

Corporate collective action and the market cycle of the cloth industry in Nieuwkerke, Flanders, 1300-1600

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Biography

Jim van der Meulen recently finished his PhD at the University of Antwerp in late 2017, which focussed on the interaction between town and countryside in western Flanders in the late Middle Ages. He is currently affiliated with a project at Ghent University as a post-doctoral researcher, about state formation and seigneurial lordship in the duchy of Guelders.

Abstract

This article addresses the connections between corporate collective action and economic development in the pre-industrial Low Countries. It focusses on a micro-historic case study: the textile industry of the village Nieuwkerke in the county of Flanders. This rural cloth centre witnessed an exceptional industrial expansion between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries.. Following the recent proposition by Bas van Bavel that market economies follow a fixed pattern of development, the chronology of the evolution of Nieuwkerke's cloth industry can be discussed in terms of three phases. This article argues that the first phase of development (1358-c.1500) was characterized by limited success because of pressure from the city of Ypres. The second phase (c.1500-c.1550) was marked by an industrial boom, predicated upon successful corporate collective action intertwined with the perception of social equality among the village's cloth entrepreneurs. The third and final phase (>c.1550) was one of stagnation and decline, caused by the breaking down of the collective and concomitant social polarization. The case study thereby closely conforms to van Bavel's theory about market cycles. Yet, the correlation between economic decline and social polarization should in this case be understood in terms of changing perceptions of inequality, rather than increasingly unequal opportunities.

Keywords: collective action, textile industry, rural history, sixteenth century, Low Countries

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In the early fourteenth century, several export-oriented rural textile industries emerged in the so-called 'West-Quarter' of the county of Flanders, which covered the region north-west of the river Lys and south of the city Ypres (see Figure 1). Many industrial centres arose here over the course of the next two centuries, yet during that period none of them produced more than 2000 pieces per annum. Then, around the year 1500, the village of Nieuwkerke suddenly witnessed a swift expansion of its cloth trade. By the time of its apogee in the mid-sixteenth-century, Nieuwkerke was responsible for no less than 14 % of Flanders's total woollen cloth output.ⁱ In the mere 50 years leading up to that point, its industrial expansion had gone hand-in-glove with a demographic boom: the population grew from around 1000 in 1469 to some 5000 people around 1550.ⁱⁱ Meanwhile, cultural life flourished: two Chambers of Rhetoric were founded in Nieuwkerke, as well as two archery confraternities.ⁱⁱⁱ Within only a few years of the start of the sixteenth century, Nieuwkerke's production output had risen to twice its maximum level of the 1400s, and after 1515 it rose to still greater heights, peaking at more than 10,000 pieces per year in 1547-49 (see Figure 2). However, the village's 'golden age' was short-lived: after 1550, a gradual stagnation set in, and the industry vanished almost entirely following the Iconoclastic Fury of 1566 and the subsequent onset of the

religious conflict known as the Dutch Revolt (1568-1648).^{iv} This article addresses the related questions of what underlay the exceptional yet ephemeral success of Nieuwkerke's textile industry, and what this means in terms of wider discussions about the influence of institutional frameworks on the long-term economic and political development of pre-industrial societies.^v

More specifically, this article is entrenched in two related frameworks of socio-economic history. Firstly, it has an affiliation with the most recent book of Bas van Bavel, wherein the author posits that market economies follow a fixed cycle of rise and fall. Put simply, this cycle is characterized by limited initial economic growth due to the commodification of land, labour and capital, which chiefly benefits a small 'market elite' that then seeks to freeze the system responsible for its exalted position, causing increasing social polarization and 'institutional sclerosis', and thence stagnation and decline.^{vi} As we shall see, something similar took place in Nieuwkerke between 1350 and 1600, although the underlying mechanisms did not entirely correspond to what van Bavel proposes. Another debate aligned with the present analysis attributes a beneficial role to institutionalized forms of 'collective action'. Ever since the seminal historical work devoted to the subject by Charles and Louise Tilly in 1981, collective action has been primarily treated in direct relation to class struggle.^{vii} Studies of the late medieval Low Countries and beyond also largely connect collective action to popular protest, most often in urban society.^{viii} More recently however, Tine De Moor has created a Collective Action Network at Utrecht University in the Netherlands in order to address the long-term effects of organized forms of collective action on societal development. According to De Moor, formalized units of collective action such as guilds were paramount to the formation of an 'institutional infrastructure for socio-political change', or even part of a 'silent revolution' that laid the groundwork for the leading economic position of Western Europe up until the present day.^{ix}

The upcoming analysis will offer a contribution to these debates by integrating van Bavel's focus on cyclical socio-economic development with De Moor's framework for examining the positive influence of collective action. De Moor adopts the term 'corporate collective action', which she deems 'the concept best suited to describe the exclusive, self-governed autonomous institutions [...] which depended on the idea that a group of people could form a legal body, a *universitas*.'^x The goal here is to assess the extent to which the industrial organization of Nieuwkerke fitted within the definition of De Moor, and how the specific form of the industrial corporation influenced its success. The central thesis is that corporate collective action was the key endogenous variable responsible for Nieuwkerke's industrial expansion in the early- to mid-sixteenth century.

The article is divided into three sections corresponding to different phases in the development of Nieuwkerke's cloth industry, both in terms of corporate collective action and of economic success. The first phase, roughly from 1300 to 1500, laid the foundation for the village's

cloth corporation, mainly through the acquisition of a legal cloth charter in 1358, and through certain key organizational reforms in the second half of the fifteenth century. This paved the way for the golden age of Nieuwkerke's industrial economy (c.1500-c.1550), marked by rising outputs coinciding with successfully coordinated corporate collective action of the village's cloth entrepreneurs, the so-called 'drapers' (*drapiers*). By organizing themselves as a collective, the drapers were able to protect their industry against exogenous, extra-economic incursions, mainly from its urban rival Ypres. Around the same time, the village textile corporation also adopted a more collective approach to marketing the finished products through the creation of a public commercial platform on the urban markets, which improved the efficiency of trade transactions. Saliently, the third phase (>1550), marked by a gradual and then swift industrial decline, coincided with a breaking down of the corporate collective. Conflicts within the industry tore apart its inner cohesion, at a time when the region witnessed increasing social and religious tensions. These culminated in the Iconoclastic Fury of 1566, and the ensuing religious wars were the kiss of death for Nieuwkerke's already enfeebled textile industry. Although these latter occurrences were primarily religious in nature, the present study further argues that as social phenomena they cannot be disconnected from the discussed developments in the local economy.

