

# THE FAMILY DE GOUX AND THE ‘LAND OF WEDERGRATE’

## A case of Nobility, Lordship & Social Mobility in the County of Flanders<sup>1</sup>

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### 1. Introduction

The specific nature of nobility in late Medieval Flanders has been the subject of an intensive debate among historians. Bartier saw the acquiring and upholding of nobility as a composition of specific investments, the acquiring of different sorts of capital which allowed to maintain a certain lifestyle.<sup>2</sup> Warlop, focussing on the early and high Middle Ages, described noble birth as the preliminary condition to claim nobility as a social distinction.<sup>3</sup> From the 12<sup>th</sup> century onward however, various political and socio-economic developments contested the emphasis on nobility as a birth-right.<sup>4</sup> De Win indicated that, at least where Flanders was concerned, there was a very heterogeneous population of nobles. In this respect he made a rather pragmatic distinction, based upon the ownership structures and activities upheld by noblemen. De Win discerned a dichotomy between low and high nobles, whereby one of the major indicators for those higher elites was the possession

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<sup>1</sup> For the completion of this article, I am indebted to Mathijs Speecke, Thijs Lambrecht, Jan Dumolyn and Frederik Buylaert.

<sup>2</sup> John Bartier, *Légistes et Gens de Finances au XVe siècle: les Conseillers des Ducs de Bourgogne: Philippe-le-Bon et Charles-le-Téméraire* (Brussels: Palais Der Academiën, 1952-1955), pp. 229-230. This kind of lifestyle is also referred to in current historiography as ‘*vivre noblement*’. For an elaboration upon the subject, see Wim De Clercq, Jan Dumolyn and Jelle Haemers, “‘Vivre Noblement’: Material Culture and Elite Identity in Late Medieval Flanders’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 38 nr. 1 (summer 2007), 1-31 (p. 4). See also Frederik Buylaert, Wim De Clercq and Jan Dumolyn, ‘Sumptuary Legislation, Material Culture and the Semiotics of ‘Vivre Noblement’ in the County of Flanders (14th-16th Centuries)’, *Social History*, 36 nr. 4 (2011), 393-417 (p. 395).

<sup>3</sup> Ernest Warlop, *De Vlaamse Adel Voor 1300* (Handzame: Familia et Patria, 1968), p. 431.

<sup>4</sup> Jan Dumolyn and Filip Van Tricht, ‘Adel en Nobiliteringsprocessen in het Laatmiddeleeuwse Vlaanderen: een Status Quastionis’, *Bijdragen en Mededelingen Betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, 115 (2000), 197-222 (p. 199), see also Jan Dumolyn and Filip Van Tricht, ‘De Sociaal-Economische Positie van de Laatmiddeleeuwse Vlaamse Adel: Enkele Trends’, *Handelingen van het Genootschap Voor Geschiedenis*, 137 (2000), 3-46 (pp. 12-13), see also Hans Cools, *Mannen Met Macht: Edellieden en de Moderne Staat in de Bourgondisch-Habsburgse Landen (1475-1530)* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2001), p. 81-83.

of a *seignior* – a property right entwined with the right to exert a certain form of legal power<sup>5</sup> – with high jurisdiction.<sup>6</sup> Janssens, facing the problem from an Early Modern perspective, posited the notion that nobility as a concept was subjected to alteration throughout history. Nonetheless, there could still be made a juridical distinction for certain privileged groups such as nobles. Further historical research, like that of Dumolyn and Van Tricht, has continued this emphasis on politico-juridical and socio-economic evolutions.<sup>7</sup> Up until recently, consensus was that nobility, as a form of social capital, in the late Medieval Low Countries could be achieved through the execution of a noble lifestyle, the so-called ‘*vivre noblement*’, this could be achieved through conspicuous consumption; accumulating properties such as rural castles, urban residences, marriage alliances with noble families, and the like.<sup>8</sup> Since then, the thesis of *vivre noblement* as indicator of nobility has been contested. This resulted from the fact that from the high Middle Ages onward, participating in certain activities and conspicuous consumption – formerly exclusive to nobles – became accessible to an increasing number of commoners. Given this problem, Buylaert, De Clercq and Dumolyn posited that the only undeniable marker for nobility in late Medieval Flanders was seigniorial lordship.<sup>9</sup>

The conceptual shift that highlights seignories as an intrinsic part of nobility has a considerable impact on medieval history, for it does not fit well with the view of late Medieval Flanders as a market-oriented society. Seignories were regarded as ‘enclaved commodities’, objects that were not supposed to be sold. While it was perfectly possible to sell a seigneurie according to legal custom, noblemen tried to avoid this to any cost. Ideally, seigneuries as prime source of the family’s noble status were inherited from one generation to the next.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, Flemish feudal

<sup>5</sup> There were different kinds of seignories in the Southern Low Countries during the Ancien Régime. One can make a distinction between allodial, or so-called free seignories, and fiefs, held from an overlord. Other types of seignories were those with low-, middle-, or high jurisdiction. For an introduction, see Jacques Mertens, ‘Heerlijkheden’, in *De Gewestelijke en Lokale Overheidsinstellingen in Vlaanderen tot 1795*, ed. by Walter Prevenier and Beatrijs Augustyn (Brussels: Algemeen Rijksarchief, 1997), pp. 552-553, see also Rik Opsommer, ‘*Omme Dat Leengoed Es Thoochste Dinc van der Weerelt: Het Leenrecht in Vlaanderen in de 14<sup>de</sup> en 15<sup>de</sup> Eeuw*, 2 vols (Brussels: Algemeen Rijksarchief, 1995), I, p. 232-234.

<sup>6</sup> Paul De Win, ‘Queeste Naar de Rechtspositie van de Edelman in de Bourgondische Nederlanden’, *Tijdschrift Voor Rechtsgeschiedenis*, 53 (1985), 223-274 (p. 225), see also Paul De Win, ‘The Lesser Nobility of the Burgundian Netherlands’, in *Gentry and Lesser Nobility in Later Medieval Europe*, ed. by Michael Jones (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1986), pp. 109-110.

<sup>7</sup> Dumolyn and Van Tricht, ‘Adel en Nobiliteringsprocessen’, pp. 197-222.

<sup>8</sup> For an elaboration upon different kinds of capital in their socio-economic context, see Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. by Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977). For the specific application of this theory on late Medieval society, see De Clercq, Dumolyn and Haemers, ‘Vivre Noblement’, p. 4. For a broader overview of European nobility and social distinction, see: Martin Aurell, ‘Western Nobility in the Late Middle Ages’, in *Nobles and Nobility in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Anne J. Dugan (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2000), pp. 267.

<sup>9</sup> Buylaert, De Clercq and Dumolyn, ‘Sumptuary Legislation’, p. 396.

<sup>10</sup> Buylaert, De Clercq and Dumolyn, ‘Sumptuary Legislation’, p. 416.

law impeded free interchange of seigniories to some extent. If a noble family ran out of heirs in the patrilineal line, collaterals could appeal to certain rights of pre-emption.<sup>11</sup> Because of this sustained exclusiveness, one could not as easily buy his way into nobility as the theory of '*vivre noblement*' suggested earlier, even though it remained a possible strategy. In fact, not many examples of the selling and buying of seigniories are known. It was likely more common and easier for rich commoners with an aim for social promotion to acquire seigniories another way, such as by marriage into a noble family. Previous studies have shown that there were various ways to achieve noble status. One of those strategies being service for 'the state'.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, existing noble lineages were in constant degeneration, constituting a need for newcomers in their ranks.<sup>13</sup> This multiplicity of ennobling factors compromised lineage as a reliable indicator, whereas seigniorial lordship might well have been a 15<sup>th</sup>-century marker for true nobility. Due to the scarcity of case-studies involving lordship and ennoblement, more in-depth research is required. While others have investigated the effects and circumstances of newly founded lordships, this paper focuses on a remarkable case-study that revolves around the acquisition and management of established seigniories.<sup>14</sup>

The subject of this research is the *de Goux* family, which developed an important seigneurial estate in late medieval Flanders. Granted the wealth and stature amassed in their service of the Burgundian Dukes, they rapidly joined ranks with the late medieval elite. A major and exceptional component of their strategy was the procurement of five neighbouring Flemish estates, which they successfully bound together into one solid entity. The archival trail left by this family allows us to study the effect of lordly property in their quest for noble status. This provides a certain insight as to when an individual was perceived as commoner or a noble. In the first section of this article we shall follow how our case-subjects successfully climbed the social ladder by purchase and appropriation of seigniorial possessions. Aside from its effect on social promotion, our case will also show the importance of seigniories for familial strategies concerning the achievement and consolidation of

<sup>11</sup> Dirk Heirbaut, *Over Lenen en Families: Een Studie over de Vroegste Geschiedenis van het Zakelijk Leenrecht in het Graafschap Vlaanderen (ca. 1000-1305)* (Brussels: Paleis Der Academiën, 2000), p. 168-170.

