

d from region to region depending on local customs of condowment of daughters, and so forth.¹²³ So in one region, and in the Low Countries, the rich buyers of available farms were absentee landlords. They obviously attempted to consolidate their holdings in this still remote territory, which would have divested the land as a land of small farms. The count of Hainaut became a center at the rural depopulation of Delftland that he intervened, and new acquirers of property there after 13 January 1316 to find and take up residence.¹²⁴

The excitement of the land market is reflected in the frenzied subleases, as occurred in other periods of economic or financial depression. The implicit hope of sellers that improving conditions might later allow them to repurchase or re-lease their alienated properties exempt from redemption clauses sometimes found in the records of transactions in the manner of hard-hit monasteries, nobles, and burghers who sold their property to their more fortunate compeers, an ordinary condition of sale that they be given the opportunity to redeem their property from the local chapter.¹²⁶ In other regions, a wide variety of land transfers, with very little or nominal purchase of subsistence, characterizes the peak in turnovers in this period.¹²⁷ But everywhere rich were the first to benefit, as, for example, in East Anglian where the "kulaks" (perhaps not the best word, but, as mentioned earlier, one or two scholars' choice) again reaped the benefits of an "abundant" number of turnovers in 1316-1317.¹²⁸

The facts suggest that even if, as Hallam writes, the "agricultural conditions of the peasantry seem not to have differed materially from those of the nobles," their tenurial interests most assuredly did, or, at least, that they did not see as much advantage as disadvantage in the further accumulation and concentration of property in the hands of the well-to-do.¹²⁹ The courts authorized the waiving of entry fees to maintain holdings in the hands of those who hardly cared if the persons to whom they were offering their property had two, four, six, or ten recently acquired plots already under their hands. Stewards might have been more circumspect; uppity farmers would not have been so hard to deal with. But ultimately stewards did what their bosses told them to do.¹³⁰ In Richard Smith's words, "there is certainly no indication of the manorial lord or his officials intervening to arrest the land sales or the activities of the village 'kulaks' . . . between 1315 and 1317."¹³¹ The increasing number of the landless without customary rights was the heaviest burden. They cease to appear in the court rolls, having no land, they had no homesteads to surrender in court. As Jack Ravensdale's words, "things were never quite the same

The effect of the land market's volatility on rural mentality may have been nothing short of dramatic: there appears to have been a decline in concern with the details of inheritance customs in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and a new obsession over conveyancing precisely because acquisition of land no longer needed to be delayed until inheritance, as had more regularly been the case during the perceived land shortage of the thirteenth century. This transformation would have received a major fillip during the Great Famine. Of course, there continued to be profound and pervasive interest in widows' rights since their existence inhibited the free market in land, but this was not *stricto sensu* an issue of inheritance.¹³³

The ecological and social settings explored thus far represent with notable exceptions well-established communities with typical open-field agriculture. Of course, at a number of times we have had to discuss other kinds of communities, such as those living largely from fishing and hunting or from mixed husbandries. A few more words need to be addressed to these, however. We may begin with communities oriented toward grape husbandry; and, although it cannot be said to make interesting reading, Wilfried Weber's detailed tracing of the expansion of grape husbandry in the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries is a useful introduction to the subject.¹³⁴

The expansion of viticulture, Weber shows, was erratic, partly because wine did not ship well, and so it was not always immediately necessary for new settlements to create vineyards. Also, long-term changes in weather transformed some regions from inhospitable to hospitable and back to inhospitable loci for grape production in our period. Some lands in grape production had been specifically assarted (from forest or marsh) for this use often as a joint enterprise of monasteries and consortia of lay people.¹³⁵ Others had been converted to viticulture from quite different husbandries. Consequently, people who produced wine sometimes lived in villages dominated by cereal production, in villages of mixed husbandry, or in outlying (almost rural) parishes of towns.¹³⁶ A viticulturalist might own or lease a house, storage cellar, small parcel of arable, kitchen garden, and plot growing some other cash crop.¹³⁷

Nevertheless, like the typical farmer of wheat and other cereals, families whose livelihood came principally from vineyards found the early years of the famine very difficult indeed. High prices for wine offset the quantitative losses from the bad weather only where, as on big monastic and noble estates, the scale of production was vast. Ordinary family enterprises were not so fortunate. One such enterprise in the Rhine-Moselle region, worked by a husband-and-wife team, Wallefrandus and Levardis, can stand for many others. The couple made arrangements in 1314 with the church of Saint Gertrude of Nivelles to donate their vineyard to the