Feudal Obligation or Paid Service? The Recruitment of Princely Armies in the Late Medieval Low Countries

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Feudal Obligation or Paid Service? The Recruitment of Princely Armies in the Late Medieval Low Countries*

In 1338–9, Duke Jan III of Brabant (r. 1312–55) raised an army of more than 1,500 knights and squires to help Edward III of England (r. 1327–77) in his struggle to win the French Crown. The king paid him an enormous sum of money for his help; in the autumn of 1339, he owed the duke a staggering 307,000 Florentine florins.¹ Edward’s first serious military campaign against Philip VI of France (r. 1328–50) was launched in September 1339 from the Brabantine town of Leuven, where the English king had established his headquarters.² Duke Jan’s men, who supported King Edward, were primarily recruited from among the duke’s ‘own’ Brabantine vassals, although there were also men from neighbouring principalities, such as the counties of Loon, Mark, Namur and Hainaut. The duke paid them all, vassals as well as others, according to their military and social rank: knights received £6, whereas squires earned half that amount. The total costs for these men-at-arms amounted to some £6,200.³

The increasingly international character of warfare had a significant impact on the way kings and princes composed their armies. The traditional feudal host of the high Middle Ages, in which unpaid vassals served their lord because of their feudal oath, no longer met the needs of belligerent kings and princes. Scholars tend to agree that the

* We would like to thank our colleagues both at the University of Amsterdam and at the Huygens Institute for the History of the Netherlands, the two anonymous reviewers and the editors of the EHR for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article.

1. H.S. Lucas, The Low Countries and the Hundred Years’ War, 1326–1347 (1929; repr. Philadelphia, PA, 1976), pp. 353–5. In July 1337 Edward III had already promised the duke £60,000 sterling in exchange for his loyalty and future collaboration: ibid., p. 215. See also S. Botha, ‘The Duchy of Brabant. Caught between France and England: Geopolitics and Diplomacy during the First Half of the Hundred Years War’, in L.J.A. Villalon and D.J. Kagay, eds., The Hundred Years War: A Wider Focus (Leiden, 2005), pp. 211–40. Throughout this article, we use many different coinages and so-called moneys of account (in pounds). Since it is impossible to standardise all these different currencies, we give the exact sums as mentioned in the sources. On monetary problems in medieval sources, see P. Spufford, Monetary Problems and Policies in the Burgundian Netherlands, 1433–1496 (Leiden, 1970), pp. 13–28.

2. Botha, ‘Duchy of Brabant’, pp. 218–21. The names of the persons mentioned in the text are given in their original spelling, except for those of the French kings Philip IV the Fair and Philip VI, for which the accepted anglicised form is used.


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alternative, the contract army in which professional soldiers fought for whomsoever would pay them, was still a phenomenon of the future. But the Brabantine example of 1338–9 demonstrates that the division between the two types of armed forces was not clear-cut. Instead, there was a transitional period in which both forms could occur at the same time, and in which the distinction between unpaid vassals and mercenaries was blurred.

In this article, we examine this transition from feudal host to paid forces in the Low Countries during the fourteenth century. As early as the twelfth century, the princes of Holland, Brabant and Flanders were capable of mobilising armies of 500 to 1,000 mounted men-at-arms. In the fourteenth century these figures were substantially higher, ranging from 1,000 to 2,500. Although some princes had over 2,000 vassals and sub-vassals, it is unlikely that these men alone were capable of providing an armed force appropriate for a princely military campaign. We show that both the princes and the men who fought for them deployed various strategies and methods to cope with changing circumstances. Since there was no linear development from an army consisting of vassals to one of paid ‘retainers’, it is necessary to disentangle a wide range of feudal and other personal relationships. We focus in particular on the formal ties between princes and nobles in relation to the build-up of princely hosts, and on the ways in which these ties developed and changed. These relationships, both feudal and non-feudal, have previously been studied only in part (in the case of fiefrentes, for example) or in the context of particular military conflicts.

In looking at the full gamut of these relationships and at their evolution across an entire century, this article also contributes to the wider debate about the military position of the nobility in the Low Countries and

7. See, for example, Boffa, *Warfare in Medieval Brabant*, and A. Janse, *Grenzen aan de macht: De Friese oorlog van de graven van Holland omstreeks 1400* (The Hague, 1993).
the nature of their relationship with the princes. Whereas the role of the nobility in the growing Burgundian state in the fifteenth century has been examined in depth, noble–prince relations in the fourteenth century remain relatively little studied.8

This article also compares military changes in the Low Countries to those in England. The English case is particularly well studied and recent research into the transition from feudal obligation to paid service has contributed to a rich debate about the concepts of ‘bastard feudalism’ and ‘military revolution’. A comparative approach will shed light on the (dis)similarity of this transition and the underlying mechanisms in regions on both sides of the North Sea, and thus clarify the nature and scope of socio-political and military developments at a trans-regional level not usually considered by traditional nation-centred scholarship.9

From the thirteenth century onwards, military conflicts in Western Europe grew in frequency and scale. Kings and princes found it increasingly difficult to summon the traditional feudal host of heavily armoured and mounted vassals, frequently reinforced with urban militias and hired infantry and archers. They could not simply acquire more vassals, since the availability of extra fiefs (extracted from their own domains) was limited, and the division of existing fiefs would violate the rights of the fiefholders. On the other hand, princes were more successful in financing military expeditions from their own treasuries, either from their ordinary domain incomes or from their extraordinary revenues, such as subsidies (aides) and loans supplied by private capital.10

The growth of the fiscal ‘war-state’11 had a significant influence on feudal relationships all over Europe. Historians of late medieval England have paid particularly close attention to these developments. In the 1940s, K.B. McFarlane was the first to elaborate on the concept of ‘bastard feudalism’. In his view, this included all ties between a lord and his retainers, which were not only based on a feudal relationship, but also on life-long monetary allowances, mostly in the form of annuities. In other words, the personal bond between a lord and his vassal,
which was traditionally founded on the possession of a fief, normally
a heritable landed estate, was gradually replaced by a more business-
like relationship. The indentures, or contracts, that formalised these
relationships specified the kind of (military) obligations that a retainer
had towards his lord and determined how many men he had to bring
with him for military service. This view of bastard feudalism was not
restricted to lords and their retainers, however, but was also applied to
the changing social and political order in England in the fourteenth
and fifteenth centuries.

In 1989 the discussion about the concept of bastard feudalism
was reopened by P.R. Coss, with reactions from David Carpenter
and David Crouch, and it continued in 1995 with Michael Hicks's
monograph. The finer details of the debate do not concern us here,
but two central subjects in that discussion have been the origins and
the end-point of the practices described by McFarlane and the wider
impact of bastard feudalism on English society. Christine Carpenter
has recently stressed the differences between the bastard feudalisms of
the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries, and has even questioned the
existence of affinities—now the preferred term for a noble following,
replacing ‘retinue’—before 1370. Moreover, it is important to keep
in mind that there was a distinction between commitments for life to
provide service in peace as well as in war (‘indentures of retinue’) and

(1945), pp. 161–80, repr. in England in the Fifteenth Century: Collected Essays of K.B. McFarlane,
(London, 1981), pp. 23–43 (citations are for the latter). See also A.E. Prince, ‘The Indenture System
under Edward III’, in J.G. Edwards, V.H. Galbraith and E.F. Jacob, eds., Historical Essays in
Honour of James Tait (Manchester, 1933), pp. 283–97, at 283–4, who also mentions these practices
without using the term explicitly. The scope of this article does not allow us to contribute to the
debate on the evaluative nature of the term ‘bastard feudalism’, which supposes a ‘pure’ or ‘ideal’
not engage either in the still more fundamental debate on the meaning of the term ‘feudalism’
or whether it should be used at all. In the following, the term ‘feudal’ stands for the practice,
abundantly attested in the sources of the period, of a formal bond between a lord and a free man
implicating specific mutual rights and obligations, mostly of a military nature.

77, and D. Carpenter, ‘Bastard Feudalism Revised’, ibid., pp. 177–89, and a ‘Reply’ by Coss, ibid.,
p. 190–203. See also M. Hicks, ‘Bastard Feudalism, Overmighty Subjects and Idols of the
Feudalism to Bastard Feudalism’, in N. Fryde, P. Monnet and O.G. Oexle, eds., Die Gegenwart
des Feodalismus (Göttingen, 2002), pp. 79–108.

positive reviews. See, for example, the critical reviews by P. Morgan in Welsh History Review, xviii

15. Hicks, Bastard Feudalism, pp. 57–63.

and J. Goodare, eds., Kings, Lords and Men in Scotland and Britain, 1300–1625 (Edinburgh, 2014),
p. 59–92.

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short-term contracts for specified and defined tasks, such as a campaign or garrison duty (‘military indentures’).  

