculture was performed as wage labour.²⁴ Yet the nature of the produce of the small Holland farms makes it clear that only part of this produce would have been consumed by the farmer and his family. Meat and dairy, the products of animal husbandry, were primarily designated for urban markets in Holland or abroad. Where arable farming did take place, it produced, besides pulses and vegetables, mainly products that served as raw material for the urban industries: hemp, hops, barley and oats.²⁵

Peasants no doubt did eat home-grown peas, beans and vegetables, and could well have drunk home-brewed beer made of their own barley and oats. Even if they brought most of their meat and dairy to the market, they would not have missed the opportunity to consume some of it at home. Still, a considerable part of rural agrarian labour must have been market-oriented, as is demonstrated by dairy production in the Waterland countryside. Around the year 1500 three quarters of households in the villages around Edam owned cows, the average number of animals being 4.8.²⁶ Fragmentary evidence from other parts of Holland suggests that this was fairly normal: 5 to 6 head seems to have been the typical size of a peasant's herd.²⁷ The marketable surplus the Waterland villagers could expect from a herd of this size can be calculated in the same way as has just been done

²² Van Zanden, 'Taking the measure', 134-138.

²³ Van Zanden, *Rise and decline* 30-34; Van Zanden, 'A third road', 87-89.

²⁴ Van Bavel, 'Rural wage labour', 55-56.

²⁵ Bieleman, *Geschiedenis van de landbouw*, 56-76.

²⁶ Boschma-Aarnoudse, *Tot verbeteringe*, 474-475. The figure of 4.8 is the unweighted average for 1462 (5.4), 1506 (4.8) and 1514 (4.2).

²⁷ De Vries, *Dutch rural economy*, 70-71.

for urban livestock owners: it was around 80%.²⁸ Again, market orientation may have been less pronounced for other products than dairy; to be on the safe side market orientation of the agrarian sector as a whole has therefore been estimated at 60 to 80%.

Combined with the figures on urbanisation and on non-agrarian occupations in the countryside, it follows that around the year 1500 between 87% and 94% of the total labour input of Holland's population would have been devoted to the production of commodities and the provisioning of services through the market.

Before the early 16th century information on Holland's rural occupational structure is more scarce, but Van Bavel's study of early proto-industrialisation provides a foothold. Based on estimates for a large number of different non-agrarian activities, peat-digging, peat-transport, fishery and the cloth and linen industry being the most important ones, Van Bavel surmises that even in the middle of the 14th century about a quarter of rural labour went into something else than agriculture. This figure does not include digging and diking, or the labour of the many millers, bakers, blacksmiths and others servicing the local community. For 1500 the shares of rural labour input involved in these categories are estimated by Van Bavel at 5% and 10% respectively.²⁹ In the middle of the 14th century the figures may have been somewhat lower, although there can be no doubt both groups existed. Egmond abbey for instance frequently bought nails and iron tools from at least two local smiths in the latter part of the 14th century; the accounts over 1388 also mention lists of wages paid to labourers hired to dike the Zijpe, a sea-arm that had been causing extensive flooding.³⁰ An estimate of around 30% of total rural labour input in non-agrarian activities in the middle of the 14th century is therefore not presumptuous.

Of the remaining 70% devoted to agrarian work, a much larger proportion than in the early 16th century would have been devoted to subsistence-oriented activities: before 1350 grain cultivation did not pose any problems and urban demand for provisions was still modest. For the English peasantry of the late 13th and early 14th century the share of labour that went into growing crops for the market is estimated at 30 to 40%.³¹ There are no good grounds to argue this proportion was much higher or much lower in Holland.

Table 9.1 combines the figures. It shows that by the middle of the 14th century an estimated total of less than two thirds of Holland's labour input was devoted to market-oriented activities, while in 1500 this share had risen to about 90%. Two conclusions can be drawn. The first is that even a late developer like Holland must have experienced a significant growth of commercialisation before the middle of

²⁸ Assuming a household size of 4.6, based on the unweighted averages of 4.8 in 1462 and 4.35 in 1506 (Boschma-Aarnoudse, *Tot verbetering*, 423-424).

²⁹ Van Bavel, 'Early proto-industrialization', 1143.

³⁰ Hof, ed., *Egmondse kloosterrekeningen*, 49-59.

³¹ See below, section 9.4.

the 14th century. A reliable estimate for the year 1100 or 1200 cannot be given, but there can be no doubt that at that time market orientation was far below the level of 1348. Secondly, the process of commercialisation continued to proceed rapidly between the middle of the 14th and the end of the 15th century. The development is even more striking when the simultaneous growth of population numbers from around 235,000 in 1348 to about 275,000 in 1500 is taken into account: at the end of the 15th century the number of people dependent on the market for their sustenance was about 70% higher than 150 years earlier.

Table 9.1 Share of labour input in market-oriented activities, Holland

	Mid 14 th century <i>Population: c. 235,000</i>	Late 15 th / early 16 th century <i>Population 1514: c. 275,000 Density: c. 60 residents per km²</i>
Urban sector		
a. Urban population as percentage of total (see text)	23%	45%
b. Share of urban labour input in market- oriented activities (see text)	88-94%	92-97%
c. Resulting share of total population in market- oriented activities (a x b)	20-22%	41-44%
Rural sector		
d. Rural population as percentage of total (100% - a)	77%	55%
e. Share of rural labour input in non-agrarian activities(see text)	30%	59%
f. Resulting share of total population in market- oriented activities (d x e)	23%	32%
g. Share of rural labour input in agrarian activities (100% - e)	70%	41%
h. Share of rural agrarian labour input in market-oriented activities (see text)	30-40%	60-80%
i. Resulting share of total population in market- oriented activities (d x g x h)	16-22%	14-18%
Total share of labour input in market- oriented activities (c + f + i)	60-66%	87-94%

Sources: see text.

Population density in 1514 has been based on an estimated area of 4600 km² (see chapter 2).

9.3 Flanders

To all appearances in Flanders a high level of market orientation had been reached much earlier than in Holland, due to the county's early industrialisation and urbanisation. Towns first emerged in Flanders in the 10th century. Stimulated by the rise of the textile industry a phenomenal urban growth took place in the 11th and particularly the 12th century. By 1200 Flanders had become the most urbanised region in northern Europe, with Ghent, Bruges and Ypres as its main centres of industry and trade. The three cities continued to grow in the 13th and with the possible exception of Ypres also in the first decades of the 14th century. In the latter half of that century recurrent epidemics, warfare and structural problems in the textile industry heralded decline.³²

In contrast to Holland, Flanders had no medium-sized towns; besides the three large cities there were only small and very small towns. The development of these lesser towns between the middle of the 14th and the late 15th century displays a differentiated pattern. Although many small towns, especially the older drapery centres but also, for instance, the small port towns in the Zwin estuary, stagnated or declined in the 15th century, others developed favourably and expanded rapidly. The new industrial centre of Hondschoote is a good example, as are the ports of Ostend and Dunkirk.³³

The earliest reliable demographic information for Flanders is provided by the Flanders Transport of 1469, an assessment of the demographic and economic conditions of the Flemish towns and rural districts made for taxation purposes. The Transport is not complete, but in combination with other sources it does allow for an estimate of the population numbers in all of Flanders in the third quarter of the 15th century. By then about 35% of the Flemish population was living in towns. Around 47% of these townspeople lived in Ghent (about 60,000 residents) or Bruges (around 45,000). Another 40% lived in one of the eighteen small towns with a population of 2,000 to 10,000; among them was Ypres, which by this time had seen its population fall to under the 10,000 mark. The remainder, about 13%, lived in one of the many very small towns with fewer than 2,000 inhabitants.³⁴ By the year 1500 the urban ratio may actually have been somewhat lower than 35%, if only because in the intermediate years Ghent and Bruges experienced a marked decline.³⁵ This distribution of the urban population can be used to calculate the market orientation of the labour input of the urban population, using the same assumptions about agricultural activities in towns of

³² Nicholas, *Medieval Flanders*, 29-38, 112-115, 117-119, 130-131, 273-275, 305-306.

³³ Stabel, *Dwarfs among giants*, 34-43.

³⁴ Prevenier, 'Démographie'; for the towns slightly revised by Stabel, 'Demography and hierarchy', 210-213. Here Stabel's figure for the urban population (just over 224,000) and Prevenier's for the countryside (just over 423,000) have been combined to calculate the urban ratio of 35%.

³⁵ Stabel, *Dwarfs among giants*, 31-33. Paul Klep has in fact suggested a very significant drop in the urban ratio in the late 15th and early 16th century (Klep, 'Population estimates'), but his calculations are contested (cf. Stabel, *Dwarfs among giants*, 19-20).

varying sizes as in Holland. This results in a share of urban labour devoted to market-oriented activities of 92-97%.

Information for the middle of the 14th century is much more precarious. Population estimates for Flanders before the late 15th century are fragmentary and uncertain. Most likely the urban ratio in the 14th century was higher than in the 15th, but we do not know how much higher. Staying on the safe side, the urban ratio for the middle of the 14th century has here been estimated at 40%.³⁶ Total market orientation of urban labour input may also have been a little higher than in the late 15th century, but the absence of demographic data precludes a translation into quantitative terms. In the calculations levels of market orientation have therefore been kept at their late 15th-century level of 92-97%.

The countryside of Flanders can be divided into two quite distinct regions. Inland Flanders, covering perhaps three quarters of the total area of the county, consists of sandy or loamy soils that were mostly occupied during the early or high Middle Ages. There were some large farms owned by lords in this densely populated region, but smallholding prevailed and peasants retained secure property rights to their plots throughout the Middle Ages. The heavier soils of coastal Flanders were reclaimed later in time. The region was increasingly dominated by middle-sized and large farms; by the end of the Middle Ages the great majority of these farms was held in leasehold.³⁷ The degree of market orientation of agriculture in the two regions diverged.

The predominant agrarian system in inland Flanders has been described as a 'commercial peasant system'. Peasants were primarily focused on feeding themselves and their families, putting in large amounts of labour to increase yields on their small plots; but as part of their survival strategy they also produced for the market.³⁸ If only because of the larger provisioning needs of the Flemish cities in both food and raw materials for the textile industry, by the middle of the 14th century the share of labour input in market-oriented activities was probably at the high end of the range of 30 to 40% estimated for Holland (and England).

However market orientation of agriculture in inland Flanders most likely did not increase much in the late 14th and 15th century. Although Erik Thoen's detailed study of the agrarian economy in the inland Oudenaarde and Aalst districts does demonstrate a rising share of industrial commodities such as rape seed, hops and particularly flax, a large part of the agricultural sector remained geared to subsistence. By the middle of the 16th century peasants in the Oudenaarde district sowed at least half of their land with bread grains. There is good reason to believe they did not merely do this because of the high nutritional needs of flax and the crop rotation that had to be practised as a consequence, but also to satisfy the needs of their own families. Peasants owning less than two hectares cultivated bread grains on an even larger percentage of their plots than

³⁶ Stabel, *Dwarfs among giants*, 19.

³⁷ Soens and Thoen, 'Origins of leasehold', 32-34.

³⁸ Thoen, 'Twee gezichten', 76.

average (between 60 and 80%), whether grain prices were high or not, suggesting that most of their grain crop was intended for auto-consumption.³⁹ Larger farms no doubt produced for the market to a much greater extent, but the continued preponderance of small, mainly subsistence-oriented farms – in fact the number of small farms probably grew in the 15th century –⁴⁰ suggests that in inland Flanders the share of labour input in agriculture devoted to market-oriented activities underwent no significant changes between 1350 and 1500.

In contrast to inland Flanders, agriculture in coastal Flanders did experience a transformation in the late Middle Ages. In the early 13th century social structures in this newly reclaimed part of the county were reminiscent of the situation in Holland: the power of the count was strong, local lordship was relatively weak, and many peasants were freeholders. But whereas in Holland smallholding continued to exist until the end of the Middle Ages, in coastal Flanders leasehold gained weight from the 13th century onwards. This was accompanied by a process of land concentration: a minority of peasants accumulated substantial quantities of land at the expense of many others who lost their holdings. This process probably originated in the high costs of water management in the region, but it was accelerated by an institutional factor rooted in customary law: the so-called ‘right to abandon’, which allowed the count to expropriate landowners unable to pay their share in the expenses of dike maintenance or repair.⁴¹

The result was a predominance of middle-sized and large leasehold farms that mainly produced meat, dairy and commercial crops. The Veurne district is a good example. In the early 16th century the polders around Veurne were an important cattle farming region. Although very little information on the marketing of meat and dairy produced on the large farms in this district is available, there can be no doubt that most of these products were sold on the urban markets in the vicinity.⁴² The polders also produced large quantities of wheat and barley. Wheat was used as bread grain for the farmer’s family and the farm labourers, but the surplus was sold; the barley crop was almost entirely marketed.⁴³ In short, while in the early 14th century the market orientation of agrarian labour in coastal Flanders was probably not very different from the rest of the county, by the late 15th century it must have been considerably higher. An estimate of 70 to 80% (the same as for English tenant farming)⁴⁴ seems realistic.

Urbanisation rates in coastal Flanders were probably similar to those in inland Flanders. An accurate figure cannot be given: although late 15th-century population figures for towns and countryside are available per *casselry*, the five coastal *casselries* (the Franc of Bruges, Vier Ambachten, Veurne, Bergues and Bourbourg) all include parts of sandy inland Flanders as well as coastal polders.

³⁹ Thoen, *Landbouweconomie*, 706-707, 722-726, 840-842.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 876.

⁴¹ Soens and Thoen, ‘Origins of leasehold’, 43, 45, 47.

⁴² Vandewalle, *Geschiedenis van de landbouw*, 232.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 333-339.

⁴⁴ See below, section 9.4.

However since for these five casselries the urbanisation rate is 34%, virtually the same as for Flanders as a whole, there is no reason to believe that in the coastal region a much smaller, or larger, percentage of the population lived in towns than in the rest of the county.⁴⁵

However, differences did exist in the proportion of rural labour devoted to non-agrarian activities. As we saw in chapter 3, in the early 14th century Flemish towns became more aware of rural competition and increasingly tried to suppress rural cloth production. Spinning and other preparatory activities still took place in the countryside, but they were subordinated to the needs of urban industry. From the late 14th century the countryside of inland Flanders increasingly turned to linen production as an alternative, combined with the cultivation of flax. Even though the development of the rural labour force towards greater occupational diversity and market orientation was probably muted by urban dominance, a modest growth did take place. Van Bavel's calculations show that in the rural districts around Aalst and Oudenaarde the share of labour input in textile production rose slightly in the course of the 14th and 15th centuries, from about 15% to around 20%. Other proto-industrial activities did not acquire a prominent position.⁴⁶ Of course in Flanders too bakers, smiths and other artisans were active in the villages, selling their products to the local population. Assuming their numbers were similar to what they were in Holland, for inland Flanders the total share of rural labour input in non-agrarian activities can thus be estimated at about 20% in the early 14th and 30% around 1500.

For coastal Flanders there is no comparable detailed study, but the proportion of rural labour input devoted to non-agrarian activities appears to have moved in the opposite direction. In the early 14th century many smallholding peasants in the coastal region combined agriculture with activities specific for the region, such as peat-digging, salt making, fishing and dike maintenance.⁴⁷ In this they much resembled the peasants in Holland; a share of labour input going into non-agrarian activities of 30%, the same as in Holland for the middle of the 14th century, seems realistic. By the early 16th century, however, the number of smallholders had dwindled. Consequently the importance of non-agrarian labour in the countryside must have declined, from 30 to perhaps 20%.

A calculation along the lines of what has been presented for Holland leads to the conclusion that at the end of the 15th century two thirds to three quarters of total labour input in inland Flanders was devoted to market-oriented activities. In the middle of the 14th century this share had been only a little smaller (table 9.2).

⁴⁵ The ratio of 34% has been calculated from the population in the towns in the five coastal casselries (collected from the list given by Stabel, 'Demography and hierarchy', 210-211) and the rural population in these casselries (Prevenier, 'Démographie', 269).

⁴⁶ Van Bavel, 'Early proto-industrialization', 1116-1117, 1124-1125.

⁴⁷ Soens and Thoen, 'Origins of leasehold', 41; cf. the reference to the declining importance of proto-industry in the schedule on p. 33 of this article.

Table 9.2 Share of labour input in market-oriented activities, Flanders

	Mid 14 th century	Late 15 th / early 16 th century <i>Population 1469: c. 647,000</i> <i>Density: c. 76 residents per km²</i>
Urban sector		
a. Urban population as percentage of total (see text)	40%	35%
b. Share of urban labour input in market-oriented activities (see text)	92-97%	92-97%
c. Resulting share of total population in market-oriented activities (a x b)	37-39%	32-34%
Rural sector		
d. Rural population as percentage of total (100% - a)	60%	65%
e. Share of rural labour input in non-agrarian activities (see text):		
- <i>Inland Flanders:</i>	20%	30%
- <i>Coastal Flanders:</i>	30%	20%
f. Resulting share of total population in market-oriented activities (d x e):		
- <i>Inland Flanders:</i>	12%	20%
- <i>Coastal Flanders:</i>	18%	13%
g. Share of rural labour input in agrarian activities (100% - e):		
- <i>Inland Flanders:</i>	80%	70%
- <i>Coastal Flanders:</i>	70%	80%
h. Share of rural agrarian labour input in market-oriented activities (see text):		
- <i>Inland Flanders:</i>	30-40%	30-40%
- <i>Coastal Flanders:</i>	30-40%	70-80%
i. Resulting share of total population in market-oriented activities (d x g x h):		
- <i>Inland Flanders:</i>	14-19%	14-18%
- <i>Coastal Flanders:</i>	13-17%	36-42%
Total share of labour input in market-oriented activities (c + f + i)		
- <i>Inland Flanders:</i>	63-70%	65-72%
- <i>Coastal Flanders:</i>	67-74%	82-89%

Sources: see text.

Population density in 1469 has been based on an estimated area of 8500 km². This is the area of the current Belgian provinces of *West-Vlaanderen* and *Oost-Vlaanderen* plus Dutch *Zeeuws Vlaanderen* and the French *Westboek*.

The differences with Holland are clear: inland Flanders reached a higher level of market orientation at an earlier stage, but there was only very limited growth afterwards. In coastal Flanders the share of labour input devoted to market-oriented activities in the middle of the 14th century would at best have been only marginally higher than in inland Flanders. However, at the end of the Middle Ages the highly commercialised nature of agriculture in coastal Flanders would have implied a total share of labour input in market-oriented activities of 82 to 89%, almost as high as in Holland. It should be stressed, however, that the lowlands of coastal Flanders covered perhaps a quarter of the total area of the county. Moreover, population densities in this region were much lower than in inland Flanders.⁴⁸ For Flanders as a whole market orientation would therefore have been considerably below the Holland figure.

9.4 England

Demographic development in medieval England has been, and still is, the subject of scholarly debate: there is no general agreement on either the total population or the proportion living in towns before the middle of the 16th century. Towns in England emerged earlier than in Holland. Based on the references to urban land and houses in Domesday Book, by the late 11th century some 8 to 10 percent of a population of 1 to 2 million may have been living in towns. In the 12th and 13th century total population numbers soared. The more cautious estimates state that there may have been a little over 4 million people living in England at the end of the 13th century.⁴⁹ The progress of urbanisation, however, seems to have been fairly modest; for the late 13th century Campbell calculates an urban ratio of 15%. Lonely at the top of the urban hierarchy stood London, estimated by Campbell at 60,000 inhabitants, followed at a considerable distance by York (22,700). Of all townspeople 15% lived in one of these two large cities. In contrast to Flanders, England did have medium-sized towns of 10,000 to 20,000 inhabitants, but they were few. Only Bristol, Lincoln and Norwich qualified as such; together they were home to 6% of the urban population. Another 39% lived in towns with 2,000 and 10,000 inhabitants and the remaining 40% in towns with less than 2,000 inhabitants.⁵⁰

An earlier, less detailed estimate by Dyer arrives at a somewhat higher urban ratio of 20% for the year 1377. The main reason for the difference appears to be Dyer's much higher estimate of the average size of the smallest towns (the towns with less than 2000 inhabitants): 750 residents instead of the 340 implied in

⁴⁸ For the casselry of Veurne densities for the inland (sandy) and the coastal (polder) part respectively have been calculated by Vandewalle, *Geschiedenis van de landbouw*, 56-57.

⁴⁹ Many of the discussion on demographic development in the 12th, 13th and early 14th century is related to problems with interpreting Domesday Book information. For a survey: Britnell, 'Commercialisation and economic development', 9-12. For a recent addition proposing a two-phased model of growth: Langdon and Masschaele, 'Commercial activity', esp. 54-68.

⁵⁰ Campbell, 'Benchmarking medieval economic development', 11-18, 36.

Campbell's calculations. Dyer's higher urban ratio thus assumes an even higher proportion of the urban population living in the smallest towns than the 40% calculated by Campbell.⁵¹

Here Campbell's urban ratio of 15% has been taken as a minimum and Dyer's 20% as a maximum for the middle of the 14th century. Combining these two estimates with the implied distribution of the urban population over smaller and larger towns and assuming that in England, just as in Flanders and Holland, 50% of urban agricultural labour was devoted to production for the market, the total share of urban labour input going into market-oriented activities can be estimated at 89 to 94%.

