

## Landscape and Settlement: the Development of a Medieval Village along the Flemish Coast<sup>1</sup>

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*Taking into account the importance of the excavation of the shrunken village of Wal-Raversyde it was worthwhile to subject the landscape in which the village emerged and developed to a historical examination. More particularly, we paid attention to the exploitation of the physical landscape and the use of the cultural landscape thus created, looking also at the evolution of the physical presence of humankind in that landscape from the High Middle Ages to the Early Modern Times.*

### 1 A brief word about methodology

We focused on the settlement itself, using a retrogressive and interdisciplinary reconstruction of the historical landscape in and near Wal-Raversyde. The starting point of this reconstruction was the mid-19th-century land registry plan of the Section Raversyde of the municipality of Middelkerke. At the same time, this plan provided us with the circumscription of the research area. Starting from there and making good use of the many historical sources (18th-century drawn and painted maps and various 18th- and 17th-century copies of parochial landbooks from 1628 and 1534) we succeeded in reconstructing in some detail the 17th- and 16th-century organisation of the plots in the research area. On the strength of the data found in the extensive archives of the abbey of Saint-Peter's in Gent, which owned by far the larger part of the area, and of the many geological and particularly archaeological data (surface finds on the beach and systematic excavations by the Institute for the Archaeological Heritage), we were able to further reconstruct the evolution of the larger part of the landscape going back as far as 992 A.D.

### 2 The formation of the landscape, the High Middle Ages

At the end of the 10th century, the landscape seems to have been very much as it originated after the so-called post-Roman inundation-phase between the 4th and 8th century A.D. (formerly referred to as the *Dunkirk II-transgression*; Baeteman & Denys 1997, 8). During these inundations, the causes of which are yet to be fully explained, a tidal channel which separated a strip of land from the mainland was formed in the peat-moor between the present towns of Nieuwpoort and Ostend (Prof. Baeteman pers. comm.). After the flooded coastal area evolved into salt-marshes, the separate strip of land eventually formed the so-called geographical entity of Testerep, on which the research-area is located (Fig. 2). The salt-marshes on Testerep were used to herd sheep. The wool of these sheep was probably an important factor in the development of the textile industry in the rising Flemish towns of that time and also constituted the basis of the economic power and wealth of the major abbeys. The donation in 992 and 995 of two *terrae ad oves*<sup>2</sup> or ‘sheepland’ on Testerep to the Ghent St.-Peter's abbey laid the foundation of the domain of the St.-Peter's abbey on Testerep. This domain is the most important part of the landscape examined and can be reconstructed without problems on the map of the research-area (Fig. 1).

Until the 11th century, these sheeplands on Testerep were constantly threatened by flooding from the tidal channel on the landside. Eventually this problem was controlled, probably at the latest around 1100 A.D., by the construction of the so-called *Kaaidijk* (‘quay-’ or ‘embankment’-dike). This *Kaaidijk* divided the research area into two zones: a now well-protected *oudland* (‘oldland’) zone on Testerep and

<sup>1</sup> I wish to thank my brother M. Tys, for the English translation of this text, S. Moernaut for the drawing of the figures 1, 4 and 5 and Prof. Dr. F. Verhaeghe for his help in general.

<sup>2</sup> FAYEN A. 1906, *Liber traditionum Sancti Petri Blandiniensis. Livre des donations faites à l'abbaye de Saint-Pierre de Gand, depuis ses origines jusq'aux XIème siècle, avec des additions jusq'en 1273*, Gand, 1906, 95-nr. 100 and 96-nr. 102.

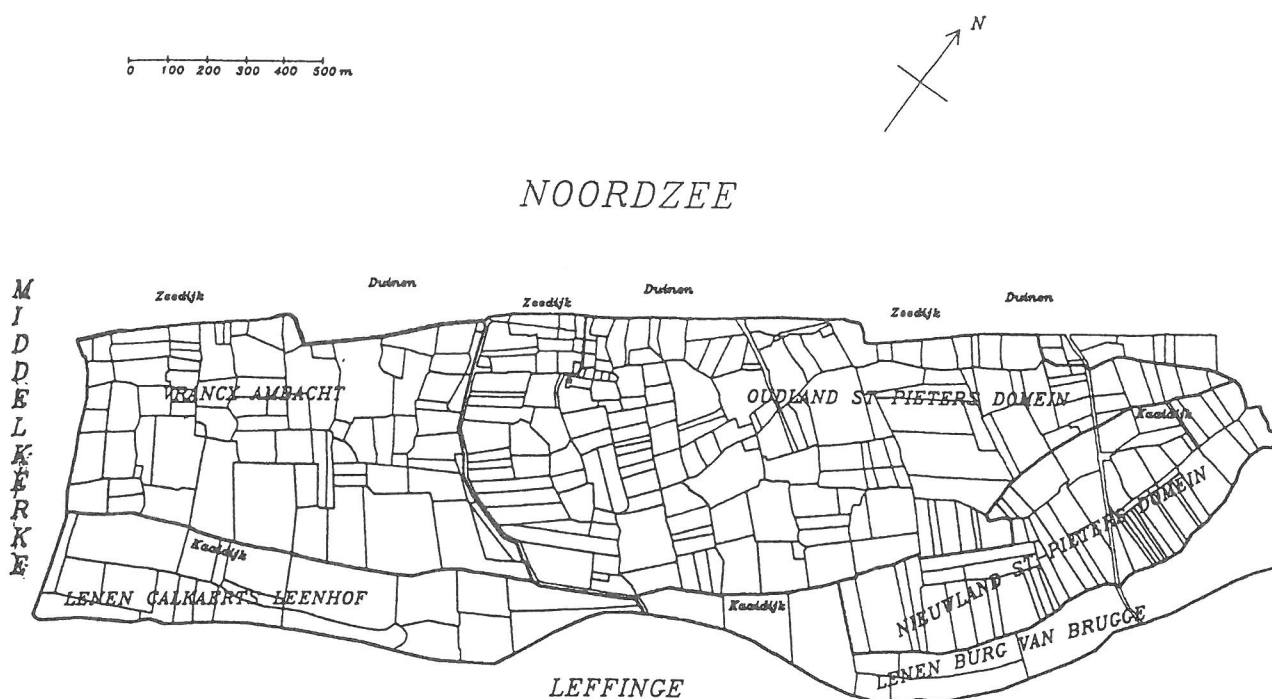


Fig. 1. - The main parts of the research-area. Above the "Kaaidijk" we find the "oldland", the original Testerep. Underneath the "Kaaidijk" we find the "newland", the reclaimed tidal channel. The largest part of the area is formed by the domain of the Abbey of St.-Peter's (Gent), which exists of original land on the "oldland" and recovered land on the "newland".