There is universal agreement that, especially in the fourteenth century, military developments were strongly correlated with changes in feudal relationships. Charles Tilly characterised this century as an age of transition between the era of ‘patrimonialism’, when monarchs and princes extracted capital from their domains to cover the costs of their wars and relied heavily on feudal levies and urban militias, and that of ‘brokerage’, when princes were only able to wage war with contracted armies consisting of mercenaries and only with the consent of the ‘dominant classes’.  

Some historians of late medieval England have labelled this development—the formation of contract armies on the basis of aristocratic affinities, paid by the king during a finite period—as one of the characteristics of a medieval ‘military revolution’. However, they simultaneously point out that the demise of the feudal host and its gradual or even ‘inevitable’ replacement by a contract army was not as abrupt as the term ‘revolution’ seems to suggest: first, because there were combinations of ‘feudal’ and ‘paid’ soldiers in the royal armies as early as the eleventh and twelfth centuries; and secondly, because English kings still regularly summoned a feudal host well into the fourteenth century, and hence their armies consisted of a mix of ‘partly paid, partly voluntary unpaid and partly feudal … mounted armoured forces’. There was thus a degree of continuity in the way armies were constituted. However, the military campaigns against the Scots and the French in the first half of the fourteenth century certainly caused the royal government to modify its recruitment policies.

Although similar military developments took place in the Low Countries, historians have never applied the concept of bastard
feudalism to changes in feudal relationships in this conglomerate of principalities and lordships. We argue that some feudal relationships in the late medieval Low Countries bore many similarities to the characteristics of bastard feudalism as described by McFarlane. These may have had autonomous origins, but they can also be explained by the multi-faceted contacts between England and the Low Countries, not only in the field of diplomatic and military relations, but also in the commercial and economic sphere.

As in England, in the Low Countries the fourteenth century formed a pivot between the thirteenth century, when military recruitment was primarily based on the traditional feudal host, and the fifteenth century, when the Burgundian dukes managed to raise standing armies. In this period there existed a wide range of feudal and other personal relationships, which were constantly put to the test by the multiple conflicts between ambitious princes and lords and their incessantly changing alliances. The political and military interventions of the kings of England and France and the Holy Roman Emperor, who invested large sums to buy support in the Low Countries, were an incentive for princes to create new ways of forging bonds, not only with their own vassals, but also with those of their competitors. Our results shed new light on the development and nature of ‘bastard feudalism’ in the Low Countries, and also highlight the similarities to and differences from the English situation.

Around 1300, the most important princes of the Low Countries were the prince-bishops of Utrecht and Liège, the duke of Brabant and Limburg, the count of Flanders and the count of Holland, Zeeland and Hainaut.


23. The French king followed the same policy as his eternal adversary of England did in 1338–9. In 1314, for example, the French king promised Count Willem III of Holland a yearly sum of £40,000 Tourn. for his support: J.F. Niermeyer, ‘Henegouwen, Holland en Zeeland onder Willem III en Willem IV van Avesnes’, in J.A. van Houette et al., eds., *Algemene geschiedenis der Nederlanden, III: De late middeleeuwen, 1305–1477* (Utrecht, 1951), pp. 63–91, at 68. In the same year, the German King Louis IV (r. 1314–47) paid Count Willem, who had helped him to get elected, £52,000 black Tourn.: ibid., p. 69. In February 1315 the French king promised the count a monthly sum of £140,000 small Paris. for 50,000 armed infantrymen (‘hommes a piet deffensaules et armés’), who were to invade Flanders for a period of at least a month: *Registers van de Hollandse graafschap*, 1299–1345, ed. J.W.J. Burgers (Huygens Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis, 2015) [hereafter Registers], available at http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/registershollandsegrafelijkheid, no. CA 35 (accessed 11 May 2018). Later that year, the king paid the count £27,755 Holl. for the wages of some 7,000 combatants who were to invade Flanders: H.P.H. Jansen and P.C.M. Hoppenbrouwers, ‘Heervaart in Holland’, *Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, xciv (1979), pp. 1–26, at 4; Janse, *Ridderschap in Holland*, pp. 295–6.
They were followed, in terms of power, by the duke of Luxembourg and the counts of Guelders, Namur, Loon, Cleves and Jülich. In the following century, the power relationships between the princes scarcely changed; it was only in the fifteenth century that the Burgundian dukes acquired most of the principalities of the Low Countries, which they integrated into a composite state. In other words, princely authority in the entire region was fragmented, but some players were ultimately more successful than others in extending their power through military and diplomatic endeavours. Moreover, in the border regions of all these territories, and especially in the region between the Meuse and Rhine rivers, many high-ranking nobles held semi-independent lordships in combination with smaller fiefs in two or even three principalities. This ‘multiple vassalage’ system implied not only that such nobles could act as courtiers or councillors in the service of different princes, but also that they could be summoned to serve in the armies of different lords.

The test case in the present study is the duchy of Brabant, situated in the heart of the Low Countries and, together with Holland and Flanders, one of its most urbanised territories. In the thirteenth century, successive dukes of Brabant achieved the political unification of the duchy through warfare and diplomacy. This culminated in the Battle of Worringen (1288), in which Duke Jan I (r. 1267–94), aided by the counts of Berg, Mark, Loon and Jülich, among others, defeated the count of Guelders and his allies and added the duchy of Limburg to his possessions. However, in the fourteenth century, this major territorial aggrandisement led to new military conflicts with the princes of the surrounding principalities, especially the counts and dukes of Guelders, Jülich and Flanders.

Brabant makes an ideal case-study, as archival sources on the fourteenth-century duchy, some of them published, are abundant. These sources consist of hundreds of charters in which the duke paid nobles for their military assistance, as well as ducal registers of vassals and fiefs. The case of Brabant has already been studied by Sergio


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Boffa, who dedicated an entire book and several articles to warfare in the duchy in the second half of the fourteenth century. Nonetheless, he paid very limited attention to feudal relationships. With regard to the role of the nobility in the armies of the duke of Brabant, he remarks that ‘they formed the core of the army,’ and that during the fourteenth century their ‘appreciable power, derived from their landed property and the prestige of their representatives’ did not undergo major changes. Although this is undoubtedly true, the personal ties between the duke and the nobility do merit closer examination, for they changed substantially in this period, as we shall see.

In addition, and by way of contrast, we analyse feudal ties and military recruitment in other principalities in the Low Countries. The county of Holland, for which sufficient comparable sources are available, will be our primary focus. In 1299, this principality was united with the counties of Hainaut and Zeeland and the lordship of Friesland in a personal union that enclosed Brabant at its Northern and Southern borders. The duke and the count thereby became natural opponents. In the following, we focus on five forms of military recruitment which mark the transition from a feudal host to a contract army. We argue that in the fourteenth century a nobleman rendered military service to a prince in return for: (i) the lands, princely rights or lordships that he held in fief (the classic feudal relationship); (ii) payment, although he was formally a fiefholder; (iii) a fief-rent given to him by a prince, not necessarily the prince of the principality where the vassal had his main possessions; (iv) a fief-rente de reprise: a feudal relationship on the basis of a largely fictitious fief-rente; (v) a formal contract—that is, there was no feudal relationship whatsoever between the prince and the contracting party. At the same time, we should note two caveats: first, that, despite developing in rough chronological order, these five forms often overlapped to a great extent; and secondly, that a nobleman could engage in more than one of these five relationships at the same time, and do so with various princes.

I

In the ‘classic’ feudal relationship, a vassal who held a fief from his lord was obliged to provide him with consilium and auxilium. Throughout Europe, auxilium consisted of military assistance: a vassal had to present himself for service with his own weapons and equipment, sufficient horses of a certain quality (war horses or destriers), and often a retinue. This obligation long remained in effect: for his military expedition against

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the Frisians in 1398, the count of Holland ordered his vassals to ‘serve him, armed and with good and armed men, well equipped’.33 This meant that vassals had to have the means to purchase adequate arms, armour and mounts.34 In theory, these were provided by the revenues extracted from both their allodia and their fiefs, in the form of landed estates and/or seigniorial rights such as jurisdiction (the right to judge crimes and offences within their lordships), rents (in money or in kind), tolls, mills, fishing and ferry dues.35 The relationship between the possession of a fief and the military obligation of the vassal was specifically stated in the summons letters that princes issued for military expeditions.36

There is little doubt that, until well into the thirteenth century, the feudal host formed the basis of princely armies in most principalities of the Low Countries. However, the available source material does not provide much insight into the precise military implications of the feudal bond for this period. The nature of the fief and the occasional payment in the case of relief (verheffing), in money or in kind, were usually specified in charters or accounts, but both contracting parties seem to have been aware of the vassal’s military obligations, since the latter were seldom written down.37 In thirteenth-century sources we catch only the occasional glimpse of the obligations connected to the feudal oath. In 1279, the Flemish nobleman Jan, lord of Oudenaarde and Rozoy-en-Thiérache, transferred his allodial lordship of Ghoy (near Lessines, situated in Walloon Brabant) to Duke Jan I of Brabant. In return, he received the lordship in fief from the duke (as a so-called fief de reprise), who also undertook to provide him with annual compensation of three queus of Rhine wine and a falcon.38 In 1285 a new clause was added


34. Contamine, War in the Middle Ages, pp. 95–7.


36. See, for example, the letters of Albert of Bavaria, Count of Holland, of 5 May 1398 in which he summoned his vassals on the basis of their fief (‘en de ombieden u als wij begeertelicst moghen ende vermanen op sulc lien, als ghi van ons hout’): Groot placaat en charterboek, ed. Schwartzenberg, i. 270–71; Janse, Grenzen aan de macht, p. 264.

