

FLEMISH TEXTILE WORKERS IN ENGLAND,  
1331–1400

In the fourteenth century, with the encouragement of King Edward III, textile workers from the Low Countries – predominantly Flanders but also Brabant – settled in England. Using extensive and original resources from both sides of the English Channel, Milan Pajic argues that the exponential growth of the English textile industry was due to the skill and influence of Flemish immigrants, challenging interpretations from a section of economic historians in the latter half of the twentieth century who concluded that immigrants did not contribute to the economic development of England. The book explores the geography of immigration, the reasons behind the movement of people and the varied social encounters with local populations. In so doing it uncovers an important and vibrant history which provides essential historical context for contemporary debates on the free movement of people.

MILAN PAJIC is the Alexander von Humboldt postdoctoral fellow at Freie Universität Berlin. This is his first book.

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# FLEMISH TEXTILE WORKERS IN ENGLAND, 1331–1400

*Immigration, Integration and Economic Development*

MILAN PAJIC

*Freie Universität Berlin*



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## NOTE ON CURRENCY, WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

Given the nature of a study where the main subjects (artisans) under investigation moved across numerous cities in different countries, a variety of sources from these areas had to be used. Not only are these primary materials in several different languages, but they also mention a variety of currencies, weights and measures throughout the second half of the fourteenth century that deserve some clarification.

The standard unit for all currencies mentioned in the study was the pound. Three types of pound circulated in our evidence – pound sterling from England, pound groot and pound *Parisis* from Flanders (£1 groot = £12 *Parisis*, and is not to be confused with the *livre paris* of France). One pound (£1) contained twenty shillings/*schellingen* (20s), or 240 pence/*penningen* (d). Further subdivisions included a mark (160d) for pound sterling and a mite (1d = 24 miten) for pound groot. When prices, wages or other values are recorded in Flemish currencies, this is specified by adding groot or *Parisis* to the numerals (for example, £300 groot). For English currency (pound sterling), no such additional information is provided (for example, £7 6s). As the currency exchange varied greatly over time, we can only propose indicative conversion rates between these currencies:<sup>1</sup>

1£ sterling = 23 1d or 19s 3d groot

As regards weights and measures, traditional medieval units were used across different towns. Wool was sold in sacks of 364lbs (165 kilograms) and stones of 14lb (6.5 kilograms). Cloth was measured by the yard (3 feet, or 0.9 metres) or the ell, which was often as long as a yard and a

<sup>1</sup> These approximate values are based on currency exchanges observed by Hans van Werveke across various financial sources in Flanders for the fiscal years 1378 and 1379. H. van Werveke, 'Westeuropese muntstelsels in de tweede helft van de veertiende eeuw', *Handelingen der Maatschappij voor Geschiedenis en Oudheidkunde te Gent*, 27 (1973), 241–7, at 247.

*Note on Currency, Weights and Measures*

quarter (1.1 metres). Depending on the type of cloth, sizes fluctuated, but it is considered that throughout the second half of the fourteenth century the dimensions of a standard English broadcloth were 24 yards long and 2 yards wide, while narrower cloths such as straits or russets from Essex were 12 yards long and 2 yards wide.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> J. H. Munro, 'Medieval woollens: The western European woollens and their struggles for international markets, c. 1100–1500', in D. Jenkins (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Western Textiles*, 2 vols. (Cambridge and New York, 2003), vol. I, pp. 240–80; R. H. Britnell, *Growth and Decline in Colchester, 1300–1525* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 60.

## ABBREVIATIONS

ADN	Archives départementales du Nord.
Benham, <i>Court Rolls</i>	<i>The Court Rolls of the Borough of Colchester</i> , ed. W. G. Benham and H. I. Jeayes, 4 vols. (Colchester, 1921–41).
CCA	Canterbury Cathedral Archives.
CCR	<i>Calendar of the Close Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office</i> , 61 vols. (London, 1892–1963).
CFR	<i>Calendar of the Fine Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office</i> , 22 vols. (London, 1911–62).
CPMR	<i>Calendar of the Plea and Memoranda Rolls Preserved among the Archives of the Corporation of the City of London at the Guildhall</i> , ed. A. H. Thomas and Philip E. Jones, 6 vols. (Cambridge, 1926–61).
CPR	<i>Calendar of the Patent Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office</i> , 55 vols. (London, 1891–1916).
ERO	Essex Record Office.
Espinas, Pirenne, <i>Recueil</i>	<i>Recueil des documents relatifs à l'histoire de l'industrie drapière en Flandre</i> , ed. G. Espinas and H. Pirenne, 3 vols. (Brussels, 1909).
Fenwick, <i>Poll Taxes</i>	<i>The Poll Taxes of 1377, 1379, and 1381</i> , ed. C. C. Fenwick, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1998).
HRO	Hampshire Record Office.
<i>Letter Books</i>	<i>Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: A–L</i> , ed. R. R. Sharpe (London, 1905).
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives.
NRO	Norfolk Record Office.
PROME	<i>The Parliamentary Rolls of Medieval England</i> , ed. C. Given-Wilson et al., 16 vols. (Woodbridge, 2005).



*List of Abbreviations*

RAG	Rijksarchief Gent.
SAB	Stadsarchief Brugge.
SAG	Stadsarchief Gent.
SRO	Suffolk Record Office.
TNA	The National Archives.