an unprotected wet or flooded one (which would become the *nieuwland* or 'newland') along the channel. Recent geological findings show that Testerep was not ravaged by floods of any great importance after the early Middle Ages (Pieters 1993, 251 and 255). The investment in a defensive dike screening the 'oldland' suggests that the latter area had an economic value well worth protecting. Besides, these lands no longer consisted of salt-marshes, but now consisted of salty and other meadows. However, in contrast to prof. Verhulst's (1995, 91) theory, we feel that this never put a stop to specialised sheepherding, since the domain of St.-Peter's was transformed into a *berquaria* (a sheepfarm that was let in exchange for a certain tribute), probably at the end of the 11th century and at least until 1133<sup>3</sup>.

The open, unprotected zone along the tidal channel and the channel itself evolved into a cultural landscape in the 12th century. The 'newland' (or *novae terrae*) zone of Testerep was partly formed by the gradual and passive drying out of the wet and flooded lands of St.-Peter's in the first quarter of the 12th century<sup>4</sup> and partly by the active reclamation of the tidal

channel by Count Philip of Alsace between 1165 and 1173, which united Testerep with the mainland again (Verhulst 1995, 53-54). What remained of the old tidal channel was a large ditch called *Groot Geleed* (Fig. 2). The reclamation of the channel meant an important extension of the agricultural area. In the meantime, the research area went through an important evolution during the course of particularly the 12th century. Although the sources leave somewhat to be desired for this period, we can establish that during that phase:

- 1) specialised sheepherding made way for cattle-breeding and agriculture,
- 2) the population of the area grew considerably leading to the emergence of the first villages on Testerep, even before the reclamation of the channel was completed,
- 3) the St.-Peter's domain was leased by several individual agricultural enterprises<sup>5</sup> and
- 4) cropfarming began to intensify.

Why did sheepherding disappear to be replaced by cattle-breeding and farming? Did cattle-produce and industrial crops bring in more on the urban markets?

<sup>3</sup> DE HEMPETINE T. & VERHULST A., *De oorkonden der Graven van Vlaanderen (juli 1128-september 1191). Regering van Diederik van den Elzas (juli 1128-januari 1168)*, Brussel, 1988, 51-54, nr. 25.

<sup>4</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>5</sup> See the description of the domain in the *Liber Inventarius Omnium Bonorum* from 1281 (Rijksarchief Gent, fonds St.-Pietersabdij, f°50v° and 114v°-115r°).

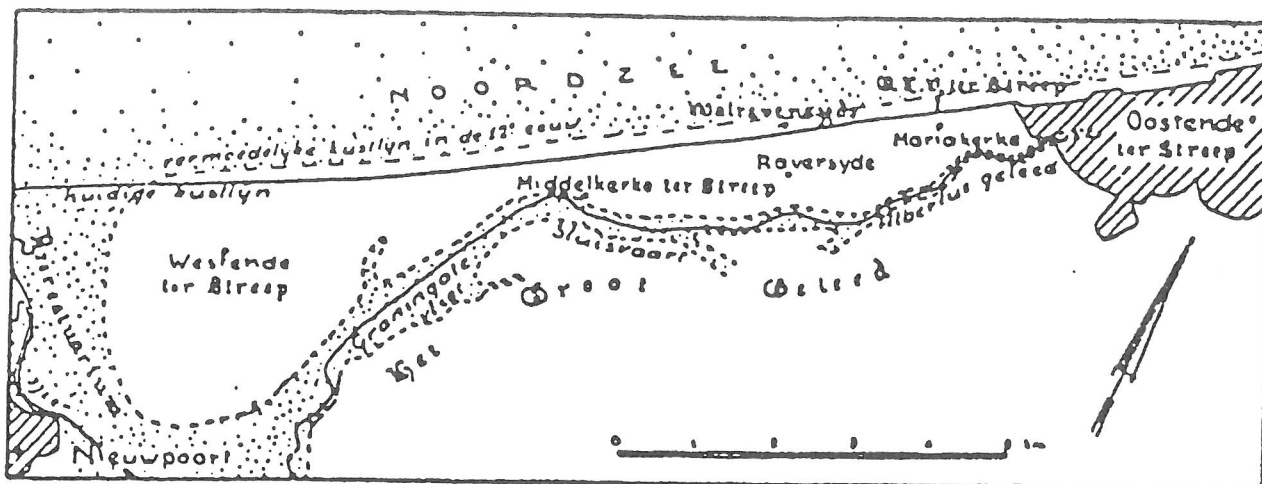


Fig. 2. - Rough reconstruction-map of Testerep and the tidal-channel which separated Testerep from the mainland. After the reclamation of the tidal-channel remained a large ditch, called the "Groot Geleed".

Was it perhaps the growth of the population which led to an increase of the demand for cereals (and thus also for fertiliser)? Or could it have been the arrival of English wool, which may have been of higher quality? These are questions which our sources do not answer and which are part of a complex problem. In any case, the development outlined above, testifies to the favourable conjuncture in the High Middle Ages, which according to prof. Thoen (1988, 1075-1077), resulted in Flanders from the early commercial orientation and limited impositions on the economic surplus.