37. See also S. Reynolds, Fiefs and Vassals: The Medieval Evidence Reinterpreted (New York, 2001), p. 31. Until well into the fourteenth century, for some fiefs in Flanders and Brabant, a new fietholder had to hand over an object that was associated with his service, such as a pair of gauntlets, a pair of spurs, a lance or a falcon. In the fifteenth century these objects were generally replaced by monetary payments: Godding, Le Droit privé, p. 159; R. Opsommer, ‘Omme dat leengoed es thoochste dinc van der weereld’: Het leenrecht in Vlaanderen in de 14de en 15de eeuw (Brussels, 1995), pp. 608–10.

38. Le Livre des feudataires, ed. Galesloot, pp. 38–9; Christophe Butkens, Trophées tant sacrés que profanes de la duché de Brabant, I (Antwerp, 1641), p. 291 and preuves, pp. 109, 111, who mentions eighteen ‘amez de vin’ and seven falcons. On the same day, Jan was also enfeoffed with the village of Roncqûières, situated in Walloon Brabant. On this nobleman and his predecessors, see E. Wârlop in Nationaal Biografisch Woordenboek (22 vols. to date, Brussels, 1964–), vol. ii, cols. 656–60, s.n. ‘Oudenaarde’.

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stipulating that he did not have to serve the duke at his own expense.39 From this, we can conclude that a vassal would normally have borne the costs of serving his lord.40 A contemporary charter from Holland confirms this practice. In 1283, Count Floris V (r. 1256–96) declared that his vassal Dirk van Brederode was obliged to serve him in his host for as long as the count was personally present on the battlefield with his banner. In such a case, the vassal had to come at his own expense with a twenty-oar heerkogge (war boat), or with fifteen men-at-arms and five archers.41

In contrast to a relative paucity of detail for the thirteenth century, the documentation concerning the Brabantine war of succession of 1356–7 offers an excellent insight into the importance and relevance of the feudal oath by the mid-fourteenth century. At this point, the count of Flanders, Louis of Male (r. 1346–84), had conquered most of the duchy. On 27 August 1356, ten days after the defeat of the Brabantine army at the Battle of Scheut, near Brussels, the count summoned 158 knights to do homage and swear fealty (‘manscap ende hulde’) to their new lord for the fiefs they held in Brabant. The most important towns of Brabant had already sworn loyalty to the count.42 Although this ‘feudal policy’, which was clearly intended to neutralise the military potential of opponents, initially seemed successful, it met with resistance from the most important vassals. The lords of Breda and Glimes declared that they were too ill to travel to the count to render him homage.43 Other vassals were more forthright and openly declared that they wanted to remain loyal to their ‘just lord’ (‘gherechten heere’); that is, to Duke Wenceslas of Luxembourg (r. 1355–83), who had acquired the ducal title thanks to his marriage to Johanna, eldest daughter of Duke Jan III of Brabant. In October 1356 the count ordered his officers to confiscate the goods and fiefs of the men who had not paid homage to him. These included many bannerets, such as the lords of Wezemaal, Gaasbeek, Grimbergen, Hoogstraten, Diest, Marbaix and Perweis.44 Several important princes, such as the counts of Berg, Loon and Nassau and their followers, who were allies and very probably also vassals of the duke, declared themselves enemies of the count. Finally,

40. Boffa, Warfare in Medieval Brabant, p. 207.
there were those vassals who had already paid homage to the count, but who changed their mind at a later stage and ‘returned’ their fiefs to him in order to be acquitted of their oath. In other words, in the Low Countries in the fourteenth century, both the liege lord and the vassal took the feudal oath seriously. The oath of loyalty—with its inherent promise of military aid—was closely connected to the fief, but could be renounced; the fief could be transferred to other holders in the case of disobedience.

An army consisting of vassals clearly had advantages for a prince, since these men were trained, and—because of the feudal bond—probably loyal and motivated. None the less there was a potential problem in that the number of men-at-arms that could be raised through feudal obligations was inadequate for a large-scale campaign; that was one reason why the princes sought the support of foreign combatants. An additional disadvantage was that feudal regulations brought restrictions. In Flanders and Brabant, for example, vassals were only obliged to follow their prince on a military expedition at their own expense with a harness and horse within the boundaries of the principality, normally for a maximum of forty days. If the vassal’s military service was performed abroad or exceeded the maximum duration, the prince had to cover the costs. A further problem was that some vassals held fiefs from two or even more princes. In his acclaimed study on feudal society, Marc Bloch mentions two German nobles who had twenty and forty-three lords, respectively. Although it is difficult to trace vassals in Holland and Brabant with similar numbers of feudal ties, it is clear that, especially in border areas, nobles held fiefs from several princes. Problems would


46. There were vassals who served in princely armies even though they were not required to do so (for instance, because the maximum term of service had expired), and without asking for payment: M. Prestwich, ‘Money and Mercenaries in English Medieval Armies’, in A. Haverkamp and H. Vollrath, eds., *England and Germany in the High Middle Ages: In Honour of Karl Leyser* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 145, 150; Jansen and Hoppenbrouwers, ‘Heervaart in Holland’, p. 2.

47. This was certainly the case in England, where Edward I had to deal with an ever diminishing number of vassals responding to a feudal summons: Prestwich, *War, Politics and Finance*, pp. 79–82. His successor faced the same problem: id., ‘Cavalry Service’, pp. 153–6.


49. F.L. Ganshof, *Feudalism*, tr. P. Grierson (3rd edn., New York, 1964), pp. 102–5; M. Bloch, *Feudal Society* (2 vols., London, 1975), i. 211–18, esp. 212. In theory, as liege lord, one lord had pre-eminence over the others in the case of conflicting interests, but this was often little more than a theoretical position.

arise for a vassal if two of his lords were to enter into conflict, since he was then obliged to assist both. Feudal regulations in Brabant stipulated that in such cases a vassal should remain passive (‘stille sitten’), and only help a lord whose opponent was fighting an ‘unjust’ war.51

Willem van Duivenvoorde (c.1290–1353) presents an excellent example of such dual loyalty. As the illegitimate son of a high-ranking nobleman from Holland, he became a trustee, councillor and chamberlain to Count Willem III of Holland (r. 1304–37), who knighted him in 1328 after the Battle of Cassel.52 Between 1323 and 1340, he managed to acquire important feudal goods in the border areas of the county of Holland and the duchy of Brabant.53 But Duivenvoorde would soon cross this border on his own account. In 1325, he acquired the lordship of Oosterhout (near Breda) with high jurisdiction as a ducal fief from Gerard van Rassegem.54 In the following years, Duke Jan III of Brabant enfeoffed him with many other lordships (Dongen, Boutersem)55 and smaller fiefs and rents, most of them situated in the northern part of the duchy. Understandably, Duke Jan III expected his vassal to assist him when he was besieged by a coalition of seventeen lords and princes, among them Count Willem III of Holland, in April and May 1332. Duivenvoorde responded positively and loaned the duke 56,693 small Florentine guilders, intended to cover the costs of the defence of Brabant. The duke was only able to redeem this enormous debt seven years later, with the money provided by Edward III.56 Nevertheless, when the coalition—probably at the instigation of Count Willem III—put Duivenvoorde under pressure in the spring of 1333, he changed sides and resigned his feudal tie with the duke of Brabant.57 After a

peace was concluded at Amiens in August 1334, the breach between the duke and his vassal was repaired, in all likelihood because of the duke’s huge financial obligations towards Duivenvoorde. It should thus come as no surprise that Duivenvoorde played a crucial role in the duke’s Council from 1334 to 1353, and presented himself as a Brabantine nobleman. 58

To summarise: in theory, the feudal oath was a useful tool for a prince to ensure that he would receive military assistance when needed, albeit that he was not always able to summon enough mounted men-at-arms. Both lord and vassals were aware of the implications of their oath. Vassals had their own strategies, however, and seized opportunities that arose in other principalities. They could show amazing flexibility when changing sides in the case of a military conflict between two of their lords. Princes were increasingly aware of the fact that they could not ‘claim’ a vassal. They were even prepared to compensate a vassal who lost his fiefs in an opponent’s lands. 59

II

During the thirteenth century it became standard practice for a prince to pay his vassals for their service, either for their expenses or as wages, even when they were bound by their feudal oath to serve. 60 In England, royal vassals were paid for military service from the second half of the thirteenth century onwards. 61 These payments were one of the reasons why war became a very costly enterprise, as is illustrated by the staggering sums spent by Edward III on his French and Scottish campaigns in the 1330s. 62 In France, Philip IV the Fair (r. 1285–1314) had to pay vassals who served him for more than forty days during his numerous military campaigns between 1294 and 1304. These vassals normally brought their own retinues, consisting of knights, squires and sergeants who did not have a direct feudal tie with the king and who

58. Avonds, Land en instellingen, pp. 75–6, 105, 109, 139, 145, 151, 255. He also built a house and a chapel in Brussels—now integrated into the Royal Library of Brussels—and in the same town, founded a convent of the Clarisses where he would eventually be buried.