Phase one, 1358 - c. 1500: strained beginnings

Textile production had been the cornerstone of Flanders's economy since the twelfth century, when the industry had become concentrated in the Flemish cities. During this period, the expansion of the cloth trade in Flanders went hand in hand with the county's massive urbanization only rivalled by the Italian city-states.^{xi} However, the county's urban textile centres were confronted with fundamental problems towards the end of the thirteenth century, chiefly because of the rise of international competition, a reduced supply of the English wool that was invaluable to the production process, and the decline of their main commercial outlet of the Champagne fairs.^{xii} To cope with these averse circumstances, the cloth entrepreneurs in the Flemish towns reoriented towards the production of expensive luxury fabrics from around 1300 onwards.^{xiii} The result was a vacuum in the lower market segments of the cloth trade, which was gradually filled by cloth producers in the countryside in the vicinity of the cities.^{xiv} Meanwhile, the county's rural economy was receptive to this relocation because increasing demographic pressure in the late thirteenth century had caused landholdings to become fragmented, to the point that they became too small to provide enough food or income for peasant families. Therefore there was no lack of industrial labour in the countryside in this period.^{xv}

This, too, was the case in the Flemish West-Quarter. Moreover, when the cloth industry of the city of Ypres reoriented towards luxury fabrics in the fourteenth century, the migration of textile

workers and entrepreneurs caused a surge of human capital into the neighbouring countryside. Indeed, after Ypres's partial destruction following a major siege in 1383, this process of migration visibly bolstered the industries of small (semi-) urban cloth centres such as Langemark and Wervik.^{xvi} Nieuwkerke and the other rural settlements of the West-Quarter appear to have profited from migratory currents in a similar way, presumably already in the fourteenth century, but probably also in a second wave, in the early-fifteenth century. Most likely, there was a correlation between the new successes of the rural draperies and the very swift collapse of Langemark's industry around 1400.^{xvii} In addition, the demands of protesting weavers and fullers from Ypres in the early-fifteenth century suggest that some of the city's drapers were engaged in a kind of medieval outsourcing, dipping into the cheaper labour pool of the countryside.^{xviii} This appears to have been in process as early as the 1280s.^{xix} In doing so, the drapers of Ypres had not only injected capital into these villages, but also transferred technical know-how from city to countryside.

A pivotal moment in the rise of textile production in the rural West-Quarter occurred in the year 1358, when Nieuwkerke first acquired its official charter (*keure*), giving the village legal licence to produce woollen fabrics.^{xx} During this period, the count of Flanders pursued a general policy of expanding the privileges of small towns and villages so as to reduce the preeminent power of the cities in his territory.^{xxi} However, Nieuwkerke resided under the authority of Louis of Namur, member of a cadet-branch of the Flemish comital family that ruled independently over the lordship Bailleul—to which Nieuwkerke belonged—between 1305 and 1421.^{xxii} So, Louis of Namur copied the strategy of his cousin the count of Flanders by granting Nieuwkerke a legal charter, but in his case it was a means to insulate his subjects against incursions from outside his territory. The phrasing of the document makes clear that the people of Nieuwkerke requested legal privileges from their prince, probably to protect them against harassment from Ypres. Indeed, in 1352, the 'bastard of Flanders', accompanied by 55 citizens, had led an armed expedition to the village to stop the manufacture of cloth.^{xxiii}

Nieuwkerke was the only village in the region to attain a cloth charter this early on; other centres had to wait until the later fifteenth century before they finally received a charter, and some of the cloth-producing villages in the West-Quarter never even managed to procure one.^{xxiv} From a legal perspective, this was a crucial element in Nieuwkerke's economic development, because the charter formed the legal linchpin of the industry as a 'corporation', even though traceable signs of corporate collective action only took place much later. The charter also enabled the village industry to more or less govern itself and operate with autonomy—important preconditions for institutionalized collective action, according to De Moor.^{xxv}

Also important was that the charter gave Nieuwkerke's drapers and artisans an official basis to counter infringements from outside, mainly from the city of Ypres. Indeed, the government of

Ypres proved a main inhibitor to industrial development in the burgeoning cloth centres of the West-Quarter. A political faction in Ypres looking after the interests of the cloth industry was constantly trying to smash the competition from industrial villages in the city's hinterland on legal grounds.^{xxvi} In 1428, they managed to acquire a charter from Duke Philip the Good of Burgundy, then count of Flanders, forbidding the rural textile centres from producing woollens similar to those of the city. This hearkened back to privileges granted by Count Louis of Nevers in the early fourteenth century, protecting the Flemish cities from competition within a certain radius of their walls, but with the exception of towns with a chartered industry.^{xxvii} Accordingly, by (re-) establishing this charter, Philip the Good gave Ypres ammunition to ban export-oriented industry in the cloth villages through punitive measures. In fact, prosecutions of several rural drapers in the West-Quarter followed. Moreover, in June 1429, the Count ordered his officers to arrest cloth entrepreneurs from Nieuwkerke on their way to the fair of the Flemish town Torhout.^{xxviii}

Thus began a legal battle during which the West-Quarter villages, Nieuwkerke chief among them, tried to have this prohibitive charter nullified. The villages were supported in their attempts by Jeanne de Harcourt, dowager countess of Namur and lady of Bailleul. With her help, their emissaries sought to bypass the decision of the count of Flanders through an appeal to the Parlement of Paris.^{xxix} The Parlement initially lifted the ban on rural cloth production, but Philip the Good simply overturned its decision, and in 1431 the Duke reaffirmed his previous ruling obstructing Nieuwkerke's industry.^{xxx} The village's champion Jeanne de Harcourt was in a difficult position because Duke Philip was her feudal overlord, having bought the county of Namur in 1421.^{xxxi} Fortunately for the drapers of Nieuwkerke, after 1435 Philip withdrew from interfering in French matters and by extension in the Parlement, so that in 1441, the procurator of the reinstated king of France brought the issue before that court. Finally, in 1449, the Parlement determined that the rights of the village industries were to be respected.^{xxxii} Thereafter followed a few decades when the rural centres were apparently left alone by the urban aggressor, and Philip the Good's son and successor Charles the Bold did not reinstate Ypres's privilege during his reign (1467-77) either. It was during this period that Nieuwkerke first reached a production output above 2000 pieces per annum.^{xxxiii}

However, the 1480s and 1490s were again marked by crisis because of the renewed political power of Ypres and the continuous state of war in the West-Quarter. First the region was invaded by the king of France and then, later, it became the stage of civil war within Flanders, when the Flemish cities rose up against Archduke Maximilian I.^{xxxiv} As a consequence of this urban uprising, Ypres briefly ruled supremely in the West-Quarter in the early 1480s. The city used its new authority to come down hard on the rural draperies in its hinterland again, prosecuting many cloth entrepreneurs from the various villages.^{xxxv} The hardships to Nieuwkerke's cloth industry in the

1480s are reflected in its irregular production outputs during this period. These dropped from 1757 pieces in 1480 to 517 in 1481, followed by a few years when the cloth tax was not collected at all because of Ypres's hegemony, only to come in at an all time low of 258 pieces in 1489.^{xxxvi} Then in 1501, Philip the Fair, count of Flanders, reinstated Ypres's charter, once again restricting textile production in the West-Quarter along the lines laid down in the city's privilege of 1428.^{xxxvii} When a number of cloth traders from Nieuwkerke and some other villages continued to sell their prohibited fabrics in Antwerp and Bergen op Zoom, the governments of these cities were forced to publish placards that banned merchants from having any commercial dealings with these places.^{xxxviii} Joost Godeschalck, a weaver who had lived in Nieuwkerke in this period, would later remark that at that time 'the trade broke down entirely'.^{xxxix}

All in all, the first phase of formally organized industry in Nieuwkerke was marked by strain due to the opposition from Ypres. And although the city was not wholly successful in defeating the rural competition, there is little doubt that its efforts had a negative effect on the potential growth of the industries. The villages were unable to overcome this obstacle, firstly because they were dependent upon the support of lords and princes. Yet even though Countess Jeanne de Harcourt defended the interests of the cloth villages she held in usufruct, her efforts were wasted because her opponent Philip the Good was also her feudal superior. Nor did the efforts of the lords of Nieuwkerke contribute much in this period. In 1484, the lord brooked some temporary success through procuring decrees of the Parlement of Paris, but these were overturned one year later by the administration of the new count of Flanders.^{xl} The counts were mainly on Ypres's side throughout the fifteenth century, having had close ties with the city's oligarchy ever since the late fourteenth century.^{xli} Yet make no mistake: for Ypres, princely support also required careful lobbying, as evidenced by the £8875 par. that exchanged hands to buy the city its important privilege of 1428.^{xlii}