### 3 Settlement in the 13th and 14th century: the origins of Walravensyde

It is, however, within the context of this new agricultural structure that Walravensyde originates in the second half of the 13th century. The oldest written testimony of the village dates from 1290, when *les poissonniers de Wiltravenszeide* are indebted to the city of Ypres<sup>6</sup>. The place-name means the *hyde*, landing-place or wharf, of a certain Walraf and is comparable to the toponyms *Lombardsyde* and *Koksyde*. This 13th-century *hyde* could be situated along the bank of what remained of a small tidal channel that ran into the sea in the research-area, or as Chocqueel called it *une petite baie naturelle* (Chocqueel 1950, 88 and E. Cools, pers. comm.). The settlement along

the original landing-place should be the one located on what is now the beach. Until the end of the 1970, the remains of this village could be seen on the beach, where they were thoroughly researched by A. Chocqueel, E. Cools and A. Mortier. This *hyde* possibly originated at the same time as the other *hyde*-places along the Flemish coast around the mid-13th century, albeit within the framework of the seignorial policy of Countess Margareth of Constantinople who aimed at promoting the Flemish ports. Anyway, it is worth noting that the original village was located on Countal territory, west of the domain of St.-Peter's. According to the findings on the beach, the village moved more to the east during the 14th century (E. Cools, pers. comm.), while a rudimentary landbook of the domain from 1357 proves that in that year part of the village was located inside the borders of the domain<sup>7</sup>. Unfortunately, there is no other historical information about the 13th- and 14th-century village to confront with the archeological finds on the beach. Therefore, as we will see later, our knowledge of the 13th- and 14th-century Walravensyde is very weak in comparison with our knowledge of the 15th- and 16th-century village.

### 4 Settlement in the 13th and 14th century: the agricultural structure of the domain of St.-Peter's

We have more data concerning the agricultural inhabitation of the domain of St.-Peter's behind the village. This settlement was densely built and populated. According to the landbook of 1357 some 50 farmsteads and houses were to be found in an area of approximately 194 hectares. Many of them probably had a moat. Like *Veurne Ambacht* this area had a great density of isolated *Einzelhöfe* in the mid-14th

<sup>6</sup> WYFFELS C., *Analyse des reconnaissances des dettes passées devant les échevins d'Ypres (1249-1291. Editées selon le manuscrit de f Guillaume Des Marez*. Brussel, 1991, nr. 5204.

<sup>7</sup> Rijksarchief Gent, Fonds St.-Pietersabdij, Reeks I, Goederenbeheer Brugse Kwartier, Rek. 806d.

century (Verhaeghe 1981, 109-111). Besides, most of the moated sites in *Veurne Ambacht* had originated between the end of the 12th century and the mid-14th century (*ibidem*, 106). This might be an indication for the development of moated farmsteads and houses in the domain. At the same time, the agricultural lands were cut up rather strongly amongst many, mainly smaller, leaseholders (see Fig. 6), whilst the majority of the agricultural enterprises in that area were small (between 1.5 and 4 hectares) and submarginal (less than 1.5 hectares) ventures. This evolution was probably influenced in a positive way by the favourable economical conjuncture of the High Middle Ages, with high incomes and low taxes and other liabilities. This situation favoured particularly the smaller, more intensive and commercially oriented agricultural enterprises, that had strongly grown in number before 1357 (Verhulst, 1990, 67-74 and 85).

The excessive fragmenting of the holdings and the increasing liabilities in the 14th century may have caused such problems that pauperization and 'proletarianisation' took place within the group of small enterprises, which resulted in a growing number of submarginal holdings (*ibidem*, 84-85 and 115). From that time onwards, the sources do not refer any longer to these small holdings as farmsteads. But the term used is *plaetsen daer zy up woenen*<sup>8</sup> or 'places where they live', in other words cottages. Also the appearance at that time of the parochial institution called the 'table of the poor' (in both the parishes of Sint-Mariakerke and Middelkerke) is an indication of a certain pauperization of the agricultural population. Possible solutions for the subsistence-problems of the inhabitants of the submarginal and small ventures consisted of performing wage work on the larger holdings, the exploitation of the clay and peat in the underground, or maybe even fishing at sea. It is not impossible that the development of Walraversyde was influenced by the 14th-century subsistence problems in the domain and its surroundings.

## 5 The crisis of the late 14th and early 15th century and its consequences on landscape and settlement

The situation changed completely as a result of several closely connected events at the end of the 14th century. The village as well as the domain suffered heavily from a severe crisis between 1360 and 1420. In this period the conjuncture in Flanders was

not as favourable as before, which was generally caused by falling incomes and rising impositions (Mertens 1967, 51-52 and Thoen 1988, 1030). More specifically, the crisis hit the area a first time with the outbreak of the war between the town of Gent and the Count of Flanders, between 1379 and 1385, which had major consequences for the Flemish coast. The sources tell us that the fields and the farmsteads at the domain of St.-Peter's were temporarily abandoned during the years of war<sup>9</sup>. Together with the burdens and destructions caused by war, this meant a great loss of income for the different holdings in the area. The war and the intensive use of the dunes in the decades before the war had weakened the strength of the dunebelt so much that the village and the domain suffered from severe sand-drifts. The weakening and drifting of the dunes made Walraversyde and the domain very vulnerable to storms and floods. Therefore it is not surprising that the flood of 1393 became a large disaster for the whole of the central part of the Flemish coastal area. The domain of St.-Peter's alone lost no less than 35 ha to the inundations and sand-drifts resulting from the flood of 1393. The dunes even drifted all over the village and into the domain, where they formed a new but very weak dunebelt. The village had no other option than to be – probably in its totality – rebuilt behind the new dunebelt, on lands which belonged to the domain. The remainders of this relocated and newly built Walraversyde are nowadays the object of the systematic excavations of this site, directed by Marnix Pieters of the Institute for the Archeological Heritage. What remained of the old, drifting dunebelt, was washed away by the sea, so that the ruins of 13th- and 14th-century Walraversyde came to lie on the (new) beach before the dunes, where they remained visible until 1980.