<sup>12</sup> Dumolyn and Van Tricht, 'Adel en Nobiliteringsprocessen', p. 200 & 206, see also Frederik Buylaert, 'Lordship, Urbanization and Social Change', *Past & Present*, 227 (May 2015), 31-75 (p. 38).

<sup>13</sup> Buylaert, 'Lordship, Urbanization', p. 39-40, see also Dumolyn and Van Tricht, 'Adel en Nobiliteringsprocessen', p. 201-205.

<sup>14</sup> See Tim Soens, *De Spade in de Dijk? Waterbeheer en Rurale Samenleving in de Vlaamse Kustvlakte (1280-1580)* (Ghent: Academia Press, 2009), p. 226, see also Jonas Braekevelt, 'Introduction', in *De Rijzelse Rekenkamer en de Stichting van Middelburg-in-Vlaanderen (ca. 1444-1472): De Ambities van een Opgeklommen Hofambtenaar Versus de Bescherming van het Vorstelijke Domein*, ed. by Jonas Braekevelt (Brussels: Paleis Der Academiën, 2012), pp. ix-xvii.

such social promotion. The second section focuses on the socio-political networks that made this enterprise possible. Certain family members were highly ranked officials under the Burgundian state apparatus, employing practices of patronage and nepotism to their advantage. The third section explores the impact a new seigniorial lord had upon the territory under his jurisdiction.

## 2. Ennoblement and familial strategy

The family of Goux – the protagonists of this case-study – hailed from the duchy of Burgundy, but acquired great social prominence in Flanders around 1500. Being of non-noble birth, Pierre de Goux was able to attain an impressive career.<sup>15</sup> At the end of his life, Pierre fulfilled the position of chancellor at the courts of Philip the Good and Charles the Bold. Due to his high position, Goux was able to accumulate a considerable amount of wealth, which he in turn invested in landed property.<sup>16</sup> Around 1442, he successfully defended a claim to lordship over Varennes-sur-Saille.<sup>17</sup> Not much later, in December 1449 he could exert high justice over the town and land of Goux, from which he handily derived his name.<sup>18</sup> This was likely a strategic move, tying his name to the estate thus suggested an older noble lineage.<sup>19</sup> Lordship usually came with a considerable amount of power a local lord could exert within his jurisdiction. In seigniories with low and middle-high justice, the *seigneur* was authorized to prosecute minor offences. Territories with high justice however, permitted the lord to punish crimes with a death sentence. Such power meant the lord could decide over matters of life and death, increasing his power and status. Seigniorial rule often formed an exertion of public authority, gained from higher powers such as princes, though many variants existed.<sup>20</sup> Pierre de Goux rapidly earned a trustworthy reputation in ducal service, undertaking voyages as one to the council of Basel and participating in diplomatic negotiations. With his knighting after the battle of Gavere (23 July 1453), all ambiguity around

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<sup>15</sup> Bartier, *Légistes et Gens*, 204 & 342-343.

<sup>16</sup> Bartier, *Légistes et Gens*, 357-358, see also Frederik Buylaert, *Repertorium van de Vlaamse Adel, (ca. 1350 – ca. 1500)* (Ghent: Academia Press, 2011), p. 282.

<sup>17</sup> Bartier, *Légistes et Gens*, 357.

<sup>18</sup> Pierre Cockshaw, *Le Personnel de la Chancellerie de Bourgogne-Flandre sous les Ducs de Bourgogne de la Maison de Valois (1384-1477)* (Kortrijk-Heule: UGA, 1982), p. 50-51.

<sup>19</sup> Frederik Buylaert and Jelle Haemers, 'Record-keeping and Status Performance in the Early Modern Low Countries', *Past & Present*, 230 (2016), 131-150, (pp. 11-13). The authors of this article investigate a nobleman who employed a similar strategy.

<sup>20</sup> Mertens, 'Heerlijkheden', p. 552-553, see also Buylaert, De Clercq and Dumolyn, 'Sumptuary Legislation', p. 409-410.

his social stature was erased.<sup>21</sup> By the late medieval period, knighthood had evolved from a mere military concept to a title implying nobility.<sup>22</sup> We can thus safely posit that Pierre de Goux joined the ranks of nobility between 1442 and 22 July 1453.

Aside from his domains in Burgundy, Goux went on to gain multiple Flemish seigniories. The patrimony that he acquired was 'the land of Wedergrate', a personal union formerly in the possession of the Flemish family of Wedergrate. This collection of lands, however, was by no means a formal entity. It consisted of five seigniories – of which four were Flemish and one was connected to the Duchy of Brabant – namely Pollare, Neigem, Denderwindeke, Appel terre-Eichem and Meerbeek. In other words, Goux had to acquire every single seignior as an individual commodity. On 28 January 1458, the Burgundian chancellor bought Denderwindeke, Appel terre-Eichem and Neigem from Jan van Schoonhoven. Three years later, in 1461, Goux bought a fourth seignior, namely Pollare. Finally, the property right of Meerbeke was not bought, but given to the Burgundian statesman. On the twentieth of November 1465, Anton of Brabant – a bastard of the Burgundian duke – gave up his rights to the seignior, benefiting Pierre de Goux.

The path of ennoblement followed by the Goux-family corresponds perfectly with the classic patterns of the '*vivre noblement*'-theory. As such, it is very difficult to distinguish only one of the factors involved as the single criterion for nobility. However, there is an element in the discourse of Pierre de Goux that speaks in favour of the seignior as an essential asset for noble families, or for those who aspired to become thus. This specific element is the acquisition of Wedergrate. For the sake of his own noble status, the chancellor did not need to gain another lordship, not to mention one as far removed as Flanders. When one considers the case of Pierre's offspring, the underlying trigger becomes clear. Goux did not obtain the Flemish properties for his own sake, but for that of his second-born son, Guillaume. Due to primogenital rights, most of Goux' patrimony would pass to Jean de Goux, the eldest son.<sup>23</sup> Most likely, Pierre wanted to ensure noble status for his son Guillaume by bestowing on him a fitting patrimony. In addition, the continuation of Goux' family name would be achieved. This interpretation is supported by a

<sup>21</sup> For an overview of Pierre de Goux' impressive career in ducal service, see: Bartier, *Légistes et Gens*, 341-361, see also Cockshaw, *Le Personnel*, 50-51, and Marie-Thérèse Caron, *La Noblesse dans le Duché de Bourgogne 1315-1477* (Lille: Presses Universitaires de Lille, 1987), pp. 394-395.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Barber, 'When Is a Knight Not a Knight?', in *The Ideals and Practice of Medieval Knighthood: Volume V: Papers From the Sixth Strawberry Hill Conference 1994*, ed. by C. Harper-Bill and R. Harvey (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1995), pp. 11-17.

<sup>23</sup> Jean de Goux later became Jean de Rupt, due to a marital agreement stricken with a prominent noble house. For a discussion of primogeniture in High Medieval Flanders and the surrounding regions, see Heirbaut, *Over Lenen en Families*, 212-213, for Late Medieval Flanders, see Opsommer, 'Omme Dat Leengoed', II, 794. For Jean de Rupt's inheritance of Rupt, see Caron, *La Noblesse*, 25.

charter from 1471, where Jean de Goux in a so-called '*leenverhef*' renounced his claim to the seignery of Meerbeke in favour of his younger brother.<sup>24</sup> This is substantial proof that Pierre de Goux was not merely interested in amassing some lordships for his own wealth and prestige, which was also a phenomenon of the time.<sup>25</sup> A similar application of this strategy for continuity can be observed for the families of Halewijn and van Pottelsberghe.<sup>26</sup> Lieven van Pottelsberghe was one of Flanders' most influential nobles at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Suffering from what is believed to be an hereditary illness, Lieven tried to safeguard the future position of both his surviving sons anno 1522. One son received a rent befitting a young nobleman, another was given the lordship of Wissekerke.<sup>27</sup> These examples show that in some cases – if possible – patriarchs of elite standing sought to secure the noble position of not only their firstborn heir, but of other siblings as well.

Pierre de Goux gained his Flemish properties under controversial circumstances.<sup>28</sup> Even after the purchases in 1458, 1460 and the donation in 1465, the lords of Wedergrate had to deal with contenders challenging their claims. This fierce competition was the consequence of contemporary supply and demand in real estate – more specifically lordly estates – which in turn was influenced by Flemish feudal law. Prosperous members of various social classes, such as state officials, nobles and the urban elite, tried to amass fiefs and other landed property. Among these estates, seignories were the most difficult to acquire.<sup>29</sup> This was due to the

<sup>24</sup> Bartier, *Légistes et Gens*, 360, see also Louis Galesloot, 'Revendication de la Terre de Wedergrate, Près de Ninove, (1444-1445), Épisode Judiciaire du Moyen-Âge', *Annales de la Société d'Émulation par l'Étude de l'histoire et des Antiquités de la Flandre 4e Série*, 5 (1881-1882), 1-42 (p. 22). In this charter, Jean de Goux already changed his suffix to 'of Rupt', I maintained his original name in the main text to avoid unnecessary confusion. A renouncement for the other Flemish lordships is not known. Additional evidence is found in another charter; Belgian State Archives, Kortrijk, Fund Descantons-de Montblanc (Plotho), MSS 12.472, where Guillaume de Goux acts as "*dominus temporalibus [...] de Wedergrate*".