Secondly, the lack of internal cohesion within the textile 'corporation' of Nieuwkerke arguably restricted its potential to defend itself. In the legal proceedings via the Parlement and French monarchy in 1443, there is mention of only 'a *small number of inhabitants* of the parishes [Nieuwkerke, Nieppe, and Eécke]' who initiated the legal objections (my emphasis).^{xliii} Ypres's solicitor used this as a legal argument to try and refute the villages' case before the Parlement: he claimed the 77 people who filed the suit had no right to declare themselves representatives of a community of some 6000 people in total.^{xliiv} Obviously, this point should not be taken too far, since one could hardly expect the village communities in their entirety to lend nominal support to the lawsuit. On the other hand, additional evidence does indeed indicate that the drapers may have lacked the required unity to engage in 'corporate collective action'. In the 1450s, there were clear signs of factional struggle within the cloth industry of Nieuwkerke. A small group of wealthy drapers were apparently acting against the interests of the '*commun pueple*' by combining several

craft stages in their workshops and hiring workers from outside the community.^{xlv} Because Nieuwkerke's industry hardly had any regulations at this point, it may have fallen victim to exploitation by a small group of dominant drapers to whom the village formed an entrepreneurial paradise. Presumably, the differences in entrepreneurial scale created sentiments of unequal opportunity among one faction of drapers, which undermined social cohesion within the corporation.

On the one hand therefore, the lack of unity within Nieuwkerke's drapery may have factored into its failure to reach common accord in the fight against Ypres. On the other hand, in the 1450s and 1460s, the conflict between factions of entrepreneurs over unequal opportunities also led to an increase in formal regulations. The administration of Charles the Bold, who was lord of Bailleul at the time, laid the institutional groundwork for more 'egalitarian' conditions for entrepreneurs, mainly by countering vertical integration and electing an officer to guard over regulations that were expanded considerably in 1462.^{xlvi} After Charles the Bold's demise in 1477, the political turmoil shifted conditions to the detriment of the West-Quarter cloth villages, but Nieuwkerke's redacted cloth charter would be the first building block for its 'golden age' in the first half of the sixteenth century.

Phase two, c. 1500 - c. 1550: corporate collective action and 'golden age'

The early sixteenth century marked the beginning of a new phase in the economic development of Nieuwkerke. Saliently, the village's reversal of fortune began when a new lord arrived on the scene in 1503. In a legal document of 1545, the drapers of Ypres complained that the village lord's protection had prevented their reinstated cloth charter of 1501 from sticking in Nieuwkerke:

[U]nder cover of being subjects of the late count of Gavere, and before that of his father the late lord of Fiennes, who were both successively grand governors in our land and county of Flanders and feared accordingly, [...] [the people of Nieuwkerke] have intervened and acted to contravene against the mentioned decree and bylaw.^{xlvii}

Indeed, the new lord looked after the interests of his villagers on several occasions, interfering on their behalf against Ypres.^{xlviii} He himself had a vested interest in the survival and success of the rural drapery, because he was entitled to 6d par. for each cloth that was produced within the parish.^{xlix} Every piece of cloth that was to be sold as 'chartered' cloth from Nieuwkerke had to be inspected by industrial officials, the 'wardens' (*wardeinen*), and if the quality was sufficient, the fabric received a leaden seal which signified that it had passed inspection. The drapers had to pay a 12d duty for this privilege, half of which went to the count of Flanders, and the other half to the lord

of Nieuwkerke. Accordingly, the wardens had to keep a record of how many cloths they sealed, and these documents provide us with relatively exact production figures for parts of the sixteenth century (Figure 2).

Certainly, the same interests had already existed in the fifteenth century, but at that time the lords of Nieuwkerke had been local nobles without much political clout.ⁱ Up until the late fourteenth century, the lordship was held by the toponymic van Nieuwkerke family, who were only engaged with their single lordship, and in the fifteenth century the lords of the village belonged to the relatively unimpressive de la Douve family.ⁱⁱ After his marriage with heiress Isabel de la Douve, lord George d'Escornay briefly ruled over it, but his highest political office was that of alderman in the Franc of Bruges.ⁱⁱⁱ Now, in 1503, lordship reverted to Jacques II de Luxembourg-Fiennes, knight of the Order of the Golden Fleece, one of the most eminent aristocrats of the Low Countries, and stadholder of Flanders and Artois from 1504 onwards. Indeed, according to Hans Cools, from around 1490, he was one of the nobles who 'determined the appearance of the Burgundian-Habsburg court for several decades.'^{liii} As stadholder of Flanders, his authority was perhaps not 'feared' as such by the people of Ypres, but his high position at court must have been well known in the city. At various times, Jacques de Luxembourg interfered in issues between Ypres's city government and other parties, and the same went for his successor.^{liv}

However, it is important to stress that it was the drapers of Nieuwkerke who exploited the fearsome quality of their lord. According to Frans de Lopere, who had lived in the village at the time, the drapers initially obeyed the bylaws of Ypres's prohibitive privilege of 1501 'until *they* bought the lordship of Nieuwkerke *and bequeathed it to the lord of Fiennes*' (my emphases), whereafter they began to produce cloth in violation of the privilege.^{lv} Unfortunately, the original document of infeudation is not extant, so it is unclear what to make exactly of this curious statement. An entry in the inventory of the archives of the lords of Egmont—who inherited Nieuwkerke after 1550—mentions the 'purchase by the lord of Fiennes of the land and seigniorship of Nieuwkerke' without mentioning the involvement of the villagers.^{lvi} But another source sheds more light on the event. It derives from a now lost document of 14 July 1503. Isidore Diegerick, nineteenth-century archivist of the city archives of Ypres, summarized the document as follows in 1868:

[T]he aldermen and inhabitants of the lordship Nieuwkerke have committed themselves, in the name of the community, to pay Jacques de Luxembourg [...], their lord, the sum of £12,000 par., to be employed for the redemption of a claim laid on the aforementioned lordship by Jean Sauvage.^{lvii}

The Egmont archives indeed mention an annual rent of £95 15s ‘for the benefit of Lord Jean Sauvage’, but it is unclear how this claim had come to rest upon the lordship.^{lviii} It probably ensued from a loan made out by Sauvage to one of the village’s former lords or even Jacques de Luxembourg himself; a lump sum in exchange for a yearly annuity. Jean le Sauvage was a key figure at the Burgundian-Habsburg court, a Knight of the Golden Fleece, Lord of Escobecques near Lille, and president of the Council of Flanders since 1497.^{lix} This placed him very close to Jacques de Luxembourg. In fact, in 1508, the two men joined a party of nobles who stood surety for a sum of 50,000 crowns that the future Charles V had to pay if he should renege on his marriage contract with Mary Tudor.^{lx} Therefore it seems probable that le Sauvage had lent a large sum to the lord of Nieuwerkerke at some point, whether this was de Luxembourg or not.