The Black Death took the lives of perhaps half the population of England. Recovery did not begin until the early 16th century and only in the 17th or even the 18th century the population figure once more reached the level of around the year 1300.⁵² Whether in the late 14th and 15th century towns fared better or worse than the countryside is not quite clear. Recent research, based on a comparison of the returns for 100 provincial towns in the poll tax of 1377 and the lay subsidy of 1524/25, suggests that the urban ratio stabilised or may even have declined a little; the calculations below depart from the first of these two options.⁵³ The development of the market orientation of urban labour input is also open to debate. On the one hand there may have been more room for agricultural activities in and around the shrunken towns; however raised standards of living may also have stimulated market demand. Assuming the two trends more or less kept each other in balance, the market orientation of urban labour is taken to have stabilised since the 14th century.

In the countryside, estate surveys for the 12th century testify to the presence of other than strictly agrarian activities: they mention large numbers of millers, smiths and carpenters and also contain occasional references to other professions such as masons and weavers. Most of these people probably worked their land as well; some of them seem to have held that land as a 'service holding', rendering their specialised services to the lord of the manor in return. They can therefore certainly not be considered as purely market-oriented producers. But in the course of the 13th century the number of specialised craftsmen in the villages grew and the system of service holdings almost entirely disappeared, giving way to monetary rents.⁵⁴ Some regional specialisation emerged: growing urban demand gave rise to activities such as mining, charcoal burning, pottery and tile-making or commercial sea fishing and salt production, depending on local resources.⁵⁵

These activities were restricted to specific, often small, regions; moreover villagers usually combined them with agriculture. Therefore, probably only a

⁵¹ Dyer, 'How urbanized was Medieval England?', 174-176; Dyer, 'Small towns', 506, 510.

⁵² Hatcher, *Plague*, 55-63.

⁵³ Rigby, 'Urban population'. Rigby's article contains well founded criticism on the work of Alan Dyer, who on the basis of the same data claims a modest rise of the urban ratio.

⁵⁴ Harvey, 'Non-agrarian activities', 107-111.

⁵⁵ Britnell, *Commercialisation*, 113-114.

modest part of the labour force was involved in them. On the other hand there is no reason to believe the proportion of the English rural population engaged in providing basic services to their neighbours was much smaller than the rates assumed for Holland or Flanders. As demonstrated in chapter 3, to give just one example, many women occasionally sold bread and beer to other villagers, in England as well as in Holland. The issue can also be approached from another angle: the fact that about 40% of the peasantry did not have enough land to support a family must have induced people to look for ways to supplement their income.⁵⁶ Harvest time excepted, the agricultural sector could accommodate only limited numbers of wage labourers: non-agricultural activities provided an alternative. In short, Britnell's assumption that in total about 5% of rural labour input would have been devoted to non-agrarian activities seems an underestimation.⁵⁷ A rate of 10 to 20% sits more comfortably with the evidence for the Low Countries.

That takes us to the agrarian sector of the rural economy. In the late 13th and early 14th century seignorial agriculture was balancing between the needs of consumption and the attractions of the market. There were big differences depending on product, location and the needs of the lord's household. In the London region lay lords tended to sell a large part of their demesnes' grain harvest, whereas convents and colleges often transferred a considerable share to the central household in town. Still, for the London region as a whole an estimated 50% of the grain crop (after deduction of next year's seed) ended up in the market.⁵⁸ In more distant regions demesne grain cultivation was probably less commercialised, but the products of pastoral farming were frequently marketed. Peterborough Abbey, its manors scattered over the east Midlands, sold only a very small part of its grain crop, but about half the yield of the dairy herds and almost all of the wool from its sheep.⁵⁹

The seignorial sector probably only covered between one fifth and one third of the land under cultivation and produced a more or less corresponding part of agricultural output. Peasants, either villeiners or freeholders, were responsible for the rest.⁶⁰ The yardlanders, the most prosperous 25% or so of the peasantry, most likely followed strategies very similar to those adopted by manorial lords: they were influenced by market opportunities, but also by the subsistence needs of their own families and those of the village community that regulated land use on the open fields. An analysis of the lay subsidy roll of 1297 for 44 villages in Bedfordshire has shown that the taxable wealth of the top layer of the peasantry in these villages was to a large extent determined by the distance to the nearest weekly market.⁶¹ The correlation is particularly strong for wealth held in sheep,

⁵⁶ Dyer, 'Were peasants self sufficient?', 655.

⁵⁷ Britnell, *Commercialisation*, 115.

⁵⁸ Campbell *et al.*, *A medieval capital*, 74-75, 176.

⁵⁹ Biddick, *The other economy*, 72-73, 95, 109-110.

⁶⁰ Campbell, *English seignorial agriculture*, 56-60.

⁶¹ Biddick, 'Medieval English peasants', 828.

followed by the malting grains oats and dredge (a mixture of barley and oats), and by other livestock. For wheat, however, no correlation appears in the analysis, suggesting that the decision to cultivate bread grains depended on considerations of subsistence instead of on the market.

Yardlanders, at least in normal years, had a surplus to sell; according to Dyer's budget calculations they were able to market up to half of their grain crops and an even higher share of products like meat, dairy, eggs, fruit and vegetables.⁶² It is doubtful if the agricultural activities of those with more modest holdings were as much market-oriented as that, let alone those of the 40% of rural households with so little land that it could not sustain a family. Even this latter category may well have had a cow out on the common pasture and sold part of the dairy it produced, to give just one example of a market-oriented strategy. However, considering the fact that people who owned but little land already depended on wage labour for part of their sustenance anyway, they would probably have preferred to use most of what their tiny plots did render to reduce their dependency on the market and increase self-sufficiency. In total perhaps 40 to 50% of labour input in the seignorial sector and 30 to 40% in peasant agriculture may have been devoted to market-oriented production.

Between the early 14th and the late 15th century important changes in the English rural economy took place. For one, a higher standard of living gave rise to an increased demand for industrial products, stimulating further regional specialisation.⁶³ Consequently the proportion of rural labour input going into non-agrarian activities was no doubt higher in 1500 than it had been in 1300 or 1350. Court roll evidence suggests that in early 16th-century rural Norfolk just over a quarter of the rural population found (primary) employment in crafts and services.⁶⁴ Norfolk did belong to the most commercialised part of England: proportions were probably lower elsewhere. On the other hand many peasants and agricultural labourers may have combined agricultural work with part-time industrial activities: at the end of the Middle Ages this combination was quite common.⁶⁵ An increase of the share of rural labour input going into non-agrarian activities to 20 to 30% therefore seems reasonable.

Agriculture experienced changes as well. Direct management of demesnes declined strongly. Rising labour costs and declining prices eroded profits; in growing numbers lords decided they were better off as lessors than as managers. Between 1300 and 1400 the seignorial sector may already have been reduced by half and it continued to contract in the 15th century.⁶⁶ The former demesne lands, perhaps a fifth or a quarter of all agricultural land, were leased out to an emerging class of tenant farmers, many of them of peasant origin. Relationships between

⁶² Deduced from the calculations made by Dyer, *Standards of living*, 112-114. For the size of landholdings: *ibidem*, 119. Cf. Dyer, 'Were peasants self sufficient?', 656-660.

⁶³ Britnell, *Commercialisation*, 195-196.

⁶⁴ Whittle, *Agrarian capitalism*, 236.

⁶⁵ Dyer, *Standards of living*, 145-146.

⁶⁶ Campbell, *English seignorial agriculture*, 59-60.

lords and tenants changed and new methods of production and management were introduced: the lessees practised a large-scale, capital-intensive, specialised and highly commercialised type of agriculture.⁶⁷ For this group a share of 70 to 80% of labour input in cultivating marketable crops does not seem too high.

Changes in peasant agriculture were not as dramatic. As population numbers diminished many peasants were able to acquire land that fell vacant, thus enlarging their holdings. Some fields were converted into pasture and more peasants than before owned livestock. This gave them a better chance of producing a marketable surplus than their predecessors. On the other hand, just like manorial lords peasants were confronted with slack markets and falling prices.⁶⁸ In the end most yardlanders and half-yardlanders continued to practise mixed farming with a strong emphasis on grain cultivation, balancing between the needs of their own families and marketing opportunities.⁶⁹ Ultimately the proportion of labour input in market-oriented production in the peasant sector was probably not very different from the 30 to 40% reached in the early 14th century.

Combined these estimates suggest an increase of the share of labour input in market-oriented activities from 46 to 62% in the early 14th century to 57 to 71% by 1500: a considerable increase, but not on a par with developments in Holland.

Of course regional differences were substantial. In the most commercialised eastern part of England market orientation at the end of the Middle Ages was certainly at the top end of the ranges indicated for the country as a whole and may even have been a little above it, as a look at the county of Suffolk may demonstrate.⁷⁰ Landownership and social structure in Suffolk, one of the most densely populated counties of England, showed some special features. Manors were small in comparison to other parts of England, and most manorial lords exercised only limited powers. About 80% of the peasants were freemen. Smallholding prevailed: in the early 14th century about three quarters of all peasants, a higher share than in most other counties, had less than 10 acres of land. Communal land use arrangements were mostly restricted to pasturing rights: individuals could usually crop their lands as they saw fit.

Let us first have a look at the situation in the early 14th century. Manorial accounts suggest that in Suffolk commercialisation of the seignorial sector was at the high end of the scale indicated in table 9.3. This is probably also true for the peasant sector: as elsewhere those that held no more than a few acres probably gave priority to feeding their families, but middling and wealthy peasants were highly responsive to market forces. In the sources they are found selling grain, renting gardens and orchards, producing hemp and leasing the lord's dairy herds.

⁶⁷ Dyer, *Making a living*, 346-349.

⁶⁸ Dyer, *Standards of living*, 141-144, 148-149.

⁶⁹ Dyer, *Making a living*, 353.

⁷⁰ The following is based on Bailey, *Medieval Suffolk*, 21-27 (seignorial agriculture), 39-41 (peasant agriculture), 103-104 (communal regulations of land use), 129 (non-agrarian activities), and 153 (urbanisation).

Table 9.3 Share of labour input in market-oriented activities, England

	Early 14 th century	Late 15 th / early 16 th century
	<i>Population 1290: 4.0 million ? Density: 31 residents per km²</i>	<i>Population 1541: 2.8 million Density: 21 residents per km²</i>
Urban sector		
a. Urban population as percentage of total (see text)	15-20%	15-20%
b. Share of urban labour input in market-oriented activities (see text)	88-94%	89-94%
c. Resulting share of total population in market-oriented activities (a x b)	13-19%	13-19%
Rural sector		
d. Rural population as percentage of total (100% - a)	80-85%	80-85%
e. Share of rural labour input in non-agrarian activities(see text)	10-20%	20-30%
f. Resulting share of total population in market-oriented activities (d x e)	8-17%	16-26%
g. Share of rural labour input in agrarian activities (100% - e)	80-90%	70-80%
h. Share of rural agrarian labour input in market-oriented activities (see text):		
- seignorial sector:	40-50%	20-25%
- farmer tenants:		70-80%
- peasants:	30-40%	30-40%
i. Resulting share of total population in market-oriented activities (d x g x h):		
- seignorial sector:	5-11%	1-2%
- farmer tenants:		8-14%
- peasants:	13-24%	12-20%
Total share of labour input in market-oriented activities (c + f + i)	46-62%	57-71%

Sources: see text.

The estimated population in 1541 is given by Wrigley and Schofield, *Population history*, 208.

The division of labour input in the agriculture over the seignorial sector, farmer tenants and peasants is estimated at 20-30% : 0% : 80-70% in the early 14th century and at 5% : 20-25% : 75-70% by 1500.

Because of interdependencies between the components, the ranges indicated in the last line are narrower than summing up the lowest estimates and highest estimates for each of the components suggests (e.g. the share of non-agrarian and agrarian rural activities cannot both be at the high end of the indicated ranges at the same time).

Considering the fact that most holdings were too small to sustain a family, it is hardly surprising that many peasants supplemented their income with activities like sea fishing, brewing or petty retailing. The share of rural labour input in non-agrarian activities was therefore probably also at the high end of the range given

for England as a whole. All the same, urbanisation levels appear to have been moderate: despite the large number of small towns the urbanisation rate in the early 14th century was only about 15%. A calculation based on these assumptions arrives at an estimate of at most 60% of total labour input being devoted to market-oriented activities.

Between the early 14th and the early 16th century population numbers fell sharply, just as they did elsewhere in England, but despite demographic contraction the Suffolk economy did remarkably well.⁷¹ The rise of tenant farming and the yeomanry was not very different from developments elsewhere in England, but responding to a rising demand for meat and dairy from the much larger group of people that could now afford these products, Suffolk did experience a very pronounced shift to cattle farming. By the end of the 15th century cattle farming dominated the rural economy; this probably allowed agriculture to maintain its commercial orientation on the relatively high early 14th-century level.

Even more striking was the rapid rise of industries such as brick-making, leather working, and particularly textile production, likewise in response to raised living standards. Spreading from the older urban centres to small towns and villages, the textile sector offered employment to an increasing part of the rural population of Suffolk. According to Bailey by 1500 about one third of the rural population earned a living predominantly from crafts.⁷² To be sure, many combined this with agricultural work, holding on to their few acres of land to provide the household with some basic foodstuffs; but on the other hand many peasants and agricultural labourers probably found part-time employment in the cloth industry as well. It is therefore safe to assume that the total share of rural labour input going into non-agrarian activities was above the range indicated in table 9.3 for England as a whole: 30 to 40% (instead of 20 to 30%) does not seem unreasonable.

The rise of the textile industry also affected urbanisation. In contrast to the general trend in England the urban ratio in Suffolk increased markedly at the end of the Middle Ages: by the early 16th century about 30% of the Suffolk population lived in towns. A calculation that takes the raised estimates for the share of non-agrarian activities and the urban ratio into account, suggests that by the year 1500 a total share of at most 77% of labour input in Suffolk was devoted to market-oriented activities. This is more than in most other English counties, but it is still below the figure for Holland.

⁷¹ The following is based on Ibid.: 153 (population numbers), 213-226 (pastoral farming), 269-278 (industries), 245 and 288 (combination industrial work and smallholding), 279-286 (urbanisation).

⁷² Ibid., 294.

9.5 Conclusions

The aim of chapters 8 and 9 has been to test market performance in late medieval Holland by looking at two quantitative indicators: market integration in the previous chapter and market orientation in this one. As we saw Holland's advance on England and Flanders on the issue of market integration was limited. In contrast, the results for market orientation as presented in the current chapter suggest some striking differences. Admittedly, these results should be seen as indications. They are composed from estimates of the share of labour input devoted to market-oriented activities; some of these estimates are rooted in detailed research, but others are necessarily based on much less solid ground. Even so the tendency in table 9.4, which summarises the results, is clear.

Table 9.4 Share of labour input in market-oriented activities: Holland, Flanders and England

	Early/mid 14 th century	Late 15 th / early 16 th century
Holland	60-66%	87-94%
Flanders		
- <i>Inland Flanders:</i>	63-70%	65-72%
- <i>Coastal Flanders:</i>	67-74%	82-89%
England:		
- <i>Range for England as a whole:</i>	46-62%	57-71%
- <i>Suffolk (maximum figures):</i>	60%	77%

In Flanders a considerable level of commercialisation had been reached by 1350. After that market orientation rose markedly in the coastal area, but as virtually no progress was made in larger and more densely populated inland Flanders, for the county as a whole the increase of market orientation must have been limited. In early 14th-century England market orientation was relatively low. In the next century and a half commercialisation did increase, but even in the most commercialised eastern part of the country it did not reach the same level as in Holland. Here in the middle of the 14th century commercialisation was below the Flemish level, but by the early 16th century an impressive 90% or so of labour input was devoted to market-oriented activities. This high figure is based on three interrelated elements: a high urban ratio, the widespread presence of non-agrarian activities in the Holland countryside, and -despite the predominance of small family farms- the highly commercialised nature of agriculture.

These three elements are constituents of a commercialised economy rather than explanations for its rise. For that we need to look deeper, following the suggestions made in the previous chapter. Exogenous factors were no doubt important. For one, rising standards of living triggered changes in consumption

patterns. Common people in the post-Plague era could spend more on food, drink and clothing than their predecessors, thus stimulating market-oriented pastoral farming and encouraging the growth of urban industries. This happened in Holland; it also happened in coastal Flanders (at least with regard to cattle farming) and in Suffolk, and for that matter in other parts of Europe as well. A second exogenous factor regards Holland only. Because of the subsiding of the peat soil, bread grain cultivation in Holland became increasingly problematic from the late 14th or early 15th century onwards. Peasants adapted *en masse* to the new situation by shifting to pastoral farming and other forms of market-oriented agriculture, by taking up proto-industrial activities in the countryside or, very frequently, by a combination of both.

However adaptation was not automatic. Severe flooding and repeated harvest failure, especially since they were preceded by recurrent outbreaks of the Plague in the second half of the 14th century, might have been disastrous: they could well have led to serious decline and depopulation. This did not happen; on the contrary, population numbers recovered with remarkable speed from the impact of the Plague. Holland's society was apparently able to cope with adverse circumstances with relative ease.

The explanation for this resilience can only be found in endogenous factors, in turn related to the structure of society; among them are the favourable commodity market institutions discussed in the first two parts of this book. That institutions did indeed matter is also suggested by the case of Suffolk. Although Suffolk, in contrast to Holland, did experience a sharp demographic decline during the late Middle Ages, at the same time commercialisation increased more rapidly than in most other English counties. One of the factors -admittedly not the only one- that contributed to Suffolk's relative success was the way in which social structures encouraged entrepreneurship and trade.⁷³ In fact in some respects, such as the weak character of manorialism, the weakness of communal restrictions on land use, and the presence of many small towns that did not impose strict controls on trade and industry, Suffolk institutions are reminiscent of Holland rules and practices.

Returning to Holland, the least that can be said is that the strong growth of market orientation between 1350 and 1500 would not have been possible without an efficient organisation of commodity markets supporting it. Holland's favourable institutions did not generate high levels of commercialisation of their own accord; the process was ultimately triggered by exogenous forces. But the contribution of the institutional framework was nonetheless essential: it facilitated and supported flexible adaptation to changing circumstances.

⁷³ Ibid., 145, 290-293.

10. Conclusions

How to explain medieval Holland's rapid economic development from a largely agrarian region in the margin of European civilisation around the year 1200 to a highly urbanised and market-oriented society by the end of the Middle Ages? This book set out to explore the contribution of favourable commodity market institutions rooted in Holland's specific social and political structure -in turn related to the county's history of reclamation and settlement- to the rapid commercialisation Holland experienced. It focused on the organisation of commodity markets in Holland in the 13th, 14th and early 15th century and compared it to developments in England and Flanders (or the southern Low Countries in general), discussing institutions, the factors that gave rise to them, and their impact on market performance.

10.1 Endogenous factors

Let us begin with a sobering remark. In many respects commodity market institutions in Holland were not unique at all; indeed they closely resembled those in neighbouring countries. This is certainly true for the organisation of long distance trade: the system of brokerage in Dordrecht for instance functioned much as it did in the trade centres in the neighbouring countries. To a lesser extent it is also true for local and regional trade: practices like trading at informal Sunday gatherings near the church and urban bread price regulation were known in Holland as well as elsewhere in northwestern Europe.

In those areas where commodity market institutions in Holland do appear to differ from those in England or in the southern Low Countries, the effects of diverging historiographical traditions should be taken into account. Contrasts are sometimes exaggerated by the emphasis historians have placed on specific aspects. The literature on England, for instance, tends to underline the absence of urban coercion over the countryside and the uniformity of weights and measures imposed by national standards. However, upon closer look it turns out that in both issues there were exceptions and nuances that diminish the notion of English distinctiveness.¹

Having said this, we can also conclude that some very real differences did exist, and that these differences were indeed frequently rooted in diverging social and political relations. The reclamation of Holland's central peat district had given rise to a class of free peasants, who recognised the count as their sovereign but were not subjected to feudal ties. The manorial system, so prominent in many parts of England, had in Holland all but disappeared at an early stage. The count

¹ Cf. Epstein, 'Town and country', 3-4.

of Holland, although clearly growing in authority especially in the second half of the 13th century, did not command the same power over his subjects as the English king. On the other hand, in Holland towns were late to emerge. Once they did, urbanisation rates increased rapidly, but even by contemporary standards towns were all small or very small: no single metropolis dominating the urban network developed. Towns only slowly acquired political influence: even in the middle of the 14th century they were by no means in a position to dictate conditions, as the cities of Flanders frequently were. Periods of turmoil excepted - such as the civil war that in the 1340s and 1350s made the count vulnerable to urban demands - central and local power more or less kept each other in balance.

The society that emerged fulfilled, to a large extent, conditions for the development of beneficial economic institutions: a political constellation that provides effective constraints on rent-seeking by power-holders, and that gives power to a broad group of people with investment opportunities and therefore with an interest in securing property rights for all. Here the main characteristics of this society and the way these affected the organisation of commodity markets are summarised by focusing on four aspects: the balanced relation between state and towns, the weakness of seignorial control, the near absence of urban coercion over the countryside, and the limited role of guilds.

Central and local government

The early rise of a strong central state in England left a clear imprint on market institutions: central coordination and central regulation of trade was much more prominent than in Holland. Even if we take into account that due to the diversity of local practice English ambitions of centralisation and uniformity were never fully realised, the difference cannot be overlooked. Uniform standards for weights and measures, or central intervention in the enforcement of commercial contracts, established in England largely in the course of the 13th century, were virtually unknown in Holland until at least two centuries later.