<sup>25</sup> For the prestigious nature of the medieval seignory, see Erik Thoen, *Landbouweconomie en Bevolking in Vlaanderen Gedurende de Late Middeleeuwen en het Begin van de Moderne Tijden, Testregio: De Kasselbrijen van Oudenaarde en Aalst* (Leuven: Belgisch Centrum Voor Landelijke Geschiedenis nr. 90, 1988), p. 608-609. For the economic ideology, see Jan Dumolyn, 'Het Hogere Personeel van de Hertogen van Bourgondië in het Graafschap Vlaanderen (1419-1477)' (unpublished doctoral thesis, 5 vols, Ghent University, 2000-2001), II, p. 364-371.

<sup>26</sup> Frederik Buylaert, *Eeuwen van Ambitie: De Adel in Laatmiddeleeuws Vlaanderen*, Verhandelingen van de Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone kunsten van België, Klasse der Letteren vol 21 (Brussels: Lannoo, 2010), p. 64-65.

<sup>27</sup> Annick Born, Frederik Buylaert, Wim De Clercq and others, 'The Van Pottelsberghe-Van Steelant Memorial by Gerard Horenbout: Lordship, Piety and Mortality in Early Sixteenth-Century Flanders', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 77 nr. 4 (2014), 491-516 (pp. 505-508).

<sup>28</sup> For a schematic overview of property transfers and parties involved in the process, see Thijs Lambrecht and others, 'Conclusion', in *Making a Living: Family, Labour and Income*, ed. by Eric Vanhaute and others (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), pp. 332-333.

<sup>29</sup> Dumolyn, 'Het Hogere Personeel', II, p. 363-365, see also De Clercq, Dumolyn and Haemers, 'Vivre Noblement', p. 2-4.

patrilineal succession of these patrimonies. Lords were against the division of their inheritance, since this would lead to dispersed islands of authority, jeopardizing public order.<sup>30</sup> Then again, patrilineal succession could cause another problem: the extinction of families through lack of heirs. Two out of five noble houses failed to generate a male successor.<sup>31</sup> When this was the case, Flemish feudal law prescribed that members from collateral branches of the family were entitled to inherit from the deceased.<sup>32</sup> In addition, those of closer kin were better positioned, whereas the oldest (male) relative had the advantage.<sup>33</sup> However, the possessor of seigniories was free to sell his estates, while measures as pre- and post-emptive purchase rights protected the chances of potential heirs.<sup>34</sup> Theoretically, this was a properly regulated system. Different heirs however proved to be quite pragmatic in terms of making their claims, and did not shy away from defending those rights in court.

Every noble or aspiring noble saw potential in seigniorial possessions. Despite the advantage state officials had through their professional network, feudal law ultimately favoured (distant) relatives. Who became the final proprietor was thereby dependent on who could make the most convincing claim in court of law. We see similarities for the English gentry: descendants not only had to be wary of external threats, equally hazardous were devious kin who competed for the inheritance.<sup>35</sup> Such opportunist attitudes also occurred in the case of Wedergrate, impeding Pierre de Goux in his endeavour to procure the properties.

We see this phenomenon among distant relatives when the patrimony of Wedergrate became available by the passing of Maria van Wedergrate in 1445. Leaving no heirs, the personal union under her family ceased to exist, meaning every seigniority now was a single obtainable entity. A considerable amount of claimants tried to secure a part of the inheritance. Strikingly, almost all of them went for a limited quantity of estates, only one person laid his claim upon every possible property, being Jan van Schoonhoven. For Meerbeke, the territory located in Brabant, three parties fought for the ownership. Roland de Bornival eventually won the proceedings, only to be challenged by a fourth adversary: Jan van Schoonhoven.<sup>36</sup> Bornival won anew, but not much later Philip the Good, duke of Bur-

<sup>30</sup> Heirbaut, *Over Lenen en Families*, 24, see also Buylaert, *Eeuwen van Ambitie*, 48.

<sup>31</sup> Michel Nassiet, 'Parenté et Successions Dynastiques aux 14<sup>e</sup> et 15<sup>e</sup> Siècles', *Annales, Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 50 nr. 3 (1995), 621-644 (p. 621).

<sup>32</sup> Heirbaut, *Over Lenen en Families*, 89-90.

<sup>33</sup> Heirbaut, *Over Lenen en Families*, 61 & 89-93.

<sup>34</sup> Heirbaut, *Over Lenen en Families*, 168-170.

<sup>35</sup> Eric Acheson, *A Gentry Community: Leicestershire in the Fifteenth Century: c. 1422 – c. 1485* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 80-83.

<sup>36</sup> Dirk Van De Perre and R. Van Hauwe, 'De Geschiedenis van Denderwindeke: Deel II: De Middeleeuwse Heren (ca. 1100-1487)', *Het Land Van Aalst*, 64 nr. 1 (1992), 1-62 (pp. 39-40).

gundy, proclaimed that Meerbeke was his domain, arguing none of the former contestants ever had a proper claim to the property. The court of Brabant did not dare to confirm nor reject the duke's confiscation, upon which the latter granted it to a bastard, Anton van Brabant.<sup>37</sup> Bornival nevertheless attempted to trial this decision, but lost his lawsuit. From 1454 until 1465, Anton would be lord of Meerbeke, after this short period of time he restored his estate to the duke, who in turn bestowed it upon Pierre de Goux.<sup>38</sup>

For the Flemish estates, the developments were quite comparable. Although Maria van Wedergrate in this case was more proactive concerning her inheritance. She sold her rights to the territories to Hendrik van Schoonhoven. Afterwards, Maria accepted a second offer from Pierre de Roubaix, thus having sold her property twice. Hendrik took this conflict of interests to court in Ghent. The verdict stated that Roubaix was entitled to become the new owner of the seigniories Pol-lare, Denderwindeke and Neigem, if he redressed Schoonhoven the already paid money.<sup>39</sup> Relatively late after Maria's death however, Jan van Schoonhoven tried to prevail his rights as older heir over those of his brother Henry. A sentence from 1448 put Jan in his right, if he refunded Roubaix the price of the Flemish estates. Instead of paying Roubaix, Schoonhoven sold the lordships to Pierre de Goux.<sup>40</sup> Roubaix instituted proceedings to regain his investments, but would never see his money. A legal statement prescribed that Goux should not be impaired in his newly acquired possessions.<sup>41</sup>

Notwithstanding the legal support Pierre de Goux seemed to enjoy, other contestants in turn tried to lay their hands upon parts of his property. Another Pierre de Roubaix – most likely the son of Pierre senior – proceeded to contest the legitimacy of Goux' purchases in the Flemish county.<sup>42</sup> He demanded a restitution of the seigniorial possessions, as well as a remuneration of the financial damage the Roubaix-family had suffered. A so-called 'purging letter' testifies of the trail of requests and correspondence the challenger sent in order to defend his claim.<sup>43</sup> Even-

<sup>37</sup> Van De Perre and Van Hauwe, 'De Geschiedenis van Denderwindeke', p. 39-40.

<sup>38</sup> Belgian State Archives, Kortrijk, Fund Descantons-de Montblanc (Ploho), MSS 12.473, fol. 3.

<sup>39</sup> Van De Perre and Van Hauwe, 'De Geschiedenis van Denderwindeke', p. 42-43.

<sup>40</sup> Cools, *Mannen Met Macht*, 223.

<sup>41</sup> Buylaert, *Repertorium*, 283, see also Van De Perre and Van Hauwe, 'De Geschiedenis van Denderwindeke', p. 44-45.

<sup>42</sup> Cools, *Mannen Met Macht*, 287, see also: Buylaert, *Repertorium*, 610, and Van De Perre and Van Hauwe, 'De Geschiedenis van Denderwindeke', p. 42-45.