In any case, the joint effort by the people of Nieuwerkerke to either purchase the lordship or to buy off such a massive debt resting on it would have been an impressive form of collective action on the part of the village community in general. The £12,000 par. truly was an extraordinarily high sum by any standard; one hundred times higher than the annual income the lord could expect from his 6d duty on sealed cloth! Unfortunately, there are no references as to how and if this money was ever raised. Yet, Jacques de Luxembourg certainly became lord of Nieuwerkerke in 1503, and apparently the village’s cloth industry benefited from his protection. The reason why the drapers needed a powerful aristocrat as their lord was his ability, not so much to scare off Ypres, as to lobby on their behalf with the city and with the count of Flanders. Indeed, the original document specifying that the people of Nieuwerkerke would pay the £12000 was joined to two letters addressed by Jacques de Luxembourg to the magistrate of Ypres, inviting them to discuss the long-standing disagreement between the city and the cloth village.^{lxi}

Still, a powerful lord was mainly useful as an *external* shield. Internally, the less involved he was, the better it suited the cloth entrepreneurs of Nieuwerkerke. Fortunately for them, although the lords officially ruled over the industry, in practice, their engagement was superficial at best. This is noteworthy, because these same lords did actively interfere in their other cloth industry of the town Armentières.^{lxii} Therefore, Nieuwerkerke’s industry continued to enjoy a large degree of autonomy and self-governance. Yet the conflicts over unfair competition in the 1450s make clear that up to that point, the industry lacked the proper ‘institutionalization’. In other words: it had still been largely deregulated, whereas the successful implementation of corporate collective action required a set of rules that prevented free-riding, and guarded over collective interests in general.^{lxiii} This is where the expanded regulations begun during the reign of Charles the Bold came in. For one thing, the 1462 charter introduced the office of ‘bailiff of the drapery’ to uphold the regulations and supervise the wardens. Very important in this regard was a new bylaw ruling that all fabrics henceforth required the ‘draper’s mark’ (*’t maerc van den drapier*) to be woven into them.^{lxiv} This

measure was presumably designed to increase accountability, as the cloth charter articulated that customers could return substandard cloth to sender via the wardens, who were able to identify the responsible party by his or her mark. However, this also meant that the industrial officers had to have held some kind of administration listing which mark belonged to which draper. Accordingly, new drapers had to be entered into this ledger while former entrepreneurs had to be removed from it, which strongly suggests that entrance into the drapery came with a procedure of admission, even though the charters never explicitly mention this.

The draper's mark therefore constituted a two-pronged approach, since it not only raised accountability but acted as a gatekeeper as well by monitoring new entrants. As mentioned, De Moor considers exclusivity a key component of corporate collective action, and in that sense the formal use of the draper's marks in Nieuwkerke contributed towards the development of corporate collective action. Having said that, there is not really any evidence that tells of the criteria of admission, with the exception of a bylaw specifying that all drapers had to reside in Nieuwkerke and be taxable (*taillable*) there.^{lxv} Nevertheless, the mark was a sign of membership of the corporation, and both this and the implied initiation rite would have increased cohesion among the drapers. That sense of unity was further facilitated by the periodic public inquests (*waerheden*) also instituted in 1462, at which the industrial officers passed judgment on offenders of the regulations. All drapers and master-artisans could be summoned to attend these proceedings. The inquests hearkened back to an old inclusive legal tradition in Flanders, the so-called *franches vérités* or *waerheden*, which were general inquests held by an officer of the Count, who invited ordinary people to bear testimony in local judicial matters.^{lxvi} Indeed, during the *waerheden* of Nieuwkerke's drapery, any attendant could be prompted to give testimony concerning the contents of the bylaws, and therefore all those present had to swear an oath.^{lxvii} This ensured that people were more involved with their fellows, and reinforced general knowledge about the regulations while at the same time ratifying the verdicts of the wardens. Meanwhile, evidence about the cloth industry in the small Flemish town Estaires (Stegers) indicates that the *waerheden* were also the occasion when the wardens officially recorded the names of new drapers.^{lxviii} So towards the sixteenth century, the institutional framework was already stimulating a sense of membership and collective responsibility, although the turbulent period of the 1470s until around 1500 had precluded these facets from bearing fruit.

Starting in 1503, then, Nieuwkerke drew up its lordly 'cover', while the drapery effectively maintained its independence and strengthened internal control over its members. It was around the same time that the village entrepreneurs started a new collective approach towards marketing their cloth. From the late fifteenth- to the mid-sixteenth century, the main commercial outlet for Nieuwkerke's fabrics were the Brabantine cities Bergen op Zoom and Antwerp.^{lxix} No later than

1511, the village's entrepreneurs decided to rent a cloth hall—functioning both as a shop and as storage facility—during the fairs of Bergen op Zoom, for the benefit of ‘the entire nation of the drapery of Nieuwkerke’.^{lxx} This suggests that some type of common fund had been created before that moment in order to come up with the yearly rent of £120 par.^{lxxi} Around the same time, the corporation rented a cloth hall in Antwerp. By 1573, its rental price amounted to no less than £720 par. per year.^{lxxii} There is little doubt but the management of these rent sums would have required a commonly controlled treasury. Also, the phrasing in the original contract with the city government of Bergen op Zoom conjures up an image of an actual trading ‘nation’, which supports the idea that Nieuwkerke’s drapers were perceived by outsiders as a corporation. If Nieuwkerke’s drapers termed themselves a trading nation, this would stimulate their sense of community, and it would further suggest that there was a common fund.^{lxxiii} Moreover, looking at the production figures of the village’s industry, it is very clear that cloth output skyrocketed from around this moment (Figure 2).

The commercial policy of Nieuwkerke’s textile corporation was not ‘original’ as such, since foreign traders had already used cloth halls in the fourteenth century.^{lxxiv} The village’s entrepreneurs simply copied a strategy that was already deployed by others, and the reason they did so was because it worked. When the drapers from Nieuwkerke frequented the fairs at Bergen op Zoom, they could plainly see how places like Diest, Weert, and Turnhout also rented common warehouses and stores.^{lxxv} Because of the continuous exchange between traders, successful commercial methods of foreign colleagues were imitated to and fro.^{lxxvi} In fact, sometimes it was possible to swoop into a recently vacated lodging that had already been used as a cloth hall. The drapers of the successful Flemish cloth town Armentières even employed this tactic on two occasions. In 1529, they took over the ‘old hall of Weert’ in Bergen op Zoom.^{lxxvii} A few years later, they also took up lodging in Antwerp, this time in the house ‘formerly known as the hall of Nieuwkerke’.^{lxxviii}

The main benefit of the shared trading post for the village’s entrepreneurial corporation was to lower transaction costs per trader. But while this seems very much in service of the common welfare, essentially it would not have been very advantageous to rich entrepreneurs who had their own means to set up private stores. Most likely therefore, one reason why the collective initiative took hold was because it coincided with a general period of slump, thereby drawing all entrepreneurs into the collective. After all, the richest drapers were presumably most apt to influence industrial policy, so they had to have seen the need—or the opportunity—to lower their expenses by installing a public venture. But it stands to reason that they were the ones who had to front a larger proportion of the rent sum, and like everybody else had to contend not only with an increased degree of control by the industrial officers, but also with additional levies per piece of cloth that was processed via the hall.^{lxxix} In other words: the need had to have been dire for them to accept such an arrangement. Indeed, textile industries elsewhere instated similar collective efforts at

times when their fortunes were on the wane. So for instance, the city magistrate of Leiden in the county of Holland organized a common ‘purse’ (*beurs*)—a joint venture that sold cloth in large quantities—in 1530, in order to maintain a firmer control on the price level of the town’s fabrics.^{lxxx} In fifteenth-century Bergues-Saint-Winoc in Flanders, a similar common fund (*bourse*) was set up to support the newly founded branch of light textiles.^{lxxxii} In both cases, the collective enterprise was aimed at countering a situation of crisis. Nieuwkerke’s inspiration may have likewise derived from its losses in the last decades of the fifteenth century, causing even the wealthier entrepreneurs to see the added benefit of corporate cooperation.

