



NETWORK PROJECT

## LORD

Lordship and State Formation in the County of Flanders, 15th - 18th C.

Contract - B2/191/P2/LORD

## SUMMARY

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### **Context**

Lordship is often used to characterize how pre-industrial societies fundamentally differed from modern ones, where public and private spheres are distinct. In pre-modern systems, private entities like families or monasteries could hold legally valid claims to public authority, a concept alien to contemporary democracies. This historical framework is echoed in concerns about "techno-feudalism", linking Big Tech's influence to a perceived regression to pre-modern dynamics. As lordship remains a cornerstone in understanding pre-modern societies, it is critical to study how these systems functioned. The LORD-project sought to unravel this enigma and advance our comprehension of lordship's role in historical governance.

### **Objectives**

The project adopted a two-pronged approach to examine lordship. First, it focused on seigneuries as arenas of conflict and collaboration between lords and peasants, analysing power dynamics over time to identify which groups held dominance. Second, it expanded the scope to explore lordship as a broader concept, encompassing diverse forms of authority, from seigneurial control to household, military, and administrative power.

By combining these perspectives, the project aimed to uncover how seigneurial lordship integrated with other power structures and shaped evolving power relations within the seigneurie.

### **Conclusions**

The LORD-project revealed that Flanders was an extreme outlier in the European spectrum of lordship. Unlike other regions where lordship often served to extract wealth from peasants, control over seigneuries in Flanders shifted towards peasants, who minimized taxation, limited seigneurial power, and used seigneurial courts to benefit small and middling landowners. This unique trajectory was influenced by urbanization and princely courts that curbed exploitative lordship.

The findings reshaped three key debates: first, the political economy of lordship, demonstrating how empowered peasants hindered agrarian capitalism; second, state formation, highlighting how seigneuries evolved into administrative pillars for emerging principalities; and third, urban history, revealing parallels between rural and urban social dynamics in the Low Countries. These insights bridged divides between urban and rural histories, advancing comparative research and fostering new scholarly collaborations.

### **Keywords**

state formation, seigneurie, lordship, legislation, taxation