

# LORD

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

**DURATION**  
15/12/2019 - 15/03/2024

**BUDGET**  
698 515 €

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION



Proceeding from empirical research on the county of Flanders between c. 1470 and c. 1750, this project aims to (i) intervene in current debates on state formation in Europe and (ii) to develop heuristic tools for an extensive, but understudied set of archives that are of great importance for archivists, historians, and heritage specialists in Belgium.

Today, the nature and development of pre-modern states is once more the subject of a fierce debate that largely revolves around the ways in which the “center” and “periphery” of a given polity interacted. As recent research has challenged the deep-rooted assumption that governance saw a similar trend towards centralization as the ones observed with war and taxes, historians are increasingly interested with the impact of state formation on local society. This BRAIN-be project tackles the current deadlock with a novel approach that focuses on a specific institution, namely the seigneurie, that is, villages in which public authority rested not directly with the princely administration, but with a private lord. Political historians of Ancien Regime Europe rely on the definition of Max Weber of the modern state as an institution with a monopoly on the legitimate use of force within a given territory: the development of central institutions is commonly imagined to be the process through which rulers gradually established monopolies of power. Yet, the persistence of seigneuries up to their abolishment in the French Revolution begs the question to what extent local authority was effectively centralized between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries.



This project develops the first long-run analysis of the legal and fiscal interactions between central administrations and seigneurial administrations that covers the entire Ancien Regime. Building on a recent reconstruction of all seigneuries in the county of Flanders between ca. 1470 and ca. 1550, the project would first chart the evolution of the seigneurial landscape up to the mid-eighteenth-century and investigate the integration of these seigneuries in the princely administration (Work Package 1). This provides the basis for Work Package 2 and Work Package 3, which probe the extent to which the seigneurie was a stumbling block or a stepping stone for state administrations to levy taxes and to implement legislation on the village level. Each work package also develops a set of heuristic tools that will help future generations of researchers to mine the extensive, but understudied seigneurial records.

This proposal proceeds from a methodology that uses the vast archival records that survive for many seigneuries in the Belgian State Archives to put the political history of the Southern Low Countries on a new and improved footing. In doing so, the project will also tackle the persistent difficulties with the accessibility of seigneurial archives in Belgium.

The LORD-team aims at a significant intervention in the current debates on the nature and dynamics of European state formation from the late middle ages to the end of the Ancien Regime. This project not only breaks new ground with regard to the historiography on state formation in the Southern Low Countries, but also addresses some key issues that are subject to discussion at an international level. Next to this, the project aims to generate new expertise for the Belgian State Archives with the managing, cataloguing and valorisation of the vast but understudied collection of seigneurial records which are relevant to a broad range of research topics. The heuristic tools, repertoires, maps and databases generated by this project will enable both the staff of the Federal Scientific Institution and the users of their collections (academic researchers, students, non-academic historians, genealogists, and so on) to navigate seigneurial records more easily and effectively. Finally, this project will also increase public awareness about the impact and role of lords and seigneuries in the Belgian past through a series of non-expert publications and communications.

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For the academic valorisation of the research project, the project will make use of existing recurring national and international conferences (such as the bi-annual European Social Science History Conference, Rural History Conference, and so on). The two PhD students and the postdoctoral researcher will present provisional results of their respective research projects on at least two conferences each. The supervisors of this project will also contribute to these conference papers and presentations. These presentations will pave the way for the publications listed above. Through these papers and publications the project's results will reach a diverse audience, both on the national and on the international level.

The social media and newsletters of the Belgian State Archives and the History Department at Ghent University will communicate the results of this research project to an audience of academic, professional and amateur historians. Finally, Buylaert and Lambrecht will also integrate the topic of seigneuries and state building into the research seminars on medieval and early modern history that they organize at Ghent University. During these seminars, the students will work together with the PhD students and postdoctoral researcher using original sources kept at the Belgian State Archives.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

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## LINKS

<http://arch.arch.be/index.php?l=nl&m=lopend-onderzoek&r=onderzoeksprojecten&pr=lord-lordship-and-state-formation-in-the-county-of-flanders-15th-18th-century>

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