The absence of central coordination in Holland had its drawbacks: fragmentation implied barriers to trade and thus, at least in theory, raised transaction costs. In practice these drawbacks were partly mitigated by processes of voluntary adjustment to shared norms, as is illustrated by the active role of towns in the creation of a common standard for the size of herring casks in the 15th century. More importantly, the absence of central regulation also had advantages: benefits that were perhaps less direct and less tangible, but that created, in the long run, conditions favourable to trade. After all, central regulation usually resulted from and in turn reinforced the powers of the state to exploit trade to its own advantage. Where it was absent, predation by the state was less likely to develop.

In the Low Countries, both north and south, control over market institutions was in the hands of local merchant elites, who had good reason to

promote rules and practices that prevented rent-seeking by the ruler or his officials. Local systems for the maintenance of weights and measures in the Low Countries were as effective and probably cheaper and less prone to abuse than the English centralised system. Likewise, comital taxation of international trade was largely restricted to the tolls on river transports, with rates that in comparison to the English wool customs were very modest indeed.

In Flanders there was, at least until the late 14th century, even less danger of squeezing by the ruler, but here the balance tended to tip over to the other side. The large Flemish cities were so powerful that they had little trouble pressuring the count into far-reaching concessions, frequently at the cost of others. Staple policies demonstrate this. Both Bruges and Ghent not only acquired important staple privileges, but they were also able to enforce these privileges in a wide district. Urban extraterritorial powers could be used to effectively block the economic development of other, smaller towns, as happened in the Zwin estuary.

Again, conditions in Holland were more likely to stimulate growth in the long run. Dordrecht did aspire to a privileged position similar to that of Ghent or Bruges, but it was not as successful in achieving this goal. It is true that thanks to the fact that the interests of the count and the town coincided – river tolls were easier to levy if trade was concentrated in Dordrecht – the town did have a propitious start as a staple town. Still, comital support was withdrawn more than once and even though the alliance was usually restored afterwards, the frequent interruptions provided a check on Dordrecht's power. They moreover made Dordrecht more vulnerable to the joint efforts of the many smaller river towns, aided at first by their lords but soon learning to form alliances among themselves, to diminish Dordrecht's privileged position, or to find ways around it.

Lords and rural communities

The impact of the position of lords and rural communities in Holland on the organisation of markets is best illustrated by a comparison with England. The strong position of the nobility and the persistence of manorialism gave English lords a degree of control over the peasantry that local lords in Holland could not equal. In the late Middle Ages English manorialism did change character. However, this did not mean lords released their grip on the local economy. It merely changed form: requisitioning, labour services and rents in kind made way for cash rents and impositions on various economic activities, including trade.

In their attempts to gain control over markets, English lords were sometimes restrained by the Crown, as becomes clear when under the *Quo Warranto* campaigns of the late 13th and early 14th century lords who held unauthorised markets or charged extortionate market tolls were called to order. However in many other instances central government left institutions that facilitated rent-seeking by lords in place. Regulation of weighing and measuring for instance was officially based on a system of uniform, national standards, but in

the middle of the 14th century Parliament formally authorised the existing custom of the use of manorial weights and measures suited to the needs of the manor's lord. In fact, in many ways central institutions provided a framework that not only tolerated but also actively supported seignorial rent-seeking. The right of many lords to fine transgressors of the national Assizes of Bread and Ale for instance allowed them to develop a lucrative system of retrospective licenses for the sale of these two basic foodstuffs on their lands.

Local lords in Holland, on the other hand, if at all present, had only limited powers. They simply were not in a position to exploit rural trade to the full. It is not a coincidence that the few exceptions to this rule are found in the coastal district, with its remnants of a manorial past: the abbot of Egmond, the lord of Voorne, and the lord of Wassenaer at some point in time did own markets and were entitled to at least part of the revenues of weighing and measuring. However, in the rest of the county the near absence of manorial structures, combined with the lack of urban control over the countryside discussed in the next section, gave rise to a tradition of informal rural trade. In the second half of the 14th century this tradition was to facilitate the rise of a new type of specialised rural trade venues with direct access to international trade networks: fish markets in coastal villages and rural weigh houses for dairy products. In this way the 'absence of a truly feudal past', in the words of De Vries and Van der Woude, did indeed favourably affect the organisation of medieval commodity markets.²

Rural communities in Holland were usually quite able to set their own economic course. Notably, villages in the north of the country seem to have taken the lead. In the late 13th century we thus find the Kennemerland villages Akersloot, Uitgeest and Wormer involved, together with many of Holland's towns, in a protest against the Dordrecht staple. As it happens, in the late 15th and early 16th century two of these three villages actively claimed the right to regulate local weighing and measuring themselves. Also, public weigh houses for dairy in the countryside emerged first – in the second half of the 14th century- in the north of Holland. Although the count leased out most of these facilities to individuals, some were exploited by the local community itself. This suggests that although the process of reclamation of the central peat district provides a partial explanation for the strong position of village communities in Holland, other factors contributed as well. The north-south gradient seems to indicate that a Frisian tradition of village autonomy, most prominent in the north of the Holland, played a part.

Towns and countryside

Village autonomy takes us to the third characteristic of the Holland society that affected market institutions: the near absence of urban coercion over the

² De Vries and Van der Woude, *First modern economy*, 159-160.

countryside. This aspect stands out best when contrasted to the situation in the southern Low Countries and particularly in Flanders, where towns frequently imposed regional trade monopolies in order to concentrate trade in a certain commodity within the town walls. Even though in practice these staples were sometimes hard to effectuate, there was a striking difference with Holland. Here urban monopolies were not common. If they existed, it was mainly in border regions, where monopolies were sometimes granted by the count in order to prevent a shift of economic activity and fiscal revenues to an adversary on the other side of the border. As a consequence, whereas in the southern Low Countries rural trade was mostly limited to local exchange, in Holland the near absence of urban restrictions allowed for the rise of a network of rural trade venues with direct connections to international trade routes.

Power relations, both between towns and central government and between social groups within towns, provide an important part of the explanation. Holland towns, when given the chance, did try to dominate their surroundings, as is shown by the attempts to prohibit rural industries and (in the case of Alkmaar) village markets when comital power was at a low during the civil war in the middle of the 14th century. However these experiments were short-lived: under less tumultuous conditions the authority of the count provided an effective check on urban ambitions. Moreover, the merchant elites that ruled the towns were not by definition opposed to rural markets: after all, rural trade venues were not only potential competitors but in many cases also convenient locations for urban merchants to purchase the products of commercialised agriculture and fishery.

Dordrecht was again an exception: from at least the early 15th century onwards the local authorities took steps to ensure that the population from the district of Zuidholland sold foodstuffs and raw materials exclusively in Dordrecht. Only in the late 15th and early 16th century did other towns also step up their attempts to restrict rural trade. The financial crisis of the late 15th century may have triggered urban awareness of the risks of rural competition, but the decisive factor that made change not only desirable from an urban perspective but also possible was the increased political influence of towns. In this respect Holland followed a course that contrasted to what happened in Flanders, and in fact in many other parts of Europe, where in the late Middle Ages the growing power of the state tended to reduce urban protectionism and urban coercion.³ Still, by the end of the 15th century facilities for rural trade were firmly embedded in tradition and privileges; rural communities in Holland were able to maintain at least part of their ability to resist urban domination.

Admittedly, the absence of a hierarchical relation between towns and countryside that characterised medieval Holland had mixed effects. Coordination across local boundaries was not self-evident. Because village courts traditionally had the same position in debt registration and debt recovery as urban courts,

³ Epstein, *Freedom and growth*, 84-85.

commercial conflicts between a burgess and a resident of a nearby village were not always easy to solve. In Flanders and Brabant the courts of the main cities had a prominent role in situations like this; in England central institutions offered a way out. In Holland neither was the case. Still, on the whole the disadvantages were outweighed by the benefits: the absence of urban dominance over the countryside opened possibilities for rural commercialisation and significantly reduced the risks of rent-seeking.

Merchant elites and guilds

Guilds, both merchant guilds and guilds of craftsmen and retailers, had only a very modest role in the shaping of commodity market institutions in medieval Holland. The reason is clear enough: in 13th-, 14th- and early 15th-century Holland only very few guilds were active. Merchant guilds, if they ever existed, disappeared at a very early stage: the only reference to a merchant guild in the Holland sources –it is from Dordrecht– dates from the year 1200. In most towns guilds of craftsmen and retailers emerged only in the second half of the 15th or even in the 16th century; only in Dordrecht a full-fledged system of guilds was already established by the year 1400.

Among historians the notion that guilds are nothing but instruments of elite rent-seeking that frustrate economic development is increasingly under attack. A growing group of scholars points to the benefits of guilds for the formation of human capital, the coordination of production and also the functioning of markets.⁴ With regard to this last aspect: merchant guilds did indeed provide a wide range of services that made trade safer in a time when the authorities were not able to do so, varying from protection on the road to bargaining power vis-à-vis predatory rulers and mechanisms for contract enforcement. Guilds of craftsmen could have positive effects on market performance as well: they offered a way to solve information asymmetries between buyer and seller by imposing standards for quality and quantity.

Medieval Holland had to do without these assets, but that does not appear to have been much of a problem: urban authorities provided the rules and enforcement mechanisms needed to regulate trade. Related to their late rise the young towns in Holland enjoyed self-government almost from the moment they came into being. The local court provided mechanisms for individual contract enforcement to traders and merchants almost from the start, facilitating, in the terminology of Greif, a smooth and early introduction of an individual responsibility system.⁵ Thus the foundation was laid for the later development of the strong position of the local court in the resolution of commercial conflicts. Local authorities in Holland also provided checks on quality and quantity of the

⁴ Epstein and Prak, 'Introduction: Guilds'; see also the other contributions in this volume.

⁵ Greif, 'Institutions and impersonal exchange'.

products of urban industries, in a way similar to how this was done by craft guilds in the southern Low Countries.

There obviously was a reverse side to the effects of guilds on the functioning of commodity markets: guilds had the potential to develop into vehicles for the exclusion of outsiders from the market. In this sense the near absence of guilds in the towns of Holland constituted an advantage. In the cities of Flanders there was, after the 12th century, no more need for merchant guilds as a substitute for urban jurisdiction than in Holland. Still, some of these guilds continued to exist for at least another century; merchant elites most likely used them as an instrument to defend their own interests. Holland escaped this particular type of institutional sclerosis. Even in Dordrecht the merchant elite was apparently unable to use the local guild as a vehicle for exclusion or rent-seeking once it had outlived its original function.

The absence of guilds of craftsmen and (especially) retailers had similar effects. In Flanders, and at that also in England, outsiders (non-burgesses, or non-guild members) often faced restrictions when they tried to gain access to urban markets. To be sure, complete exclusion was rare and for products in high demand restrictions were frequently lifted. Still, outsiders usually had to pay extra taxes or had to put up with less favourable trading conditions. In Holland restrictions of this type were not common until the end of the 15th or even the 16th century, at least not on market days: in many towns 'foreign' tradesmen were welcome at the weekly market on the same conditions as burgesses. In short, the overall assessment of the effects of the very limited role of guilds of retailers and craftsmen in medieval Holland on the organisation of markets is favourable: it did not harm market information, but it did enhance market accessibility.

Summing up, the single most striking element in the story is the weakness of both vertical ties (constraints ensuing from the exertion of lordly power) and horizontal ties (constraints ensuing from collectivities such as guilds) that characterised the organisation of commodity markets in Holland. It bears emphasizing that this did not mean that Holland was by definition at an advantage. The weakness of hierarchical and collective forces had benefits, but also drawbacks; to a large extent their relative weight depended on circumstances of time and place.

A good example is the creation, by seignorial initiative, of a dense network of rural markets and fairs in 13th and early 14th-century England. This development is characteristic for the control the English king on the one hand and lords on the other were able to exert over trade. When in the 12th century it became clear that there was money to be made out of controlling trade, the Crown successfully claimed the right to install a market or fair as a royal prerogative. Lords with a keen eye for the gains commerce could bring strove to acquire a market license. As a result, literally thousands of these licenses were granted between the late 12th and the middle of the 14th century. At that point in time this may well have stimulated the progress of rural commercialisation: it

offered tenants and smallholders a nearby outlet for their surplus products and provided those with little or no land with a way to buy the food they could not grow. But in the late 14th century patterns of supply and demand changed. Higher standards of living led to an increased demand for products that until then had been a luxury: meat, leather, fresh fish, dairy and higher quality textiles. The growth of specialisation and interregional trade that resulted was better served by another type of marketing infrastructure: the less formal, low-cost and flexible trade venues that thrived in rural Holland.

If this line of reasoning also applies to the trade monopolies imposed by the cities of Flanders is doubtful. It is perhaps tempting to believe that coercion was a good thing when trade volumes were still small in order to support urban investments in a commercial infrastructure, to provide peasants with a stable market or to prevent free-riding,⁶ but this notion is not supported by the facts. Both Bruges and Ghent only resorted to coercion at a later stage in their development, when they were already flourishing trade centres. This suggests that something else than the good of society at large was the driving force here: elites used their growing power to bend the institutional framework to sustain their wealth. Elites in Holland towns tried to do the same, but they were blocked by countervailing powers.

Change set in at the end of the Middle Ages. The specific character of the Holland society paled: the balance of powers changed and market institutions changed with it. The main effect in the short term was an increase of urban protectionism and urban exploitation of the countryside. However, by then favourable institutions were well embedded in law and tradition: they came under pressure, but could not be budged altogether.

10.2 Exogenous factors

It can be concluded that the balance of powers characterising social and political relations in Holland did indeed give rise to commodity market institutions that reduced opportunities for power-holders to exploit trade at the expense of others and thus were able to enhance market efficiency. However this does not necessarily mean that the internal characteristics of society were the only elements that shaped the institutional framework, nor that the institutions that developed were the only factors that determined market performance. Few scholars would contest that exogenous factors played a part as well; still, most likely as a reaction to the stress placed on these factors until quite recently, there is a tendency among the adepts of new institutional economics to focus exclusively on endogenous elements. In reality both endogenous and exogenous factors contribute; the challenge is to find out how the two interacted.

⁶ Epstein, 'Town and country', 14.

We already saw that institutions in Holland frequently resembled institutions in neighbouring countries a good deal, even though political and social relations diverged widely. The resemblance cannot only be attributed to identical economic problems triggering similar solutions. At least in part similarities are explained by a process of institutional migration: rules, practices and organisational arrangements that had developed elsewhere and had proven to be successful were simply copied. Interregional commercial contacts facilitated this process. Timing played a part: Holland was able to profit from its position as a latecomer. Opportunities for adopting effective practices from other, more advanced regions were plentiful. In more than one respect the southern Low Countries, with their early commercial prominence, appear to have been a source of institutional inspiration for Holland. In some cases the sources actually suggest a south-to-north trajectory of introduction of trading rules and customs in Holland: for instance in the replacement of the duel by truthfinding methods of proof in debt conflicts or in the extension of the immunity from arbitrary arrest traditional for fairs to weekly markets.

Institutional migration is not automatic. Holland may have learnt from the example of others, but it was a selective learning process. The selection was at least in part determined by pre-existing institutions, and by the social and political relations characterising Holland's society. However there is reason to believe that when economic needs were more pressing than usual, endogenous factors mattered less. The rules and practices shaping the internal grain trade in Holland did not diverge as much from those in neighbouring countries as those regulating trade in most other commodities. Some (although not all) of the towns in Holland's few grain producing regions enjoyed regional grain trade monopolies, even if these were uncommon for other products; and just as in the neighbouring countries the severe grain shortages of the 15th century were countered with a combination of export restrictions, forestalling prohibitions, regulation of private grain stocks and sometimes also by public grain purchases and distributions. The vital needs of grain provisioning apparently removed some of the factors that under other circumstances may have prevented the adoption of 'foreign' institutions.

It is possible to take the argument one step further. The propitious development of the interregional sea fish trade and the dairy trade that rural Holland experienced after the middle of the 14th century was primarily driven by a rising demand for a greater variety of high quality foodstuffs, at home and abroad. Institutions like the village beach markets and the weighing facilities for dairy in the countryside did not generate the growth of this trade, although they did facilitate and most likely also reinforce it. In other words: it is not just that institutions can be moulded by exogenous factors as well as by endogenous ones, but also that market performance is not exclusively determined by institutions, whatever their origin.

The conclusion that exogenous factors directly affected market performance is supported, firstly, by the chronology of events. After all, the basic social and political relations that provided the foundation for a favourable set of commodity market institutions in Holland were already in place well before the middle of the 14th century, but only when at the end of that century patterns of supply and demand changed, the Holland economy was able to make its jump-start. Apparently favourable institutions by themselves did not generate growth as long as other stimuli were absent.

The role of exogenous factors is also demonstrated by the results of quantitative tests, even though these necessarily -because of scarcity of reliable quantitative data- are limited in scope. Although in the first half of the 15th century internal market integration in Holland was probably not better than in England or in the southern Low Countries, external integration was relatively good; that is, prices on Holland's wheat markets moved more closely in concert with prices on wheat markets abroad than they did in England or in the southern Low Countries. Moreover, external integration was not only high in periods of dearth but also when prices were low.

Compared to the modest differences in the level of market integration, the divergence in the development of market orientation between Flanders, England and Holland is striking. In Flanders, a considerable level of commercialisation had been reached by the middle of the 14th century: about two-thirds of labour went into market-oriented activities. However, with the exception of the coastal region, progress after that was limited. In England, market participation in 1350 was most likely significantly below the Flemish level, but by 1500 it had just about caught up. In Holland changes were even bigger: by the middle of the 14th century market orientation was probably a little below the Flemish level, but in the early 16th century an astonishing 87 to 94% of labour was devoted to market-oriented activities.

It is clear that this rapid commercialisation would not have been possible without an efficient organisation of commodity markets supporting it. However, that does not necessarily mean that favourable institutions were the direct cause. Against the background of the analysis of the institutional framework presented above, a more complex course of events seems more likely. The direct stimulus to commercialisation was provided not by institutions, but by exogenous factors: changes in demand and supply related to demographic changes in the second half of the 14th century (a pan-European phenomenon), and to the ecological crisis that around the same time took place in the Holland peat lands and initiated a shift away from bread grain production. However, Holland peasants, craftsmen and merchants were able to make the most of the new economic opportunities that came with these changes, because commercial institutions allowed for an adequate response. In short: favourable commodity market institutions in medieval Holland were a necessary condition for high market performance, but by themselves did not suffice to generate it.

10.3 Commodity markets and factor markets

This book has focused exclusively on commodity markets, but of course the rise of commodity markets constituted only part of the process of commercialisation in medieval Holland: markets for land, labour and capital developed as well. If anything, the transformation experienced by these factor markets appears to have been even more drastic. The availability of recent research results on the organisation of factor markets in medieval Holland makes it possible to place the development of commodity market institutions discussed in this book in a wider perspective.⁷

Basically, the main features of commodity market institutions in medieval Holland identified above – the weakness of both hierarchical and collective ties – can also be discerned in factor market institutions in medieval Holland. In fact, on the whole the specific character of Holland's society does seem to have left a more profound impact on the organisation of factor markets than on the structure of commodity markets. As a consequence, differences between Holland, England and Flanders were more striking for factor markets than for commodity markets.

The land market in Holland was in many ways shaped by the ubiquity of free and individual landownership. This stimulated the rise of a real estate market unencumbered by restrictions on exchange. The notion that consent of a manorial lord was needed to transfer land, common for villein holdings in England, did not exist; impositions on transfers, in England but also in Flanders commonly levied by lords, were low or even absent. Moreover, customary prohibitions to sell land to non-peasants or non-family members were few.⁸

The characteristics of the capital market were affected by those of the land market, with which it was intimately connected: land after all was the single most important collateral for long-term loans. In England, the rise of the capital market was probably slowed down by the constraints on villein land; in any case a market for *renten*, the main instrument used to create funded debt in Holland and also in the southern Low Countries, did not develop. Moreover, because of the competition of royal, manorial and ecclesiastical courts, in England local courts did not have the same central position in the registration of land and capital transfers as their counterparts in the Low Countries. As a consequence, reliable information on property rights was not as easily available. Differences with the southern Low Countries are at first sight not as striking, but they are nonetheless essential. In the south, urban courts used their monopoly in the registration of transfers to reinforce their domination of the surrounding countryside. In Holland,

⁷ This research was carried out at Utrecht University in the years 2001-2007 within the framework of the collective research project 'Power, Markets and Economic Development: The Rise, Organisation and Institutional Framework of Markets in Holland, Eleventh – Sixteenth Centuries'.

⁸ Van Bavel and Hoppenbrouwers, 'Landholding and land transfer', 22-24, 26.

village courts maintained their central position in land and capital markets, thus providing the rural population with a stronger position in both.⁹

Holland's labour market was to a large extent defined by early personal freedom. Whereas in England labour markets were characterised by restrictions on mobility ensuing from either feudal obligations or, in the wake of the Black Death, central labour legislation such as the Statute of Labourers, in Holland neither existed. Corvée labour, common in many parts of Europe, was only employed in exceptional situations in Holland, such as severe flooding or an acute threat of war. Admittedly, this was also true for the southern Low Countries, but there flexibility and mobility on the labour market, or at least on the urban segment of it, was restricted by guild regulations on access to the trade and employment conditions. In Holland, the late rise of craft guilds implied that regulations of this type were not introduced on a significant scale until the late 15th century.¹⁰

Why did endogenous factors –the social and political relations that characterised the Holland society– leave a deeper imprint on factor market institutions than on commodity market institutions? Three possible explanations come to mind. The first is one of timing. Both in Holland and elsewhere commodity markets were the first to develop; factor markets emerged at least two centuries later. Despite the scarcity of sources we may safely assume that in some places in Holland small-scale commodity markets already existed in the 12th century and quite possibly earlier than that. Continuity of a trade function dating back to the late Carolingian era, in for instance Vlaardingen, Valkenburg, Medemblik or Muiden, cannot be ruled out. This might imply that some of the most basic institutions regulating commodity trade date back to a time when the large scale reclamation of the peat district had not yet taken place, and the specific characteristics of the society that Holland was going to become had not yet developed. Thus commodity market institutions would, from the beginning, have been based on the same principles as those in adjoining regions, which would in turn have directed the course of their later development. However, this line of reasoning attributes a very profound influence to what at best can only have been a thin and rather superficial layer of early market institutions; it is hard to believe that they would have had a lasting impact once the political context changed.