<sup>43</sup> Wim Blockmans and Walter Prevenier, *De Bourgondiërs: De Nederlanden op Weg naar Eenheid 1384-1530* (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1997), p. 141. The Burgundian dukes deliberately enabled the system of appeals to higher courts to undermine the jurisdiction and authority of more locally and regionally bound courts. Officials trained in the judicial game of lawsuits handily used this as an opportunity to settle disputes in their advantage.



tually Goux won the case before the Great Council of Malines, which again concluded that his prerogatives should not be contested.<sup>44</sup> A charter from 1458 – the very same year Goux bought his first seignories in Flanders – describes how Roland van Wedergrate, a bastard from the former lords, unlawfully claimed some rights at Denderwindeke. The belongings in question concerned a pond, grazing lands and some farmlands. It is also written that Roland, being a “son of a bastard without title or permission”, had appropriated himself the fruits of the subjects for his own profit. The accused was condemned to pay a fine.<sup>45</sup> The most striking in these cases is the diligence of Goux when it comes to defending his property rights.

The numerous lawsuits accompanying Pierre de Goux' procurement of Wedergrate's patrimony account for the fierce competition among the late medieval elite in their search for seigniorial estates.<sup>46</sup> All of Goux' contestants identified themselves with nobility in some way. Simon de Herbais was a knight and member of Philip the Good's court, coming from an ennobled patrician family.<sup>47</sup> In 1451 we find a Simon de Herbais mentioned as lord of Monchove and bailiff of Ghent.<sup>48</sup> Roland de Bornival was part of Brabant's nobility.<sup>49</sup> Pierre was lord of Roubaix and Herzele, while Jan van Schoonhoven possessed the seigniorship of Aarschot.<sup>50</sup> Lastly, Anton was the bastard of the duke Philip of Saint-Pol.<sup>51</sup> Some of these figures were involved in what Dumolyn and others have called 'state feudalism'. This was a high- and late medieval phenomenon where nobles (and those in search for a similar status) started fulfilling positions for the proto-state. One of these officials' major motives was the salary accompanying the function, enabling them to maintain or enlarge their estate. Through the advantages of their business, these officials knew the judicial order well, thereby successfully using it for their own gain.<sup>52</sup> Herbais, Roubaix and Anton were involved in the Burgundian state feudalism. Other nobles however never went for a career in princely service, whilst pertaining enough funds and property to play a significant role on a more local scale.<sup>53</sup>

As shown above, the Burgundian chancellor experienced numerous difficulties during the establishment of his Flemish lordship. It is highly unlikely that without

<sup>44</sup> Belgian State Archives, Kortrijk, Fund Descantons-de Montblanc (Plotho), MSS 11.293.

<sup>45</sup> Belgian State Archives, Kortrijk, Fund Descantons-de Montblanc (Plotho), MSS 11.609.

<sup>46</sup> Smail argues that litigation could be a manner to pursue social distinction, similar to specific consumption, see Daniel Lord Smail, *The Consumption of Justice: Emotions, Publicity, and Legal Culture in Marseille, 1264-1423* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2003).

<sup>47</sup> Galesloot, 'Revendication', p. 4-6.

<sup>48</sup> Buylaert, *Repertorium*, 353.

<sup>49</sup> Galesloot, 'Revendication', p. 5.

<sup>50</sup> Van De Perre and Van Hauwe, 'De Geschiedenis van Denderwindeke', p. 43.

<sup>51</sup> Van De Perre and Van Hauwe, 'De Geschiedenis van Denderwindeke', p. 40.

<sup>52</sup> Dumolyn, 'Het Hogere Personeel', II, p. 360.

<sup>53</sup> Dumolyn and Van Tricht, 'De Sociaal-Economische Positie', p. 37-38.

the support of his superiors, he would have succeeded in his endeavours. Pierre de Goux, in other words, benefited from the patronage of the dukes of Burgundy.<sup>54</sup> This point is proven by the judicial entanglements surrounding the obtainment of Wedergrate, where the duke's influence clearly helped in surpassing Flemish feudal law. The various local courts tried to counteract Philip the Good's measures, to no avail.<sup>55</sup> These events prove the importance of patronage, as well as the restrictive nature of seigniorial lordship as a commodity. The Burgundian state favouritism went even further than juridical support, proven by different favours to the line of Goux. For the marriage of two of his children, Goux received a generous endowment.<sup>56</sup> Pierre, along with his two sons Guillaume and Jean, obtained prestigious and profitable positions at the Burgundian court.<sup>57</sup> Pierre de Goux, as well as his six children, managed to marry into noble families with decent standing. Through their relations, networks and careers, the family achieved an integration into the upper strata of society.<sup>58</sup>

Pierre de Roubaix (junior) almost relentlessly kept on appealing judgements.<sup>59</sup> Roubaix was a high ranking Burgundian official, drawing abundant yields from other lordly possessions. He was thus equipped with the economic capital and judiciary ability to resort to trials.<sup>60</sup> All these developments considered, the decisive factor in Wedergrate's history of succession was the support from the prince. The Burgundian duke repeatedly favoured Goux in every case. Anton van Brabant was allegedly an intermediary pawn, after which the duke could bestow Meerbeke upon Goux.<sup>61</sup> Jan van Schoonhoven's sale was ratified by the duke, despite the ongoing trial.<sup>62</sup> Subsequently, when Jean de Rupt later conferred his rights to the

<sup>54</sup> For a definition of patronage as used in this paper, see Marika Keblusek, 'Profiling the Early Modern Agent', in *Your Humble Servant: Agents in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Hans Cools, Marika Keblusek and Badeloch Noldus (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2006), pp. 9-11, see also Hillyar Zmora, *Monarchy, Aristocracy and the State in Europe, 1300-1800* (London-New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 76-94.

<sup>55</sup> Van De Perre and Van Hauwe, 'De Geschiedenis van Denderwindeke', p. 39-40, see also Galesloot, 'Revendication', p. 1-3.

<sup>56</sup> Bartier, *Légistes et Gens*, 123 & 357.

<sup>57</sup> Bartier, *Légistes et Gens*, 342-343 & 358-361.

<sup>58</sup> Tom De Waele, 'Heerlijke Machtsuitoefening in Laatmiddeleeuws Vlaanderen: Ca. 1450 – ca. 1500: Het Land van Wedergrate' (unpublished master thesis, Ghent University, 2017), p. 20-27. For the phenomenon of elitist networking, see Werner Paravicini, *Invitations au Mariage: Pratique Sociale, Abus de Pouvoir, Intérêt de l'état à la Cour des Ducs de Bourgogne 1399-1489* (Stuttgart: Thorbecke, 2001), see also Hans Cools, 'Inleiding', in *Mannen Met Macht: Edellieden en de Moderne Staat in de Bourgondisch-Habsburgse Landen (1475-1530)*, ed. by Hans Cools (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2001), pp. 9-20.

<sup>59</sup> Buylaert, *Repertorium*, 282-283.

<sup>60</sup> Cools, *Mannen Met Macht*, 286-287, see also Buylaert, *Repertorium*, 610.

<sup>61</sup> Bartier, *Légistes et Gens*, 358-359.

<sup>62</sup> Frans De Potter, 'Denderwindeke', in *Aaigem, St.-Atelins, Appelsterre-Eichem, Aspelare, Baardegem, Bambrugge, Bavegem, Borsbeke, Burst, Denderhoutem, Denderleeuw, Denderwindeke, Elene, Erembodegem, Erondegem. Geschiedenis van de Gemeenten der Provincie Oost-Vlaanderen 5<sup>de</sup> Reeks 1<sup>ste</sup> Deel*, ed. by Frans De Potter and Jan Broeckaert (Ghent: Drukkerij Van A. Siffer, 1900), p. 23.

Flemish lands to his brother Guillaume, they only had to pay half the usual amount for the procedure.<sup>63</sup> All this ducal interference proves the presence of patronage.

### 3. State power relations

With the matter of Goux' motives resolved, another issue demands further scrutiny. Why did the Burgundian high-ranking officer choose Flemish possessions for the execution of his social strategy? The answer is that few seigniories ever came up for sale. As we have pointed out before, feudal law further impeded the exchange of seigniorial lordships, along with their status as enclaved commodities. In the situation of Pierre de Goux' choice, he was subject to the economic law of supply and demand, and supply was critically low indeed. It is therefore apparent that he could obtain not one but five strategically located seigniories, despite unfavourable odds. In this respect, as chancellor he was perfectly positioned to observe when a seigniorial patrimony became available. Given his professional network and knowledge, he could pull the necessary strings (bottom-up, as well as top-down and in horizontal fashion) in order to attain the available goods.<sup>64</sup> Not in the least did Goux prosper because of the duke's patronage, so too did his colleagues.<sup>65</sup> In a similar top-down manner, Goux himself upheld nepotistic methods to benefit his own family members. When Pierre got promoted to a higher function in the state apparatus, he passed his old position on to his brother or one of his sons.<sup>66</sup> All of this illustrates the environment in which Pierre de Goux operated and the underlying tactics as well as motives for the choices he made. Agents in state service had to employ and maintain their network of connections, as well as the relationship with their patron.<sup>67</sup>

In 1487, Guillaume de Goux received Maximilian's consent to unite most of his lordships into a single jurisdiction. The fusion of Wedergrates four Flemish seigneuries was a great feat, with significant repercussions. First of all, financing the arrangement was a costly affair that set Guillaume de Goux back 200 pounds par., and another 20 pounds gr. From a legal point of view, the land of Wedergrate finally became a formal entity with real judicial power. The four small lordships, each with their own criminal laws and courts, were now unified under one bench of aldermen (that of Denderwindeke). Furthermore Wedergrate was since then

<sup>63</sup> General Belgian State Archive, Brussels, Leenhof van Brabant, MSS 400, fol. 129-130.