There is also a possibility that while corporate policy posed as beneficial to all, it really served the needs of a small elite in particular. Even though the cloth halls were technically open to ‘all those of the [parish Nieuwkerke] carrying or transporting cloth into said cities’,^{lxxxiii} in practice, the enterprise could have benefited the wealthier drapers in particular. In order to make use of the cloth halls, one had to cross the vast distance of about 175 km between the Flemish West-Quarter and the north of Brabant. Although the expenditures of such a journey were of little effect, the undertaking did require a considerable investment of time during which the draper was absent from his or her workshop.^{lxxxiii} This potentially put drapers with smaller operations at a disadvantage. Then again, the example of the *beurs* of Leiden would belie this notion, because in that case the cooperative venture was actually intended to support poorer drapers who could not travel to the market towns.^{lxxxiv} To that effect, in Leiden’s drapery the cloths were sold on a common account, which those of Nieuwkerke may also have been. Indeed, it seems probable that Nieuwkerke’s textile corporation followed a procedure akin to that of the cloth centre Armentières, where the wardens appointed official hall masters to sell the fabrics of everybody who could not travel to the market cities, in exchange for a small fee.^{lxxxv} After all, the drapers of Armentières occupied premises that had been previously used by those of Nieuwkerke, so it is not unlikely that the latter had used them in a similar fashion. Moreover, a proportion of Nieuwkerke’s cloth was dyed in Armentières, which further stimulated the exchange of industrial and commercial methods.^{lxxxvi}

The corporate collective action in Nieuwkerke’s cloth industry also extended into local politics. For one thing, the village aldermen must have been involved in the attempts to buy off the claim held on the lordship by Jean le Sauvage in 1503—although that was not a measure exclusively affecting the cloth industry. Yet they also directly interfered to guard over industrial interests. In 1522 for instance, the aldermen pressured the magistrate of Ypres to make restitutions for a shipment of raw materials that had never been delivered to the drapers of Nieuwkerke.^{lxxxvii} These raw materials were apparently purchased collectively—which is further proof of the existence of a corporation—and the village officials were involved in protecting the transaction. This is not altogether surprising, considering that the aldermen often engaged in cloth enterprises

themselves, or were related to drapers.^{lxxxviii} Furthermore, the drapers of Nieuwkerke were also well-versed in the game of political lobbying, as apparent from their collaboration with the cloth towns Poperinge and Mesen in 1545. At that time, Ypres was once again launching a legal assault on the draperies in its hinterland, and in an attempt to bribe their way to a favourable verdict, the entrepreneurs of Nieuwkerke and the two towns pooled their money to buy the governor of Flanders a new horse.^{lxxxix} Incidentally, this again implies some kind of shared fund of the village's entrepreneurs, to be deployed in such cases.

In sum: from around 1500 to 1550, the close interconnections of local politics with industry and trade benefited corporate collective action among the drapers of Nieuwkerke. The foundations for this collective action were laid in the second half of the fifteenth century, as the village drapers united against the external threat of Ypres, whilst battling the attempts at vertical integration of a small number of entrepreneurs within their own village. Perhaps it is no coincidence that this prologue to effective collective action was paralleled in increased references to the 'Common Good' during the same period. In the Low Countries in general and the county of Flanders in particular, this concept mainly developed within the towns as an expression of urban self-governance, as well as one of collaboration within the urban network.^{xc} This ideological underpinning of collective action was clearly visible in 1484, when the draping 'community' (*'t ghemeente*), consisting of 160 people, conferred for three hours in Nieuwkerke's parish church to reach an accord about the terms presented to them by Ypres.^{xcⁱ} References to acts for the 'benefit of the community of drapers' (*proufict du commun des drapiers*) and the 'entire nation' on the commercial level were a rhetorical reiteration of this collective action.^{xcⁱⁱ} There is little doubt that this rhetoric promoted internal cohesion, which was reflected in the most pronounced expansion of industrial productivity that Nieuwkerke ever reached. Also, the collective strategy of the rural cloth centre was mirrored by the major cloth centre Armentières, which rose to prominence in unison with Nieuwkerke. When the drapers of that town rented their cloth hall in Antwerp in 1534, no less than 93 of them adjoined their names to the contract.^{xcⁱⁱⁱ} In connection with the economic cycle identified by van Bavel, this period in the development of Nieuwkerke's textile economy was marked by a relatively 'closed' system, in the sense that exchange was monitored by the collective through the interference of industrial officers. The accompanying social stability within the ranks of the cloth entrepreneurs was conducive to industrial flourishing.^{xc^{iv}} However, it was the deep breath before the plunge, and the gradual breaking down of internal cohesion would be accompanied by the industry's overall decline.

Phase three, after c. 1550: bang or whimper?

In 1593, the Flemish Chamber of Accounts in Lille held an inquest to determine the current state of the textile industries in Western Flanders. Although many old cloth centres had faltered in recent years, in most places there were signs of recovery and renewed growth.^{xcv} However, Nieuwkerke was found to be a mere shadow of its former self.^{xcvi} It is tempting to lay this at the door of the Dutch Revolt, the religious war that had taken hold of the region after 1566. Emperor Philip II's confiscation of Nieuwkerke's premises in Antwerp already dealt a blow to the commercial potential of the village industry in 1573, and a decade later the Brabantine city was conquered completely by imperial Spanish troops.^{xcvii} Moreover, in 1582, Spanish soldiers destroyed a large part of Nieuwkerke, including the village's cloth hall. These events caused a mass emigration from the Flemish West-Quarter, ensuring that the region's industrial successes ended for good.^{xcviii} Then again, similar circumstances hit other villages and towns, and those were able to recover.^{xcix} Armentières for instance, whose industrial boom had run parallel to that of Nieuwkerke, saw a renewed upturn during the last decades of the sixteenth century.^c Therefore this cannot have been the whole story.

Indeed, in the course of the 1550s, the output of Nieuwkerke's fabrics had already begun to drop gradually, never again to reach the level of the 1540s (Figure 2).^{ci} Saliently, this downturn coincided with increased polarization and factional struggles within the corporation of drapers. A series of conflicts ensued in the 1550s between a group of rich entrepreneurs on one side and the poor and 'common' (*commun*) drapers on the other. Members of the latter faction wanted to curb scale-enlargement of their richer colleagues, because they were increasingly less able to compete with them. Their discontent echoed that of their predecessors in the 1450s, with references to the Common Good by the faction that felt they lacked equal opportunities.^{cii} Around this same time, the wardens acted on complaints from within the drapery that certain traders were bypassing the joint cloth halls in Antwerp and Bergen op Zoom, renting private premises to market their products instead.^{ciii} In terms of corporate collective action, this constituted a form of free-riding, since the wardens could not monitor sales outside the halls. These traders were theoretically able to fly the colours of Nieuwkerke's chartered drapery while selling substandard fabrics, which did not only give them a competitive advantage, but was also damaging to the industry's general reputation. Since renting private stores must have been a costly affair, the drapers in question were at the wealthier end of the spectrum. Therefore it appears that in the course of Nieuwkerke's blooming, a group of entrepreneurs had pulled away from their fellows in terms of prosperity, and now sought to undermine the collective in their own interest. This corresponds closely to what Oliver Volckart concluded about village cooperation in the marketing of agricultural produce in the later Middle Ages: these collectives only lasted while there was a relatively small group of rich participants. Internal stratification within the community was not a problem, as long as the affluent did not

become too numerous, in which case they stood to gain more from stepping outside of—and thereby breaking— the collective.^{civ}