This severe crisis had important consequences for both the village and the domain. During the first years of the 15th century, the rentholders of the domain were not able to pay their rents because of their poverty ('*mits den aermoede van den volke*')<sup>10</sup>. The structural character of the consequences of the crisis is shown in the landbook of the domain from the year 1463<sup>11</sup>. This landbook shows how the agricultural structure of the domain had been changed completely in comparison to the situation in 1357. Only 6 out of the 50 14th-century farmsteads and houses still existed in 1463, together with several moats and ruins of vanished farmsteads and cottages. Thus, an important phenomenon of *Hofwüstungen* had occurred in the domain in the years between 1357 and

<sup>8</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>9</sup> *Idem*, Rek. 837/2 and I. 314, f° 5 r°-7 r°.

<sup>10</sup> *Idem*, Rek. 832a, f° 8 v°.

<sup>11</sup> *Idem*, Rek. 841p.

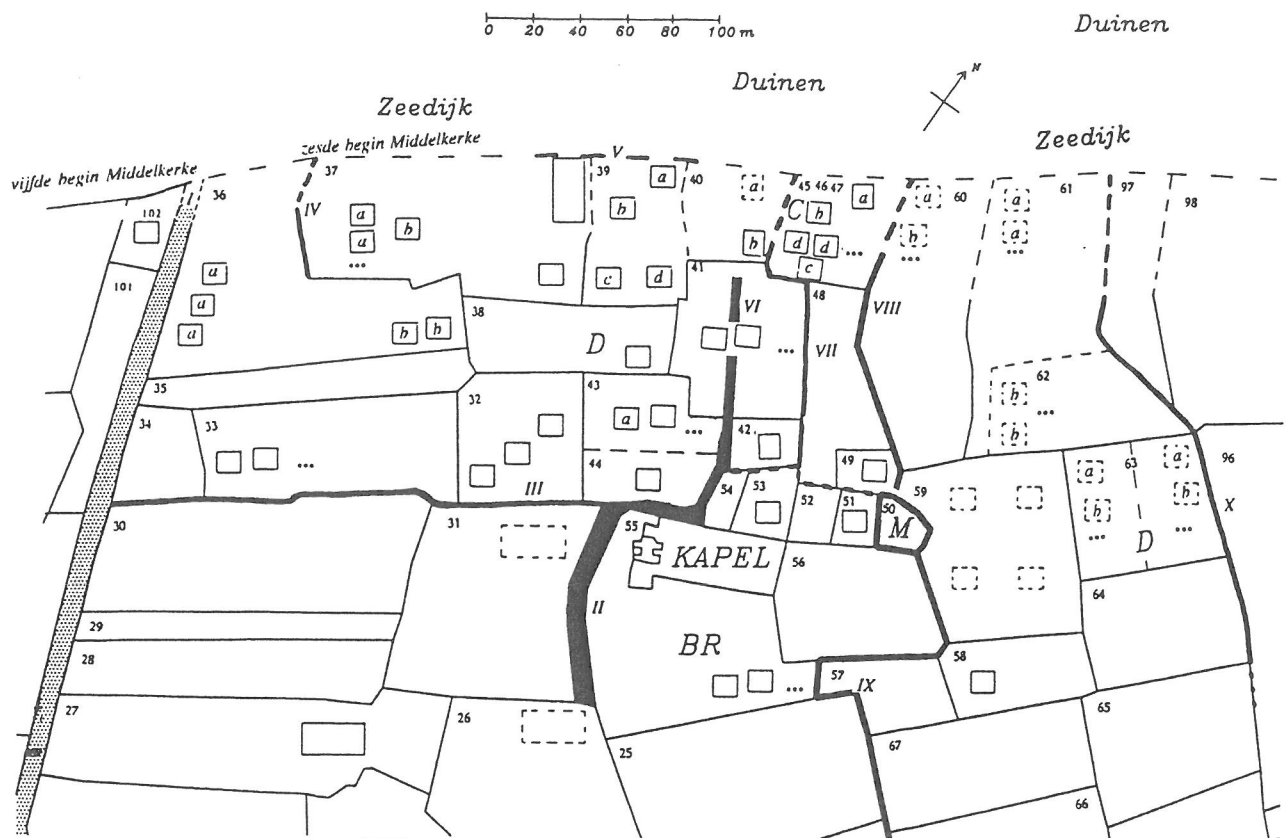


Fig. 3. - Reconstruction-map of the village of Walraversyde according to the landbook of 1534. The squares show us how many houses stood on esch plot in the village, while the dotted squares symbolise the houses which had disappeared by the year 1534. The mill was situated on plot M and the brewery of the willage on plot BR. The rectangular symbols stand for farmsteads and the Roman numbers indicate the different streets, paths and rivelets in the village. On the north-side, the village is edged by the sea-dike.

1463. The fragmenting of the domain of a century earlier had equally disappeared and the land was now concentrated in the hands of four larger landowners and their agricultural enterprises (more than 10 ha.) (see also Fig. 6). The smaller and the submarginal enterprises disappeared almost completely from the area. An explanation for this structural change can be found in the crisis we mentioned earlier. It is possible that high impositions, high costs (cf. the damage of the war and the storm), important losses because of the temporary leaving of the domain during the crisis, a high mortality and a low reproduction forced most of the farmers into such a poverty that particularly the peasants of the small and the submarginal ventures were forced to sell and abandon their holdings and/or that most small farms and cottages fell into decay. In the first decades of the 15th century, the abandoned and ruined holdings may have led to such a supply of land that its value dropped; this in turn favoured the concentration of the abandoned lands into the hands of four larger ventures. The question which arises is what happened to the inhabitants of the abandoned farms and cottages. Some probably perished, others might have joined the ur-

ban proletariat of, for instance, Bruges, and maybe a few settled in the new village of Walraversyde, working as fishermen or earning a living as wageworkers on one of the larger farms.