59. During the war of succession of 1356–7, Arnold, lord of Stein, had to choose between two lords: the duke of Brabant and the count of Namur. He eventually chose to side with Duke Wenceslas and Duchess Johanna of Brabant (r. 1355–1406), who compensated him for the loss of his fiefs in the county: Verkooren, Inventaire, ser. I, vol. ii, no. 952. Arnold, or his father of the same name, was also mentioned in c.1320 and 1329 as a vassal of the count of Holland: Registers, nos. DE 5, 50, 51.

60. Verbruggen, Het leger en de vloot, p. 57. Guenée, L’Occident, p. 207, uses the term ‘vassaux soldés’.


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received wages as well. On the other hand, when the king’s vassals chose not to serve in the royal host, they had to pay him an exemption fee.63

The sparse documentary evidence demonstrates that the practice of paying vassals for military assistance, even when this was not demanded by feudal law, already existed in the Low Countries in the last decades of the thirteenth century, although the practice was perhaps not as common as in England. In 1290, for example, Count Floris V of Holland promised to compensate his vassal Sir Hendrik Buffel for the damage that the latter suffered in his service against rebellious nobles in Zeeland.64 We have already mentioned the charter of 1285 in which Duke Jan I of Brabant held that his vassal Jan, lord of Oudenaarde, did not have to serve at his own expense. Both examples indicate that in this period it was still customary in Holland and Brabant for vassals to follow their lord on his military campaigns at their own expense, but that it was not unusual for them to receive financial compensation.

By the fourteenth century, the payment of vassals who served in princely hosts had become common practice in the Low Countries. Dozens of charters relating to the large-scale wars of 1338–9, 1356–7 and 1371, in which the duke of Brabant was involved, attest that ducal vassals were paid even when their service was required within the duchy for less than forty days. In these documents, the duke either promised to pay nobles for a planned campaign or to reimburse their expenses (often due to the loss of horses or armour). Although it is never explicitly stated that these men were vassals of the duke, many of them can be traced in the ducal books of fiefs.65

It goes without saying that payment was not restricted to the vassals, but extended to their retinues. The men mentioned in the payroll of 1338 had retinues that consisted of a certain number of knights (ranging from 1 to 16) and a number of squires (from 1 to 35), probably sub-vassals, servants, followers or simply ‘contracted’ men. Four men paid by the duke, the counts of Mark and Loon and the lords of Cuijk and Argenteau, all possessors of ducal fiefs,66 appear to have functioned as ‘sub-contractors’, as they took 100–300 knights and squires with them; it is unlikely that they would have been able to recruit so many men from their households.67 Others were not only fiefholders, but also high officials at the ducal court. Sir Leon van Kraainem, for instance, was seneschal of Brabant, the highest judicial officer of the duchy and the

65. This pertains, for instance, to the knights Arnoud van Agimont, Jan van Wijtvliet, Liedekijn van Bardeghem and Hendrik Berthout, lord of Duffel, who all served the duke in the war of 1338–9. See Verkooren, *Inventaire*, ser. I, vol. i, nos. 476 (Agimont), 493 (Bardeghem), 495 (Wijtvliet), and 497 (Berthout) (*Le Livre des feudataires*, ed. Galesloot, pp. 88, 105 [Berthout], 178 [Agimont], 194 [Bardeghem], 233 [Wijtvliet]).
lieutenant of the duke in his absence. In 1338 he received £93 of old groats for his service in the duke’s army, together with four other knights and twenty-three squires, for the duration of the war between England and France. 68 Another example is Sir Jan Craye van der Hofstat, the marshal of Brabant during the same campaign. Originally an officeholder at the ducal court, in the fourteenth century Sir Jan became a commander in the Brabantine army. 69 In 1338 Sir Jan and his lieutenant, Sir Walter van der Quadebrugge, received £111 for themselves and twenty-three squires. 70

During the war of succession of 1356–7, many non-Brabantine (or ‘foreign’) vassals fought on the side of Wenceslas and Johanna. One of them was the Rhineland nobleman Hendrik van Schönrahth, who received 32 old florins in December 1356 for the loss of a horse. Moreover, together with Pade van Heimberg, he received another 50 Antwerp schild as wages for the eight days of service rendered by themselves and six soldiers. Finally, in February 1357, he obtained another 54 old schild for the eighteen days of service he and two glaives (men-at-arms) had provided, including four days for his journey home. 71

Two developments fostered the general practice of paying vassals from the end of the thirteenth century onwards. First, the mixed composition of the armies, with a growing contingent of ‘foreigners’, had an impact. We shall see that the duke had to pay these men even if they possessed a fief-rente, and it therefore became increasingly difficult not to pay his Brabantine vassals. 72 Secondly, the nature of the conflicts changed: they became increasingly international, with princely armies campaigning outside their own territories. As a consequence, princes had to pay for their vassals’ participation, since these conflicts were explicitly excluded from military service in feudal law.

III

Instead of a material fief, a prince could also grant a fief in the form of an annual allowance, a fief-rente, for which the receiver became his vassal,
with all the obligations this entailed. A fief-rente did not only consist of money, but could also take the form of allowances in kind, such as certain amounts of grain or wine. Far from being an invention of the late Middle Ages, this device was already in use in the eleventh century, although it only became widespread in the thirteenth century. The earliest examples of fief-rentes in Brabant are from the reign of Duke Hendrik I (r. 1183–1235). In 1202, he gave a rente of 100 marks to Count Philippe I of Namur (r. 1195–1212); in 1208, he supplied a rente of £40 Fland. to the Flemish nobleman Raas van Gavere the younger; and in 1224, the Duke granted a rente of 20 marks of Cologne to Gauthier de Ligne and his brother Fastré, noblemen from Hainaut. During the same period, fief-rentes in Holland were issued by the abbot of Egmond in 1215 and by individual noblemen of Zeeland around 1229 and in 1235. At that time, the count of Holland also made regular use of this means of binding nobles to his person, among them Sir Arnold, lord of Oudenaarde, in 1228–9, and Sir Willem van Strijen in 1235. These examples show that the princes used the fief-rente to bind other princes or nobles who did not form part of their ‘natural’ sphere of influence. In other words, princes targeted men who lived on the fringes of, or even beyond, their territories.

Compared to the landed fief, the fief-rente brought a number of advantages for a prince. New enfeoffments would deplete the princely domain, whereas, with a fief-rente, only the princely treasury would bear the burden. Secondly, the vassal and his heirs were unable to appropriate the fief as if it were an allodium, which was common practice with landed fiefs. Thirdly, the prince could easily stop the allowance if a vassal were to misbehave; confiscating a landed fief was more complicated, and

73. Lyon, From Fief to Indenture; developments in Flanders are described in D. Heirbaut, ‘The Fief-Rente: A New Evaluation, Based on Flemish Sources (1000–1300)’, Tijdschrift voor Rechtsgeschiedenis, i (1999), pp. 1–37. Incidentally, the term ‘fief-rente’ is not used in contemporary sources; the latter simply use the term ‘fief’ (feodum, leen) with a statement of the annuity involved.

74. See, for example, for Flanders, Heirbaut, ‘Fief-Rente’, p. 15; Verbruggen, Het leger en de vloot, p. 31.


76. Verkooren, Inventaire, ser. II, vol. ii, pp. 32, 38, 57; B.D. Lyon, ‘The Fief-Rente in the Low Countries’, Revue belge de philologie et d’histoire/Belgisch tijdschrift voor filologie en geschiedenis, xxxii (1954), pp. 422–65, at 428 (Philippe I of Namur). The fief-rente of Gauthier de Ligne was confirmed later by the dukes Hendrik II (r. 1235–48) and Hendrik III. The confirmations are known solely from a charter issued by Hendrik III on 22 April 1253 (Verkooren, Inventaire, ser. I, vol. i, no. 56), in which a rente of £20 Fland. is mentioned, converted into a yearly allowance of two barrels of Rhine wine.