<sup>64</sup> Dumolyn and Van Tricht, 'Adel en Nobiliteringsprocessen', p. 206, see also Buylaert, 'Lordship, Urbanization', p. 38.

<sup>65</sup> Bartier, *Légistes et Gens*, 94 & 239.

<sup>66</sup> Bartier, *Légistes et Gens*, 52 & 87-89.

<sup>67</sup> Keblusek, 'Profiling the Early Modern Agent', p. 10-11.

placed under the highest feudal court of Flanders, the so-called ‘*Wetachtige Kamer*’. This resulted in a loss of influence for lower urban courts, which impaired some power that the cities Aalst, Ghent and Ninove held over the surrounding country.<sup>68</sup> Primarily Guillaume de Goux and the Burgundian duke benefited from these reforms. The latter gained some influence over the former allodium Neigem. Possessors of allodia had no feudal overlord nor feudal obligations. Even so, many owners of these fiefs still relieved them to the prince, who in turn enfeoffed it back to them. This was done to bypass Flemish customary law and prevent the fragmentation of allodial seigniorial possessions, even in spite of more bonds to their new liege.<sup>69</sup> These developments had likely something to do with ties of patronage.<sup>70</sup> Guillaume, an officer in the dukes service, owed him his career, status and wealth.<sup>71</sup> It was through these factors the fusion of Wedergrate could be achieved. In turn, having a loyal and competent client overseeing a strategic region was in the patron’s advantage.<sup>72</sup> Maximilian’s motive to empower a foreign nobleman at the expense of local cities and nobles can also be tied to his rivalries with the Flemish cities and their noble allies during the conflicts over the regency of his son Philip.<sup>73</sup>

Through an apparent strategy of accumulation, the family of Goux succeeded in acquiring a reasonably large estate in the late medieval Flemish region. As shown above, the success of their efforts was interwoven with clientelist ties to the Burgundian dukes. Pierre and his son Guillaume cleverly employed their newly won fortune and status in order to integrate themselves within noble society. Being newcomers, they however did not perceive themselves as such. During his lucrative career, Pierre de Goux could likely afford to participate in noble culture through ‘*vivre noblement*’, which helped to proclaim a high social status.<sup>74</sup> Once noble stature was truly accomplished and consolidated for future generations – by the posses-

<sup>68</sup> For a transcription of the charter, see De Potter, ‘Denderwindeke’, p. 28-34.

<sup>69</sup> For an introduction to allodial fiefs, see Mertens, ‘Heerlijkheden’, p. 552. See also Opsommer, ‘*Omme Dat Leengoed*’, I, 205-208. For a more general summary about feudal bonds and strategies, see: Buylaert, De Clercq and Dumolyn, ‘Sumptuary Legislation’, p. 410.

<sup>70</sup> Koblusek, ‘Profiling the Early Modern Agent’, p. 9-10.

<sup>71</sup> The relationship between client Goux and patron Maximilian is recorded in a statement in the charter’s text: “*pour considération des services, qu’il nous a faiz parcidevant à ses grands frais et despens en nous guerres et armées et aultrement, comme il faict encoires journellement*” in De Potter, ‘Denderwindeke’, p. 28-34.

<sup>72</sup> Gunner Lind, ‘Great Friends and Small Friends: Clientelism and the Power Elite’, in *Power Elites and State Building*, ed. by Wolfgang Reinhard (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 134-135.

<sup>73</sup> Haemers, *De Strijd om het Regentschap over Filips de Schone: Opstand, Facties en Geweld in Brugge, Gent en Ieper (1482-1488)* (Ghent: Academia Press, 2014), p. 44 & 162-165 & 167-190. During the period of 1482-1488, both the Flemish cities as Maximilian used patronage and clientelism to reward loyal followers and punish adversaries. Many noblemen were excommunicated or by contrast enriched as a consequence of the sides they chose to support.

<sup>74</sup> For a view of the career path of Pierre de Goux, see Bartier, *Légistes et Gens*, 341-358, see also Cockshaw, *Le Personnel*, 50-51. For the theory of ‘*vivre noblement*’ as a means of statutory promulgation, see Buylaert, De Clercq and Dumolyn, ‘Sumptuary Legislation’, p. 396.

sion of one or more seigneuries – the process of appropriation went even further.<sup>75</sup> In this case, the seigneur did not simply uphold a noble lifestyle, he had lordly rights and obligations. The essence of being a lord was, as Heirbaut states it, “above all to uphold the law within his fiefdom”. It was his duty to safeguard the weak living on his estate, such as children, orphans, widows and clerics.<sup>76</sup> In order to do so, the nobleman had a certain juridical power over his domain. Together with privileges, this distinguished his status as someone with power and wealth. Social distinction could thus be achieved through the appropriation of a social function and identity. Pierre de Goux could do this by affiliating himself with his Burgundian (and later, his Flemish) lordships. Soon after, his son Guillaume could do the same via his conduct of Wedergrate. A charter from 1470 confirms Guillaume’s noble rank as ‘knight and lord of Wedergraet’, even though formally the territory was still under his father’s supervision.<sup>77</sup> This sense of necessary leadership is illustrated in a treatise by the nobleman Roeland de Baenst, where he pleads for the conservation of feudal estates and the importance of noble hierarchy and conduct.<sup>78</sup> If we view the Burgundian officials and their seigniorial conduct from this perspective, they were perfectly integrated in their contemporary noble society.<sup>79</sup>

#### 4. Friction with local players

Despite their successful integration into Flemish noble society the Burgundian family did encounter resistance from multiple adversaries.<sup>80</sup> The lords of Wedergrate made seigniorial claims on matters as taxation, legislation and property rights within the domain of their jurisdiction. By consequence, their lordly authority was contested by different stakeholders who saw their own welfare imperilled. In the following section, we will indicate the contrast between what local lords considered measures benefitting the common good, and how this was received by those affected from their conduct. Churches, officials and local inhabitants disputed unwanted

<sup>75</sup> Willem Frijhoff, ‘Toeëigening: Van Bezitsdrang Naar Betekenisgeving’, *Trajecta*, 6 (1997), 99-118, see also Buylaert, De Clercq and Dumolyn, ‘Sumptuary Legislation’, p. 395.

<sup>76</sup> Heirbaut, *Over Lenen en Families*, 30.

<sup>77</sup> Descantons-de Montblanc (Ploto), MSS 12.472.

<sup>78</sup> Buylaert, De Clercq and Dumolyn, ‘Sumptuary Legislation’, p. 407.

<sup>79</sup> Howard Kaminsky, ‘Estate, Nobility and the Exhibition of Estate in the Later Middle Ages’, *Speculum*, 68 nr. 3 (1993), 684-709 (p. 692), see also Bisson, ‘Medieval Lordship’, p. 754. Different social strata of Medieval society did not necessarily agree upon what was in the benefit of the so-called ‘common-good’, see Jan Dumolyn, ‘Urban Ideologies in Later Medieval Flanders, Towards an Analytical Framework’, in *The Languages of Political Society: Western Europe: 14th-17th centuries*, ed. by Andrea Gamberini, Jean-Philippe Genet and Andrea Zorzi (Rome: Viella, 2011), pp. 76-77, see also Blockmans and Prevenier, *De Bourgondiërs*, 67.

<sup>80</sup> J. De Brouwer, ‘Geschiedenis van Pollare’, *Het Land Van Aalst*, 25 (1973), 35-156 (pp. 39-40), see also Buylaert, *Repertorium*, 283.

measures. Despite multiple quarrels, mutually profitable agreements were struck between the lords of Wedergrate and local partners.<sup>81</sup> These developments are relatively well-documented for the situation of our testcase. By examining the conflicts between lordly influence and other power structures, this case-study reveals the impact 15<sup>th</sup>-century seigneuries had on the domains under their jurisdiction. Surviving sources inform us about the self-image of the lords themselves, and what they perceived as ‘good conduct’. These documents can be contrasted to sources testifying about disagreements, conflicts and the like with other parties. We will discuss the reception of certain measures by the respective stakeholders one at a time.