These developments also conform to van Bavel's prediction about the connection between rising social polarization and economic decline. Yet it would be wrong to label the Nieuwkerke case a unilateral question of 'the rich' parasitizing the industry. In the second half of the sixteenth century, Nieuwkerke's cloth industry was facing massive exogenous challenges, both in terms of international competition and a shift in market demand; circumstances which were worsened by an overall increase in food prices and a downturn in real wages.^{cv} In dealing with these external developments, the industrial officers were wedged in between opposing factions on the home front. While they were trying to rein in the rich drapers who had set up private shop in Antwerp, at the other end they had to contend with inferior cloth from poor or impoverished producers. This is apparent from their attempts, around the year 1553, to enforce stricter regulations on the types of wool allowed for use.^{cvi} Although a useful strategy in an increasingly competitive international textile market, this constituted an indirect assault upon the poorer drapers, who were unable to afford materials of the required standards. Subpar fabrics would indeed have damaged the reputation of Nieuwkerke's product, thereby undermining collective interests just as much as trading outside the halls did. However that may be, these new regulations must have fuelled the flame of factional friction even more. Although the high fines were brought down through the interference of the Flemish Chamber of Accounts, the requirements remained in place. As a consequence, many drapers will have been unable to maintain their own enterprises, and were forced to work for their richer colleagues, either as subcontractors or as wage workers.^{cvi} Indeed, the available data from the wardens' accounts of the cloth seal in 1564-65 suggests that by that time more than half of the village's drapers had an annual output that was probably too small to constitute a successful enterprise on its own merit (see Table 1). Even in the cloth industry of Leiden, where the woollens were more expensive than in Nieuwkerke, an individual production of 30 pieces per annum signified only a small operation.^{cvi} As the figures for Nieuwkerke show, more than half of the village's cloth entrepreneurs produced fewer than 25 cloths annually, and therefore it seems unlikely that their industrial revenue alone was sufficient to support their families.

Still, it remains unclear to what extent the cracks in the collective were a cause, rather than a consequence, of the recession. After all, Nieuwkerke was not the only textile centre that faced conflicts about inequality between drapers in this period. In the Flemish boom-town Hondschoote in 1557, the '*commun drapiers*' were also protesting against attempts at scale-enlargement by the richer entrepreneurs.^{cix} The difference was that Hondschoote was almost entirely driven by capital inputs from external merchant firms, in the fifteenth century mainly from Bruges, in the sixteenth from Antwerp.^{cx} These merchants bought finished cloth off the drapers and took care of the

marketing process. By contrast, in Nieuwkerke it was the drapers who oversaw both the production process and the marketing of fabrics.^{cxix} While things were going smoothly, this integration on the collective level may have given the drapers a self-image of belonging to unified corporation. Yet, when their own tradesmen started openly pursuing individual gain, apparently enriching themselves at the expense of the others, this was interpreted as a subversion of the public interest, causing ‘great scandal and damage to the entire parish’.^{cxii}

Following van Bavel’s framework then, one might argue that the 1550s marked the end to the cycle of development of Nieuwkerke’s textile industry, with growing inequality between the richer drapers—the ‘market elite’—and the rest of the corporation. However, it is very much the question whether the conflicts within the industry were sparked by actual increasing inequality, as van Bavel’s theory would suggest. The all-round worsening of Nieuwkerke’s position on the international cloth market might have been unequally distributed over the various layers of society, but it is more likely that the crucial element was an absolute reduction of prosperity for the entrepreneurs in general. Of course, a drop in income brought the poorer drapers a lot closer to the bottom than the rich, thereby raising the former’s *perception* of unequal opportunities, which became the proverbial straw that broke the camel’s back. This is in accordance with a recent study that found no clear correlation between rising sentiments of unequal opportunity—potentially leading to revolt—on the one hand, and objectively measurable increases in societal inequality on the other hand.^{cxiii} There is even evidence to suggest that economic decline diminished a pre-industrial society’s potential for inequality, because the surplus that could be extracted by an elite was lower under these circumstances.^{cxiv} Indeed, in the first quarter of the sixteenth century, the Brabantine city of ‘s-Hertogenbosch (Bois-le-Duc) witnessed increasing socio-political polarization, just like Nieuwkerke, yet during this period the distribution of wealth actually became more egalitarian. In that instance as well, it was the economic ‘cake’ in general that shrank, bringing the less well-to-do closer to, or across, the brink of poverty.^{cxv}

Having said that, one cannot exclude the possibility that the polarization arose at least in part because of actual rising inequality. Indeed, another complaint levelled against the richer drapers of Nieuwkerke was that they traded in ‘foreign cloth’ (*draps estrangiers*), which is to say any textiles that were not produced in the local parish.^{cxvi} This may suggest that these cloth entrepreneurs had in fact made the jump to more independent merchant activity in an attempt at hedging their bets following deteriorating market conditions for Nieuwkerke’s fabrics. From the perspective of the corporate collective, this was base treason, because in doing so, these traders diverted capital from potentially productive usage in the village itself.^{cxvii} These merchant-drapers may have had one foot out the door already, as they obviously had their own personal ties to the market cities. On the other hand, no such accumulation of wealth in the village’s social top layer was apparent at the moment

when the religious wars broke out. In the period 1566-72 even the wealthiest inhabitants of Nieuwkerke—among whom were some drapers—did not qualify as truly rich in their time, the richest draper possessing less than £400 Flemish groats.^{cxviii} Such entrepreneurs were less able to recover from temporary economic adversity than the far more prosperous merchants, for example those from the Antwerp trading firms.^{cxix} They were also more dependent upon pooling their resources, both to buy the expensive raw materials and to come up with the rent for their commercial outlets in the market cities. Even though Nieuwkerke's corporation still rented the cloth hall in Antwerp shortly before it was seized in 1573, through falling production figures the ratio between overhead and income would have been increasingly off keel.

So, on the one hand, the all out state of war after the Iconoclastic Fury of 1566 seems like a *deus ex machina* that extinguished Nieuwkerke's cloth industry with a bang. The wave of emigration from the general region, coupled with the fall of Antwerp in 1585, was certainly instrumental in the downfall of Nieuwkerke's cloth industry.^{cxx} On the other hand, the question remains whether without these external circumstances the village would have recovered from the decline that had already set in by that time. In fact, the religious troubles of this period can arguably be considered as interconnected with the underlying social tensions.^{cxxi} The increased gap between poor and rich—whether imagined or real—within the cloth industry of Nieuwkerke was only indicative of a social rift that was impacting upon society as a whole. The Iconoclastic Fury itself has sometimes been attributed to the aftermath of harvest failures that brought social tensions to breaking point.^{cxxii} Peter Arnade has also emphasized the role of the 'grossly unequal distribution of wealth' in the textile industries of the West-Quarter in the rise of militant Calvinism in the region.^{cxxiii} Indeed, there were increasing signs of poverty in the West-Quarter during this period. One inhabitant of Nieuwkerke was even so plagued by hunger in 1556 that he robbed the parish church of its silver chalice, but not before eating the sacramental bread it contained.^{cxxiv} At the other end of the spectrum, two men, one of whom was a draper from Nieuwkerke, were convicted for abusing their status as deputies to the bailiff in order to extort money from their fellows in several rural parishes.^{cxxv}

Within this context of worsening social conditions, the drapers were in a position to behave very much like the 'market elites' characteristic of the end-cycle in van Bavel's model, potentially enriching themselves at the expense of ordinary people whose collective efforts in industry and trade had advanced the primacy of the market but who had thereby advanced their own market-dependence.^{cxxvi} Indeed, at this juncture, Nieuwkerke's development seems to fit the model quite well, because the expansion of its drapery in the sixteenth century was buttressed by cloth workers who had to trade their labour via the market. Meanwhile, a small market elite could potentially

exploit these people's productive efforts for their own betterment, thereby ultimately causing their own economy to stagnate or decline.^{cxvii}