In the 15th century, Walraversyde probably had a mixed economy which included not only seamen, but also craftsmen and wageworkers. There was probably a close relation between the large and probably concentrated 15th-century village and the open agricultural area with only a few isolated farmsteads (most of which still exist today) behind the village. At the top of the social structure in the village probably stood the masters of the fishing-fleet, who probably not only owned their ship but also worked as traders and even pirates. These 'skippers' had an important part in the foundation and enlargement of the chapel of St.-John, which was built in the new village around 1435, and also in its possessions (Vlietinck 1889, 14-15). In the 15th century, the fishing fleet of Walraversyde became one of the five major sea-fishing fleets in Flanders (the others were those of Dunkirk, Newport, Ostend and Heist). Apart from the historical data, the recent excavations in this 15th-century Walraversyde also offer us vital information

about the village. The fruitful confrontation of the archeological and historical data makes it possible to reconstruct successfully not only the topographical situation and spatial pattern of the village but also the social-economical conditions of its inhabitants (e.g. Pieters, Eryvynck, Van Neer & Verhaeghe 1995).

## 6 Difficulties between c. 1470 and 1570: the shrinking of Walraversyde

At the end of the 15th century, the area had to deal with the violence of war once again. The war between the regent Maximilian of Austria and a coalition between Bruges and Gent (between 1483 and 1493) took part for a great deal between Nieuwpoort and Ostend. The domain and the village lay right between the fighting parties and were probably deserted for several years. Once again, the consequences of this desertion were important, though not as important as in the previous century. The historical sources tell us that many houses had been abandoned and were 'delapidated and ruined' (*syn vervallen ende te ruïne*) as a direct result of the conflict<sup>12</sup>. Another source, the landbook of the parish of Middelkerke of 1534, describes in detail how many houses stood on each plot in Walraversyde at that time<sup>13</sup> (see Fig. 3). It also describes more particularly which part of the village had been abandoned in the previous years. It is striking that in 1534, in comparison with the location of the village in the 15th century, almost the complete north-eastern part of the village had disappeared (see Fig. 3). This is also the part of the village which has been the subject of the recent systematic excavations by the Institute for the Archaeological Heritage (see Pieters 1993, 1994 and 1995). This archeological research proved – independently from the historical evidence – that the houses in the north-western part of the village were probably abandoned before the end of the 15th century (*idem* 1994, 295). Thus the historical and archeological data do not contradict one another and their confrontation confirmed the hypothesis that the whole of the north-eastern quarter of Walraversyde was deserted and ruined before the first years of the 16th century because of the war against Maximilian of Austria. It seems that this part of the village was abandoned rather systematically, but this problem needs further investigation. Anyway, the result of the events of the late-15th century was that Walraversyde became a

shrunken village, and, as we said earlier this process was already engaged by the beginning of the 16th century.

Although the war and the temporary abandonment of the area probably led to a great loss of income for the domain, it seems that the larger farms had overcome this difficult period without too many problems. On the contrary, in the 16th century the property of this larger holdings had increased even more in comparison with the situation in the 15th century (see Fig. 6). This means that the agricultural structure which had come into existence in the previous century had been consolidated, notwithstanding the emergence in the domain of a few smaller farms. It is very striking that the lands of this larger farms were equally concentrated topographically around the farmsteads themselves. It is possible that we are dealing with an early example of re-parcelling.

The shrunken village of Walraversyde did not recover in the 16th century. Quite to the contrary, the village had again to deal with limited sand-drifts, the village-brewery closed its doors and the fishing-fleet suffered from the increased danger at sea. Indeed, during the 16th century the Channel and the North Sea were terrorised by different belligerent parties and the Flemish fishermen were obliged to arrange for armed convoy-ships to protect their fleet (Coornaert 1970, 140-145).

## 7 The Eighty Years' War and its consequences: the end of the village of Walraversyde

The lack of safety at sea was only a prelude to the disaster which followed with the Eighty Years' War, which started in 1567. Throughout the coastal area, the war situation lasted for 40 years. It started with a blockade of the Flemish ports by the *Watergeuzen*. As a reaction, mercenary troops were sent to the coast, where they started to plunder and loot themselves (Geldhof 1982, 55-56). During the following years, the war hit the coastal plain very hard. Walraversyde and the domain were almost completely deserted between 1571 and 1581 (see Fig. 5). 1581 was the year in which the dikes that surrounded the Calvinistic bastion of Ostend were breached in order to defend the town. From then onwards and for several years, the domain was flooded by the sea<sup>14</sup>, which made the area uninhabitable. During the following years, war raged on and ravaged the vicinity

<sup>12</sup> *Idem*, Rek. 840h, p. 415.

<sup>13</sup> Private collection Van Der Heyden (Leffinge), ommeloper van de parochies Middelkerke en Mariakerke, 1666, copy of an

original from 1534.

<sup>14</sup> Rijksarchief Gent, Fonds St.-Pietersabdij, Reeks I, Goederenbeheer Brugse kwartier, rek. 845a, f° 37 v°.