Noble authority enabled misuse, such as violence and unlawful seizure of property.<sup>82</sup> Violence and conflict however, could also lead to more socially constructive solutions, resulting in amicable settlements.<sup>83</sup> Hoppenbrouwers discerns a dichotomy between what late medieval social groups perceived as ‘good lordship’ and misrule. A virtuous lord possessed a considerable plot of land, wherein he protected different social groups, all depending on his governance one way or another. Abuse of power meant misrule, such as maladministration, leaving crime unpunished and allowing political discord to spread.<sup>84</sup> The lord, in other words, let (his own) individual interests prevail, neglecting his duties and harming the common good.<sup>85</sup> The discourse involving terms as ‘common good’ or ‘justice’ however differed greatly depending on the socio-political groups that used them. During the innumerable conflicts between centralizing princes and cities, both parties justified their actions by using the very same vocabulary.<sup>86</sup> That being said, there were some commonplaces all parties agreed upon, matters regarding safety and trade, for example.<sup>87</sup> Measures improving the common good were stipulated in legislation. Within the seigniority it was the lord who – to the extent permitted by his low, mid-

<sup>81</sup> For social groups, their ideologies and forms of resistance, see Dumolyn, ‘Urban Ideologies’, p. 69-96, see also Jan Blommaert and Chris Bulcaen, ‘Critical Discourse Analysis’, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 29 (2000), 447-466. See also Justine Firnhaber-Baker, ‘Seigneurial War and Royal Power in Later Medieval France’, *Past & Present*, 208 (2010), 37-76 (pp. 37-38).

<sup>82</sup> Bisson, ‘Medieval Lordship’, p. 752.

<sup>83</sup> Gerd Althoff, ‘Satisfaction: Peculiarities of the Amicable Settlement of Conflicts in the Middle Ages’, in *Ordering Medieval Society: Perspectives on Intellectual and Practical Modes of Shaping Social Relation*, ed. by B. Jussen and P. Selwyn (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), pp. 270-285.

<sup>84</sup> P. C. M. Hoppenbrouwers, ‘Malgoverno or Good Lordship? The Failing State in the Later Middle Ages’, in *Vetera Novis Augere: Studia i Prace Dedykowane Profesorowi Waclawowi Uruszczakowi*, ed. by Stanisława Grodziskiego, Doroty Malec, Anny Karabowicz and Marka Stusa (Krakau: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2010), p. 328.

<sup>85</sup> Hoppenbrouwers, ‘Malgoverno’, p. 322.

<sup>86</sup> Dumolyn, ‘Urban Ideologies’, p. 76-77.

<sup>87</sup> Dumolyn, ‘Urban Ideologies’, p. 86-87, see also Wim Blockmans and Walter Prevenier, *Prinsen en Poorters: Beelden van de Laat-Middeleeuwse samenleving in de Bourgondische Nederlanden 1384-1530* (Antwerpen: Mercatorfonds, 1998), p. 189.

dle, or higher justice – enforced the law in the public domain. If the population felt violated in their rights, they resorted to means as riots or appeal to higher courts.<sup>88</sup> The lord in turn expected his subjects to serve the common good by showing respect and through submission to his rule.<sup>89</sup>

Pierre and Guillaume de Goux restructured the social, economic and political arrangements within the seigneuries they possessed. After acquiring Denderwindeke in January 1458, Pierre de Goux received rights in September that same year to hold a local fair.<sup>90</sup> Subsequently, a bench of aldermen was installed on 27 October.<sup>91</sup> In April 1459, Goux ensured that a charter was issued for Denderwindeke, in which all of the inhabitants' rights and obligations were prescribed. Furthermore, the new fair of Denderwindeke, alongside with an older one existent at Neigem, obtained privileges to regulate safe passage for merchants and travellers. Four years after the passing of his father in 1471, Guillaume earned milling rights for the seignory of Pollare.<sup>92</sup> Shortly before his death, Guillaume granted the people of Meerbeek brewing rights for the fabrication of beer.<sup>93</sup> The lords of Wedergrate had a claim to some pints and financial shares when beer was brewed in their seigneuries.<sup>94</sup> Negotiations between local seigneurs and communities were probably not that exceptional. From the late middle ages onward, a decline of the manorial system gradually enabled socio-economic shifts. A slow rise in freedom of labour came into effect, with regional differences.<sup>95</sup> A simultaneous decrease of serfdom caused certain communities and inhabitants to renegotiate their often outdated feudal obligations. Whereas the agreement struck in Wedergrate attests for one of the few Flemish documents that survived the test of time, French regions such as Quercy and Lyon provide similar examples of seigneurs and inhabitants in dialogue.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Marc Boone and H. Brand, 'Vollersoproeren en Collectieve Actie in Gent en Leiden in de 14de en 15de Eeuw', *Tijdschrift Voor Sociale Geschiedenis*, 19 (1993), 168-192 (pp. 178-180), see also Bas Van Bavel, *Manors and Markets: Economy and Society in the Low Countries, 500-1600* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 96-100.

<sup>89</sup> Arie Johan Vanderjagt, *Qui sa Vertu Anoblist: The Concepts of 'Noblesse' and 'Chose Publique' in Burgundian Political Thought* (Michigan: Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1985), p. 62-63.

<sup>90</sup> For the transcription of this charter, see De Potter, 'Denderwindeke', p. 11.

<sup>91</sup> For an elaboration upon aldermen and their juridical function, see Isabelle Devos and others, 'The Low Countries 1000-1750', in *Making a Living: Family, Labour and Income*, ed. by Eric Vanhaute, Isabelle Devos, Thijs Lambrecht and Gérard Béaur (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), pp. 174-175.

<sup>92</sup> Belgian State Archives, Kortrijk, Fund Descantons-de Montblanc (Ploho), MSS 3.130.

<sup>93</sup> Descantons-de Montblanc (Ploho), MSS 12.473.

<sup>94</sup> Van De Perre and Van Hauwe, 'De Geschiedenis van Denderwindeke', p. 53.

<sup>95</sup> Van Bavel, *Manors and Markets*, 200-203.

<sup>96</sup> Jean Lartigaut, *Les Campagnes du Quercy Après la Guerre de Cent Ans (Vers 1440 – Vers 1500)* (Toulouse: Association Des Publications de l'Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail, 1978), p. 139-162, see also Marie-Thérèse Lorcin, *Les Campagnes de la Région Lyonnaise aux XIVe et XVe Siècles* (Lyon: Imprimerie BOSC Frères, 1974), p. 140-152.

Concerning the rights and duties of Wedergrate's population, a reasonable amount of sources are preserved. The most important testimony is the terrier of Wedergrate. In this voluminous manuscript, the lords' aim was to compile information about 'the land and its state'.<sup>97</sup> Although we find descriptions of the seigniories, local clerical institutions, lands, lordly privileges, fairs and the like, no structural report of rights for inhabitants has been written down. The only exception to this document structure is Denderwindeke. This is probably the case because of Pierre de Goux' reforms around 1458. Even in Denderwindeke's charter, the primary aim was consolidating lordly power. Most of the headings involve the regulation of justice, Pierre de Goux also states the reason of his reforms, being '*pour le bien conduite [...] des causes et matieres de justice en notre terre et seigneurie de Dendrewindeque*'.<sup>98</sup> The same discourse is found in Guillaume de Goux' patent for the fusion of Wedergrate. The Burgundian officer proclaimed that those frequently committing crimes escaped justice by moving through the various jurisdictions. A unified Wedergrate would more efficiently punish the trespassers, for example by banishment, giving them no more opportunities to simply move to the neighbouring seigniorie.<sup>99</sup> The absence of explicit references to the rights of their subjects in their rentier – likely a work of self-representation – emphasises that in their own view, the lords of Goux served the local population best by exerting power and justice.<sup>100</sup>

The use of certain forms of rights and powers often led to conflicts with rivalling parties, such as clerical orders. Religious institutions often held a fair amount of landed property in the countryside.<sup>101</sup> In addition, the church depended heavily on financial contributions. The importance of tithes for religious congregations is shown by the frequency of conflicts with local village communities.<sup>102</sup>

The continuous shift in distribution of land ownership and rights – be it seigniorial or other – gave way to enduring competition.<sup>103</sup> Different parties fought over claims of property and power. Guillaume de Goux's revenues were usurped by

<sup>97</sup> Belgian State Archives, Kortrijk, Fund Descantons-de Montblanc (Plotho), MSS 378, fol. 23 recto.

<sup>98</sup> Descantons-de Montblanc (Plotho), MSS 378, fol. 29 verso. 'For the good governance of matters of justice on our ground and seigniorie of Denderwindeke.'

<sup>99</sup> De Potter, 'Denderwindeke', p. 29-30.

<sup>100</sup> For literature about self-representation of lords in their own documents, see Buylaert and Haemers, 'Record-keeping', p. 131-150. See also Peter Burke, 'Representations of the Self From Petrarch to Descartes', in *Rewriting the Self, Historians From the Renaissance to the Present*, ed. by R. Porter (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 17-28.