A second consideration focuses on the process of migration of institutions. Commodity trade crosses boundaries frequently and easily: trade contracts between merchants may have facilitated the migration of institutions developed elsewhere. Examples are not hard to find. We saw how the Cologne standard weight was used in interregional trade throughout the Rhine delta; we also saw that once that was the case, Cologne weights became the standard on many local

⁹ Zuiderduijn, *Medieval capital markets*, 184-190, 262, 265-266.

¹⁰ Kuijpers, 'Who digs the town moat?', 8-10, 23-29; Kuijpers, 'Labour legislation', 12-15.

markets as well. To be sure, medieval factor markets were by no means purely local or regional either. However, at least for the land market and the labour market the parties that determined the institutional framework (landowners and landuser, and employers and labourers respectively) may not have had the same international outlook as merchants.

Thirdly and finally, by their nature factor market institutions were probably closer to the most basic values of life and therefore more firmly embedded in the fabric of society. As in almost all pre-modern societies, in Holland land and descent were constituents of power. Land ownership to a very large extent defined the status of an individual in society: not just his economic position, but also his role in the family, his social status and his political influence.¹¹ Therefore, the way land markets were organised, and by implication also the organisation of the capital markets that developed from these land markets, was intimately linked to the basic characteristics of society. To a lesser extent the same is true for labour: then, as now, labour determined a person's position in life. Labour market institutions, especially if they relate to aspects like labour mobility or remuneration, cannot be easily be disentangled from the society they are part of. Although the movable goods a person owns matter for status as well, they do not have the same defining quality. That would explain why the link between commodity market institutions and the structure of society is not as tight; commodity market institutions might simply be more adaptable to exogenous forces.

In fact this confirms the notion that for an explanation of the rapid commercialisation of Holland in the Middle Ages an analysis of commodity markets alone does not suffice: a wider perspective is needed. Be that as it may, clearly the characteristics of society that determined the organisation of factor markets had an impact on commodity markets as well, and even though by itself this would not have been sufficient to generate economic growth it did help to improve the efficiency of these markets. The Holland towns that in 1457 raised their voices against the fish staple in Naarden because it clashed with the tradition of a free fish trade were of course biased: this particular interpretation best suited their own interests.¹² Still, there was a core of truth in their statement: in Holland restraints on trade, although not absent, were in many respects relatively mild, allowing people to make full use of commercial opportunities once these presented themselves.

¹¹ Van Bavel and Hoppenbrouwers, 'Landholding and land transfer', 24.

¹² The protest against the Naarden fish staple is discussed in chapter 4.

Nederlandse samenvatting

Marktinstituties in de middeleeuwen

De organisatie van goederenmarkten in Holland, ca. 1200 – ca. 1450

In de late middeleeuwen ontwikkelde Holland zich in hoog tempo van een vrijwel geheel agrarisch gebied in de periferie van de Europese beschaving tot een sterk geurbaniseerde en gecommmercialiseerde samenleving. In dit boek wordt onderzocht welke bijdrage de organisatie van goederenmarkten, geworteld in de ontginnings- en occupatiegeschiedenis van het gebied, leverde aan deze ontwikkeling. Het boek bespreekt de instituties -het geheel van regels, gewoonten en praktijken- die het functioneren van de markt bepaalden, hun herkomst en hun effecten, en vergelijkt de situatie in Holland met die in Vlaanderen (of als de beschikbaarheid van data dat nodig maakt met de zuidelijke Nederlanden in zijn algemeenheid) en met Engeland.

Tot de 11^e eeuw bestond het gebied dat later Holland genoemd zou worden grotendeels uit veenmoerassen; alleen in de kuststrook en langs de rivieren was permanente bewoning mogelijk. De eerste steden begonnen zich pas aan het eind van de 12^e eeuw te ontwikkelen. Vanaf de laatste decennia van de 13^e eeuw maakte de Hollandse economie echter een snelle ontwikkeling door die de samenleving ingrijpend veranderde. Vooral in de tweede helft van de 14^e eeuw en de vroege 15^e eeuw voltrok zich een ware transformatie. De urbanisatiegraad nam snel toe; scheepsbouw, bierbrouwerij en textielnijverheid groeiden uit tot bloeiende exportindustrieën. Op het platteland maakte akkerbouw plaats voor op de markt gerichte veehouderij en de teelt van handelsgewassen; plattelanders combineerden het werk op de eigen boerderij bovendien vaak met niet-agrarisch loonarbeid in dijk aanleg of -onderhoud, visserij, turfwinning of transport. Deze dynamiek stond in schril contrast met de verschijnselen van stagnatie en verval in andere delen van laat-middeleeuws Europa.

Eerdere verklaringen voor deze opvallende ontwikkeling richtten zich grotendeels op de tweede helft van de 14^e eeuw. In Holland werd door inklinking van de veengrond de verbouw van graan geleidelijk steeds moeilijker. Dat had twee elkaar versterkende gevolgen. De overstap naar de minder arbeidsintensieve veehouderij leidde tot een arbeidsoverschot: dit gaf een impuls aan de stedelijke nijverheid en de opkomst van proto-industriële activiteiten op het platteland. Tegelijkertijd werden grootschalige graanimporten noodzakelijk. Dat stimuleerde een specialisatie in producten zoals zuivel, vlees, haring, textiel en bier; producten waarnaar vraag bestond op de stedelijke markten in de binnen- en buitenland dankzij het feit dat na de pestepidemieën de koopkracht gestegen was. Toch

bevredigt deze redenering niet helemaal. Nog afgezien van enkele problemen met de chronologie -de inhaalslag van Holland lijkt al ruimschoots vóór 1350 begonnen te zijn en graanverbouw werd waarschijnlijk pas ná 1400 onmogelijk- had de samenloop van een demografische en een ecologische ramp ook anders kunnen uitpakken: verpaupering en ontvolking waren net zozeer realistische scenario's.

Dit boek vult de bestaande verklaringen aan op een aspect waaraan tot nog toe niet systematisch aandacht is besteed: de wijze waarop goederenmarkten georganiseerd waren. Volgens de theorie van de nieuwe institutionele economie zijn markten meer dan neutrale, spontane ontmoetingsplaatsen van vraag en aanbod. Hun functioneren wordt bepaald door regels, gewoonten en gebruiken, die op hun beurt weer gevormd worden door sociale en politieke verhoudingen. In middeleeuws Holland weken die verhoudingen op een aantal punten af van de situatie in de buurlanden. De ontginning van het centrale veengebied in de 11^e tot 13^e eeuw had geleid tot de opkomst van een stand van vrije boeren die wel het gezag van de graaf erkenden, maar die eigenaar waren van hun grond en niet onderworpen waren aan een lokale heer. Het hofstelsel, dat in Engeland domineerde, was in Holland al vroeg verdwenen. De macht van de graaf van Holland nam in de 13^e eeuw weliswaar toe, maar bleef in vergelijking met die van de Engelse koning beperkt. Anderzijds kwamen de steden pas laat op en bleven ze klein. Daar waar de Vlaamse steden de landspolitiek domineerden, groeide de politieke invloed van de Hollandse steden slechts geleidelijk. Pogingen om het omringende platteland te domineren, zoals in Vlaanderen gebruikelijk was, waren althans tot het midden van de 15^e eeuw meestal weinig succesvol; alleen Dordrecht vormde hierop een uitzondering. Kortom: in Holland was mede als gevolg van de specifieke ontginnings- en occupatiegeschiedenis een situatie ontstaan waarbij de graaf, de steden, de adel en de plattelandsgemeenschappen elkaar min of meer in evenwicht hielden. De machtsbalans die op deze manier ontstond betekende dat voldaan werd aan een belangrijke voorwaarde voor de ontwikkeling van gunstige marktinstituties.

Een deel van de handel, en vermoedelijk betrof het in de Middeleeuwen een aanzienlijk deel, vond plaats op vaste plaatsen en tijden: op fysieke markten. Deze markten staan centraal in het eerste deel van het boek. In hoofdstuk 2 komen allereerst de jaarmarkten aan de orde. Holland kende geen grote internationale jaarmarkten, maar er waren wel tal van kleine jaarmarkten. Het overgrote deel was gesitueerd in een van de Hollandse steden; bijna alle steden hadden een jaarmarkt en vele hadden er zelfs twee of meer. Veel jaarmarkten blijken al te dateren uit de vroege 14^e, de 13^e of zelfs de 12^e eeuw. Net als in Engeland en in de zuidelijke Nederlanden dankten de oudste jaarmarkten hun ontstaan vermoedelijk aan hun ligging nabij een hof. Vanaf het midden van de 13^e eeuw daarentegen was de belangrijkste impuls voor het ontstaan van jaarmarkten gelegen in de economische behoeften en ambities van de steden. Zij zagen jaarmarkten als een stimulans voor

de handel: via de door de graaf en de stad zelf gewaarborgde marktvrede boden deze markten veiligheid aan kooplieden. Vooral voor kleine handelaren en boeren boden ze bovendien goede mogelijkheden om snel en tegen relatief lage kosten kopers voor hun waren te vinden.

Daar waar in Engeland na 1350 nauwelijks nog nieuwe jaarmarkten tot stand kwamen, bleef het aantal in Holland groeien. De marktvrede speelde daarbij steeds minder een rol: in toenemende mate voorzag het reguliere recht in de behoefte aan veiligheid. Wel bleken de kostenvoordelen die jaarmarkten boden goed aan te sluiten bij de behoeften van de opkomende veehouderij. Verschillende van de jaarmarkten die in deze periode opkwamen speelden, overigens naast andere vormen zoals weekmarkten en permanente handel, een rol in de interregionale handel in zuivel, vee en later ook paarden. Ook in de eerste helft van de 15^e eeuw kwamen er nog nieuwe jaarmarkten bij, maar niet meer zoveel als voorheen. Dat hing vermoedelijk samen met een lager tempo van economische groei in deze periode. Diverse conflicten tussen steden over jaarmarkten illustreren dat in deze periode een zeker verzadigingspunt bereikt was, al bleven jaarmarkten gedurende de hele middeleeuwen (en nog geruime tijd daarna) populair.

Jaarmarkten mogen in Holland dan vooral een stedelijk verschijnsel zijn geweest, dat betekende zeker niet dat er op het platteland niet gehandeld werd. Rurale markten staan centraal in de hoofdstukken 3 en 4. Hoofdstuk 3 concentreert zich op de ontwikkelingen in de 13^e en vroege 14^e eeuw. In Engeland kwamen in die periode grote aantallen week- en jaarmarkten op het platteland tot ontwikkeling. Voor Holland blijken de aantallen zoveel lager te liggen, dat dat niet alleen het gevolg kan zijn van minder betrouwbaar bronnenmateriaal. Ook in Vlaanderen waren er weinig rurale markten, maar de verklaringen die daarvoor aangevoerd kunnen worden -de sterke verstedelijkingsgraad in combinatie met de extra-territoriale bevoegdheden die het steden mogelijk maakte handel op het platteland te onderdrukken- golden voor Holland in deze periode niet. Wel van invloed was waarschijnlijk de goede toegankelijkheid van de markten in de Hollandse steden: beperkingen voor anderen dan de eigen burgers, zoals die in Engeland en in Vlaanderen regelmatig voorkwamen, waren in Holland meestal afwezig. Daarnaast ontbrak in Holland een machtige landadel. Juist die groep trachtte in Engeland markten tot stand te brengen, omdat dat mogelijkheden bood voor inkomstenverhoging via belastingheffing en rechtspraak. In Holland ontbrak deze stimulans voor een vroege ontwikkeling van een dicht netwerk van formele markten op het platteland. De afwezigheid van zowel heerlijke als stedelijke dominantie bood echter wel meer ruimte voor de ontwikkeling van een traditie van informele handel.

Hoofdstuk 4 laat zien dat juist die traditie in de periode na 1350 een voordeel bleek. Aan het eind van de 14^e en het begin van de 15^e eeuw ontstond op het platteland van Holland een nieuw type markten, vaak met directe aansluiting op interregionale handelsnetwerken. Langs de Noordzeekust ontwikkelde zich een

reeks van informele vismarkten op het strand; op het platteland in het noorden van Holland ontstonden kleinschalige dorpswagenvoor kaas en boter. Deze voorzieningen boden vissers en boeren gelegenheid om de producten van een zich specialiserende rurale economie af te zetten. De opkomst van deze markten werd weliswaar gestimuleerd door ontwikkelingen aan de vraagzijde en de groei van de interregionale handel, maar kan alleen verklaard worden door ook de machtsbalans tussen steden, graaf, heren en plattelandsgemeenschappen in de beschouwing te betrekken. Naast een zwak heerlijk gezag en het nagenoeg ontbreken van stedelijke dwang valt op dat dorpsgemeenschappen vaak goed in staat waren hun economische belangen te verdedigen. Het succes van de strandmarkten voor zeevis was bijvoorbeeld mede te danken aan de tolvrijstellingen op de Hollandse binnenwateren die enkele vissersdorpen wisten te bemachtigen en aan de rol van deze dorpen in de protesten tegen stapeldwang van de vishandel. Een goed voorbeeld is ook de geslaagde actie van de Katwijkse vissers om aan het eind van de 14^e eeuw de Katwijkse vismarkt van Katwijk-Binnen naar de kust te doen verplaatsen. De opkomst van de dorpswagenvoor kaas en boter in het noorden van Holland is naar alle waarschijnlijkheid mede toe te schrijven aan de traditie van lokaal zelfbestuur die juist in dit deel van het graafschap sterk was ontwikkeld. Illustratief is het feit dat enkele wagenen in het gebied door de graaf verpacht werden aan dorpen; daarmee werd aangesloten op de West-Friese gewoonte om rechten die de graaf elders verpachtte of in leen uitgaf aan individuen in handen te leggen van een dorpsgemeenschap.

In andere delen van Europa -Vlaanderen vormt een goed voorbeeld- ontstonden aan het eind van de Middeleeuwen met de groeiende macht van de centrale staat meer mogelijkheden voor rurale handel; barrières opgeworpen door de steden werden geleidelijk uit de weg geruimd. Holland ontwikkelde zich juist in tegenovergestelde richting: de macht van de steden groeide en hun controle over het platteland nam toe. Maar de basis voor een institutioneel raamwerk dat gunstig was voor de rurale handel was toen al gelegd. In veel gevallen bleek dat raamwerk sterk genoeg om op zijn minst gedeeltelijk weerstand te bieden aan de pogingen van de steden om de rurale handel aan banden te leggen.

Met een bespreking van de stapelmarkt van Dordrecht keren we in hoofdstuk 5 terug naar een stedelijke omgeving. Dordrecht vormde in de Hollandse context, waarin niet-economische beperkingen op handel meestal niet aan de orde waren, een bijzonder geval: de Dordtse stapel berustte immers juist wel op privileges en dwang. Het ontstaan van de stapel is terug te voeren op een combinatie van twee omstandigheden: de macht en rijkdom van de stedelijke elite, samenhangend met de vroege opkomst van de stad, en de relatie tussen de stapel en het voor de graaf zo belangrijke systeem van riviertollen. De alliantie tussen de graaf en de Dordtse elite bleef tot het eind van de Middeleeuwen bestaan, en daarmee bleek ook de stapel een taai instituut. Toch leidde deze alliantie niet tot buitensporige heffingen op de rivierhandel: de lastendruk bleef bescheiden, zeker in vergelijking tot de extreem hoge uitvoerrechten die de koning van Engeland

kon heffen op de wollexport via de Engelse wolstapel. Ook blijkt de stapeldwang ontwikkelingsmogelijkheden van andere steden in de rivierdelta bepaald niet op voorhand onmogelijk gemaakt te hebben. De Vlaamse steden Brugge en Gent waren dankzij hun politieke macht en extra-territoriale bevoegdheden beter in staat onwelkome competitie te onderdrukken dan Dordrecht.

Detailstudies van de stadjes Brielle en Schoonhoven laten zien dat externe omstandigheden een rol speelden: deze steden konden profiteren van de opkomst van handel in nieuwe producten zoals haring en zuivel, waarvoor geen stapelplicht gold. Maar endogene factoren leverden ook een bijdrage. Brielle en Schoonhoven hadden in hun strijd tegen de Dordtse stapel aanvankelijk voordeel van het feit dat ze beide vielen onder een heer (of vrouwe) met een relatief autonome positie die in staat was tegenwicht te bieden tegen het gezamenlijk optreden van de graaf van Holland en de Dordtse elite. Al in de 14^e eeuw kwam daarvoor een ander mechanisme in de plaats: door onderling allianties te vormen wisten de Hollandse steden weliswaar niet het einde van de stapel te bewerkstelligen, maar wel de reikwijdte ervan te beperken en de negatieve effecten aanmerkelijk te verzachten.

In het tweede deel van het boek komen instituties aan de orde die niet aan een specifieke plaats en tijd gebonden waren. Hoofdstuk 6 behandelt de organisatie van meten en wegen, als onderdeel van een bredere groep van regels en gewoonten die van invloed waren op de afstemming van vraag en aanbod. Op het eerste gezicht lijkt er op dit punt een groot verschil te bestaan tussen Holland en Engeland; een verschil dat is terug te voeren op de verhouding tussen centrale en lokale autoriteiten. Beide wilden maten en gewichten onder hun gezag brengen; fiscale motieven speelden daarbij een grote rol. In Engeland ontwikkelde zich al in een vroeg stadium een nationaal stelsel van maten en gewichten en werd ook de handhaving op nationale leest geschoeid: op die manier werd belastingheffing op import en export door de kroon vergemakkelijkt. In Holland ontstond juist een sterk gefragmenteerd stelsel. Hier waren het de stedelijke autoriteiten die het gezag over maten en gewichten verwierven en daarmee de heffing van de voor de stedelijke financiën zo belangrijke accijnsen faciliteerden. In de praktijk waren de verschillen echter minder groot dan ze leken. De Engelse uniformiteit werd deels aangetast toen in de 14^e eeuw het Parlement zijn groeiende invloed ging gebruiken om uitzonderingen op het gebruik van de nationale standaarden te bedingen ten behoeve van vooral de landadel, en in Holland werden lokale maten vaak juist vrijwillig aangepast aan standaarden die in het interregionale handelsverkeer gebruikelijk waren. Daarnaast was het sterk gelaagde Engelse handhavingstelsel gevoeliger voor fraude en misbruik dan het decentrale Hollandse.

De organisatie van meten en wegen in Holland was grotendeels vergelijkbaar met de situatie in de zuidelijke Nederlanden: ook hier gold het primaat van de stadsbesturen. Toch lijken er in Holland twee punten te zijn waarop de sociale en politieke verhoudingen doorwerken. Ten eerste laat de harmonisatie van de maat van de haringtonnen in de eerste helft van de 15^e eeuw

zien dat de Hollandse steden soms initiatief namen om tot onderlinge afstemming te komen. Ten tweede blijken vanaf de tweede helft van de 15^e eeuw dorpsautoriteiten actief op te treden in het reguleren van de lokale maten en gewichten. In beide gevallen was de opkomst van de interregionale handel vermoedelijk de aanjager, maar kon men daarop vlot inspelen dankzij enkele karakteristieken van de Hollandse samenleving: in het eerste geval het ontbreken van een duidelijke stedelijke hiërarchie en de ervaring die de steden inmiddels hadden met het sluiten van allianties, in het tweede de traditie van autonomie van dorpsgemeenschappen.

In hoofdstuk 7 komen vervolgens instituties aan de orde die vooral van invloed zijn op de veiligheid. Meer specifiek bespreekt dit hoofdstuk de manieren waarop de naleving van afspraken en overeenkomsten in de handel kon worden afgedwongen in de talrijke situaties waarbij betaling en levering niet gelijktijdig plaatsvonden. Elders in Noord-West Europa zien we in deze periode koopliedengilden ontstaan als oplossing voor dit probleem. Het gilde kon als gemeenschap verantwoordelijk worden gesteld als een lid zijn verplichtingen jegens een derde niet nakwam. In de Hollandse steden waren gilden van inheemse kooplieden echter zeer uitzonderlijk: de enige vermelding dateert uit het jaar 1200 en komt uit Dordrecht. Vermoedelijk hangt dat samen met het feit dat nagenoeg vanaf het moment dat de steden ontstonden, ter plaatse gerechten functioneerden die in staat waren commerciële conflicten te beslechten. Holland kon daarmee vroeg overgaan van systeem van gemeenschappelijke op een systeem van individuele verantwoordelijkheid. Dat hangt samen met het feit dat men gebruik kon maken van modellen die elders ontwikkeld waren: verschillende procedures voor het verhalen van schulden die in de Hollandse steden toegepast werden, zijn waarschijnlijk overgenomen uit de zuidelijke Nederlanden. Toch bleef de lokale context belangrijk: vaak was in het Hollandse gewoonterecht al een basis aanwezig die het mogelijk maakte de meer geavanceerde methoden uit het zuiden snel in te voeren.