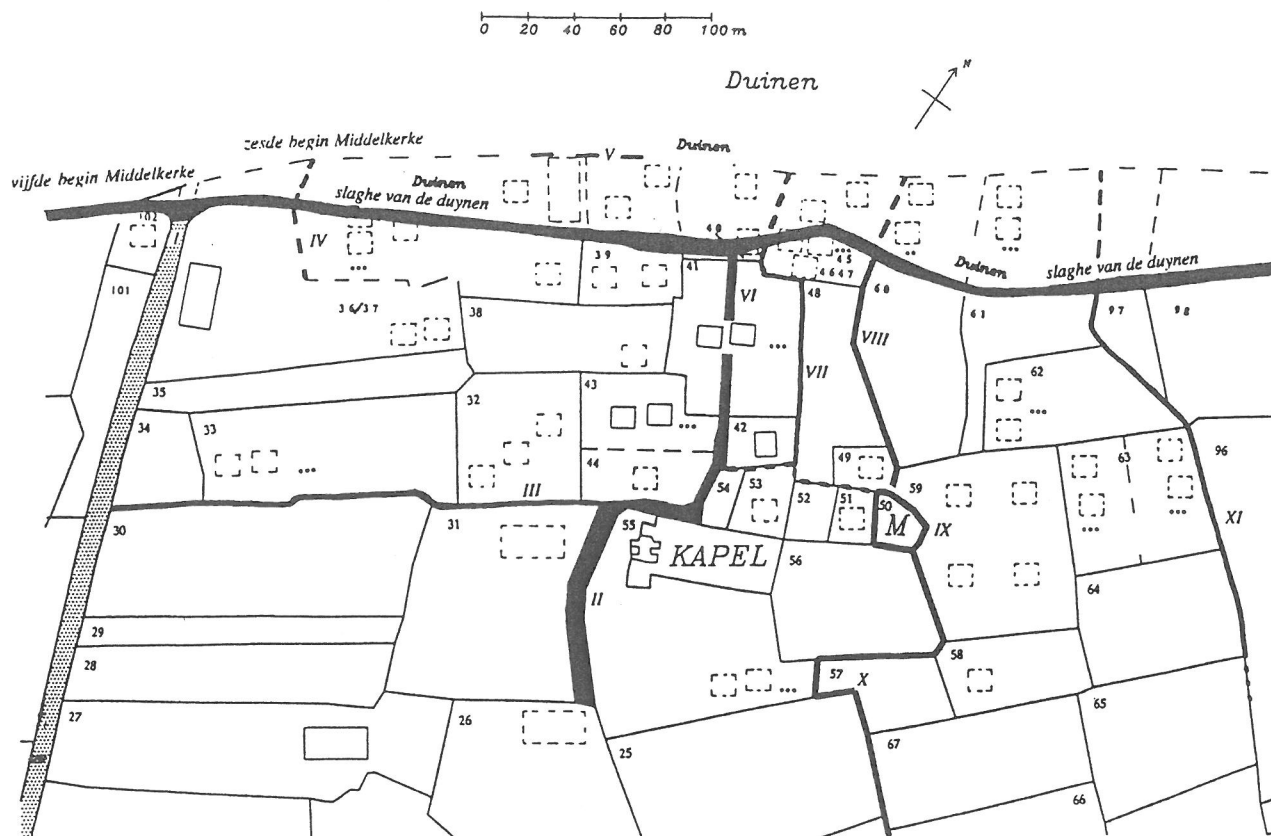


Fig. 4. - Reconstruction-map of the remains of the village of Raversyde after the Spanish War, according to the landbook of 1628. In comparison with the situation in 1534, the largest part of the village had disappeared. Only a small number of village-houses around the chapel remained. In the north-west of the village, the dunes had croned the sea-dike and buried several houses. Along these dunes a new path was drawn, called the "slaghe van den dune".

of Ostend completely. In 1598, the sources tell us that the domain lay waste, because of the 'destruction of these parts through troubles and war' (*verwoestinghe van selver kwartiere deur de troubelen ende oorloghe*<sup>15</sup>). While in the last decade of the 16th century the larger part of Flanders and its coast started to recover, Ostend and its surroundings remained a battle-field and this until 1604. Only in that year, Spinola's troops succeeded in capturing the last stronghold of the Calvinist troops in the Southern Netherlands. For the first time in 40 years (some) peace returned to the region. During the siege of Ostend, the abandoned village of Raversyde, as it was called from the beginning of the 17th century onwards, served as military camp for Spinola's cavalry (Vlietinck 1889, 39-40).

The first year in which the St.-Peter's abbey started to collect again the rents in the domain behind Raversyde, and thus also the first year in which the domain was taken into use again, was 1610<sup>16</sup>. In 1628, a new landbook of the parish of Middelkerke shows the effects of the war on the domain and the

village, as well as the first attempts of recovery in the area<sup>17</sup>. The landbook describes how almost all the houses in the village from before the conflict had disappeared (Fig. 4). Most of the plots on which the village of Raversyde once stood, were now fields and meadows. The plots just behind the old seadike and the seadike itself had been covered by the sand of the drifting dunes. The present *Duinenweg* ('Dunes' road') still follows the edge of this late 16th and early 17th-century sand-drifts (Fig. 4). The village of Raversyde had not, however, disappeared completely. Around the mill and the ruined chapel a few houses remained. In contrast to some of the other villages which had suffered from the war, the shrunken village of Raversyde did not recover. A lot of research has yet to be done on this problem, but with some caution we would venture to bring forward some interesting explanatory elements. According to us, one of the most important explanations is to be found in the enormous economic damage caused by the war along the coast in general and in Raversyde

<sup>15</sup> *Idem*, f° 67 v°.

<sup>16</sup> *Idem*, rek. 845c, f° 27 v°.

<sup>17</sup> Rijksarchief Brugge, Ommelopers verzameling Mestdagh, nr. 923, 1628.

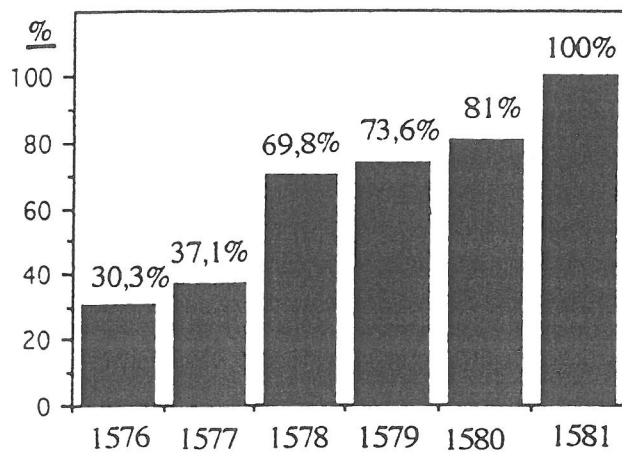


Fig. 5. - The evolution of the un-paid rents (in %) between 1576-1581, including the part of the domain that had been deserted and abandoned in these difficult years.