<sup>101</sup> Devos and others, 'The Low Countries', p. 167 & 172, see also Van Bavel, *Manors and Markets*, 62-63.

<sup>102</sup> Devos and others, 'The Low Countries', p. 178.

<sup>103</sup> Bas van Bavel, J. P. Richard, W. Hoyle and Stefan Brakensiek, 'The Low Countries, 1000-1750', in *Social Relations: Property and Power*, ed. by Bas Van Bavel and W. Hoyle (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), pp. 172-175.



a religious institution. Since the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the Nivelles abbey of Saint Gertrude possessed seigniorial rights over Meerbeke. The abbess of the Nivelles abbey admits having collected rents on grounds belonging to Guillaume de Goux and his mother Mathilde de Rye. This charter is actually an amicable arrangement between the two conflicting parties. Mathilde de Rye had taken the matter to the Council of Brabant, which condemned the abbey to a fine of 12 écus. The abbess however managed to broker an understanding, promising frequent payments until the indebted sum was refunded.<sup>104</sup> Saint-Gertrude's congregation would retain rights over Meerbeke to well after the 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>105</sup>

From the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries onward, Flemish cities contested princely authority. After gaining more self-governance, such as their own administration and jurisdiction, the cities started to expand their influence to more surrounding territories. This was often in disadvantage of smaller towns and feudal lords.<sup>106</sup> One of the most famous examples of urban power is the phenomenon of 'outburghers'. Some cities sold the privileges of their citizenship to tenants who lived outside the city walls. Even though they were not located within the city's territory, such outburghers fell under urban law.<sup>107</sup> In their struggle for power with local and princely lords, cities used this as a weapon to undermine lordly power. By consequence, tenant farmers who refused to pay their rents could not be prosecuted by the *seigneur* they were indebted to.<sup>108</sup> This in turn provoked fierce reactions from the lords, who saw their authority and income endangered.<sup>109</sup>

Jurisdictional conflicts between nobles and the cities often led to lawsuits. Pieter Bladelin, founding the new seigniorly of Middelburg-in-Vlaanderen with ducal patents, encountered heavy resistance from the Court of Audits in Lille.<sup>110</sup> Likewise, the lords of Goux clashed with the urban authorities surrounding their estates. Through the legal reforms of Denderwindeke in 1458 and Wedergrate as a whole in 1487, the influence of cities as Ghent, Ninove and

<sup>104</sup> Belgian State Archives, Kortrijk, Fund Descantons-de Montblanc (Plotho), MSS 12.267.

<sup>105</sup> Frans De Potter, 'Meerbeke', in *Idegem, Idegem, Impe, Kerksken, Lede, Leeuwergem, Letterboutem, Lieferingen, Meerbeke, Meldert, Mere, Moerbeke, Moorsel, Neder-Boelare, Neder-Hasselt. Geschiedenis van de Gemeenten der Provincie Oost-Vlaanderen Sde reeks 3de Deel*, ed. by Frans De Potter and Jan Broeckaert (Ghent: Drukkerij Van A. Siffer, 1900), p. 32.

<sup>106</sup> Van Bavel, *Manors and Markets*, 112-113.

<sup>107</sup> For the various sorts of outburghers, Tineke Vandewalle and Jim Van Der Meulen, 'The In-and-Out Burgher? The Jurisdictional Status of People Living Between Town and Countryside: Oudenaarde and Nieuwkerke in the Sixteenth Century' (unpublished conference paper, Girona, Rural History, 2015).

<sup>108</sup> Thoen, *Landbouweconomie*, 496, see also Devos and others, 'The Low Countries', p. 177.

<sup>109</sup> Buylaert, De Clercq and Dumolyn, 'Sumptuary Legislation', p. 411.

<sup>110</sup> Braekevelt, 'Introduction', p. XIV. Braekevelt gives a good image of ambitious noblemen and/or state officials, see the Introduction, p. XI-XIII. For another example, see the lawsuits with varying degrees of success of Jeronimus Lauwerein against the aldermen of Boekhoute as well as the Franc of Bruges in: Soens, *De Spade in de Dijk*, 230-231.

Aalst diminished considerably.<sup>111</sup> When Guillaume de Goux and his judicial officers started to exert power over outburghers of Aalst, this resulted in a long lasting feud and a trail of lawsuits.<sup>112</sup> Testimonies from Aalst's bailiffs reported serious maltreatments and jailing of their outburghers, stating Goux falsely claimed the city's privileges. The lord often appealed these cases to the Malinois Parliament, losing all of them.<sup>113</sup> It is clear that during the Late Middle Ages, the struggle for power between different political entities was still far from resolved.<sup>114</sup>

Whereas for the lord himself, the main emphasis of his conduct was the nature of lordly power (i.e. his privileges, properties and jurisdiction), we have already seen some positive measures bestowed upon Wedergrate's seigniories. Local inhabitants probably benefited from the annual fairs at Denderwindeke and Neigem.<sup>115</sup> By confirming 13<sup>th</sup>-century privileges for Meerbeke, the population could freely trade in realty and they received free passage through the village. Furthermore the lord no longer had a claim on a part of the deceased's inheritance (this was still the case for other seigniories).<sup>116</sup> In 1502, Guillaume de Goux promised to respect Meerbeke's "customs", additionally granting them beer-brewing rights. In parallel to these favours, the very same charter however reports the events prior to the brewing deal. There had been some kind of discord between the lord and his subjects. Due to this conflict, the lord had incarcerated some of the brewers. Following these events, the commoners requested Goux that he would not diminish their privileges and would free the prisoners. In exchange, they promised payments and to be "good subjects" in the future.<sup>117</sup> Other sources confirm that the lords of Goux did not eschew imprisoning perpetrators on their grounds.<sup>118</sup> This conflict

<sup>111</sup> Frans De Potter, 'Appelterre-Eichem', in *Aaigem, St.-Atelins, Appelterre-Eichem, Aspelare, Baardegem, Bambrugge, Bavegem, Borsbeke, Burst, Denderhoutem, Denderleeuw, Denderwindeke, Elene, Erembodegem, Erondegem. Geschiedenis van de Gemeenten der Provincie Oost-Vlaanderen 5<sup>de</sup> Reeks 1<sup>ste</sup> Deel*, ed. by Frans De Potter and Jan Broeckaert (Ghent: Drukkerij Van A. Siffer, 1900), p. 16, see De Potter, 'Meerbeke', p. 20-23, and Frans De Potter, 'Pollare' in *In Neigem, Nieuwenhove, Nieuwerkerke, Oelter, Okegem, Onkerzele, Oombbergen, Oordegem, Op-Hasselt, Ottergem, St.-Gooriks-Oudenhove, Ste.-Maria-Oudenhove, Over-Boelare, Pollare, Ressegem, Sarlardingem, Schendelbeke, Smeerebbe, Smetlede. Geschiedenis van de gemeenten der provincie Oost-Vlaanderen 5<sup>de</sup> Reeks 4<sup>de</sup> Deel*, ed. by Frans De Potter and Jan Broeckaert (Ghent: Drukkerij Van A. Siffer, 1900), p. 9, and Van De Perre and Van Hauwe, 'De Geschiedenis van Denderwindeke', pp. 59-61.

<sup>112</sup> Van De Perre and Van Hauwe, 'De Geschiedenis van Denderwindeke', p. 61.

<sup>113</sup> L. De Mecheleer, 'Enkele Bevoegdheidsconflicten in het Laatmiddeleeuwse Aalst', *Het Land Van Aalst*, 62 (1990), 263-271 (pp. 268-271).

<sup>114</sup> Hoppenbrouwers, 'Malgoverno', pp. 323-324.

<sup>115</sup> Belgian State Archives, Kortrijk, Fund Descantons-de Montblanc (Plotho), MSS 3.479, see also De Potter, 'Denderwindeke', pp. 11-12.

<sup>116</sup> Descantons-de Montblanc (Plotho), MSS 12.472, see also Galesloot, 'Revendication', pp. 37-40.

<sup>117</sup> Belgian State Archives, Kortrijk, Fund Descantons-de Montblanc (Plotho), MSS 3.463.

<sup>118</sup> De Mecheleer, 'Enkele Bevoegdheidsconflicten', p. 269.

provides us a minor peek into how brokerage between lord and inhabitants could sometimes be a precarious process.