Ondanks tal van overeenkomsten verschilden de procedures voor schuldrechtspleging in Holland op één punt van die in de buurlanden: de registratie van commerciële schulden. In Holland konden partijen een schuld laten registreren voor het lokale gerecht, zowel in de stad als op het platteland. Daarmee werd het voor de crediteur mogelijk om via een betrekkelijk eenvoudige procedure van inbeslagneming een debiteur die in gebreke bleef te dwingen zijn verplichtingen na te komen. In de zuidelijke Nederlanden werden de dorpsgerechten op dit punt verdrongen door de rechtbanken van de grote steden. In Engeland vond registratie alleen in steden plaats; voor transacties met anderen dan stadsgenoten trad bovendien een zekere concentratie op in het beperkte aantal steden waar aanvullende verhaalsmogelijkheden geboden werden door de Kroon. De justitiële autonomie van de lokale gerechten in Holland had als nadeel dat bestuurlijke grenzen een struikelblok bleven bij het afdwingen van contractuele verplichtingen, maar daar stond tegenover dat stedelijke dominantie

van het platteland werd voorkomen en dat een actieve rol van de lokale gerechten in het beslechten van commerciële conflicten werd gestimuleerd.

In het derde en laatste deel van het boek wordt aan de hand van twee kwantitatieve indicatoren getoetst of goederenmarkten in Holland daadwerkelijk beter functioneerden dan markten in Vlaanderen of Engeland. De eerste van deze twee indicatoren betreft de integratie van markten; als de hypothese dat een gunstig institutioneel kader zich vertaalt in lagere transactiekosten juist is, dan mag immers verwacht worden dat markten relatief goed geïntegreerd zijn. In hoofdstuk 8 wordt daarom gekeken naar de ontwikkeling van tarweprijzen in de eerste decennia van de 15e eeuw. De resultaten steunen de hypothese maar gedeeltelijk. De volatiliteit van de tarweprijzen op de Hollandse graanmarkten was in deze periode niet minder groot dan in de zuidelijke Nederlanden of in Engeland. Omdat we alleen beschikken over goede prijsgegevens uit de omgeving van Leiden is moeilijk te zeggen in hoeverre prijsbewegingen binnen Holland onderling gecorreleerd zijn; dat lijkt weliswaar in hoge mate het geval, maar gezien de geringe afstanden tussen de locaties is dat niet bijzonder. Wel tekent zich een verschil af ten aanzien van de externe integratie: de bewegingen van prijzen op de graanmarkten van Holland vertonen een nauwe samenhang met prijsfluctuaties op graanmarkten in het buitenland, niet alleen in perioden van duurte maar ook in normale jaren. In de zuidelijke Nederlanden en in Engeland was de koppeling met de ontwikkelingen op buitenlandse markten aantoonbaar minder sterk. De achtergrond hiervan ligt naar alle waarschijnlijkheid voor een belangrijk deel in het feit dat de bevolking van Holland in hoge mate afhankelijk was van graanimporten. Anderzijds is het de vraag of het noodzakelijke robuuste en wijdvertakte interregionale handelsnetwerk opgebouwd had kunnen worden als er geen sprake was geweest van een institutioneel kader dat zich kenmerkte door een goede toegankelijkheid van markten en het grotendeels ontbreken van restricties op handel.

De tweede indicator is de marktorientatie, in hoofdstuk 9 gemeten via het aandeel van de beroepsmatige arbeid dat besteed werd aan op de markt (in plaats van op zelfvoorziening) gerichte activiteiten. Ramingen gebaseerd op cijfers over de urbanisatiegraad, over niet-agrarische activiteiten op het platteland en over de commercialisatie van de landbouw laten zien dat op dit punt de verschillen tussen de ontwikkelingen in Holland, Vlaanderen en Engeland groot waren. In het midden van de 14e eeuw was in Vlaanderen al een aanzienlijk niveau van commercialisatie bereikt: ongeveer twee-derde van de beschikbare arbeid werd besteed aan marktgerichte activiteiten. Met uitzondering van de kuststreek, waar zich een sterk gecommmercialiseerde landbouw ontwikkelde, was daarna de voortgang op dit punt echter uiterst beperkt. In Engeland lag de oriëntatie op de markt rond 1350 ruim onder het niveau voor Vlaanderen, maar aan het einde van de middeleeuwen was die achterstand min of meer ingelopen. In Holland trad een veel grotere verschuiving op. Midden 14e eeuw lag de oriëntatie op de markt iets

onder het niveau van Vlaanderen, maar rond 1500 werd al ongeveer 90% van de arbeid gestoken in marktgerichte activiteiten. Opnieuw speelt het feit dat de verbouw van broodgraan in Holland na 1350 steeds moeilijker werd een belangrijke rol; maar daarnaast kan ook hier aangevoerd worden dat zo'n forse groei van de marktorientatie alleen maar mogelijk was als deze kon steunen op een efficiënte organisatie van goederenmarkten.

Al met al vertoont de organisatie van goederenmarkten in middeleeuws Holland weliswaar tal van overeenkomsten met die in de buurlanden, maar toch ook een aantal belangrijke verschillen. Die verschillen zijn in ieder geval voor een deel terug te voeren op de ontstaans- en ontginningsgeschiedenis van het gebied. De evenwichtige relatie tussen staat en steden, de geringe macht van de adel, het nagenoeg ontbreken van stedelijke dwang ten opzichte van het platteland en de beperkte rol van gilden maakten het mogelijk dat zich marktinstituties ontwikkelden die gunstige voorwaarden boden voor commercialisatie. Toch was de aanwezigheid van een gunstige institutioneel raamwerk alleen niet voldoende om de snelle commercialisatie die zich na het midden van de 14^e eeuw voltrok tot stand te brengen. Daarvoor was ook een directe stimulans nodig, gelegen in exogene ontwikkelingen: de opkomst van de interregionale handel als gevolg van veranderingen in de vraag en de ecologische veranderingen die zelfvoorzienende graanverbouw onmogelijk maakten. Het gunstige institutioneel kader was, kortom, een noodzakelijke, maar geen voldoende voorwaarde: het maakte het mogelijk economische kansen te benutten, maar genereerde die niet.

Appendices and references

Appendix A Survey of fairs

The Dutch medieval sources mention two concepts that are both translated as ‘fair’ in English: the *jaarmarkt*, which is mainly a commercial event, and the *kermis* which is primarily a festival. The *kermis* usually has roots in a religious feast, most often the commemoration of the dedication of a local church; the *jaarmarkt* sometimes has religious origins as well, but in many other cases there seems to be no such connection.¹ The survey is restricted to fairs as commercial institutions: the *jaarmarkten* in the Dutch sources. The only two *kermissen* that have been included are those in late 15th-century Amsterdam, as the Amsterdam by-laws frequently refer to trade at the *kermissen*: it is clear that despite the title these events had a commercial role besides a social and religious one.

Sources

The survey is based on:

- A systematic check of a large body of edited sources of both central government and local authorities, consisting of collections of charters, accounts and by-laws. Titles can be found in the second column of the survey. The most productive publications –for this purpose– turned out to be the following five well-known editions:
 - o A.C.F. Koch, J.G. Kruisheer and E.C. Dijkhof, eds., *Oorkondenboek van Holland en Zeeland tot 1299*, volume I-V (The Hague, 1970-2005) (indicated in the table as OHZ; volume V was published when this part of the research had already been completed and has therefore not been checked systematically. Instead for the last decade of the 13th century and the first years of the 14th century an older edition of comital charters has been used: L.P.C. van den Bergh and J. de Fremery, eds., *Oorkondenboek van Holland en Zeeland*, volume II (Amsterdam / The Hague 1866).
 - o F. van Mieris, ed., *Groot charterboek der graaven van Holland en Zeeland en beeren van Vriesland*, volumes II-IV (Leiden, 1753-1756) (volume I has not been checked as for the 8th to 13th centuries the OHZ is virtually exhaustive)..
 - o J.F. Niermeyer, ed., *Bronnen voor de economische geschiedenis van het Beneden-Maastricht*, volume I, 1104-1399 (The Hague 1968).
 - o H.G. Hamaker, ed., *De rekeningen der grafelijkeheid van Holland onder het Henegouwsche huis*, volumes I and II (The Hague 1875)
 - o D.E.H. de Boer, D.J. Faber and H.P.H. Janssen, eds., *De rekeningen van de grafelijkeheid van Holland uit de Beierse periode*, volumes II, *De rekeningen van de rentmeesters van de domeinen, 1393-1396* and III, *De rekeningen van de gerechtelijke ambtenaren* (The Hague 1983).
- A systematic check of the comital accounts for the years 1450 and 1500. The revenues from the count's domains, which included the tolls for several fairs in small towns and in villages, were collected by stewards who had to report to the treasury every year. Most accounts have been preserved; they are now in the Nationaal Archief, Archief Grafelijkheidsrekenkamer of Rekenkamer der Domeinen van Holland, Afgehoorde en gedeponeerde rekeningen (indicated in the table as GRRek). The accounts for the following domains have been checked: Noordholland; Zuidholland; Kennemerland en Westfriesland; Voorne; Gouda, Schoonhoven en 't land van Stein; Woerden; Arkel, Van der Leede en Schoonrewoerd; Schoonhoven; Putten; Strijen;

¹ For the difference between *jaarmarkt* and *kermis* in the Middle Ages and their partial convergence in the early modern period: Noordegraaf, *Atlas Nederlandse marktsteden*, 24-25.

Heusden; Beverwijk en Noordwijk; Amstelland, Waterland en Zeevang; Muiden en Gooiland; Texel en Wieringen.

In the (few) cases where the year 1450 or 1500 was missing, the nearest available year has been checked instead. Whenever a previously existing fair was no longer mentioned in an account, the accounts for the previous year and the next year were also consulted in order to make sure the fair had really ceased to exist.

In addition use has been made of:

- A mid 16th-century merchant manual titled *Een zeer huerbuerlic registre ofte Handbouck voor alle man*.² This booklet provides all kinds of information of use to merchants in the Low Countries, for instance on the value of coinage, the effect of tides on the accessibility of the main ports, and also the dates and locations of fairs. However the information on this latter element is incomplete: several fairs that according to other sources took place in the middle of the 16th century are not mentioned in the *Huerbuerlic registre*. Perhaps the *Huerbuerlic registre* gave only the fairs that had a function in interregional trade, but even of that we cannot be sure. Therefore this manual is only used as a supplementary source of information: as confirmation of the (continued) existence of fairs known from other sources.
- Secondary literature on individual towns or fairs. These works have mainly been used to supplement information on the continuation of medieval fairs in the 16th century (and sometimes beyond).

The survey

The survey presents the following information:

- column 1: the location (town or village) of the fair;
- column 2: the year in which the fair is first mentioned (in bold printing if the reference regards an official license) plus the source of this reference.
- column 3: the year (or period) in which the fair was last mentioned in the sources that were consulted, plus the source of this reference.
- column 4: the sources of additional references to the fair between the first and the 'last' date.
- column 5 shows if the fair is mentioned in the *Huerbuerlic registre* or not.
- column 6: the date of the fair, i.e. the day on which it started and its official duration. Both date and duration are usually mentioned in a license where it exists. However it should be remembered that small changes in dates were probably frequent; also it is usually not clear if the duration that is recorded is the duration of the fair itself or that of the safeguard, which normally covers a longer period.
- column 7: additional remarks; anything that concerns a license (for instance licenses granted to fairs already recorded at an earlier stage) is in bold printing.

Not included in the survey are:

- A fair in Hoppenisse, on the border with Utrecht, granted to lord Zweder van Beusekom by the bishop of Utrecht in 1271. By the time this region was incorporated in the county of Holland, the village of Hoppenisse had ceased to exist.³
- Two fairs in Schoorl, reputedly granted by duke Philip the Good of Burgundy. Schoorl certainly did have two important cattle fairs at a later stage; the license for these fairs which according to the villagers had been destroyed during the 'troubles' in the 1570s was

² *Een zeer huerbuerlic registre* (Ghent 1544).

³ OHZ III, nr. 1566; Niermeyer, *Bronnen Beneden-Maasgebied*, nr. 75.

confirmed by the Estates of Holland in 1609 and again in 1623.⁴ But although according to local historian R.P. Goettsch the original license had been granted in 1446, no evidence in the primary sources has been found to support this assumption.⁵

On a regional level fairs were often scheduled consecutively. As an example, the table below reproduces the schedule of fairs in the north of Holland (Kennemerland, Westfriesland, Waterland and Zeevang) around the year 1450 as it can be deduced from the survey.

Fairs of which the existence in 1450 is not certain are in italics. The dates of the ‘middle’ and ‘last’ fair in Monnickendam are unknown; therefore they have not been included in the schedule.

Month	Location	Date	Official duration
March	Hoorn	Palm	
April	Alkmaar	One week after Easter	3 weeks
May	Monnickendam	Week before Pentecost	
	Hoorn	Pentecost	
June	<i>Medemblik</i>	<i>June 5 or 12</i>	<i>2 weeks</i>
	Haarlem	June 24	
	<i>Egmond</i>	<i>June 24</i>	
July	Beverwijk	July 15	1 week
	Akersloot	July 25	
	<i>Grootebroek</i>	<i>July 25</i>	
August	Hoorn (dairy fair)	August 10	1 week
	Alkmaar	August 24	3 weeks
September	Enkhuizen	Sunday before September 14	2 weeks
	Alkmaar	September 16	1 week
	Beverwijk	September 28 or October 1	1 week
October	Haarlem	October 18	2 weeks

⁴ *Register van Hollandt en Westvrieslandt*, 1607-1609 p. 810 and 1623-1626 p. 214; Regionaal Archief Alkmaar, Stadsarchief Alkmaar inv nr 2318).

⁵ Goettsch, *Schoorl*, 42. Goettsch refers to Lams, ed., *Groot privilegie en handvestboek Kennemerlandt*, but this edition of source material contains no reference to fairs in Schoorl, nor is it mentioned in the a list of privileges in the local archives (Regionaal Archief Alkmaar, Oud Archief Schoorl, inv nr. 15) or in the comital registers of this period (Nationaal Archief, Archief Grafelijkheidsrekenkamer, part I; the inventory gives excerpts of the contents of the ‘Rood register A’ and the ‘Eerste Geluwe register P’).

Survey of fairs in Holland, 12th – 15th centuries

Location	First reference	'Last' reference	Other references in between first and 'last'	In Huerbuerlic registre?	Date (first day; duration)	Remarks
Akersloot	1367/68 (NA AGH 1553 f16)	1500 (NA GRRek 927 16v,17v)	De Boer, <i>Rekeningen grafelijkeid</i> , 24-25; Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek</i> III, 691; NA AGH 1559 f9 ff, NA GRRek 859 f6v ff	no	July 25 (St. James); unknown	
Alblas / Alblasserdam	1331 (Hamaker, <i>Rekeningen grafelijkeid</i> I, 330)	1534 (Smit, <i>Rekeningen Hollandse tolln</i> , 340)	De Bruin, <i>Alblasserdam</i> 6, 3; Smit, <i>Rekeningen Hollandse tolln</i> , 279	no	July 25 (St. James; in 16 th c); unknown	
Alkmaar	1339 (Van Mieris, <i>Groot Charterboek</i> II, 626)	1526 (Boomkamp, <i>Alkmaar</i> , 68-70)	Hamaker, <i>Rekeningen grafelijkeid</i> I, 47; II, 271, 362; NA AGH 1568 f20 ff	yes	Aug 24 (St. Bartholomew) / Aug 26; 3 wks	At least one of these three fairs formally licensed in 1339 already existed in 1272 (<i>OHZ</i> III, nr. 1583)
Alkmaar	1339 (Van Mieris, <i>Groot Charterboek</i> II, 626)	1526 (Boomkamp, <i>Alkmaar</i> , 68-70)	Hamaker, <i>Rekeningen grafelijkeid</i> II, 271, 362; Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek</i> III, 160, 177; NA AGH 1568 f20 ff	yes	Mo one wk after Easter / Thu before Easter; 3 wks	
Alkmaar	1339 (Van Mieris, <i>Groot Charterboek</i> II, 626)	1344 (Hamaker, <i>Rekeningen grafelijkeid</i> II, 362)		no	July 25 (St. James); 3 wks	
Alkmaar	1343 (Hamaker, <i>Rekeningen grafelijkeid</i> II, 271)	1344 (Hamaker, <i>Rekeningen grafelijkeid</i> II, 362)		no	Sept 29 (St. Michael) / Oct 2 (St. Bavo); unknown	

Location	First reference	'Last' reference	Other references in between first and 'last'	In Huerlic registre?	Date (first day; duration)	Remarks
Alkmaar	1343 (Hamaker, <i>Rekeningen grafelijkheid</i> II, 271)	1344 (Hamaker, <i>Rekeningen grafelijkheid</i> II, 362)		no	Mid Lent; unknown	
Alkmaar	1379 (Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek</i> III, 357)	1526 (Boomkamp, <i>Alkmaar</i> , 68-70)		no	Sept 19 (3 d before St. Matthew); 1 wk	The 1379 charter refers to this fair as the second fair to be established in Alkmaar
Amsterdam	(c. 1460 Breen, <i>Rechtsbronnen Amsterdam</i> , 76)	16th c (Kistemaker, <i>Amsterdam marktstad</i> , 81)	Breen, <i>Rechtsbronnen Amsterdam</i> , 203, 304-305, 309	no	Late September (dedication of the church); unknown (safe-conduct lasts 2 wks)	Amsterdam's market rights were temporarily withdrawn in 1301, but it is not clear if these market rights included a fair.
Amsterdam	(1494 Breen, <i>Rechtsbronnen Amsterdam</i> , 316-317)	16th c (Kistemaker, <i>Amsterdam marktstad</i> , 81)		no	Lent / 2nd Wed in March; unknown (safe-conduct lasts 2 wks)	
Beverwijk	1298 (OHZV, nr. 3430)	1547 (NHA, ASGB 40)		no	July 15 (<i>Scheiding der Apostelen</i>); 1 wk	
Beverwijk	1298 (OHZV, nr. 3430)	1547 (NHA, ASGB 40)		no	Sept 28 (day before st. Michael) / Oct 1 (St. Bavo); 1 wk	
Brielle	before 1445 (De Jager, <i>Keuren Brielle</i> , 171-174)	1551 (Van Alkemade, <i>Beschrijving Briele</i> II, 171-173)		yes	Sa before Nov 25 (Sa before St. Catharine / Nov 21; 9 days	

Location	First reference	'Last' reference	Other references in between first and 'last'	In Huerbuerlic registre?	Date (first day; duration)	Remarks
Delft	1317 (Hamaker, <i>Rekeningen grafelijkeheid</i> I, 39)	1500 (NA GRRek 334 f55v-56)	Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek</i> II, 837; III, 183-184; IV, 1082; Hamaker, <i>Rekeningen grafelijkeheid</i> I, 39, 189; II, 128; De Boer, <i>Rekeningen grafelijkeheid</i> , 59; NA GRRek 283 f21	yes	Sept 1 (St. Giles) / Aug 29 (St. John decollatio; unknown	
Delft	1246 (OHZ II, nr. 680)	1500 (NA GRRek 334 f55v-56)	Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek</i> II, 837; III, 183-184; IV, 1082; Hamaker, <i>Rekeningen grafelijkeheid</i> I, 39, 189; II, 128; De Boer, <i>Rekeningen grafelijkeheid</i> , 59; NA GRRek 283 f22; several references to the fair as date of payment	no	June 12 (St. Odolf); unknown	
Den Haag	1334 (Hamaker, <i>Rekeningen grafelijkeheid</i> I, 184)	1500 (NA GRRek 334 f47)	Hamaker, <i>Rekeningen grafelijkeheid</i> II, 21, 126; NA GRRek 283 f17v.	yes	Around Nov 25 (around St. Catharine); unknown	
Den Haag	1407 (NA AGH 203 f32)	1500 (NA GRRek 334 f47)	GRRek 283 f17v.	yes	April 24 (1 wk before May 1) / May 8; 2 wks	according to the 1407 charter: fair for cattle and horses
Dordrecht	1342 (Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek</i> II, 665)	17th century Boots, <i>Kermis</i> , 27		yes	Oct 10 (10 days after St. Bavo) / Fri after Oct 10 (Fri after St. Victor) / Oct 18; 2 wks	

Location	First reference	'Last' reference	Other references in between first and 'last'	In Huerbuerlic registre?	Date (first day; duration)	Remarks
Dordrecht	1331 (Hamaker, <i>Rekeningen grafelijkheid</i> I, 147)	17th century Boots, <i>Kermis</i> , 27		no	June 5 (St. Bonifatius); 8 days	
Dordrecht	1342 (Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek</i> II, 665)	17th century Boots, <i>Kermis</i> , 27	Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek</i> II, 680-681; III, 358; Fruin, <i>Oudste rechten Dordrecht</i> , 114-115, 304-305	yes	May (26 days after Easter); 2 wks	
Edam	1357 (Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek</i> III, 31-35)	1357		no?	Su 2 wks before Easter (Judica); 8 days	The three fairs are not mentioned in the comital accounts over 1350-1375; in the 1450 account they are referred to as declined. The Edam fair mentioned in the 1544 <i>Huerbuerlic registre</i> is probably new.
Edam	1357 (Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek</i> III, 31-35)	1357		no?	June 24 (St. John); 8 days	
Edam	1357 (Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek</i> III, 31-35)	1357		no?	Su after Oct 1 (Su after St. Bavo); 8 days	
Egmond	c. 1140 (Vis, <i>Historia</i> , 124-125)	1215 (OHZ I, nr. 357)		no	June 25 ? (St. Adalbert); unknown	The late 14th-century accounts of Egmond abbey mention a toll in Egmond, but it is not clear whether this is the toll of the fair (Hof, <i>Kloosterrekeningen</i> , 129).