in particular. Because of the war, Raversyde lost its most important economical activity, namely its fishing at sea. Other ports had taken over the part of Raversyde, while none of the by now more than 30 years older fishermen from before the war returned to the village after the hostilities had ended. With the disappearance of sea-fishery, one of the most important factors which could have had a positive influence on a possible recovery of the village had been lost. Another factor which could have had a positive influence was the chapel of St.-John. Several attempts of the few remaining villagers to renovate the ruined chapel failed. The church governors of Middelkerke played a dubious part in this matter. During the war, they had been given the care over the 50 ha owned by the chapel (English 1960, 230). The economic value of these lands was great, certainly in the years of recovery after the war. So, when the remaining villagers of Raversyde demanded that the lands of their chapel be returned to their community, in order to allow them to start rebuilding the chapel, Middelkerke refused and even tried to hinder any attempt at a renovation of the chapel and thus also the recovery of the community of the village (*idem*, 231-233). Middelkerke succeeded in its attempts and kept the lands. The chapel was never rebuilt. Raversyde remained an agrarian hamlet in close relationship with the old domain behind the shrunken village.

## 8 New impulses to a memory

In 1735, the old chapel, used as a shed, collapsed during a winter storm. Only the tower remained, until it was pulled down in 1860. By this time, Raversyde had become almost legendary, nothing more than a memory. This changed at the end of the

19th century, when Raversyde and its surroundings finally got new impulses from rising coastal tourism. At the same time, some local historians and antiquarians started to become interested in the history and the remains on the beach of the old fishermen's village (see Vlietinck 1889). In the 20th century, this led to further archeological research on the remains of the village on the beach. Particularly the work of A. Chocqueel, who gathered a lot of surface finds between 1930 and 1950 (see Chocqueel 1950) and of Mr. and Mrs. Cools, who brought the site to the attention of universities and media, was very important in this respect. Although around 1980 the remains on the beach disappeared under sand-depositions as a result of the building of new breakwaters, the site of Raversyde remained within the sphere of scientific interest; eventually, this finally resulted in the above-mentioned systematic excavations of the remains of the village behind the dunes since 1991 (Pieters 1997). At the end of the 20th century, these remains of the landscape and settlement of Raversyde will be preserved in a touristic and educational park, ready to confront the 21st century.

## 9 Conclusions, problems and questions

The historical study of the landscape and settlement of Raversyde and its surroundings was fruitful and led to several interesting problems. We succeeded in a partial but not unimportant reconstruction and interpretation of the social and particularly economic history of the inhabitants and the users of the landscape and settlement studied. Our work reveals the existence of an interaction between landscape and settlement and the social and economic situation and evolution of its users.

We saw how the feudal owners of the salt-marshes started to manipulate the possibilities of the natural landscape and tried to manage the exploitation thereof as they saw fit. The consequence of the construction of a defensive dike was that the area evolved into a cultural landscape with the potential to change from sheepherding to other agricultural activities. We also saw how the feudal owners abandoned direct exploitation of the domain, leaving the area to a number of more individual users, who availed themselves of the opportunity to start new agricultural enterprises.

The potential of the landscape as well as the important socio-economic evolution of the second half of the 12th century influenced the emergence of a new agrarian structure with new villages and other forms of rural settlement. As said earlier, we do not know the exact causes of this important but complex development and many problems remain to be solved.