78. Count Floris IV (r. 1222–34) enfeoffed Arnold, lord of Oudenaarde, in 1228–9 with a yearly allowance of four barrels of wine and two red falcons; the protector Willem of Holland (r. 1234–8) enfeoffed Sir Willem van Strijen in 1235 with an annual sum of £6 Holl. from the toll of Geervliet. Another example is the enfeoffment by Count Willem II in 1239–56 of Arnoud Kinds or his son Willem with a yearly sum of £4 Holl. from the lease of a piece of land in De Lier: Oorkondenboek van Holland, ed. Koch, Kruisheer and Dijkhof, vol. i, no. 483, and vol. ii, nos. 573, 1071.

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often only possible through the use of force. Furthermore, fief-rentes facilitated the recruitment of ‘foreign’ vassals who could be deployed for various purposes. Through this means, for example, high-ranking nobles could be engaged as friends and allies at a foreign court, where they might be expected to exert their influence on behalf of their liege lord. This diplomatic use of the fief-rente also dates back to the thirteenth century. Still, it was even more important that these vassals could be summoned in the case of a military conflict, and it was especially to this end that the princes used the fief-rente. This is confirmed by the two above-mentioned examples from Brabant, in 1202 and 1208: in both years, the duke was at war with the counts of Holland and Guelders.

Other princes followed similar strategies. The count of Flanders granted a large number of fief-rentes to foreign noblemen during the second half of the thirteenth century, when the French king posed an imminent military threat. The immediate use of these rents is expressed in summons lists of 1297, with the names of the allies (‘li alloié’) and the number of men they were supposed to bring to the Flanders army. The lists involve some 1,200 ‘armures de fer’ from all over the Low Countries, but mostly from Brabant and the Meuse and Rhine regions. Malcolm Vale has noted that some of the men who had been summoned, such as the Brabantine nobles Willem, lord of Horne, and Jan, lord of Cuijk, were bound to the count with a fief-rente and thus had to obey the count’s summons. In the same period, the duke of Brabant also gave fief-rentes to foreign nobles, including Gerard of Luxembourg in 1283, the son of the count of Virneburg in 1284, Gerard ‘advocatus’ of Cologne in 1292, and Henry of Luxembourg in 1297. These men were all of high rank, most of them of princely

79. Lyon, From Fief to Indenture, pp. 161–81; for Flanders, cf. Heirbaut, ‘Fief-Rente’, pp. 25–6. For examples from Holland, see, in n. 78 above, the fief-rente that Count Floris IV gave to Arnold, lord of Oudenarde, who was a vassal and bailiff of the count of Flanders; and the annual allowance of £15 from the toll of Niemandsvriend which Count Floris V conferred in 1278 to the advocate of Cologne (Oorkondenboek van Holland, ed. Koch, Kruisher and Dijkhof, vol. iv, no. 2351). See also Lucas, Low Countries, pp. 354–5.


84. Verbruggen, Het leger en de vloot, pp. 53–4, counts 1,228 listed men. See also the analysis by Vale, ‘Anglo-French Wars’, pp. 23–5, who gives a total of 1,189 armures de fer enlisted as alliés. The term armure de fer indicates that these men possessed mail armour, at least, but they were not necessarily all heavily armed and mounted men-at-arms; see Janse, Ridderschap in Holland, p. 295.


descent. This pattern of recruitment shows that, as early as the later thirteenth century, the duke was actively seeking support among the leading families of neighbouring principalities.

In the first half of the fourteenth century, the fief-rente became widespread in the principalities of the Low Countries. The duke of Brabant was the uncrowned champion of fief-rentes, since he granted hundreds of them in the fourteenth century. The duke was particularly interested in foreign princes and nobles. In 1340, for example, Duke Jan III granted a yearly allowance of £400 old groats to Count Guillaume I of Namur (r. 1337–91), and in 1347–54 he gave a lump sum of £50 old groats to Walram of Luxembourg, lord of Ligny. Sometimes he used a fief-rente as a reward for services performed, as happened in 1334, when he augmented a fief held by Adolf, count of Mark, with an annual fief-rente of £200 Tourn.

The count of Holland also awarded fief-rentes relatively frequently in this period. From 1316 onward, some 470 fief-rentes are listed in the registers of the comital chancery in Holland. Like the duke of Brabant, the count granted over a hundred fief-rentes (or rather fief-rentes de reprise; see below) to foreign princes and nobles, such as the counts of Jülich, Virneburg, Neuenahr and Sayn and the lords of Fauquemont and Cuijk. For the military expeditions against the Frisians in the last decade of the fourteenth century, the count of Holland summoned his vassals who held fief-rentes, including the counts of Megen and Meurs and the lord of Heinsberg. In the end, none of these three vassals chose to present themselves, showing that the fief-rente was not always an adequate tool for raising an army.

Among the holders of fief-rentes, the names of certain high-ranking nobles appear time and again. For example, the lords of Fauquemont, Cuijk, Löwenburg, Greifenstein, Van de Bongerd, Stein and Dollendorf are mentioned in 1297 as alliés of the count of Flanders, whereas in the 1320s and 1330s they received fief-rentes from the count of Holland and

87. Lyon, ‘Fief-Rente’.
88. Lyon, ‘Fief-Rente’, pp. 425–6, mentions 1,224 transactions of fief-rentes by the duke of Brabant. This number, however, ‘represents totals of entries rather than totals of different fief-rentes’. A great many references to fief-rentes can indeed be found in the archives of the duke of Brabant. Sometimes even the quittances delivered to the treasurer of Brabant have been preserved, such as fifteen documents from November–December 1371: Verkooren, Inventaire, ser. I, vol. iii, nos. 2876–82, 2884–92. See also Boffa, Warfare in Medieval Brabant, p. 210.
90. Verkooren, Inventaire, ser. I, vol. ii, nos. 778, 779, 864, 865, 879. This rente was paid, according to the remaining quittances, between 1347 and 1354. The quittances were half-yearly payments of £12½.
92. Cf. the edition in Registers.
93. Registers, nos. DE 5, 6, 14–16, all datable between 1315 and 1320.
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the duke of Brabant. The availability of these military professionals from the Meuse–Rhineland furthered the diversification of feudal ties in the Low Countries. It goes without saying that these foreign vassals were less loyal than the indigenous vassals who shared a territory with their prince.

A fief-rente also brought clear advantages for a vassal, especially in times of decreasing seigniorial revenues. He could sell his fief-rente, give it to his own vassal as an arrière-fief, or give it to his spouse as a dowry. A fief-rente was therefore not fundamentally different from a landed fief, since in principle it was also hereditary—unlike a so-called pension-fieffié, which was also an annual allowance given to influential foreigners, but one that was not hereditary. In this respect, fief-rentes also differed from English indentures of retinue, which lasted only during the lifetime of the retainer.

Only occasionally was the military service associated with a fief-rente specified. In 1325, for instance, Count Willem III of Holland enfeoffed Willemen Wittenzoon with a modest annual allowance of £5 Holl., ‘which he and his heirs will hold from us and our heirs as a loan heritable from father to son’. In return, Willem had to present himself at the castle of Nieuwburg, near Alkmaar, when summoned by the bailiff. In 1337 the count of Flanders granted a fief-rente to Jean de Noyelle, a noble member of his household, on the condition that ‘he should serve us well and loyally as we live, in war, tournoi and jousts and in all other things belonging to a knight … And for his warhorse, if he shall lose it, we shall pay him our marshal’s price’. Thus the lord

95. See the lists in Verbruggen, Het leger en de vloot, pp. 53–4, and J.W.J. Burgers, ‘Die Grafen von Holland-Henegau in der Region von Maas und Niederhollan in der ersten Hälfte des vierzehnten Jahrhunderts’, Rheinishe Vierteljahrsblätter, lxxx (2016), pp. 58–89; in the latter, Table 3 (pp. 79–80), we find the names of those lords as receivers of fief-rentes of both the count of Holland and the duchess of Brabant.