Location	First reference	'Last' reference	Other references in between first and 'last'	In Huerbuerlic registre?	Date (first day; duration)	Remarks
Enkhuizen	1356 (Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek</i> II, 831-835)	1565 (<i>Handtvesten Enchuysen</i> , 85-86)	<i>Handtvesten Enchuysen</i> , 32	no	Aug 22 / 26 (4 / 8 days before St. John decollatio); 2 wks	
Geertruidenberg	1213 (<i>OHZ I</i> , nr. 334)	c. 1400 (Mollenberg, <i>Onuitgegeven bronnen Geertruidenberg</i> , 144-145)	<i>OHZ III</i> , nr 1683; Niermeyer, <i>Bronnen Benedenmaasgebied</i> , nr. 270.	no	According to the 1213 charter the three fairs take place in July, Oct and Nov.	
Geertruidenberg	1213 (<i>OHZ I</i> , nr. 334)	c. 1400 (Mollenberg, <i>Onuitgegeven bronnen Geertruidenberg</i> , 144-145)	<i>OHZ III</i> , nr 1683; Niermeyer, <i>Bronnen Benedenmaasgebied</i> , nr. 270.	no	According to the c. 1400 by-law the four fairs start on July 1 (day before Visitation of Mary),	
Geertruidenberg	1213 (<i>OHZ I</i> , nr. 334)	c. 1400 (Mollenberg, <i>Onuitgegeven bronnen Geertruidenberg</i> , 144-145)	<i>OHZ III</i> , nr 1683; Niermeyer, <i>Bronnen Benedenmaasgebied</i> , nr. 270.	no	July 13 (St. Margaret), Aug 29 (11 days before Birth of Mary), and Oct 7 (2 days before St. Denis)	
Geertruidenberg	1274 (<i>OHZ III</i> , nr. 1683)	c. 1400 (Mollenberg, <i>Onuitgegeven bronnen Geertruidenberg</i> , 144-145)	Niermeyer, <i>Bronnen Benedenmaasgebied</i> , nr. 270.	no	and last 2 wks each.	

Location	First reference	'Last' reference	Other references in between first and 'last'	In Huerbuerlic registre?	Date (first day; duration)	Remarks
Giessen	1259 (Hoppenbrouwers, <i>Heusden</i> , 597)	1476 (Korteweg, <i>Rechtsbronnen Woudrichem</i> II, nr. 334)	<i>OHZ</i> IV, nr. 2102; Korteweg, <i>Rechtsbronnen Woudrichem</i> II, nrs. 67, 170, 190; Hamaker, <i>Rekeningen</i> I, 128, 136; Niermeyer, <i>Bronnen Benedenmaasgebied</i> , nrs. 671, 680; De Boer, <i>Rekeningen grafelijkeid</i> , 15, 23, 26; Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek</i> IV, 114	no	July 10 (3 days before St. Margaret's eve); 3 days.	
Gorinchem	1382 (Bruch, <i>Rechtsbronnen Gorinchem</i>, nr. 21)	16th century (Stamkot, <i>Geschiedenis van Gorinchem</i> , 47)	Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek</i> IV, 301, 319, 1012-1015	no	Fr before 3rd Su in Lent (Fr before Oculi); 2 wks	At least one of the six fairs formally licensed in 1382 already existed in 1359 (Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek</i> III, 94). According to the 1382 charter the July fair was a horse fair, the October fair a cattle fair and the November fair a cloth fair.
Gorinchem	1382 (Bruch, <i>Rechtsbronnen Gorinchem</i>, nr. 21)	16th century (Stamkot, <i>Geschiedenis van Gorinchem</i> , 47)	Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek</i> IV, 301, 319, 1012-1015	no	Pentecost; 2 wks	
Gorinchem	1382 (Bruch, <i>Rechtsbronnen Gorinchem</i>, nr. 21)	16th century (Stamkot, <i>Geschiedenis van Gorinchem</i> , 47)	Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek</i> IV, 301, 319, 1012-1015	yes for one of the two (Mo after Oct 10)	Oct 1 (St. Bavo)/ (Mo after St. Victor); 2 wks	
Gorinchem	1382 (Bruch, <i>Rechtsbronnen Gorinchem</i>, nr. 21)	16th century (Stamkot, <i>Geschiedenis van Gorinchem</i> , 47)	Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek</i> IV, 301, 319, 1012-1015		Fri before Nov 1 (Fri before All Saints); 2 wks	
Gorinchem	1382 (Bruch, <i>Rechtsbronnen Gorinchem</i>, nr. 21)	16th century (Stamkot, <i>Geschiedenis van Gorinchem</i> , 47)	Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek</i> IV, 301, 319, 1012-1015	no	Nov 11 (St. Martin); 6 days	

Location	First reference	'Last' reference	Other references in between first and 'last'	In Huerbuerlic registre?	Date (first day; duration)	Remarks
Gorinchem	1382 (Bruch, <i>Rechtsbronnen Gorinchem</i> , nr. 21)	16th century (Stamkot, <i>Geschiedenis van Gorinchem</i> , 47)	Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek</i> IV, 301, 319, 1012-1015; Smit, <i>Rekeningen Hollandse tollén</i> , 276.	no	July 2 (day before St. Martin translacio); 4 days	
Gouda	1356 (Geselschap, 'Opkomst Gouda', 31-32)	c. 1509 (Rollin Coucerque, <i>Rechtsbronnen Gouda</i> , 285)	Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek</i> IV, 63, 151-152; NA GRRek 1707 f1, f5v; NA GRRek 1743 f 1v, f5v-6; Ibelings, 'Markt Gouda', passim	yes? (July 13)	July 25 (St. James); 3 days	
Gouda	1356 (Geselschap, 'Opkomst Gouda', 31-32)	c. 1509 (Rollin Coucerque, <i>Rechtsbronnen Gouda</i> , 285)	Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek</i> IV, 63, 151-152; NA GRRek 1707 f1, f5v; NA GRRek 1743 f 1v, f5v-6; Ibelings, 'Markt Gouda', passim	yes	Originally Sept 17 (St. Lambertus), in 15th c July 13 (St. Margaret), in early 16th c Sept 21 (St. Matthew); 3 days	
Grootebroek	1364 (Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek</i> III, 166-170)	1406-1422 (Pols, <i>Westfriesche stadrechten</i> II, 270)		no	July 25 (St. James); 2 wks	
Haarlem	1355 (<i>Handvesten Haerlem</i> , 39)	1512 (<i>Handvesten Haerlem</i> , 186-187)	Huizinga, <i>Rechtsbronnen Haarlem</i> , 494, 503	yes	Oct 18 (St. Lucas); 2 wks	

Location	First reference	'Last' reference	Other references in between first and 'last'	In Huerbuerlic registre?	Date (first day; duration)	Remarks
Haarlem	1267 (OHZ III, nr. 1442)	1456 (NA GRRek 2869 f3v)	NA AGH 1236 f30, 1247 f29 ff, 147 f13 ff; NA AGB 523-534; NA GRRek 150 f10	yes? (June 11)	June 24 (St. John); unknown	Comital account over 1500 (NA GRRek 927 f13) mentions toll for Haarlem, but it is not clear if this is only for the Lucasfair or for both fairs.
Haastrecht	1447 (NA GRRek 1707)	1500 (NA GRRek 2348 f 15)		no	June 11 (day before St. Odolf); unknown	
Heenvliet	1469 ('t Hart. Heenvliet, 450)	1469		no	unknown; unknown	
Heerjansdam	1340 (Müller, Regesta Hannonensia, 270)	1340		no	unknown; unknown	
Heusden	1391 (Niermeyer, <i>Bronnen Benedenmaasgebied</i> , nr. 671)	1500 (NA GRRek 2761 f22)	Niermeyer, <i>Bronnen Benedenmaasgebied</i> , nr. 680; Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek</i> IV, 61-63, 65-66, 114, 118, 162, 257, 272, 301, 319; <i>Chronologisch register vervolg Groot charterboek</i> , 81	yes	day before beginning of Lent; unknown	The 'smalle tol' (fair toll) was leased to the town in 1452; the revenues are in the comital account over 1500
Hoorn	1447 (<i>Handvesten Enchuyzen</i> , 90 (2nd paging))	c. 1600 (Velius, <i>Chronyk van Hoorn</i> , 64)	Pols, <i>Westfriesche stadsrechten</i> II, 94	no	Palm Sunday; unknown	

Location	First reference	'Last' reference	Other references in between first and 'last'	In Huerbuerlic registre?	Date (first day; duration)	Remarks
Hoorn	1447 (<i>Handvesten Enchuysen</i> , 90 (2nd paging))	c. 1600 (Velius, <i>Chronyk van Hoorn</i> , 633)	Pols, <i>Westfriesche stadsrechten</i> II, 94	no	Before Pentecost; unknown	
Hoorn (dairy fair)	1447 (<i>Handvesten Enchuysen</i> , 90 (2nd paging))	c. 1600 (Velius, <i>Chronyk van Hoorn</i> , 633)	Pols, <i>Westfriesche stadsrechten</i> II, 94	yes	Aug 10 (St. Lawrence); 1 wk	
IJsselstein	1310 (Berkelbach van der Sprenkel, <i>Regesten oorkonden Utrecht</i> , 212)	1436 Fruin, <i>Middelieunse rechtsbronnen Nedersticht</i> , 45		no	First Thu in Lent / 14 days before beginning of Lent; 8 days	
IJsselstein	1310 (Berkelbach van der Sprenkel, <i>Regesten oorkonden Utrecht</i> , 212)	1310		no	June 12; 8 days	
IJsselstein	1310 (Berkelbach van der Sprenkel, <i>Regesten oorkonden Utrecht</i> , 212)	1310		no	June 21; 8 days	
Leiden	1266 (OHZ III, nr. 1435)	16th c (Weterings, <i>Wie maakt me los</i> , 25-30)		? Mo after Ascension	originally in Sept? / later in week before Ascension ('crucmerct'); unknown	

Location	First reference	'Last' reference	Other references in between first and 'last'	In Huerbuerlic registre?	Date (first day; duration)	Remarks
Leiden	1303 (Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek</i> II, 32)	1497 (re-instatement) (<i>Leidenaars voor de Grote Raad</i> , 46, 164)		yes	July 12 (day before St. Margaret); 1 week	
Medemblik	1289 (OHZ IV, nr. 2385)	1343 (Hamaker, <i>Rekeningen grafelijkeid</i> II, 271)		no	June 5 (St. Bonifacius) / June 12 (St. Odolf); 2 wks	
Monnickendam	1342/43 (Hamaker, <i>Rekeningen grafelijkeid</i> I, 268-269)	1500 (NA GRRek 2951 f10v)	Hamaker, <i>Rekeningen grafelijkeid</i> I, 318-319, 382; NA AGH 1662 ff, NA GRRek 2904 f4	yes?	week before Ascension ('te crucen'); unknown	The three fairs were officially licensed in 1357 (Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek</i> II, 866). Comital accounts until 1369 mention tolls from three fairs, afterwards they just mention 'market tolls'; it is not clear if all three fairs survived, or just one or two.
Monnickendam	1342/43 (Hamaker, <i>Rekeningen grafelijkeid</i> I, 268-269)	1369 (NA AGH 1677 f15)	Hamaker, <i>Rekeningen grafelijkeid</i> I, 318-319, 382; NA AGH 1662 ff	no	unknown ('middelste merct'); unknown	
Monnickendam	1342/43 (Hamaker, <i>Rekeningen grafelijkeid</i> I, 268-269)	1369 (NA AGH 1677 f15)	Hamaker, <i>Rekeningen grafelijkeid</i> I, 318-319, 382; NA AGH 1662 ff	no	unknown ('lester merct'); unknown	
Muiden	1308 (Hamaker, <i>Rekeningen grafelijkeid</i> I, 7)	1500 (NA GRRek 3077 f 4v)	Hamaker, <i>Rekeningen grafelijkeid</i> I, 268, 311, 318, 381; NA AGH 1659 f8v ff.; Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek</i> III, 431; NA GRRek 3045 f3v	no	unknown; unknown	

Location	First reference	'Last' reference	Other references in between first and 'last'	In Huerbuerlic registre?	Date (first day; duration)	Remarks
Naarden	1377 (Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek III</i> , 320)	1500 (NA GRRek 3077 f 4v)	Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek III</i> , 376, 431; NA GRRek 3045 f 3v.	no	Thu 11 days after Easter; 1 wk	Comital accounts over 1448 and 1500 mention tolls, but it is not clear if this is for one fair or for two.
Naarden	1377 (Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek III</i> , 320)	1500 (NA GRRek 3077 f 4v)	Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek III</i> , 376, 431; NA GRRek 3045 f 3v.	no	Oct 21 (Eleven Thousand Virgins Day); 1 wk	
Ouderamstel	1308 (Hamaker, <i>Rekeningen grafelijkeid I</i> , 7)	1369 (NA AGH 1678 f13v)	Hamaker, <i>Rekeningen I</i> , 268, 311, 318, 381; NA AGH 1659 f8v ff; Van der Laan, <i>Oorkondenboek Amsterdam</i> , 421, 828.	no	unknown; unknown	In comital accounts over 1450 and 1500 the fair is mentioned as 'decayed'.
Oudewater	1334 (Hamaker, <i>Rekeningen grafelijkeid I</i> , 220)	1343/44 (1413?) Hamaker, <i>Rekeningen grafelijkeid II</i> , 33, 136; (Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek IV</i> , 232?)		no	June 24 (St. John); unknown	Although in 1413 the count grants the tolls to the town (Van Mieris, <i>Groot Charterboek IV</i> , 232), late 14th and 15th c comital accounts state the fair is decayed.
Oudewater	1334 (Hamaker, <i>Rekeningen grafelijkeid I</i> , 220)	1334		no	Sept 29 (St. Michael); unknown	
Purmerend	1484 (Postema, <i>Purmerender markt</i> , 9)	1639 (Postema, <i>Purmerender markt</i> , 10)		no	May 8 (8 days after May 1); 1 day	

Location	First reference	'Last' reference	Other references in between first and 'last'	In Huerbuerlic registre?	Date (first day; duration)	Remarks
Purmerend	1484 (Postema, <i>Purmerender markt</i> , 9)	1639 (Postema, <i>Purmerender markt</i> , 10)		no	October 11 (1 day after St. Victor); 1 day	
Rijsoord	1339 (Müller, <i>Regesta Hannonensia</i> , 263)	1339		no	unknown; unknown	
Rijsoord	1339 (Müller, <i>Regesta Hannonensia</i> , 263)	1339		no	unknown; unknown	
Rotterdam	1340 (Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek II</i> , 638)	c. 1500 (Kersbergen, 'Rotterdamsche jaar- en weekmarkt', 167-168)	Hamaker, <i>Rekeningen grafelijkeid</i> II, 29, 132; Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek IV</i> , 210-211	yes	July 13 (St. Margaret) / after 1412 Wed after Ascension; 1 wk	
Rotterdam	1340 (Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek II</i> , 638)	c. 1500 (Kersbergen, 'Rotterdamsche jaar- en weekmarkt', 167-168)	Hamaker, <i>Rekeningen grafelijkeid</i> II 29, 132; Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek IV</i> , 210-211	no	Aug 24 (St. Bartholomew) / after 1412 Aug 15; 1 wk	
's-Gravenzande	1334 (Hamaker, <i>Rekeningen grafelijkeid I</i> , 184)	1500 (NA GRRek 283 f16, 334 f 27)	Hamaker, <i>Rekeningen grafelijkeid</i> II, 21, 126; NA GRRek 283 f16	yes	Oct 1 (St. Bavo) / Oct. 10 (St. Victor); unknown	
's-Gravenzande	1317 (Hamaker, <i>Rekeningen grafelijkeid I</i> , 30)	1500 (NA GRRek 283 f16, 334 f 27)	Hamaker, <i>Rekeningen grafelijkeid I</i> , 184; II, 21, 126; NA GRRek 283 f16	no	Lent / Palm Sunday ; unknown	

Location	First reference	'Last' reference	Other references in between first and 'last'	In Huerbuerlic registre?	Date (first day; duration)	Remarks
Schagen	1463 (Bregman, <i>Schagen</i> , 18)	1463		no	June 22 (8 days before St. Peter & St. Paul); 2 weeks	
Schagen	1463 (Bregman, <i>Schagen</i> , 18)	1463		no	July 15 (8 days before St. Magdalena); 2 weeks	
Schellinkhout	1402 (Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek III</i> , 773)	1402		no	June 12 (St. Odolf); 2 wks	
Schiedam	1270 (OHZ III, nr. 1524)	1468 (Heeringa, <i>Rechtsbronnen Schiedam</i> , 411)	Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek II</i> , 161	no	Sept 10 (3rd day after Birth of Mary / Oct 1 (St. Bavo); 8 days	
Schiedam	1500 (NA GRRrek 334 f 65v)	1500			Day before Lent; 8 days	According to the reference in the account over the year 1500 this fair was officially established by license in 1483 , as a horse fair.
Schoonhoven	1357 (Ibelings, 'Zuivelmarkt', 4-5)	1357		no	May; unknown	Comital account over 1398/99 mentions this fair ("hoenkynsmarct" or poultry fair) as decayed (NA AGH 1766).

Location	First reference	'Last' reference	Other references in between first and 'last'	In Huerbuerlic registre?	Date (first day; duration)	Remarks
Schoonhoven	1357 (Ibelings, 'Zuivelmarkt', 4-5)	1398 (NA AGH 1766 f3v)		no	Aug; unknown	
Schoonhoven	1357 (Ibelings, 'Zuivelmarkt', 4-5)	1539 (Van Berkum, <i>Beschryving Schoonhoven</i> , 69-70)	NA GRRek 1706	yes	18 / 17 Oct (St. Lucas / day before St. Lucas); 2 wks	Around 1450 (NA GRRek 1706) there were two fairs, in May and October.
Schoonhoven	1412 (Van Berkum, <i>Beschryving Schoonhoven</i>, 56-57)	1539 (Van Berkum, <i>Beschryving Schoonhoven</i> , 69-70)	NA GRRek 1706	yes	July 4 (St Martin translacio; alternative dates in May or June); 2 wks	The early 16 th c charters (Van Berkum 63-68, 69-70) also mention two fairs, one on May 1 or July 4 and one in October. The first is the same as the fair that in 1412 was transferred from Stolwijk.
Stolwijk	1412 (Van Berkum, <i>Beschryving Schoonhoven</i> , 56-57)	1412		no	unknown; unknown	According to the 1412 charter: fair for cattle and horses. Moved to Schoonhoven in 1412.
Texel	1383 (Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek III</i>, 339)	1383		no	June 23 (2 days before St. John); 5 days	

Location	First reference	'Last' reference	Other references in between first and 'last'	In Huer-buerlic registre?	Date (first day; duration)	Remarks
Valkenburg	1246 (OHZ III, nr. 680)	16th c Ibelings, 'Hollandse paardenmarkten', passim	Numerous references to the Valkenburg fair as date of payment	yes	in 16th c: Sept 1 (1 week before St. Lambertus eve); 1 wk	
Vianen	1271 (Niermeyer, <i>Bronnen Benedenmaasgebied</i> , nr. 76)	1355 (Horden, <i>Kleine geschiedenis Vianen</i> , 16)		no	Aug 21 (octave of eve of Ascension of Mary); 8 days	
Vianen	1271 (Niermeyer, <i>Bronnen Benedenmaasgebied</i> , nr. 76)	1355 (Horden, <i>Kleine geschiedenis Vianen</i> , 16)		no	Oct 24 (8 days before eve of All Saints); 8 days	
Vianen	1335 (Horden, <i>Kleine geschiedenis Vianen</i> , 11)	1355 (Horden, <i>Kleine geschiedenis Vianen</i> , 16)		no	unknown; unknown	
Vlaardingen	1246 (Niermeyer, <i>Bronnen Benedenmaasgebied</i> , nr. 39)	16th c (Ibelings, 'Hollandse paardenmarkten', passim)	Müller, <i>Oude register</i> , 172; OHZ III, nr. 1632; Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek</i> II, 377; several references to the fair as date of payment	no	In 16th c: June 22 (8 days before St. Peter & St. Paul); 1 wk	
Vlaardingen	1276 (OHZ III, nr. 1745)	1395 (De Boer, <i>Rekeningen grafelijkheid</i> , 273)	Müller, <i>Oude register</i> , 172; Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek</i> III, 377; several references to the fair as date of payment	no	unknown; unknown	

Location	First reference	'Last' reference	Other references in between first and 'last'	In Huerbuerlic registre?	Date (first day; duration)	Remarks
Voorschoten	1204 (Gumbert-Hepp, <i>Annalen van Egmond</i> , 323-324)	16th c Ibelings, 'Hollandse paardenmarkten', passim	numerous references to the fair as date of payment	no	in 16th c: July 25 (8 days before St. Peter ad vincula); 1 wk	
Weesp	1387 (Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek III</i> , 431)	1500 (NA GRRek 3077 f 4v)	NA GRRek 3045 f 4	no	Oct 8 (3 days before St. Victorsdag); 1 wk	
Woerden	1410 (Plomp, <i>Woerden</i> , 56)	16th c ("Woerdse mart")		no	July 29 (3 days before St. Peter ad vincula); 3 days	According to the 1410 charter: a horse fair and a cattle fair.
Woerden (cattle)	1410 (Plomp, <i>Woerden</i> , 56)	16th c ("Woerdse mart")		no	Oct 10; St. Victor; unknown	In the comital account over 1343 tolls in Woerden are mentioned, in the account over 1394 market tolls in Woerden (Hamaker, <i>Rekeningen</i> II, 32; De Boer, <i>Rekeningen</i> , 79); but it is not certain if these tolls are related to the fairs officially installed in 1410.