However, some marked differences do catch the eye, most importantly that the 'elite' in this case was only an economic elite. At the start of the downturn of Nieuwkerke's output around 1550, the wardens of the cloth industry were not in cahoots with the wealthy drapers who sought out private trading opportunities in Antwerp and Bergen op Zoom; in fact, they openly opposed the 'market elitism' of these drapers. Also, and partly as a consequence of this, one cannot hold the actions of this small group of drapers responsible for the 'institutional sclerosis' that would underlie eventual stagnation because it blocked the formation of new, more efficient institutions. Strictly speaking, if we apply van Bavel's theory to Nieuwkerke's textile industry and trade, the 'market elite' would actually consist of people within the industry who attempted to *maintain* the corporate collective. After all, they were the ones who tried to inhibit market conditions from running their natural course, instead applying extra-economic pressure to safeguard a preexisting institution. The small group of rich entrepreneurs who sought out individual betterment cannot be held wholly responsible for the economic stagnation, although their actions did add to the breaking down of communal sentiments and by extension the social cohesion needed for successful corporate collective action. Rather, it would be more correct to say that after 1550, Nieuwkerke fell victim to a deadly cocktail of rising social inequality, growing religious antagonism, and the breaking up of corporate collective action in the cloth industry. These elements were all interrelated, forming a vicious triangle that would have engendered stagnation to the cloth trade in any case, but wherein military pressure and depopulation acted as a final catalyst.

Conclusion

Economic historians of pre-industrial Europe focus on the influence of institutional frameworks on the long-term economic and political development of societies. This article has attempted to show that institutionalized collective action was a paramount factor in the industrial development of the rural cloth centre Nieuwkerke in the late medieval county of Flanders. By combining the framework of Bas van Bavel's latest book *The Invisible Hand?* and Tine De Moor's conception of 'corporate collective action', the economic trajectory of this rural industrial centre can be subdivided into three phases of development. In doing so, corporate collective action emerges as a key variable to economic success, because the boom period of 1500-1550 coincided with the establishment and operation of a strong institutional framework of collective action. Meanwhile, this golden age was 'book-ended' by phases during which a demonstrable lack of cohesion within the industry was accompanied either by a lack of noteworthy expansion (1300-1500) or declining production outputs (>1550). The institutional foundations for the expansion were laid during phase one, first by the

acquisition of a cloth charter in 1358, which provided the legal base for the emergence of a corporation. Prompted by internal conflicts within the ranks of the drapery, the second half of the fifteenth century saw the establishment of regulations that created exclusivity (through the ‘draper’s marks’), self-governance and autonomy (principally through the public inquests or *waerheden*, and the authority of the industrial officers)—other criteria De Moor deems necessary for corporate collective action. Yet, in the case of Nieuwkerke, the protection by a powerful village lord against extra-economic pressure from the city of Ypres was another decisive element in securing that these favourable preconditions could come to fruition. It seems the villagers of Nieuwkerke had an active hand in attracting such a powerful protector in 1503—although the exact circumstances remain clouded in uncertainty. Also, the village’s true industrial boom occurred only when the textile corporation adopted a collective approach towards the commercial aspect as well, by renting cloth halls in the market cities for the benefit of all the village’s drapers: a strategy also employed by other successful cloth centres in this period. Tellingly, around the middle of the sixteenth century, when decline gradually set in, at the same time there were traces of individual entrepreneurs breaking the collective. Presumably, it was not so much these actions as their impact upon cohesion within the corporation which precipitated the industry’s declining output. Ultimately, the Iconoclastic Fury of 1566, and the bellicose turmoil that proceeded from it, defeated Nieuwkerke’s woollen drapery by causing emigration and closing off its main market outlet.

If the case of Nieuwkerke illustrates the economic advantage of corporate collective action in the pre-industrial period, it also highlights the interconnection between social equality and the successful operation of such collectives. Van Bavel emphasizes that the end of the development of market economies is characterized by their growing inequality and the emergence of a ‘market elite’ that seeks to maintain the then current institutional framework to ensure its own position. Indeed, when we look at individual production outputs of 1564-65 (Table 1), Nieuwkerke’s entrepreneurs clearly produced on very different scales. However, the question remains whether inequality was actually increasing, as van Bavel would suggest, or whether it remained more or less stable—which is to say, manifestly unequal, but no more so than it had been before—yet with an all-round loss of prosperity, as other historic cases have borne out. The hypothesis emerging from this study is that the veracity of growing inequality is subordinated to the *perception* of that increase in unequal opportunity. It was this perceived inequality that was deemed so disruptive to the Common Good in Nieuwkerke, both in the 1450s and the 1550s, producing an internal polarization that was detrimental to corporate collective action. Likewise, the social tensions of the mid-sixteenth century fed into the rising religious polarization that would become the undoing of Nieuwkerke’s textile economy. In that sense, the Dutch Revolt should in part be considered an endogenous component of the village’s economic collapse in the second half of the sixteenth century.