98. Duke Jan III, for example, gave Nicolas Laurant, a burgher from Namur, a yearly sum in 1339 of 20 s of old groats for his lifetime: Verkooren, Inventaire, set. I, vol. ii, nos. 570, 579. Some of the allowances paid by Edward III in 1338 were of this type: for instance, the £1,000 sterling for the count of Guelders in August 1338, the £20 for Jan de la Mote, a citizen of Ghent, also in August 1338, as well as the £200 for another Ghent citizen, Simon van Halen, who was married to an illegitimate sister of Count Louis of Male: Lucas, Low Countries, pp. 307, 315, 322–3. In the last decades of the fourteenth century, the duke of Burgundy conferred many similar pensions to nobles in neighbouring principalities in order to convert them into political supporters: H. Laurent and F. Quicke, Les Origines de l’état Bourguignon: L’Accession de la maison de Bourgogne aux duchés de Brabant et de Limbourg (1383–1407) (Brussels, 1939), pp. 74–89; R. Stein, Politiek en historiografie: Het ontstaansmilieu van Brabantse kronieken in de eerste helft van de vijftiende eeuw (Leuven, 1994), pp. 176–8; B.-A. Pacquet du Haut-Jussé, ‘Les Pensionnaires fieffés des ducs de Bourgogne de 1352 à 1419’, Mémoires de la société pour l’histoire du droit et des institutions des anciens pays bourguignons, comtés et romands, viii (1942), pp. 127–50.

99. Less correct, therefore, is the observation by Vale, ‘Anglo-French Wars’, p. 19, that the fief-rente can be considered ‘the continental equivalent of the retaining fee or contract of English “bastard feudalism”’.

100. Registers, no. FR 39.


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expected military service from his vassal both on the battlefield and at the tournament, and he guaranteed him sufficient compensation in case of material losses.

The fief-rente thus established a feudal relationship between a lord and a man, although the bond was more symbolic and less personal than that of a ‘classic’ fief. Many beneficiaries must have been aware of the direct connection between the financial allowance and the military service rendered in return. As was the case with the landed fief, it was not uncommon for nobles to hold several fief-rentes from different lords at the same time. Bryce Lyon mentions the Brabantine lord of Cuijk, who held rentes from the counts of Flanders, Namur, Berg and Guelders, and from the king of England, an example which confirms the relatively ‘depersonalised’ character of the fief-rente.102

IV

There was a special form of fief-rente that differed in one essential respect from that already described. In this case, the prince paid his vassal a large lump sum, most often ten times the yearly allowance, at the moment of the enfeoffment. In reality, however, this yearly allowance was paid not by the prince, but by his vassal from the revenues of his own allodial possessions. The vassal surrendered this allowance (or sometimes the goods on which this allowance was based) to the prince in order to receive it back as a fief-rente. This type of fief-rente was in fact a combination of a regular fief-rente and a fief de reprise. The construction was therefore basically fictitious, since the prince did not pay the rente to his vassal from his own resources, as in an ordinary fief-rente; he only gave the initial bonus.103 Nevertheless, contemporaries regarded this type of fief-rente as a real fief, because it was heritable and the lord could confer it on somebody else.104 Since this fief-rente de reprise was a relatively cheap tool, it allowed princes to cast a wider net than with the ordinary fief-rente and thus attract a larger group of potential clients.

The fief-rente de reprise was a feudal bond that was mainly restricted to the Low Countries. Bryce Lyon mentions hundreds of examples, chiefly in Luxembourg, Brabant, Guelders and the Meuse–Rhine region.105 One early instance dates from 1250, when Walram, the brother of Count Wilhelm IV of Jülich, received 1,100 marks from Duke Hendrik III of


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Brabant (r. 1248–61) and in his turn yielded a yearly sum of 100 marks, which his wife would hold as a ducal fief; Walram, as her warden, would do homage to Duke Hendrik on her behalf, and the fief would be heritable.106 Another example from Brabant dates from 1274, when Duke Jan I paid Walram, lord of Fauquemont, a sum of £2,000 Louv., for which he received in return an annuity of £200, allocated on the revenues of Walram’s own lordship of Houthem, the annuity for which the duke awarded as a fief-rente to Walram.107 In the first half of the fourteenth century, there are many instances of fief-rentes de reprise in Brabant as well as in other principalities. The count of Guelders, for example, used this feudal structure extensively in 1335–6 in order to recruit foreign allies, many of them from the Meuse–Rhine region and Westphalia.108 The count of Jülich did the same, especially between 1300 and 1328.109

The counts of Holland–Hainaut were particularly active; Willem III and Willem IV (r. 1337–45) awarded a whole series of fief-rentes de reprise in the period between 1316 and 1345, especially to noblemen from the Meuse–Rhine area, where around 100 were issued.110 They granted these rentes mainly to the lower ranks of the nobility; those of a higher standing, such as the counts of Virneburg and Jülich and the lord of Fauquemont, normally received ‘real’ fief-rentes, or sometimes a combination of a fief-rente and a fief-rente de reprise, mostly including the initial bonus sum.111

Many fief-rentes de reprise were granted for military purposes. Count Willem III of Holland, for example, tended to use this tool at times of conflict with the duke of Brabant, as two lists of vassals holding rentes demonstrate. These date from shortly before 1320 and the beginning of 1333 respectively, precisely at those times when the tensions between Holland and Brabant culminated in open warfare.112

107. Verkooren, Inventaire, ser. I, vol. i, no. 97. Apparently, the duke was already recruiting vassals in the lands of Outremeuse before incorporating these lands at a later stage. However, in the case of Walram, this strategy did not bear fruit: at the Battle of Worringen in 1288, Walram sided with the count of Guelders, his wife’s brother, against Duke Jan I: Lehnart, Die Schlacht von Worringen, pp. 174–5.
111. As can be deduced from payment arrangements for and quittances by these vassals in Registers, nos. DE 18, 19. It is not always stated explicitly that the payments were made because of a yearly allowance, but the sums paid to these persons in no. DE 5 indicate that this was in fact the case. For example, on 18 March 1315, Count Willem III promised Count Robert of Virneburg £2,000, half of which was paid immediately (Monuments pour servir l’histoire des provinces de Namur, de Hainaut et de Luxembourg, ed. L. Devillers, III [Brussels, 1874], no. 145; the payment of £1,000 was registered in Registers, no. DE 5); in exchange, Count Robert would confer a yearly sum of £100, which he would receive as a fief. Instead of the other £1000, Count Willem would give Robert an annual fief-rente of £100; one payment is registered in Registers, no. DE 18. Thus, the first fief-rente is a ‘quasi’ one, the second a ‘real’ one.

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This reinforces a more general conclusion that princes used the fief-rente as a device to strengthen their military power during acute crises. Their attempts did not always prove successful, as several nobles from the lands of Outremer and the Lower Rhine areas were vassals of both the duke and the count. During the war of 1333–4, some of them chose to side with Duke Jan III, others with Count Willem III. For contemporaries, the difference between a fief-rente de reprise and a mere payment for service rendered must have been quite blurred. Even so, some kind of feudal relationship obviously remained imperative when military obligations were at stake.

The count of Holland also recruited vassals in the Meuse–Rhine region in times of peace with Brabant. He clearly deployed fief-rentes de reprise not only as a military but also as a diplomatic means, in a similar way to ‘ordinary’ fief-rentes. Both the count of Holland and the duke of Brabant, for example, issued fief-rentes de reprise to high officials of the imperial court, undoubtedly hoping to gain influence there. High-ranking nobles and officials of the Holy Roman Empire were presumably not particularly concerned about engaging in a feudal relationship with a subordinate prince of the German king, but were mainly interested in earning some extra money.

Despite these advantages, there are clear indications that this system of recruiting political and military support was abandoned in the second half of the fourteenth century. The financial investments were considerable, but the returns were disappointing. In effect, princes could not reckon upon the loyalty of these vassals, many of whom had feudal connections with more than one lord. Moreover, considerable physical distance between lord and vassal made it hard to exert pressure upon disobedient vassals. In addition, the vassal could simply keep his yearly rente at his disposal, even though he had formally surrendered it to the lord. Whereas a lord could cancel the allowance of a regular fief-rente at any moment, he was powerless to intervene in the case of a fief-rente de reprise.


115. In 1275, Duke Jan I granted a fief-rente of £150 Louv. to Werner van Bolanden, imperial seneschal, which was to be paid from the revenues of Werner’s castle Imsweiler: Verkooren, Inventaire, ser. I, vol. i, no. 98. In 1325, Count Willem III granted a fief-rente to Hermann van Lichtenberg, chancellor of the king, to be paid from certain allodia that Hermann had surrendered to the count: Registers, nos. DE 16, 17. The annual amount is not specified in the deed, but it was probably £50, since the initial bonus was £500 Holl.

116. There is no evidence of the granting of this type of fief-rente by the count of Holland after 1345, not even in a list of his vassals from the Meuse–Rhine region that was written, and partially updated, in 1350 on the basis of the older registers: Burgers, ‘Die Grafen von Holland-Hennegau’, p. 77 n. 65.

