

Leasing, fattening and guarding livestock in times of crises: North-Eastern Catalonia, c.1330–70^{*}

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Abstract

Sedentary livestock husbandry became a central activity by which peasants in late medieval Catalonia earned a living and were also able to withstand the economic, environmental, and military crises of the fourteenth century. The case study of the Les Gavarres region and the exploration of its notarial sources demonstrates that animal rearing provided economic autonomy to the servile peasantry. It initially describes the specific leasing contracts that enabled an active market for fattening livestock. Taking into account a sample of 3082 contracts related to this market between 1330 and 1370, it subsequently provides evidence about the wide extent of livestock rearing and about the factors that affected the activity (plague, crop failure, warfare). The case of the ovi-caprine herds ultimately demonstrates the strategies used by peasants in order to cope with short-cycle crisis. By resorting to these resilient animals or enlarging their herds, families could balance cereal or labour shortages. The study challenges the traditional idea of Mediterranean livestock husbandry being ancillary or hostile to settled agriculture.

It is well known that the Mediterranean was a region of transhumant livestock rearing, in which flocks and herds were driven long distances and largely kept separate from cereal agriculture. The implications of this for understanding the rural economies of the Mediterranean are profound, affecting considerations of crop yields, resource management, the role of formal institutions that organized transhumance, and the context within which peasant producers cultivated the land.¹ The administrative complexities required to manage such extensive transhumant herds have attracted the attention of historians, who

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¹ J. A. Fernández Otal, 'La ganadería y la transhumancia en Aragón: una visión historiográfica', in J. L. Castán and C. Serrano Lacarra (eds), *La transhumancia en la España mediterránea. Historia, Antropología, Medio Natural, Desarrollo natural* (2004), pp. 109–75; M. A. Carmona Ruiz, 'La Mesta Real y las mestas andaluzas', in *Historia de Andalucía* (9 vols, 2006), IV, pp. 210–18; M. C. Quintanilla Raso, 'El pastoreo en Cuenca a finales de la Edad Media. Bases y lógicas de un sistema económico en la compleja realidad agraria', in J. Gómez-Pantoja (ed.), *Les rebaños de Gerión. Pastores y trashumancia en Iberia antigua y medieval* (2011), pp. 37–69.

have focused on pastures, their management, and the conflicts arising between livestock companies and towns.²

Accordingly, for the central and late middle ages, there has also been interest in seigneurial livestock transhumance, generally that organized by large monastic institutions.³ For Catalonia and Aragon there is a large array of studies on the relations established between the highland pastures and the plains, focusing on the Pyrenees and other scales of the vertical transhumance cycle.⁴

Yet within a broader European context, Iberian livestock breeding has been deemed an underdeveloped sector. The lack of a permanent shift toward pastoral agriculture after the Black Death, and also the widespread use of the light scratch plough instead of the heavy plough hauled by draught animals, have been interpreted as some of the reasons for the long-term divergence between the economic development of the north and the south of the continent.⁵

This article introduces some nuances to the alleged Iberian paradigm of both extensive transhumance and underdevelopment. It presents a case study of sedentary pastoralism in north-eastern Iberia, a land of lasting droughts and poor soils that hindered the possibility of benefiting from all the manure produced. Still under these conditions, the study underlines the integration between settled agriculture and animal breeding.⁶ Animals held by peasants on farmsteads were an important and underexplored aspect of the rural economy in the medieval Mediterranean. The cohabitation between animal breeding and cultivation deserves further historiographical attention as it adds complexity to our understanding of the peasant economy.⁷ In overall terms, cases of the temporary or permanent increase of sedentary

² Some examples for the late medieval Crown of Aragon are J. Fernández Trabal, 'Aprofitaments comunals, prats i pastures al delta del Llobregat (segles XIV–XV). Conflictos per a la utilització de l'espai a la Baixa Edat Mitjana', *Acta Historica et Archaeologica Mediaevalia*, 10 (1989), pp. 189–220; M. T. Ferrer i Mallol, 'Les pastures i la ramaderia a la governació d'Oriola en el segle XIV', *Miscel·lània de textos medievals*, 7 (1994), pp. 79–139 and J. Fernández Trabal, 'Béns comunals a l'Edat Mitjana: un estat de la qüestió', in J. J. Busqueta and E. Vicedo (eds), *Béns comunals als Països Catalans i a l'Europa contemporània. Sistemes agraris, organització social i poder local als Països Catalans* (1996), pp. 67–74. For an earlier period, see A. Riera Melis, A., 'El valor dels erms: la gestió de les pastures a Catalunya (segles XI–XIII)', in F. Sabaté (ed.), *Natura i desenvolupament. El medi ambient a l'Edat Mitjana* (2007), pp. 221–50.

³ See C. Hoffman Berman, 'Medieval Agriculture, the Southern French Countryside, and the Early Cistercians', *Trans. American Philosophical Soc.*, 76 (5) (1986), pp. 94–117 and J. R. Hinojosa Montalvo, 'La ganadería en el Elche medieval', *Anales de la Universidad de Alicante. Historia Medieval*, 14 (2003–06), pp. 145–208.