Location	First reference	'Last' reference	Other references in between first and 'last'	In Huerbuerlic registre?	Date (first day; duration)	Remarks
Woudrichem	1388 (Korteweg <i>Rechtsbronnen Woudrichem</i> II, 170)	1476 (Korteweg, <i>Rechtsbronnen Woudrichem</i> II, 334)	Korteweg, <i>Rechtsbronnen Woudrichem</i> II 69, 134, 135, 170; Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek</i> IV, 61-63, 65-66, 114, 118, 162, 257, 272, 301, 319	no	Fourth Tue in Lent / Thu before Palm Sunday; 5 days	One of the fairs mentioned in the 1388 charter already existed in 1283 (<i>OHZ</i> IV, nr. 2102).
Woudrichem	1388 (Korteweg <i>Rechtsbronnen Woudrichem</i> II, 170)	1476 (Korteweg, <i>Rechtsbronnen Woudrichem</i> II, 334)	Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek</i> IV, 61-63, 65-66, 114, 118, 162, 257, 272, 301, 319	no	July 22/24 (3 days before St. James / day before St. James); 5 days	
Woudrichem	1388 (Korteweg <i>Rechtsbronnen Woudrichem</i> II, 170)	1476 (Korteweg, <i>Rechtsbronnen Woudrichem</i> II, 334)	Van Mieris, <i>Groot charterboek</i> IV, 61-63, 65-66, 114, 118, 162, 257, 272, 301, 319	no	Oct 15/17 (St. Lucas eve / 3 days before St. Lucas; 5 days	
Woudrichem	1388 (Korteweg <i>Rechtsbronnen Woudrichem</i> II, 170)	1388		no	Sept 6 (3 days before Birth of Mary); unknown	

Licenses for fairs granted in the first half of the 15th century:

- Amstelveen: license for a horse fair granted in 1523 (Noordkerk, *Handvesten Amstelredam*, 321-322).
- Gouda: license for a second horse fair granted in 1502, license for a third horse fair granted in 1505 (Geselschap, *Inventaris*, summaries 243 and 255).
- Haarlem: license for two horse fairs granted in 1512 (*Handvesten Haerlem*, 187-189).
- Schoonhoven: license for a dairy fair granted in 1535 (Van Berkum, *Beschrijving Schoonhoven*, 63-68).

Appendix B Rural weigh houses in the north of Holland around 1400

Village	Year of first reference	Source
<i>Waterland en Zeevang</i>		
Akswijk (Havixwijk)	1375	Accounts Waterland and Zeevang 1375 (NA AGH, inv. nr. 1679, f 5v).
Purmerend	1368	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gousset index, 1395: weigh house rented out to Sijmon Ruijsch (NA LLRK, inv. nr. 223, f 279v); Gousset index, 1399: weigh house rented out to Jan Melijsz. (NA LLRK, inv. nr. 223, f 280v); Accounts Waterland and Zeevang 1368, 1369, 1375 (NA AGH, inv. nr. 1677 f 15, inv. nr. 1678 f 14, inv. nr. 1679 f 4v).
Broek in Waterland	1375	Accounts Waterland and Zeevang 1375 (NA AGH, inv. nr. 1679, f 5).
Waterland	1359/1368	Accounts Waterland and Zeevang 1359/60 to 1367 (NA AGH, inv. nrs. 1670-1676).
<i>Uitdam</i>	1368	Accounts Waterland and Zeevang 1368, 1369 and 1375 (NA AGH inv. nrs. 1677-1679).
<i>Kennemerland</i>		
Graft	1392	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gousset index, 1392: permission to Voppe Berwoutsz. to install and exploit a weigh house (NA LLRK, inv. nr. 212, f 138). Gousset index, 1397: prolongation of rent of the weigh house to Voppe Berwoutsz. (NA LLRK, inv. nr. 212, f 139). Accounts of Kennemerland and West-Friesland, from 1410/1411 onwards (NA AGH, inv. nr. 1583 f 8 and inv. nrs. from 1584 upward).
Oostzaan	1417 or before	Gousset index, 1421: weigh house rented out to Claas Dirksz; the weigh house had previously been rented to him by duke Willem VI (NA LLRK, inv. nr. 230, f 431).
Westzaan	1421	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gousset index, 1421: weigh house rented out to Claas Dirksz. (NA LLRK, inv. nr. 230, f 431); Gousset index, 1428: weigh house rented out to Claas Dirksz. (NA LLRK, inv. nr. 230, f 433);
Wormer	1384/85	Accounts of Kennemerland and West-Friesland, from 1384/85 onwards (NA AGH, inv. nr. 1583 f 8 and inv. nrs. from 1584 upward).

Village	Year of first reference	Source
<i>Westfriesland</i>		
Grootebroek	1424	Gousset index, 1424: weigh house plus revenues donated to the local militia (NA LLRK, inv. nr 212, f 241v; also in Van Mieris, <i>Groot Charterboek</i> IV, 713).
Niedorp	1391	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gousset index, March 1391: permission to the people of Niedorperambacht to install a weigh house (NA LLRK, inv. nr. 221, f 96v-97); • Gousset index, November 1391: weigh house rented out to Henrick Dirksz. (NA LLRK, inv. nr. 221, f 97); • Gousset index, 1417: weigh house rented out to Peter Gillisz. (NA LLRK, inv. nr. 221, f 103v; also in Van Mieris, <i>Groot Charterboek</i> IV, 463); • Accounts of Kennemerland and West-Friesland, 1410/1411 (NA AGH, inv. nr. 1583 f8).
Schellinkhout	1402	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gousset index, 1402: weigh house rented out to Claas van Essen and Gijsken Vogel (NA LLRK, inv. nr. 226, f 121v); • Gousset index, 1423: weigh house rented out to Gijsbrecht Jansz. (NA LLRK, inv. nr. 226, f 126).

NA AGH: Nationaal Archief, Archief Graven van Holland

NA LLRK: Nationaal Archief, Archief Leenhoven en Leen- en Registerkamer

Appendix C Charters of urban liberties

The oldest charters of liberties of Holland towns that have been preserved date from the first decades of the 13th century and relate to two towns in the southern part of the county: Geertruidenberg (1213) and Dordrecht (1220 or 1221). Dordrecht, situated in the river delta of Rhine and Meuse had developed into a small centre of the international river trade in wine, grain, woad and salt in the course of the 12th century. Geertruidenberg was situated on the overland route between Holland and the southern Low Countries, close to the Brabant border. By the time it received urban privileges it was probably not much more than a village. In the late 12th century some of the earlier settlements on the sandy strip behind the dunes began to develop into towns. Haarlem, Delft, Alkmaar and Leiden all acquired charters of liberties in the middle of the 13th century. In the last decades of that century urbanization accelerated. Trade and urban industries expanded, existing towns grew and new ones emerged. By the middle of the 14th century most of these towns had been granted urban liberties.¹

List of charters of liberties referred to in chapter 7.²

Town	Date charter of liberties	Edition of charter used
Geertruidenberg	1213	OHZ I, nr. 334
Dordrecht	1220/1221 and 1252	OHZ I, nrs. 406 and 910
Haarlem	1245	OHZ II, nr. 672-673; Hoogewerf, <i>Haarlemse stadsrecht</i>
Delft	1246	OHZ II, nr. 680
Alkmaar	1254	OHZ II, nr. 1009
Leiden	1266	OHZ III, nr. 1433
Schiedam	1270	OHZ III nr. 1524; Van der Feijst, <i>Geschiedenis van Schiedam</i> , 292-294.
Vlaardingen	1273	OHZ III, nr. 1632
Vianen	1336	De Geer, 'Rechten van Vianen'
Rotterdam	1340	Van Mieris, <i>Groot Charterboek</i> II, 638-640
<i>Amsterdam</i>	1342	Van der Laan, <i>Oorkondenboek van Amsterdam</i> , nr. 49
Naarden	1353	Van Mieris, <i>Groot Charterboek</i> II, 847-848
Brielle	1330 and 1343	Cappon and van Engen, 'Stadsrechtsoorkonden van Brielle'
Goedereede	1312	Pols, 'Bevestiging'

Methodological aspects

As elsewhere in Europe, liberties were often derived from models used in other towns. In Holland the best known and largest 'family' of charters is the Brabant-Holland filiation. A large part of the Haarlem charter of 1245 was based on the liberties of the Brabant town of Den Bosch. In turn, a draft version of the Haarlem charter served as a model for several other towns in Holland. The

¹ For a survey of the history of urbanisation: Hoppenbrouwers, 'Van waterland tot stedenland', 118-120; De Boer, 'Op weg naar volwassenheid'.

² For a survey of all charters of urban liberties in the present-day Netherlands: Cox, *Repertorium stadsrechten*.

liberties of a group of smaller towns on the islands in the southwestern part of Holland and in Zeeland, Brielle and Goedereede among them, form a second, more loosely associated filiation. (Kruisheer 1985)³ Other towns, for instance Dordrecht, Leiden and Amsterdam, had liberties of local origin, unrelated to one of the two filiations.

The use of charters of urban liberties in historical research involves some methodological problems that are best understood by looking at the charters' original function. First and foremost, they aimed at officially establishing or confirming the position of the town as a separate administrative and jurisdictional district with a certain degree of autonomy. Charters of urban liberties were never meant to be comprehensive law codes. There was no need for anything of the kind: unwritten customary law met the normal requirements of urban society well enough. The need for recording was probably only felt when new rules were introduced, particularly if these deviated materially from customary law. The charters therefore only show a small part of the rules and practices that were actually being used and they sometimes tend to stress the exceptional instead of the regular.⁴

Still, the charters were not dead letters: in many ways they provided a useful legal framework for many years to come. This is demonstrated by the codification of local rules and customs made by the authorities of the small town of 's-Gravenzande in 1448. In this document the paragraphs from Haarlem's by then 200 years old charter of liberties were taken as point of departure: although some rules were referred to as outdated, most of the 13th-century regulations on contract enforcement were clearly still considered valid in the middle of the 15th century.⁵

Historiography

Until recently studies of the charters of liberties in the Holland towns (particularly of the mid 13th-century charters) largely focused on their origins. Jaap Kruisheer was one of the main representatives of this strain of research. In his studies of several charters of urban liberties of towns in Holland and Zeeland, he invariably arrived at the same conclusion: the charters were granted on the initiative of the burghers, who wished to have both their locally evolved rules and the results of negotiations with the count on their rights and privileges officially confirmed. In support of this conclusion Kruisheer points to aspects like the presence of preliminary versions of the charters in urban archives and changes from the subjective to the objective style, suggesting the incorporation in the charter of pre-existing local laws.⁶ Henri Camps opposed the view of Kruisheer and argued that in the case of the charters of Haarlem, Alkmaar and Delft not the urban community but the count must have been the initiator. The charters of these towns, according to Camps, reflect an attempt of the count to reinforce his position: day-to-day administration was delegated to the town government, but only in return for fixed financial and military obligations.⁷

The debate between Kruisheer and Camps was not only polemic in tone; it was also rather limited in character. It concentrated very much on the analysis of the documents and their genesis, with little reference to the historical context. Surprisingly perhaps, the regulations in the charter and what they had to say about medieval urban society were also not explored very thoroughly. In more than one respect the debate has recently taken a new direction. The scope has broadened: diplomatic research has established firmer links with historical, archaeological and geographical studies on the genesis of towns.⁸ Interest in the role of the ruler has also been renewed, this time not as a contrast to the autonomous development of towns, but as its complement. It has become clear that besides towns that developed mainly as a result of improved economic opportunities and the initiative of the

³ For the Brabant-Holland filiation: Kruisheer, *Stadsrechtsoorkonden van Haarlem, Delft en Alkmaar* For the filiation on the Zuid-Holland and Zeeland islands: Cappon and Van Engen, 'Stad door stadsrecht?'

⁴ Van Engen, 'Geen schraal terrein', 73-74, 77; Kruisheer, *Stadsrechtsoorkonden van Haarlem, Delft en Alkmaar*, 60.

⁵ Telting, 'Oude rechten van 's-Gravenzande', 382.

⁶ Kruisheer, 'Oudste Leidse stadsrechtsoorkonden'; Kruisheer, 'Oudste Zeeuwse stadsrechtsoorkonden'; Kruisheer, *Stadsrechtsoorkonden van Haarlem, Delft en Alkmaar*. For a summary of the conclusions on the charters of Haarlem, Delft and Alkmaar and on the towns of Zeeland: Kruisheer, 'Stadsrechtbeoorkonding'.

⁷ Camps, *Stadsrechten Willem II*.

⁸ An example of this approach is the recent volume edited by Rutte and Engen, *Stadswording in de Nederlanden*.

inhabitants, there is also a category of towns where lordly influence was more prominent. Rulers promoted the rise of these towns, because to them they were instruments with which to achieve political goals.⁹ Moreover, even for the towns that did develop more or less autonomously, the role of the count should not be overlooked: the early history of the oldest towns of Holland shows a strong interconnection between their roles as residential, administrative and military centres of the counts and their social, economic and institutional development as urban settlements.¹⁰

⁹ Rutte, *Stedenpolitiek en stadsplanning*. For Holland see pp. 119-143.

¹⁰ Henderikx, 'Graaf en stad', 57-58, 61-62.

Appendix D Wheat prices

1. Holland wheat price series

Nature of the prices

Prices are unweighted annual averages calculated over the accounting year used in the accounts. In addition for Leeuwenhorst a conversion to the accounting year used by the *Catharinagasthuis* has been compiled.

The original prices are in *groot* per *achtendeel*, the converted prices in grams of silver per hectolitre.

All prices are net prices, without freight or impositions (which are sometimes recorded separately in the accounts).

Units of volume

The modern equivalents of the medieval units of volume used for the conversion to grams of silver per hectolitre are based on the data collected by J.M. Verhoeff.¹ In the cases Verhoeff gives more than one interpretation, the figure he notes as ‘anno 1572’ has been used. As Verhoeff explains in his introduction almost figures are based on late 18th-century measurings; their reliability for the Middle Ages is therefore uncertain.

The following units have been used:

Delft:	1 <i>achtendeel</i> is 34.6 litres;
	1 <i>zak</i> is 3 <i>achtendeel</i> or 103.8 litres;
	1 <i>boed</i> is 32 <i>achtendeel</i> or 1107.2 litres.
Leiden:	1 <i>achtendeel</i> is 34.2 litres;
	1 <i>zak</i> is 2 <i>achtendeel</i> or 68.4 litres;
	1 <i>boed</i> is 32 <i>achtendeel</i> or 1094.4 litres.
Haarlem:	1 <i>achtendeel</i> is 36.3 litres; 1 <i>boed</i> is 32 <i>achtendeel</i> or 1161.6 litres.

Currencies:

In the accounts prices are in a variety of currencies, both Holland and foreign coinage. These have all been converted to the Holland *groot*, Holland’s as a common denominator.

The conversion of English, Flemish and Brabant coinage to silver used in the calculations is mainly based on the nominal values of each of these coinages (for the sources see the footnotes in chapter 8, section 3). However for Holland this was not a feasible option. In the late 14th and early 15th century the value of Holland currency was extremely unstable, following a saw tooth course of frequent depreciations followed by drastic revaluations.² The nominal rates of the consecutive issues of the *groot* collected by J.J. Grolle give the official value at the moments of revaluation, but do not reflect the very considerable changes during the periods of depreciation in between.³ Therefore until the year 1433/34 in the calculations of the price of wheat in grams of silver per hectolitre the conversion of the *groot* into silver has been based on:

- The official rates given by Grolle for the moments of revaluation (indicated in bold printing in the table below);
- In between, for the years for which prices are available: estimates based, if possible, on the changes in the exchange rate of the *groot* to the old French écu (*oude schild*) recorded in:
 - o The accounts of Egmond abbey (published by Hof and originals) and the comital accounts (rates published by De Boer)⁴ for the years 1387/88 to 1391/92;
 - o The accounts of the *Catharinagasthuis* (rates published by J.W. Marsilje,⁵ with a few additions from the original accounts).

¹ Verhoeff, *Oude Nederlandse maten en gewichten*

² The standard work on monetary policy in this period is Grolle, *Muntslag*. For an older, shorter, but in some respects more illuminating survey: De Boer, *Graaf en grafiek*, 176-187.

³ Grolle, *Muntslag*, 223.

⁴ De Boer, *Graaf en grafiek*, 184.

⁵ Marsilje, *Het financiële beleid van Leiden*, 214-222.

The French écu was a relatively stable golden coinage in frequent use in Holland; so were the English noble and the Rhineland guilder, but the accounts mention exchange rates to the French écu most frequently. When no exchange rates were available, the silver value of the *groot* has been estimated by interpolation; between 1430/31 and 1433/43 it has been kept constant because there was no relevant information available.

This leads to the following values of the Holland *groot*:

Year	Silver value of Holland <i>groot</i>	Remarks	Exchange rate of <i>groot</i> to old French écu
1387-1388	1.00	estimate based on rate to old French écu	44/48 (comital accounts)
1388-1389	0.95	estimate based on rate to old French écu	45/52 (comital accounts)
1389-1390	1.06	nominal value after revaluation (Grolle)	42/45 (comital accounts)
1390-1391	0.98	estimate based on rate to old French écu	44 (Egmond)
1391-1392	0.90	Interpolation	
1392-1393	0.82	estimate based on rate to old French écu	52 (Egmond) 58 (Cath.gh.)
1393-1394			
1394-1395	0.997	nominal value after revaluation (Grolle)	47/48 (Cath. gh.)
1395-1396			
1396-1397	1.04	estimate based on rate to old French écu	45.5 (Cath.gh.)
1397-1398	1.04	estimate based on rate to old French écu	45.5 (Cath.gh.)
1398-1399	0.99	estimate based on rate to old French écu	48 (Cath.gh.)
1399-1400			
1400-1401			
1401-1402	0.80	nominal value after revaluation (Grolle)	50 (Cath.gh.; after revaluation)
1402-1403	0.80	estimate based on rate to old French écu	50 (Cath.gh.)
1403-1404	0.80	as in 1402/03	50/52 (Cath.gh.)
1404-1405	0.75	estimate based on rate to old French écu	50/57 (Cath.gh.)
1405-1406	0.59	estimate based on rate to old French écu	67.5 (Cath.gh.)
1406-1407	0.59	as in 1405/06	68.25 (Cath.gh.)
1407-1408			
1408-1409			
1409-1410			
1410-1411	0.82	as in 1411/12	
1411-1412	0.82	nominal value after revaluation (Grolle, groot = 4/3 leeuw).	45.5 (Cath.gh.)
1412-1413	0.82	as in 1411/12	
1413-1414	0.82	as in 1411/12	45.5/52 (Cath.gh.)

Year	Silver value of Holland <i>groot</i>	Remarks	Exchange rate of <i>groot</i> to old French écu
1414-1415	0.72	estimate based on rate to old French écu	52 (Cath.gh.)
1415-1416	0.72	as in 1414/15	52 (Cath.gh.)
1416-1417	0.66	estimate based on rate to old French écu	56 (Cath.gh.)
1417-1418	0.66	as in 1416/17	56 (Cath.gh.)
1418-1419	0.59	Interpolation	
1419-1420	0.52	estimate based on rate to old French écu	72 (Cath.gh.)
1420-1421	0.44	estimate based on rate to old French écu	84 (Cath.gh.)
1421-1422	0.44	as in 1420/21	
1422-1423	0.61	nominal value after revaluation (Grolle)	
1423-1424	0.70	estimate based on rate to old French écu	72 (Cath.gh.)
1424-1425	0.63	estimate based on rate to old French écu	80 (Cath.gh.)
1425-1426	0.60	Interpolation	
1426-1427	0.57	estimate based on rate to old French écu	88 (Cath.gh.)
1427-1428	0.56	estimate based on rate to old French écu	90 (Cath.gh.)
1428-1429	0.56	as in 1427/28	
1429-1430	0.75	nominal value after revaluation (Grolle)	
1430-1431	0.75	as in 1429/30	
1431-1432	0.75	as in 1429/30	
1432-1433	0.75	as in 1429/30	67 (Cath.gh.)
1433-1434	0.75	as in 1429/30	

From 1434/35 onwards, that is after the unification of the Flemish, Brabant and Holland coinage by duke Philip the Good, currency more or less stabilised. For these years the value of the *groot* has been based on the nominal values collected by Van der Wee and Aerts.⁶

The use of a method of conversion for the Holland currency that is different from the methods used for the neighbouring countries has obvious disadvantages, but the alternative –using only nominal values in a situation of extreme instability- is even less attractive.

Egmond abbey 1387/88-1391/92

Sources:

Wheat prices for the first three years have been taken from the edition of the accounts (clearances between the abbot and his stewards) published by J. Hof. Prices for the last two years have been collected from the originals.⁸

⁶ Van der Wee and Aerts, 'Vlaams-Brabantse muntgeschiedenis', 85.