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The various and multi-layered feudal ties in fourteenth-century Brabant are clearly illustrated by the recruitment of a Brabantine army by Edward III in 1338–9, the episode with which this article began. When the English king called on the services of Duke Jan III of Brabant in his military campaign, the duke ultimately raised an army consisting of some 1,500 knights and squires, led by ninety-six nobles and officers. Some sixty of these captains were his own personal vassals: they can be traced in the feudal registers of the duke or were ducal officers at a local level. In addition, there were many other captains from other principalities who were not vassals, but simply contracted by the duke. A good example is Johann, Wildgrave (comes silvestris) of Dhaun in the Rhineland Palatinate, who promised to serve the duke in person with fifteen knights and twenty-four squires for the duration of the war between France and England, for a sum of £151. There were others from the Rhineland, too, although with less impressive retinues, such as Sir Gerard van Ringheberch from Cologne (with one knight and twenty-two squires) and Sir Hendrik von Sponheim (with only one knight), who had already helped the duke some years before at the siege of the castle of Rode in ’s-Hertogenrode. The contracts between the duke and these captains, and the subsequent payments, are similar to the English indentures in many ways, although they were not ‘Indented’—and therefore should not be called indentures—but took the form of a normal sealed charter. The captains were contracted for a limited period of time, for a specific number of men and with provision for special conditions (in case of injury, material losses and imprisonment). The recruitment of these nobles was not dependent

117. Based on Le Livre des feudataires, ed. Galesloot, passim.
118. They had relatively small retinues: the knight Gerard van Dornen, bailiff of ’s-Hertogenbosch, who had ten squires in his retinue; the anonymous villicus Thenensi (bailiff of Tienen) who had five squires; Sir Walter van Meling, bailiff of Nivelles, who had also five squires in his retinue; the knight Arold Noest, sculteto Trajectensi, bailiff of Maastricht, who had seven squires with him; and the knight Herpert Mule, chatelain of Roden (probably Sint-Genesius-Rode), who had nine squires. Only Henry de Racourt, the bailiff of Hannuit, had a substantial retinue consisting of thirty-four squires. Chroniques, xx. 421, 423, 425–6.
119. From Namur, Hanosin de Namur and Jean de Peleym ex comitatu Namurensi, who used this geographical annotation to distinguish himself from his near-namesake Jean de Peleymis (Pellaines) from Jodoigne: Chroniques, xx. 423, 425. The lord of Montigny-Saint-Christophe (dominus de Montengys), with a retinue of one knight and twenty squires, was from Hainaut: ibid., p. 422; Wauters, ‘La Formation d’une armée brabançonne’, p. 199.
120. Verkooren, Inventaire, ser. I, vol. i, nos. 472–3; Wauters, ‘La Formation d’une armée brabançonne’, p. 195; Chroniques, xx. 418. One of the charters was also sealed by the count’s relative, Sir Georg of Heinsberg, who received the payment in Brussels.
121. Chroniques, xx. 421, 424.

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on any feudal tie whatsoever, but simply on their availability and their capacity to mobilise their own personal retainues.

Contemporaries did not always have a positive opinion of the recruitment of these foreign nobles. The chronicler Jean le Bel, for example, recounted how, during the war of succession of 1356–7, Duke Wenceslas engaged a ‘great mass of foreign combatants’, who plundered the Brabantian countryside and were nevertheless unable to stop the Flemish invader. Wenceslas had indeed recruited nobles from Holland and Hainaut, such as Dirk van Brederode, Jan van Langerak, Baudouin de Pottes, lord of Écaussines, and Nicolas de Lalaing. And again, he had looked for possible reinforcements in the Rhineland, with men such as Hendrik van Appeltern (Guelders), Conrad van Titz and Hendrik van Garsdorf. None of these men were vassals of the duke of Brabant.

We are even better informed about the exact composition of the Brabantine army in 1371. In that year, Duke Wenceslas of Brabant undertook a chevauchée against the duke of Jülich. Wenceslas suffered a devastating defeat and had to surrender together with his entire army, which consisted of c.2,000–2,500 mounted men-at-arms. The army was divided into sixty-one routes led by captains; the duke also had a route under his personal command. Forty of these sixty-one captains originated from the duke’s principalities of Brabant (27), Limburg and Outremeuse (8) and Luxembourg (5). Almost all of these men had a feudal bond with the duke, and ten of them had an important administrative or judicial office in the duchy. The twenty-one remaining captains can be characterised as ‘foreigners’. Some of these men were closely related to the duke and the duchess, such as Robert and Louis of Namur, for example, brothers of Count Guillaume I of Namur, who also acted as the duke’s councillors and possessed fiefs.

Others, however, had no relationship whatsoever with the duke, including some of the noble leaders from the prince-bishopric of Liège. In the case of five captains’ routes, it is even stated specifically that they joined the army at the request (‘ter bede’) of the duke. They appear...

125. Verkooren, Inventaire, ser. I, vol. ii, nos. 987 (Brederode), 986 (Langerak), 1007 (Appeltern), 984 (Pottes), 983 (Écaussines), 954, 960, 976 (Lalaing), 1020 (Titz and Garsdorf), and 937, 961, 963 (Kranendonk). Titz and Garsdorf are located between Cologne and Mönchen-Gladbach.
126. Froissart estimated that the Brabantine army had ‘deux mille et cinq cens lances de très bonnes gens’: Chroniques, xiii. 21. According to Van Oeteren, ‘Recrutement et composition d’une armée’, pp. 148–50, this was quite an accurate estimate, since the presence of at least 2,000 men can be deduced from the archival sources. See also Boffa, Warfare in Medieval Brabant, p. 22, and Sander Govaerts, ‘“Mannen van Wapenen”: The Battle of Baesweiler and the Military Labour Market of the County of Loon in the Fourteenth Century’, Viator, xlvii (2016), pp. 297–341.

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to have been straightforward mercenaries, recruited to strengthen the personal *route* of the duke.\[^{129}\] It is estimated that only 250 men-at-arms—around 10 per cent of the entire army—had a ducal fief.\[^{130}\]

The situation was more complex than this, however. The accounts and receipts of the financial settlement of the military expedition reveal that they were only reimbursed for their ransoms (‘gevanckenessen’) and costs and losses (‘cost ende verliese’) relating to their horses, armour and other equipment.\[^{131}\] No wages are mentioned, probably because these had been paid in advance.

It is likely that all men participating in the Battle of Baesweiler had a contract with the duke in which this compensation was stipulated in detail, although not a single one has survived.\[^{132}\] As in 1338, the captains in 1371 probably recruited the members of their *routes* themselves, although only a few *routes* had a geographically coherent profile. Thus, in the Brabantine army we find men-at-arms of varying legal status: relatives and officials of the duke; nobles who had a landed fief; others who had a fief-rente; and

\[^{129}\] See P. Hoppenbrouwers, ‘Ridders en hun ruiter: Het krijgsbedrijf in Holland en Brabant gedurende de veertiende eeuw’, in M. Damen and L.H.J. Sicking, eds., *Bourgondië voorbij: De Nederlanden, 1250–1650* (Hilversum, 2010), pp. 327–49, at 337; Van Oeteren, ‘Recrutement et composition d’une armée’, pp. 289–90; and A. Moureaux-Van Neck, *L’Aide brabanconne de 1374*, in G. Despy, M.A. Arnould and M. Martens, eds., *Hommage au Professeur Paul Bonenfant (1899–1965): Études d’histoire médiévale dédiées à sa mémoire par les anciens élèves de son séminaire à l’Université Libre de Bruxelles* (Brussel, 1965), pp. 267–81, at 282, who cites Froissart on the recruitment for this expedition: ‘Les uns prioit, les autres mandoit’. Hence, the duke could command some to come and fight, whereas he had to ask others. Even in the late fifteenth century, when it came to the reimbursement of losses, the feudal regulations for Brabant made a distinction between vassals and those who served the prince ‘at his request and will’ (‘tot zijnder beden ende begeerten’): Van der Tanerijen, *Boec van der loopender practijken*, ed. Strubbe, p. 434. But cf. Govaerts, *Mannen van wapenen*, p. 316: ‘Given that all horsemen received wages, whether they were fiefholders of the duke or not and that connections to one’s retinue commander provided the main motivation for service, we should refrain from calling these men mercenaries’.

\[^{130}\] Van Oeteren, ‘Recrutement et composition d’une armée’, p. 191; Boffa, *Warfare in Medieval Brabant*, p. 209. In the case of the ninety-eight mounted men-at-arms who originated from the former county of Loon, for example, only twenty-three had a ducal fief: Govaerts, *Mannen van wapenen*, pp. 325–41.


\[^{132}\] For another contemporary example, see Van Oeteren, ‘Recrutement et composition d’une armée’, p. 96. On 8 October 1371, a few months after the defeat at Baesweiler, Duchess Johanna made a contractual agreement with the counts of Mark and Cleves. They promised to attend her and serve in good faith (‘in goeden trouwen’) and to help her against the duke of Jülich with their lives, with counsel and aid (‘mit huns selfs live, mit rade ende mit dade’), and with all those whom they were able to mobilise, up to 500 lances. They would serve her on their own account, whether they won or lost (‘ende sullen hair dienen op huns selfs gewin, schade ende verliese’). If they imprisoned the duke of Jülich, they would hand him over to the duchess in exchange for 100,000 schild. The duchess would have to pay them each 100 moutons per day, and one mouton a day for every two lances. Payment would be made in advance: *Les Gestes des ducs de Brabant*, ed. Willems, ii. 621–2. See also Boffa, *Warfare in Medieval Brabant*, p. 220, who describes this contract as a mixture of an indenture and an alliance.