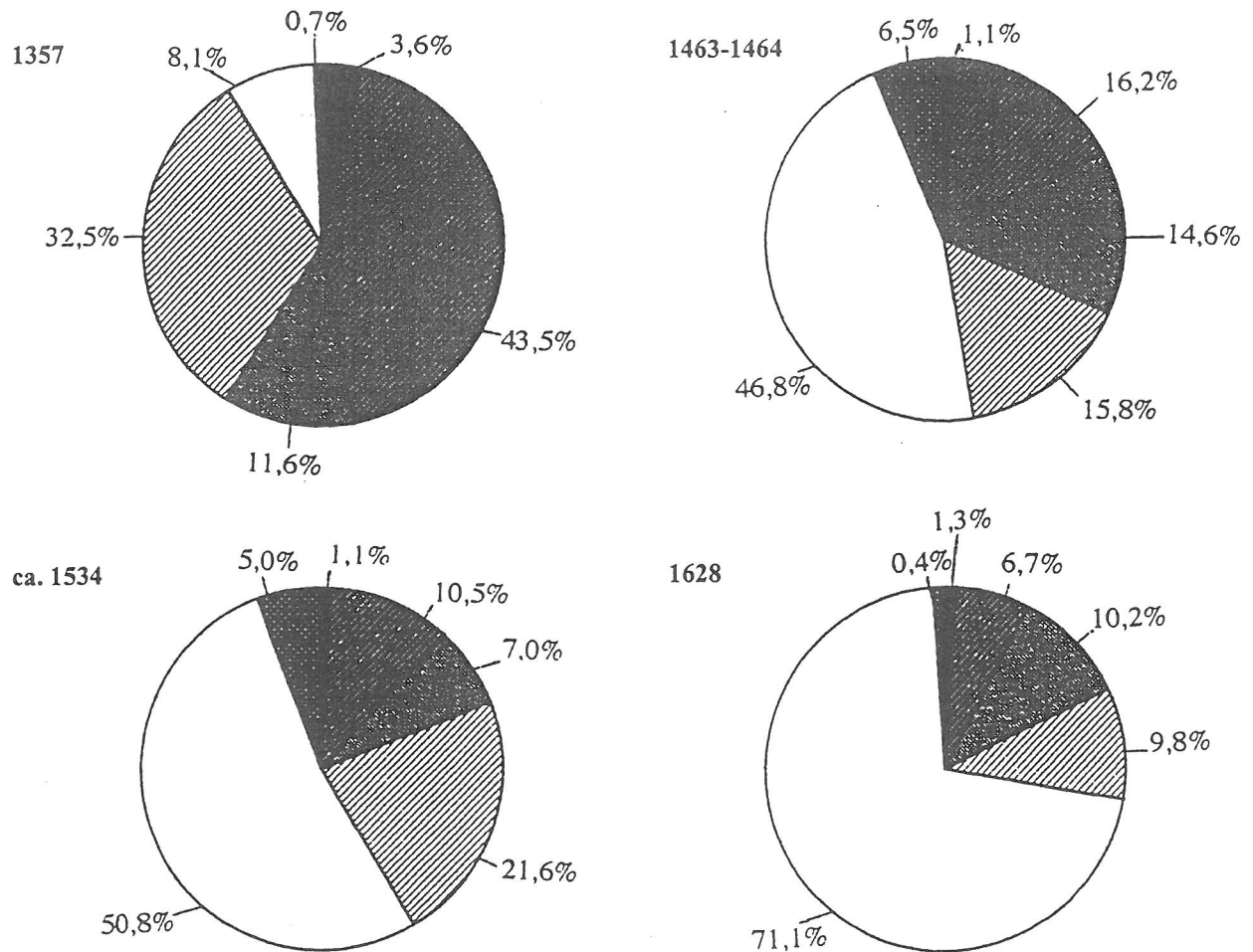


Fig. 6. - The evolution of the tribute-ratio in the domain of St. Peter's in 1357, 1463, 1534 and 1628.

- 1 holding less than 1 gemeten (0.44 ha).
- 2 holding between 1 and 5 gemeten (between 0.44 and 2.2 ha).
- 3 holding between 5 and 10 gemeten (between 2.2 and 4.4 ha).
- 4 holding between 10 and 20 gemeten (between 4.4 and 8.8 ha).
- 5 holding more than 20 gemeten (more than 8.8 ha).
- 6 village of Raversyde.

We saw how within the context of this new agrarian structure, the number of mainly smaller farms and holdings grew significantly. Probably already by the end of the 13th century, several more 'proletarian' holdings emerged, the own lands of which did not, however, raise enough surplus to allow them to survive. We can ask ourselves what caused this late 13th- and 14th-century 'proletarianisation'. Again, not enough is known about the causes of this development and these need to be studied more closely from both a historical and an archaeological point of view. The same holds true for the submarginal farms and holdings themselves. At any rate, the submarginal and small farms in the coastal plain seem to have been structurally vulnerable. The first severe crisis in the coastal plain after the phase of prosperity of the High Middle Ages resulted in the complete ruin of the submarginal and smaller farms and holdings. After this crisis only the larger farms, which controlled

the larger part of the area, survived. Thus, a new agricultural structure, in which the agricultural areas available had been concentrated in the hands of a few isolated larger farmers, emerged in the beginning of the 15th century. In the following decades and centuries this concentration-movement, which started only much later in the other parts of Flanders (Verhulst 1990, 137-140), went on until after the Spanish War when almost all of the lands were concentrated in the hands of the larger landholders.

We can ask ourselves many questions concerning this evolution, questions which are closely related to those concerning the origin and evolution of the 'proletarianised' and fragmented agricultural structure before 1400. What were the fundamental causes of these structural changes? Maybe further geological, pedological, archaeological and historical research related to the topographical situation of the late 13th- and 14th-century submarginal and small holdings (see

Verhaeghe 1984, 154) and an investigation of the particular situation of the impositions in the coastal plain may contribute to a better understanding of the causes of 'proletarianisation', progressing concentration, and so on. In this context, maybe the possible role and the social and economic background of the (urban/patrician?) landowners in the research area can be examined.

This debate should not let us forget the close relationship between the landscape and settlement in the domain and in the village of Walraversyde. We saw how a small channel – a remnant of the earlier natural landscape – probably was at the origin of the fishermen's village of Walraversyde. As a result of a complex set of conditions including warfare and some natural phenomena, this 13th- and 14th-century village was abandoned and (probably systematically) rebuilt at the end of the 14th century. Maybe some of the inhabitants of this new and presumably larger village formerly lived on the deserted 'proletarian' small and submarginal farms and houses. Therefore, it is not impossible that the structural changes discussed earlier also had an influence on the rebuilt village. We can ask ourselves what the exact relation was between the 13th- and 14th-century village and the fragmented agricultural structure on the one hand as well as between 15th-century Walraversyde and the later, more concentrated agricultural structure on the other.

Wars seem to have played an important role in the evolution of Walraversyde. At the end of the 15th century, the war between Maximilian of Austria and the Flemish towns resulted in a first shrinking of Walraversyde, while the events of the Eighty Year's War hit the village very hard and made Raversyde disappear as a village, leaving a small hamlet that would never recover from these woes. The question is whether or not these wars can be considered as the fundamental causes of the evolution of Wal-Raversyde as we outlined it. In this respect, we can ask ourselves why it seems that only Walraversyde suffered so severely from these wars. Put otherwise, why did the other villages in the area recover after the Eighty Year's War and why did Walraversyde not? Are the causes for the shrinking of Walraversyde in the 16th and 17th century of a specific type or of a more general and structural nature or even a combination of both? Are these causes to be found on a economic level (agriculture and/or fishery) or do we have to look for them elsewhere?

What seems obvious is that only further historical and archeological research can be of help and among the priorities, we may mention:

- the 15th- and 16th-century village behind (and underneath) the dunes,

- the chapel,
- the remaining houses of the 17th-, 18th- and 19th-century hamlet,
- the effects of the late-14th-, late-15th- and late-16th-century wars on other villages in the area,
- the evolution of the medieval and post-medieval agricultural structure of the coastal plain on a more than local scale and
- the moated sites and *Hofwüstungen* in the area.

As we have seen, it is only through an interdisciplinary approach, linking and confronting of the archeological and historical data that we may arrive at a better understanding of the above-mentioned problems and discussions about the landscape and settlement in and around Wal-Raversyde.

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