Apart from direct confrontations, certain denizens proved to be quite resourceful in avoiding their seigniorial payments. One way to escape feudal rents was becoming an outburgher of a neighbouring city. The offender then had to be trialled by urban justice, bypassing lordly influence.<sup>119</sup> Aalst and Geraardsbergen did have a fair amount of outburghers living within Wedergrate's jurisdictional territory. Denderwindeke alone noted 64 outburghers for Aalst, and 125 for Geraardsbergen at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>120</sup> The local inhabitants must have seen some advantage in this kind of personal statute. A riskier but easier and cheaper solution was simply withholding one's debts.<sup>121</sup> A ducal order from 1458 commands the officers of the Flemish Council to enforce indebted inhabitants of Wedergrate to pay their rents. Apparently Pierre de Goux had requested such an order. Since he did not know his newly won territories, he had no a clue about who owed him and how much.<sup>122</sup> Goux thus had to take matters into his own hands if he wanted to collect his feudal income. This probably caused the composition of his terrier in 1468.<sup>123</sup>

Lordship over a seignior, as shown above, was accompanied by certain conflicts and compromises. This was also the case for a powerful ducal officer such as Pierre de Goux. This implies that nobles making their career in princely service found themselves trapped in conflicts of interests between the socio-political networks to which they belonged, namely the central institutions on the one hand, and local entities on the other. Central institutions – such as the Burgundian duke – as well as local powers – being cities, churches and the local populace – expected from these princely agents that they would serve their interests. It took great diplomatic skill and effort to navigate through the intricate web of expectations from these different political parties.<sup>124</sup> Pierre and Guillaume de Goux both had strategic choices to make. While fighting their jurisdictional feuds with Aalst, they sought affiliation with Ninove.<sup>125</sup> Both scions fulfilled the position of captain for the city. Pierre de Goux reportedly helped the citizens multiple times during his life and

<sup>119</sup> Thoen, *Landbouweconomie*, 496.

<sup>120</sup> Van De Perre and Van Hauwe, 'De Geschiedenis van Denderwindeke', p. 61.

<sup>121</sup> Van Bavel, *Manors and Markets*, 63.

<sup>122</sup> Belgian State Archives, Kortrijk, Fund Descantons-de Montblanc (Plotho), MSS 8.386.

<sup>123</sup> Van De Perre and Van Hauwe, 'De Geschiedenis van Denderwindeke', p. 46-47.

<sup>124</sup> Dumolyn, 'Het Hogere Personeel', II, p. 514-515.

<sup>125</sup> De Mecheleer, 'Enkele Bevoegdheidsconflicten', p. 268-271. For a similar example, such as Jan van Dadizele, see Buylaert and Haemers, 'Record-keeping', p. 4-5.

possessed some property there. As an expression of gratitude, Ninove's burghers offered him bags of wine.<sup>126</sup> Other ducal officers upheld similar relations, as Jan van Kethulle equally received wine from the Franc of Bruges.<sup>127</sup> Moreover, seigniorial lords usually hired officers of their own such as receivers and bailiffs. These officeholders were in charge of the daily conduct in the seigniories, so the lord had to assure himself of their fealty. Such loyalty was assured through an income, provision of clothing and other privileges.<sup>128</sup> Both Pierre and Guillaume de Goux implemented their political experience from ducal service for the goal of their own status and estates.

## 5. Conclusion

One of the main questions of this research was the distinguishing character of the Flemish late medieval seignior as a 'marker' for noble estate. Secondly, the role of state formation and its possible effect on social promotion was closely tied to the part lordships played in this process. Our last objective was to investigate what effect the entry of a new lord had upon other stakeholders within the estate.

Concerning the first question, our testcase of Wedergrate has illustrated the role Medieval seigniories played as a means of social distinction. Moreover, the potential owners for these estates came from a relatively wide range of social groups.<sup>129</sup> The diligence of established lords and social climbers to acquire seigniorial possessions emphasizes the importance such estates represented within their tactics of self-sustainment or social promotion. One of the main objectives for these property structures was likely the continuity of status these families so dearly achieved. Indeed, nobles with successful careers tried to climb the social ladder even further by amassing seigniorial lordships, preferably with the highest jurisdiction. Inheritance rights furthermore assured the future estate of their children. Here, the care for other children proves to be a decisive element. This was clearly the rationale behind purchases of characters like Lieven of Pottelsberghhe and Pierre de Goux. Goux bought the Flemish estates for his second son Guillame, who would otherwise have no seigniorial – and thus noble – status. The renunciation of Wedergrate by Jean de Rupt forms the greatest evidence for this objective. It is ex-

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<sup>126</sup> Bartier, *Légistes et Gens*, 358.

<sup>127</sup> Dumolyn, 'Het Hogere Personeel', II, p. 515.

<sup>128</sup> Mertens, 'Heerlijkheden', p. 554. For Wedergrate specifically, see: Descantons-de Montblanc (Ploto), MSS 378, fol. 23 recto.

<sup>129</sup> Dumolyn and Van Tricht, 'Adel en Nobiliteringsprocessen', p. 197-199, see also Frederik Buylaert, 'Genealogy, Social Mobility, and the Rise of the State in Western Europe (14th-16th Centuries)' (unpublished essay, Ghent University, 2016), p. 4-5.

ceptional that the Burgundian official went through all that effort to secure an inheritance clearly meant for the sake of his second male child. Pottelsberghe, probably suffering from health issues, likewise tried to safeguard a fitting inheritance for his two sons.<sup>130</sup> It is also clear that lordship was not a simple commodity, the noble rights and duties it represented intensely shaped the identity of its possessor. These lords actively administered and increased their authority over their jurisdiction, leading to some benefits for the population, but provoking heavy resistance from other political powers.

This investigation clearly proves that seigniorial lordship played an essential role for the Goux family – among others – in their search for noble status. Both established and new noble houses put great effort in protecting, extending and preserving their estates. The nature of the sources is however thus scarce, that we can only deduce this theory by extrapolating from insufficient information.<sup>131</sup> More research into other cases of social mobility should furtherly develop our knowledge of the importance of Flemish seigniories in this respect. It is thereby essential to realize that most of our source material are documents made for or by these lords. These writings present an image of what nobles saw as important markers for their status, highlighting – sometimes exaggerating – their power and influence and concealing unwanted information. On the other hand, such literary tradition gives a great insight into how medieval noblemen perceived themselves and presented themselves in their administration. Regarding the Flemish seignior as a sole, undisputable marker of noble status, the case of Wedergrate cannot give an unambiguous answer. While there were other ways to achieve noble status, lordship over a seignior proved to be one of the most durable ways to secure nobility over multiple generations, because of its inheritable status.

State formation processes, carried out by centralizing princes, had a great impact on the composition of late medieval nobility.<sup>132</sup> While the aim of these great lords was not to create a state in the modern sense of the word, their clustering of principalities called for administrators in their service.<sup>133</sup> Among the officials fulfilling these positions, such as Pierre de Goux, some were able to build an impressive career. During their journey of social promotion, they employed the social, economic and symbolic capital they amassed to secure the most prestigious positions and im-

<sup>130</sup> Born and others, 'The Van Pottelsberghe-Van Steelant Memorial', pp. 505-508.

<sup>131</sup> Buylaert, 'Genealogy', p. 5.

<sup>132</sup> Devos and others, 'The Low Countries', p. 171.

<sup>133</sup> For a discussion about medieval state-concepts, see Frederik Buylaert and Marie-Gabrielle Verbergt, 'Constructing and Deconstructing the 'State': The Case of the Low Countries', *Low Countries Historical Review*, 132 nr. 4 (2017), 75-79. For the need of princes for officials in their service, see Blockmans and Prevenier, *De Bourgondiërs*, 138-139.

prove their status.<sup>134</sup> Our case of the Goux family and Wedergrate clearly showed this process. Certain actions, such as the obtainment of seigniories and the alteration of its juridical structures, proved to be mutually beneficial to both patron and agent. These processes were stimulated even further through the relations of patronage the princes used to ensure the loyalty of their personnel, such as gifts and career opportunities. Support of the princely overlord however was not at all self-evident. Princes only favoured those who helped them consolidate their own power, such as their officials and agents. Whenever bishops, dukes or counts could gain local support at a rivalling lord's expense, they would surely do so.<sup>135</sup>

Regarding our third and final problem, the impact on local inhabitants and power structures, a nuanced answer is in order. We have seen the clash between what multiple parties unanimously named 'common good' could carry very different meanings. Lords believed their duty was to administer law and order, and the seigniorie was widely acknowledged as a legitimate institution. At the same time they could unrightfully claim power or possession from other parties. These other stakeholders, such as churches, officials or communities proved equally resourceful in this contention for local influence and power. We have seen this for Wedergrate in the quarrels with the Nivelles Abbey, bailiffs of Aalst, outburghers and the brewers of Wedergrate. On the other hand, the conflicting parties could come to an agreement, compromising their respective interests. This was the case for disagreements between the lords of Goux with the brewers and the Nivelles abbey. Some struggles over power, such as that with the jurisdiction of Aalst, proved to be of more permanent nature.

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<sup>134</sup> De Clercq, Dumolyn and Haemers, 'Vivre Noblement', p. 3-4.

<sup>135</sup> Devos and others, 'The Low Countries', pp. 187-188.