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many others who did not have any kind of relationship with the duke. Both categories—enfeoffed noblemen and ‘mercenaries’—were paid for their services and both engaged other men for the campaign; only their personal relationship with the duke was different. As Andrew Ayton has observed with reference to England, ‘Seen from the perspective of the social realities of military service, the transition from “feudal host” to early contract army involved little change’.133

In terms of the recruitment and composition of the army, the Battle of Baesweiler demonstrates many similarities with the military campaigns undertaken by Duke Albert of Bavaria, Count of Holland (r. 1358–1404), against the Frisians in the last decade of the fourteenth century. In the first instance, he summoned his fiefholders for these three campaigns in 1396, 1398 and 1399. The response to the first expedition was positive, and many men came with their retinues. However, looking more closely at the 404 noble men-at-arms who turned up in 1396, it appears that only 40 per cent originated from Holland, Hainaut and Zeeland. There were large contingents from Bavaria, the ‘homeland’ of Duke Albert, as well as from France and England, which at that time were observing a temporary truce. The French and the Picards who arrived in the town of Enkhuizen were, according to Froissart, ‘merveilleusement bien habillé, de tous harnois et parures’. They were paid, of course, in accordance with their social status and the size of their retinues, consisting of men-at-arms and archers.134 In the campaigns of 1398 and 1399, however, the vassals’ commitment diminished drastically. In 1398 Duke Albert sent many summons letters to nobles living abroad, either with or without a feudal tie. All were simply asked (‘bidden’) to come and fight and to let the duke know whether they would be able to come.135 In the end, in May 1399 the count sent a summons for anyone who wanted to earn soudye to come to Frisia. This call was apparently effective, since there are accounts of the presence of individual English, French, Bavarian and Polish knights in this last campaign.136

Around 1346 the author of Les Voeux du heron (‘The Vows of the Heron’) reflected on the start of the Hundred Years War. According to this poem, Count Robert III of Artois allegedly incited Edward III to wage war against his brother-in-law Philip VI. Living in exile at the English court, Robert offered Edward a roasted heron, the most cowardly of all birds; Edward reacted immediately by making a vow, on the bird itself, promising that he would fight the French king. After this Robert III took the heron and invited other high-ranking nobles present to make

135. The two summons letters were sent on the same day, that is, 7 May 1398: Groot plaçaat en charterboek, ed. Schwartzenberg pp. 272–3.
136. Janse, Grenzen aan de macht, pp. 268–70.

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a similar vow. This was done by, among others, the earls of Salisbury, Hereford and Suffolk, the lord of Fauquemont and Jean de Beaumont, brother of Count Willem III of Holland-Hainaut. Beaumont, a renowned combatant on many European battlefields, took the vow but only after he had declared that he would fight for the one who paid him best. The English apparently laughed in response. Whatever it was that was actually said at the English court, the poem and the anecdote it relays are telling, since they show, on the one hand, the way in which warfare in England and the Low Countries had become intermingled, and, on the other, how military service, including that of high-ranking noblemen who had private retinues, entailed increasingly more paid service, at least in the minds of contemporaries.

The fourteenth century was an age of transformation in the composition and recruitment of armies in the Low Countries. Feudal ties multiplied and diversified, and for many princes they remained a useful tool to meet their military needs. In this article, we have explored the changing nature of these feudal relations in which, we would stress, a relatively small part of society was involved and which came to the fore principally during military conflicts. We have shown that the different forms of recruitment of men-at-arms overlapped to a great extent. Vassals with ‘normal’ landed fiefs were summoned until the very end of the fourteenth century, as the example of the Frisian campaigns of the count of Holland made clear. The fief remained the most manifest symbol of a personal bond between lord and man. It is no coincidence that, in the second decade of the fourteenth century, the chanceries of both the count of Holland and the duke of Brabant embarked upon a meticulous registration of fiefs. These princes did not only want to know the extent of their feudal possessions, but also the identity of the fiefholders. This information was crucial in case of recruitment for a military expedition.

It is clear, however, that during the fourteenth century, princes had more means, both feudal and non-feudal, at their disposal to raise an army than they had had hitherto. Their resources were greatly enlarged thanks to financial contributions by the kings of England and France as well as by the German emperor, all of whom were looking for military support. The involvement of the princes of the Low Countries in the Hundred Years War had a decisive impact both on feudal relationships and on the organisation of military endeavours.

Our evidence demonstrates that the fief-rente was a crucial link between the feudal host and the contract army. Vassalage and homage


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did not simply disappear, but were adapted to the new circumstances of large-scale international conflicts. The interaction between monarchs and princes all over Europe was a decisive factor in this process. Armies grew bigger and there were insufficient vassals available, or else it was simply too difficult to mobilise them. In the first half of the fourteenth century, at least, fief-rentes and *fief-rentes de reprise* were useful tools to fill this gap. The deployment of these tools was a decisive step in the process of the monetarisation of princely warfare. The fief-rente, especially when given to foreign nobles in times of political crisis, was in fact a disguised form of payment; but, at the same time, a feudal tie was created. The *fief-rente de reprise*, which was widespread only in the Low Countries, can be considered an additional intermediate phase, since the rente only existed in theory and the vassal was paid the initial bonus when establishing a feudal tie with a lord. When there was no feudal bond at all, a man’s loyalty was entirely dependent on the reliability of payments.

In this article, we have also pointed to the parallel developments of military recruitment in the Low Countries and in England. Around 1300, both in the Low Countries and in England, payment for military service was introduced by means of wages or the reimbursement of costs. At the same time, feudal men-at-arms remained an important factor in the host.\textsuperscript{139} Moreover, from the beginning of the fourteenth century, both the king of England and princes in the Low Countries started to acquire allies through grants of fief-rentes and other forms of contract. At the beginning of the Hundred Years War, the duke of Brabant raised an army composed of both vassals and men with whom he had no feudal ties. The latter were contracted for a limited period and under specific conditions, such as the amount of their wages and reimbursements and the number of combatants they had to supply. Although these contracts did not take the form of an English military indenture, their content was identical: the contract was valid only for the duration of the campaign. In contrast, indentures of retinue, in which English noblemen were paid a retaining fee to keep up their affinities during times of peace, were not used in Brabant.

The diversification and monetarisation of feudal ties had some marked social, political and military consequences. First of all, these developments undoubtedly affected the relationship between princes and their nobles. By extending their means of acquiring military support, princes created a wider network of noble vassals both within and beyond the borders of their principalities, and hence became less dependent on the great lords. However, greater dependency on foreign vassals was not always an advantage. Moreover, nobles within their principalities also struck up feudal ties with other princes and became less dependent on the grace and favour of one prince. These

\textsuperscript{139}. As is shown for the case of the English royal armies in Prestwich, ‘Cavalry Service’.

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developments were triggered by the increasingly business-like way in which princes raised their armies. The financial contributions of foreign kings looking for support in their political adventures enhanced and intensified this ‘internationalisation’ of the composition of the princely armies in the Low Countries. Hence, an entirely new dynamic was introduced into international politics and warfare, which facilitated large-scale and protracted conflicts such as the Hundred Years War. In this respect, it seems quite justified to speak of a ‘military revolution’ of the fourteenth century.

The changes in feudal ties and military recruitment in the Low Countries culminated in the contract armies of the Burgundian dukes in the fifteenth century. Even so, this did not spell the end of feudal service, at least in theory. In the 1470s Duke Charles the Bold was eager to revive feudal military service in the Low Countries, and summoned his fiefholders repeatedly to assist him in defending his lands. The detailed registration of all the possessions of his fiefholders and their sub-vassals permitted him to do so in accordance with their feudal income. Those who were nobles, those who possessed lordships with high jurisdiction, and those who were taxed to serve with hommes d’armes, had to serve him in person. Others could redeem their military obligations by paying a tax of one-sixth of the estimated value of their feudal revenues, because the duke discovered that many had great difficulty in gathering men, horses and harnesses. Thus, even this mighty prince found many obstacles in his path; by then, although the mounted cavalry remained essential for any fifteenth-century army, the days of the feudal host were over.140

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