⁷ I am grateful to Chris Hanselaar, who allowed me to use the data Egmond grain purchases that he collected from the abbey's archives.

The abbot's accounts between 1393 and 1403 do not give wheat prices; the accounts after 1403 have not been preserved.

Year of account

The year of account began and ended at St. Donatian (August 7) in the first three years of the series and at St. Michael (September 29) at the last two years.

Entries are usually dated.

Units

Purchases are noted per *achtendeel* (probably the Haarlem *achtendeel* of 36.3 litres) or per *boed* of 32 *achtendeel*.

Currency

Prices in the accounts are in d, s and lb *comans payment* (i.e.: *ponden Hollands* of 30 *groten* per pound).

Location and sellers

When the location of the purchases is mentioned, it is most often Haarlem, once Alkmaar. In Haarlem, the abbey probably did business with a number of merchants, most frequently with a man called Claes Ketelaer.

Volumes and frequency

Egmond abbey bought on average 50 *achtendeel* of wheat per year, distributed over two to three transactions.

Annual average wheat prices

Year	Price	
	Original (in <i>groot</i> per <i>achtendeel</i>)	Converted (in gr silver per hectolitre)
1387/88	13	34.38017
1388/89	12.79	33.82479
1389/90	11.63	33.96088
1390/91	15	40.43229
1391/92	12.80	31.62704

Catharinagasthuis Leiden, 1392/93- 1439/40

Sources:

The *Catharinagasthuis* series have been published by N.W. Posthumus. The prices between 1394/95 and 1439/40 have been checked against the originals. The series continues till the late 18th century.⁹ Checking the original accounts has led to several corrections of and additions to Posthumus's annual figures. In the following cases the difference was above 5%:

- 1401/02: In the course of this year a revaluation of the *groot* took place. The new *groot* was worth 33% more than the old *groot*. Instead of converting all prices to either the new or the old currency Posthumus bases his annual average on a mix of both.

⁸ Hof, ed., *Egmondse kloosterrekeningen*, 48, 55, 101, 102, 132; Noord-Hollands Archief, Archief van de abdij van Egmond, inv. nr. 798, f 82 and 91v.

⁹ Posthumus, *Nederlandse prijsgeschiedenis*, vol II, 445-457, column 160; Regionaal Archief Leiden, Archieven van de gasthuizen, inv. nr. 334 vol 2 to 45; in the footnotes as RAL AG. Volume 1 (1392/93) is not available for study because of severe damage.

- 1404/05 and 1405/06: Posthumus has only prices for 1405/06. He obviously missed one account, which may have been due to the fact that the account over 1405/06 has been incorrectly identified and marked as '1404' by a modern archivist. However Posthumus's annual average for 1405/06 does not match with either the data over 1404/05 or 1405/06. The reason is unclear.
- 1412/13 and 1413/14: For no apparent reason Posthumus gives no wheat prices for these years (although he does have them for the other grains).
- 1417/18 and 1420/21: Posthumus's annual averages are too low. He probably mixed up, at some point, *grooten* and *lichte grooten*, which can easily happen unless the price per unit is consistently checked with the sum in d, s and lb. The value of the *lichte groot* is 2/3 of that of the (regular) *groot*.
- 1424/25 and 1425/26: Posthumus's annual averages are much too high. He probably did not realise the *leenwen* in these accounts had, from their previous value of 2 *groot*, by this time devaluated to 4/3 *groot*, although the accounts do state this new value quite clearly.
- 1432/33: Posthumus's annual average is too high. Partly this may be due to a mistaken identification, in the case of a purchase made in Delft, of the *zak* with the Leiden *zak* of 2 *achtendeel* instead of the Delft *zak* of 3 *achtendeel*; the remainder of the difference cannot be accounted for.
- 1434/35: Posthumus's annual average is far too high. Again this may partly be due to the failure to distinguish the Delft *zak* from the Leiden *zak*. In addition, in the course of this year Philip of Burgundy issued a new, unified coinage for the Low Countries. This implied a revaluation of the *groot*: the value of the new *groot* was 43% above that of the old one. As in 1401/02, Posthumus probably did not convert all prices to either the old or the new *groot*, but based his annual average on a mix of both.
- 1435/36 and 1436/37: Posthumus's annual averages are too high, probably due to the failure to distinguish the Delft *zak* from the Leiden *zak*.

Year of account

The year of account began and ended at St. Peter ad Cathedram (February 22) or on the day before.

Units

Purchases are usually noted per *achtendeel* or per *hoed* of 32 *achtendeel*.

The *achtendeel* is normally the Leiden *achtendeel* of 34.2 litres, but for purchases made in Delft (see below) it is probably the Delft *achtendeel* of 34.6 litres. Since the difference is small, it has been ignored here: all prices have been calculated on the basis of an *achtendeel* of 34.2 litres. Some purchases at the end of the period were recorded per *zak*: in 1415/16 this is probably the Leiden *zak* of 2 *achtendeel*, but in 1422, 1432/33 and 1435 it is most likely the Delft *zak* of 3 *achtendeel* (judging from the location of the transaction and also from the price).

Currency

In the accounts prices per unit are in all kinds of currencies in common use: until 1410 usually in *grooten* (of 8d), then mostly in *botdraggers* (until 1416), *lichte grooten* (until 1420), *leenwen* (1421), *botgens* (until 1423), again *leenwen* (until 1425), *tuinen* (until 1427), then after a gap of five years *kromstaarten* (1432 and 1433) and from 1434 onwards *grooten* again. The totals are always in d, s and lb *Hollands* (*comans payment*).

All prices have been converted to *grooten* (*comans payment*) per *achtendeel* (whereas Posthumus gives *grooten* per *zak* of 2 *achtendeel*).

In the years 1401/1402 and 1434/35 a revaluation took place in the course of the year; the accounts render the prices for the first part of the year according to the old value of the *groot* and the prices for the second part of the year according to the new value. Here all prices in these years have been converted to the new value.

Location and sellers

Until the late 1420s almost all purchases were made in Leiden. Except in the (relatively few) cases when wheat was bought on the weekly market (*op die grote brugge* or *op die markt*, the hospital accounts almost always mention the sellers. In many cases they can be identified as Leiden corn mongers and members of the Leiden elite; some of them were also members of the hospital board. Other merchants came from Gouda or Schoonhoven, or occasionally from the northern part of Holland. After 1430 the hospital also purchased wheat from what were presumably farmers from the villages of Poeldijk and Rijswijk in the wheat-growing region west of Delft, or in the town of Delft itself.

Volumes and frequency

In the 1390s the hospital on average bought 75 *achtendeel* of wheat per year; in the 1430s this had risen to over 300 *achtendeel* (100 hectolitres).

In some years, for instance in the 1390s, in 1415/16 and in 1416/17, only a few wheat transactions have been recorded. In these cases a servant was regularly sent out to fetch small quantities of grain on credit; the bill, based on an average price over the entire period (*'overhoeft'*) was settled once or twice a year. In other years the number of transactions is much higher: in 1404/05 and 1405/06 for instance 12 purchases per year were recorded, in 1432/33 the total was 20 purchases.

Because the entries are usually not dated, it is not clear if wheat purchases were distributed evenly over the year.

Annual average wheat prices

Year	Price	
	Original (in <i>groot</i> per <i>achtendeel</i>)	Converted (in gr silver per hectolitre)
1392-1393	11	26.37427
1393-1394		
1394-1395	9	26.23684
1395-1396		
1396-1397	11.83	36.00278
1397-1398	11.75	35.75931
1398-1399	10.33	29.80038
1399-1400		
1400-1401		
1401-1402	13.57	31.74269
1402-1403	15.59	36.46784
1403-1404	11.71	27.39181
1404-1405	9.54	20.85588
1405-1406	13.64	23.63439
1406-1407	13.63	23.61707
1407-1408		
1408-1409		
1409-1410		
1410-1411		
1411-1412	9.15	21.87171
1412-1413	9.31	22.25417
1413-1414	10.39	24.83575

Year	Price	
	Original (in <i>groot</i> per <i>achtendeel</i>)	Converted (in gr silver per hectolitre)
1414-1415	12.67	26.50003
1415-1416	11.62	24.30389
1416-1417	19.22	37.32832
1417-1418	15.28	29.67621
1418-1419	15	25.89547
1419-1420	14.08	21.26881
1420-1421	15.83	20.49626
1421-1422	28.48	36.87515
1422-1423	15.29	27.27164
1423-1424	16.64	33.95712
1424-1425	18.68	34.30811
1425-1426	19.86	34.81736
1426-1427	22.29	37.21666
1427-1428	22.27	36.35697
1428-1429		
1429-1430		
1430-1431		
1431-1432		
1432-1433	10.85	23.79386
1433-1434		
1434-1435	17.8	42.38170
1435-1436	9.54	22.71468
1436-1437	10.25	24.40519
1437-1438		
1438-1439		
1439-1440	25.71	61.21536

Leeuwenhorst abbey, Noordwijkerhout, 1410/11-1439/40

Sources:

The price series of Leeuwenhorst abbey have been published by Geertruida de Moor. They are also available on the internet. The prices between 1410/11 and 1439/40 have been checked against the originals.¹⁰ The series continues until 1570/71.

Checking the original accounts has led to several corrections of and additions to De Moor's annual figures. In the following cases the difference was above 5%:

¹⁰ De Moor, ed., *Lonen en prijzen*, 160-164, or <http://www.iisg.nl/hpw/leeuwenhorst/grainproducts.xls>; Nationaal Archief, Archief Abdij van Leeuwenhorst, inv. nr. 18 to 38 (in the footnotes as NA AAL).

- 1410/11 and 1412/13: For these years the accounts render the prices in *licht geld*. However, while for the years 1414/15 to 1418/19 De Moor correctly converts all prices from *licht geld* to *comans payment* by multiplying with 2/3, she fails to do so for the years 1410/11 tot 1412/13. Therefore her annual averages for these two years are much too high.
- 1417/18, 1425/26, 1429/1430: De Moor's annual averages are too high; the reason is unclear.
- 1430/31: De Moor's annual average is too low: the reason is unclear.
- 1434/35: In the course of this year Philip of Burgundy issued a new, unified coinage for the Low Countries. This implied a revaluation of the *groot*: the value of the new *groot* was 43% above that of the old one. Instead of converting all prices to either the new or the old currency De Moor bases her annual average on a mix of both.
- 1437/38, 1438/39, 1439/40: De Moor's annual averages bear no relation at all to the prices in the original accounts. The reason is most likely a copying or editing mistake: the figures for 1433/34 to 1436/37 have mistakenly been noted a second time, for the years 1437/38 to 1440/41. As a consequence, De Moor's series completely miss the price peak in the years 1437/38 and 1438/39.

Year of account

The year of account began in August and ended in July.

Units

Purchases are usually noted per *achtendeel* or per *boed* of 32 *achtendeel*.

The *achtendeel* is probably either the Leiden *achtendeel* of 34.2 litres or the Delft *achtendeel* of 34.6 litres. Since the difference small, it has been ignored here: all prices have been calculated on the basis of an *achtendeel* of 34.2 litres. Several purchases were recorded per *zak*, which is according to the accounts equal to 3 *achtendeel*.

Currency

In the accounts prices per unit are in all kinds of currencies: between 1410/11 and 1420/21 in *schellingen* and *denieren*, from 1424/25 to 1427/28 mainly in *tuinen* or *leeuwen*, in 1429/30 mostly in *keromstaarten* and from 1430/31 onwards mainly in *grooten*. The totals are always in d, s and lb *Hollands*; until 1418/19 these are in *licht geld* and from 1420/21 onwards in *comans payment* (the value of *licht geld* is 2/3 of the value of *comans payment*)

All prices have been converted to *grooten* (*comans payment*) per *achtendeel* (whereas De Moor gives *denieren* per *achtendeel*).

In the year 1434/35 a revaluation took place in the course of the year; the accounts render the prices for the first part of the year according to the old value of the *groot* and the prices for the second part of the year according to the new value. Here all prices in this year have been converted to the new value.

Location and sellers

Except for some of the purchases made at the weekly market in Delft or Leiden, the abbey's accounts almost always mention the sellers. Purchases were made from merchants in Leiden, Delft and from several villages in the region, occasionally from merchants from Gouda or from The Hague, and frequently from what were presumably farmers from the villages of Poeldijk, Wateringen, Maasland, Monster or De Lier in the wheat-growing region west of Delft. Some of these farmers were probably renting land from the abbey.

Volumes and frequency

Leeuwenhorst abbey bought between 800 and 1100 *achtendeel* per year at first. Later the volumes were reduced to between 500 and 800.

In all years several wheat transactions were recorded. The minimum is 10 purchases (in 1425/26 and 1426/27), the maximum 45 purchases (in 1437/38).

Until 1430/31 most entries are dated. Although wheat purchases took place throughout the year, most wheat was bought in autumn and winter.

Annual average wheat prices

Year	Price original accounting year (August-July)		Price for accounting year of <i>Catharinagasthuis</i> (Feb 22-Feb 22)	
	Original (in <i>groot</i> per <i>achtendeel</i>)	Converted (in gr silver per hectolitre)	Original (in <i>groot</i> per <i>achtendeel</i>)	Converted (in gr silver per hectolitre)
1410-1411	10.2	24.38158	11.45	27.36952
1411-1412			8.2	19.60088
1412-1413	10.22	24.42939	10.24	24.47719
1413-1414			10.33	24.69232
1414-1415	10.09	21.10381	10.22	21.37571
1415-1416			10	20.91557
1416-1417	18.58	36.08533	17.77	34.51218
1417-1418	11.48	22.29600	15.64	30.37538
1418-1419	15.69	27.08666	14.13	24.39353
1419-1420			14.57	22.00899
1420-1421	19.66	25.45524	18.89	24.45827
1421-1422			23.5	30.42717
1422-1423				
1423-1424				
1424-1425	20.18	37.06305	19.76	36.29167
1425-1426	19.6	34.36154	20.2	35.41343
1426-1427	20.4	34.06100	19.57	32.67519
1427-1428	21.62	35.29581	22.57	36.84673
1428-1429			19.5	31.83480
1429-1430	14.61	32.03947	15.66	34.34211
1430-1431	15.92	34.91228	14.94	32.76316
1431-1432	13.22	28.99123		
1432-1433	19.21	42.12719		
1433-1434	17.48	38.33333		
1434-1435	10.6	25.23854		
1435-1436	9.66	23.00040		
1436-1437	12.5	29.76243		
1437-1438	32.7	77.85851		
1438-1439	35.77	85.16816		
1439-1440	16.17	38.50068		

2. Utrecht wheat prices

Sources

Large numbers of medieval Utrecht price data have been published by Posthumus. Here only two of the seven grain price series collected by Posthumus have been used.

The most important is the wheat price series of the chapter of the Utrecht Dom, available (with several lacunae) from the year 1394 onward.¹¹ At some point during the 13th century the Dom chapter began granting its canons a monthly allowance in money instead of expecting them to join collective meals. In order to set the appropriate level of the allowance, monthly or weekly grain prices at the local market were systematically registered.¹² Fifteenth century monthly price registrations are available for only a few years. However the annual prices that have been based on the *taxationes bladorum* are available for much of the century, with some omissions for one to three years and a rather large gap between 1451 and 1459. They can be considered reliable reflections of the (unweighted) average annual wheat price in Utrecht.

Prices for the decades between 1370 and 1394 and for some lacunae in the early years the Dom chapter prices have been supplemented from the wheat price series of the chapter of St. John, which covers the years between 1370 and 1406.¹³ Information on the origin of these prices is more scarce, but Posthumus assumes St. John's used a method similar to the Dom chapter. (Posthumus 1964)¹⁴ The other price series either begin (much) later or are based on less reliable sources and have therefore not been used.

Year of accounting

The Utrecht year of accounting begins and ends at St Remigius (October 1).

Unit of volume

The unit of volume used in the Utrecht series is the *modius* or *mud*, which equals 120.4 litres.

Currency

Utrecht had its own currency, which was originally closely linked to Rhineland coinage; from the 14th century onwards the influence of monetary developments in Holland on Utrecht currency continued to grow. The value of the Utrecht currency depreciated rapidly from the early 15th century onwards.¹⁵

The basic unit of the Utrecht currency was at first the *plak*, after 1390 the *albus* or *witte*, and from 1466 onwards the *stuiver* of 12 *albi*. Each of the chapters used their own currency of accounting, but in his edition of Utrecht prices Posthumus converted all prices to *plakken*, *albi* and *stuivers*.

These prices have been converted to grams of silver as follows. According to the exchange rates of the Utrecht currency to the Rhineland guilder published by Peter Spufford, prices have first been converted to Rhineland guilders, with some interpolations to fill in the gaps (in italics in the table below). Spufford based these rates on the data collected by Ten Haeff and Enno van Gelder from the accounts of the construction of the Utrecht Dom church.¹⁶ Since these accounts begin in 1395, no exchange rates are available before that year. As a consequence for the years 1387 to 1394 the value of the *plak/albus* had to be extrapolated with the aid of the changing exchange rates to the French écu collected by Posthumus (also in italics in the table).¹⁷

¹¹ Posthumus, *Nederlandse prijsgeschiedenis*, II, 70 ff column 28a.

¹² Ibid. *Nederlandse prijsgeschiedenis* II, 41; cf. Sillem, 'Tabellen van marktprijzen en granen te Utrecht in 1393-1644: uit de rekeningen en weeklijsten der Domproosdij', 3-5, for a more detailed explanation of the origins of these *taxationes bladorum*.

¹³ Posthumus, *Nederlandse prijsgeschiedenis*, 217 ff column 89.

¹⁴ Ibid. *Nederlandse prijsgeschiedenis*, 226.

¹⁵ For a (not always very clear) survey of Utrecht's monetary history: Ibid. *Nederlandse prijsgeschiedenis*, 12-30.

¹⁶ Spufford, 'Currency exchanges from *Handbook of medieval exchange*'

¹⁷ Posthumus, *Nederlandse prijsgeschiedenis* II, 23-27.

Subsequently all prices in Rhineland guilders have been converted to prices in grams of silver with the aid of the official silver values of the Rhineland guilder published by Rainer Metz, collected from the ordinances.¹⁸

Metz also collected very detailed data on the actual silver content of the Cologne *albus* and its (changing) rate to the Rhineland guilder, but although this method no doubt offers a much better approximation of the actual value of the Rhineland guilder in Cologne, it is not at all certain that it reflects the value of the Rhineland guilder in Utrecht with the same accuracy. Therefore this dataset has not been used here.

Silver value of the Utrecht albus and average annual wheat prices

Year	Silver value of Utrecht <i>albus</i> (In italics: intra- and extrapolations)	Original wheat price (in plakken (until 1390) or albi (after 1390) per modius)	Converted wheat price (in grams of silver per hectolitre)
1387/88	1.05404	38.00	33.26699
1388/89	0.92755	35.15	27.07933
1389/90	0.82817	27.27	18.75771
1390/91	0.77296	32.67	20.97396
1391/92	0.77296	43.00	27.60577
1392/93	0.71350	32.87	19.47910
1393/94	0.71350	43	25.09615
1394/95	0.70269	40.07	23.38611
1395/96	0.70269	54.6	31.86628
1396/97	0.70269	62	36.18515
1397/98	0.70269	46	26.84705
1398/99	0.68481	40	22.75109
1399/1400	0.69824	56	32.47606
1400/01	0.69824	65	37.69543
1401/02	0.69824	72	41.75493
1402/03	0.65944	74.5	40.80449
1403/04	0.64037	42.5	22.60444
1404/05	0.62873	51.78	27.03945
1405/06	0.62873	51.88	27.09167
1406/07	0.62873	66.67	34.81499
1407/08	0.62873	80.88	42.23543
1408/09	0.62306	99.03	51.24745
1409/10	0.62306	80.25	41.52891
1410/11	0.62306	54.56	28.23449
1411/12	0.62306	58.5	30.27341
1412/13	0.61750	67.63	34.68565
1413/14	0.61750	63.88	32.76238

¹⁸ Metz, *Geld, Währung und Preisentwicklung*, 345.

Year	Silver value of Utrecht <i>albus</i> (In italics: intra- and extrapolations)	Original wheat price (in <i>plakken</i> (until 1390) or <i>albi</i> (after 1390) per <i>modius</i>)	Converted wheat price (in grams of silver per hectolitre)
1414/15	0.57633	58	27.76357
1415/16	0.57633	54.56	26.11690
1416/17	0.50267	90.75	37.88787
1417/18	0.46400	56.63	21.82419
1418/19	0.44031	65.13	23.81831
1419/20	0.46561	56.63	21.89973
1420/21	0.46561		
1421/22	0.46561	130.5	50.46644
1422/23	0.46561	80	30.93728
1423/24	0.41527	91.5	31.55916
1424/25	0.37938	106.38	33.52054
1425/26	0.36583		
1426/27	0.34920	135.88	39.41023
1427/28	0.32691	164.5	44.66570
1428/29	0.25608	159.5	33.92466
1429/30	0.22763	147	27.79199
1430/31	0.22763	155.5	29.39901
1431/32	0.22763		
1432/33	0.21231		
1433/34	0.19699		

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 - o III. Kennemerland en Westfriesland: inv. nrs. 859 (account over the year 1428/1429), 880 (account over the year 1449/1451), 881 (account over the year 1450/1451), 927 (account over the year 1500);
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