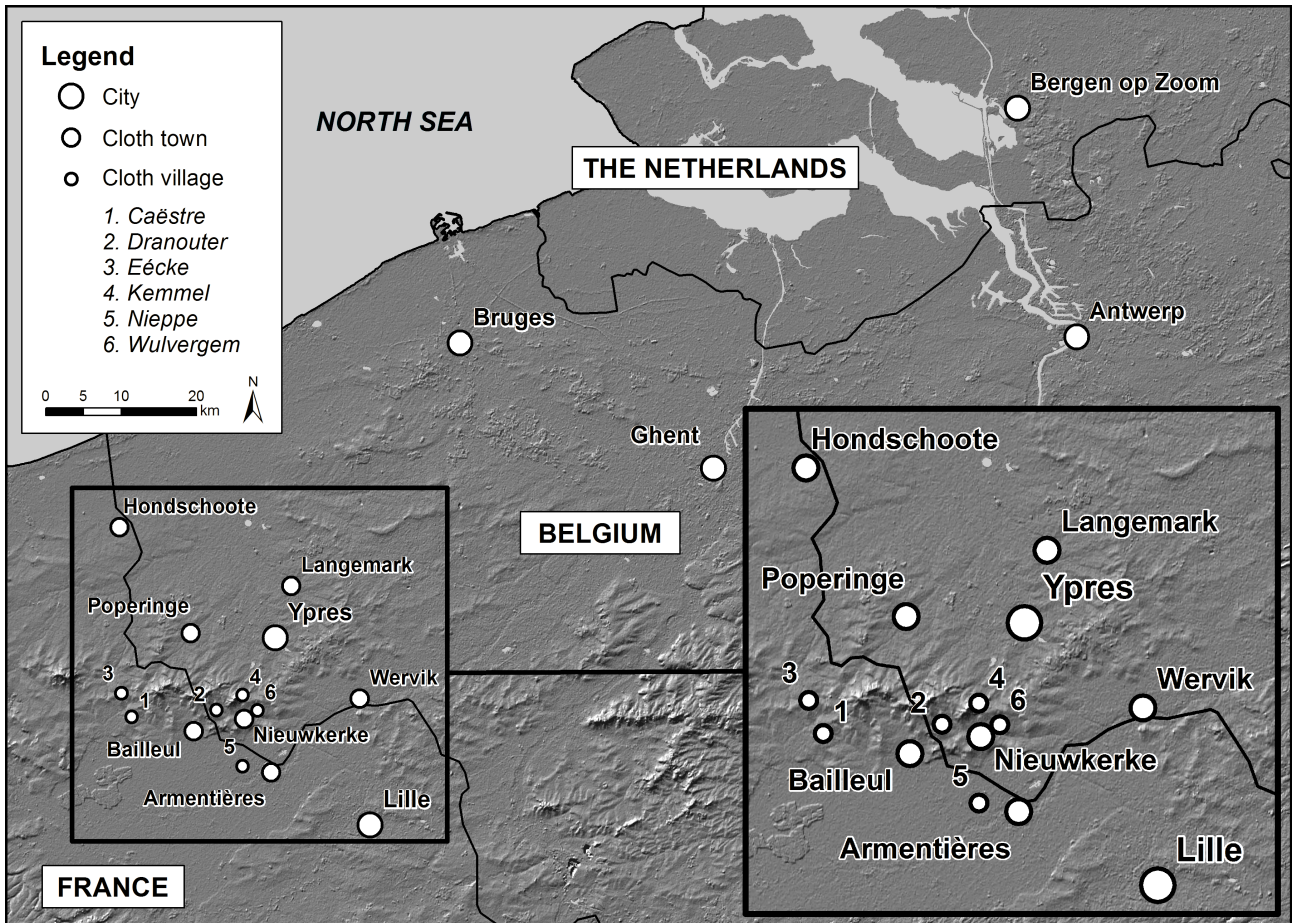


Figure 1. Textile centres in the Flemish West-Quarter, c. 1350-1600

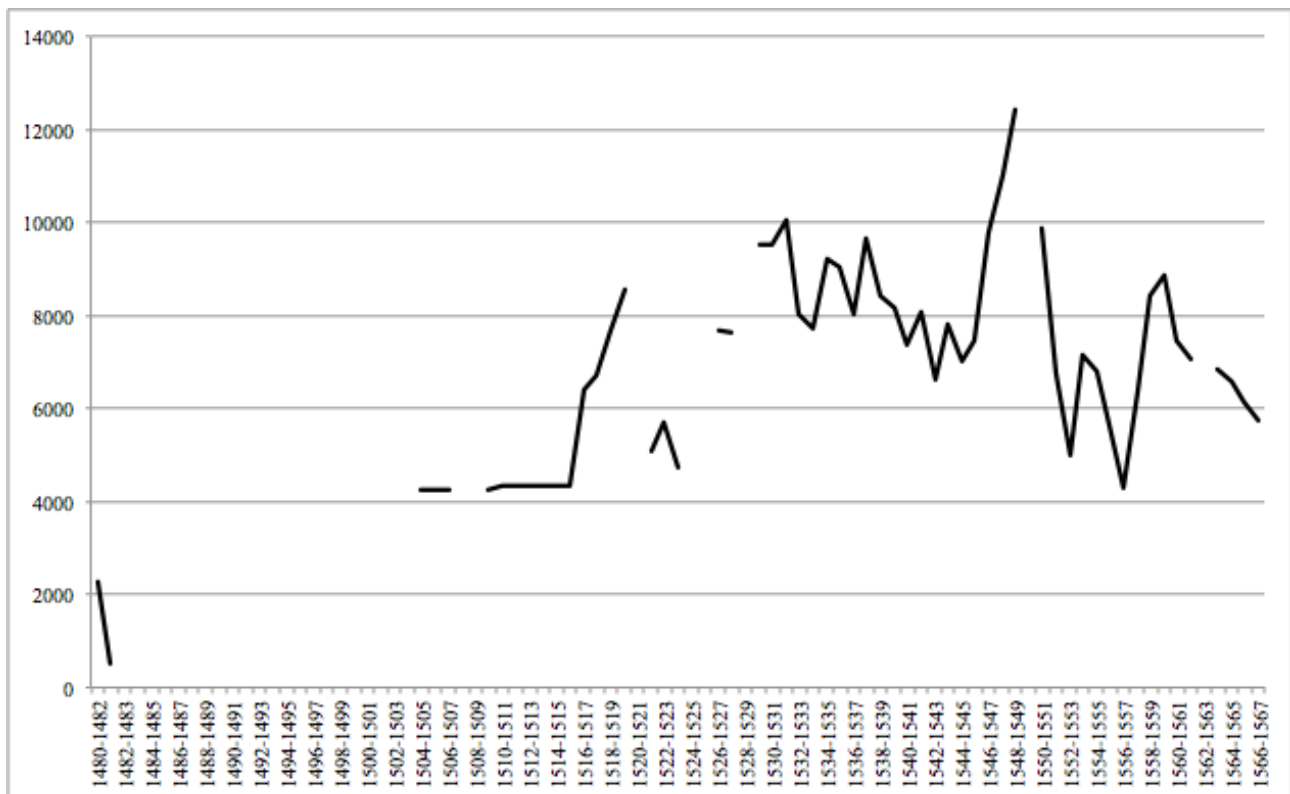
Source: Iason Jongepier, *GISTorical Antwerp II* (University of Antwerp/Hercules Foundation).

Table 1. Stratification of drapers in Nieuwkerke, based on production output (1564-65)

Pieces of cloth	No. of drapers	Percent of drapers	Percent of total production
<=5	100	28.90	2.72
>5<=25	98	28.32	14.20
>25<=50	84	24.28	32.31
>50<=100	53	15.32	36.59
>100	11	3.18	14.19
Total	346	100	100

Source: ARB, *Chamber of Accounts, Acquits en portefeuilles*, No. 1367, unnumbered, disassembled booklet.

Figure 2. Cloth output in Nieuwkerke, late-fifteenth and sixteenth century



Source: ARB, *Chamber of Accounts*, No. 44562.

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- ⁱⁱ M. Le Glay, 'Tableaux de la population des châtelainies de Cassel, Bergues et Bailleul, en 1469', *Bulletin du Comité flamand de France*, 1 (1857), 344-47; J. Geldhof (ed.), *Het handboek van P. J. Vandendorpe, pastoor van Nieuwkerke (1730-1806)* (Bruges 1974), 21.
- ⁱⁱⁱ State Archives Bruges (subsequently SAB), *Fonds aanwinsten*, No. 504, f. 5v, 19v.
- ^{iv} H. De Sagher, *Recueil de documents relatifs à l'histoire de l'industrie drapière en Flandre. Deuxième partie. Le sud-ouest de la Flandre depuis l'époque bourguignonne*, III (Brussels, 1966), 93-100
- ^v See for example: B. van Bavel, *Manors and markets. Economy and society in the Low Countries, 500-1600* (Oxford 2010); D. Acemoglu and J. Robinson, *Why nations fail: the origins of power, prosperity, and poverty* (New York 2012).
- ^{vi} Van Bavel, *The invisible hand? How market economies have emerged and declined since AD 500* (Oxford, 2016), 2, 19-20.
- ^{vii} L.A. Tilly and C. Tilly (eds.), *Class conflict and collective action* (Beverly Hills & London, 1981).
- ^{viii} J. Haemers, 'Révolte et requête. Les gens de métiers et les conflits sociaux dans les villes de Flandre (XIIIe-XVe siècle)', *Revue historique*, 677, 1 (2016), 27-56; S.K. Cohn Jr., *Lust for liberty. The politics of social revolt in medieval Europe, 1200-1425. Italy, France and Flanders* (Cambridge USA & London, 2006), esp. 8; J. Dumolyn, 'Guild politics and political guilds in fourteenth-century Flanders', in J. Dumolyn et al. (eds.), *The voices of the people in Late Medieval Europe. Communication and popular politics* (Turnhout, 2014), 15-48; *id.*, 'Les "plaintes" des villes flamandes à la fin du XIIIe siècle et les discours et pratiques politiques de la commune', *Le Moyen Âge*, 121, 2 (2015), 383-407.
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