⁴ C. Laliena Corbera, F. Utrilla Utrilla and

G. Navarro Espinach, 'La evolución histórica del paisaje rural en los Pirineos durante la Edad Media: explotación agropecuaria y recursos forestales', in A. Sabio and I. Iriarte (eds), *La construcción histórica del paisaje agrario en España y Cuba* (Zaragoza, 2003), pp. 53–64; C. Denjean, 'Gens des villes ou peuples des montagnes? Regards sur les Pyrénées (XIIe–XVe siècle)', *Actes des congrès de la Société des historiens médiévistes de l'enseignement supérieur public*, 34 (2003), pp. 293–314; O. Codina Vialette, 'Del dret d'orri al cortó. Evolució de la ramaderia ovina a Andorra (segles XV–XIX)', *Estudis d'Història Agrària*, 18 (2005), pp. 91–110.

⁵ M. Hechter, M. W. Brustein, 'Regional modes of production and patterns of State formation in Western Europe', *American J. Sociology*, 85 (5) (1980), pp. 1061–94; N. Voigtländer H.-J. and Voth, 'How the West "invented" fertility restriction', *American Economic Rev.*, 103 (6) (2013), pp. 2227–64.

⁶ B. Kayser, 'Désintégration et intégration des relations agriculture-élevage dans les régions méditerranéennes', *Annales de Géographie*, 557 (1991), pp. 18–30.

⁷ As has been assessed for other regions of the Continent by G. Barker, A. Grant, P. Beavitt, N. Christie, J. Giorgi, P. Hoare, T. Leggio and M. Migliavacca, 'Ancient and modern pastoralism in central Italy: an

pastoralism in relation to transhumance should also be taken into account by researchers, as has been the case for later periods in Iberia.⁸

Thorough exploration of notarial registers of the region of Les Gavarres, in Catalonia, demonstrates not only that sedentary pastoralism was a prominent activity, but that, through rearing livestock, the servile peasants were able to achieve a certain level of economic autonomy. Furthermore, study of the legal mechanisms by which they loaned, shared or sold livestock has uncovered the widespread use of *comanda* contracts, which penetrated into all layers of rural society. Sedentary livestock rearing was, ultimately, an important means by which peasants were able to withstand the economic, environmental, and military crises of the fourteenth century.

In this context, agriculture and pastoralism coexisted on farmsteads and shaped one another, likely improving the yields of both activities. Over the period studied (1330–70), the region saw a more intensive exploitation of the fallows, through a selective contribution of manure to the fields, the construction of dovecotes, and the extension of forage land plots (*farraginals*); and, in the largest farmsteads, the stabling of livestock or the closure of certain plots of land to guard the animals (*closos*).⁹ Long-range transhumance has not been detected in this zone of small peasant landholdings and scarce communal land. The latter circumstances hampered the mobility of animals. Most of the flatter lands in northern Catalonia shared these same conditions.¹⁰

The study is also inspired by the question of the nature of ecological adaptation of livestock rearing to conditions in Les Gavarres. Peasant families set in diverse ecological contexts showed marked preferences for specific breeds depending on the prevalence of crops or scrubland, while ecological and environmental factors also imposed limitations on herd sizes. In periods of crisis, the intensification of livestock breeding, and breed selection, allowed peasant families to mitigate the impacts of crop failure, mortality, and warfare.

Drawing on extensive archival material from the region of Les Gavarres from the fourteenth century, section one of the article discusses the *comanda* contracts which underpinned the system of leasing livestock between peasants and the ways in which a market for fattening livestock developed in this region, demonstrating the importance of this legal and financial instrument to the peasant economy. Section two examines the extent of livestock rearing,

Note 7 continued

interdisciplinary study in the Cicolano mountains', *Papers of the British School at Rome*, 59 (1991), pp. 15–88 and by P. Slavin, 'Peasant livestock husbandry in late thirteenth-century Suffolk: Economy, environment, and society', in M. Kowaleski, J. Langdon, and P. R. Schofield (eds), *Peasants and lords in the medieval English economy: Essays in honour of Bruce M. S. Campbell* (2015), pp. 3–26.

⁸ C. R. Phillips and W. D. Phillips Jr., *Spain's Golden Fleece: wool production and the wool trade from the middle ages to the nineteenth century* (1997).

⁹ Contemporary sources show the practice of a 'guaret vell', in opposition to a newer form of fallow husbandry, likely a three-field system. In the latter, fodder legumes such as white lupin would have been

incorporated to provide nitrogen to the crops: AHG, Notaria de Caldes-Llagostera, CL 44, f. 124v–125r (1353–V-3). See also A. Riera Melis, *Els cereals i el pa en els països de llengua catalana a la baixa edat mitjana* (2017), pp. 237–8.

¹⁰ But rare exceptions do exist. The hills of the Montgrí, some 20 km. further north, were largely scrubland on calcareous soils, not suitable for agriculture. Large flocks of sheep grazed here in the winter after having descended from the summer pastures of the Oriental Pyrenees. See X. Soldevila i Temporal, 'L'élevage ovin et la transhumance en Catalogne nord-occidentale (XIIIe–XIVe siècles)', in P.-Y. Laffont (dir.), *Transhumance et estivage en Occident* (2006), pp. 109–18.

the volume of transactions which can be extrapolated from the sources, and how external factors such as plague, weather and crop failure affected the prevalence of livestock rearing. In particular, it will be seen how embedded sedentary livestock rearing was in the rural economy of this region, and the role of environmental factors in supporting, maintaining, and limiting the size of flocks and herds. Section three puts these trends in livestock rearing into context to show how livestock rearing allowed peasants greater economic agency and resilience than has previously been thought. Together, this paper throws light on an as yet unexplored aspect of the medieval economy.

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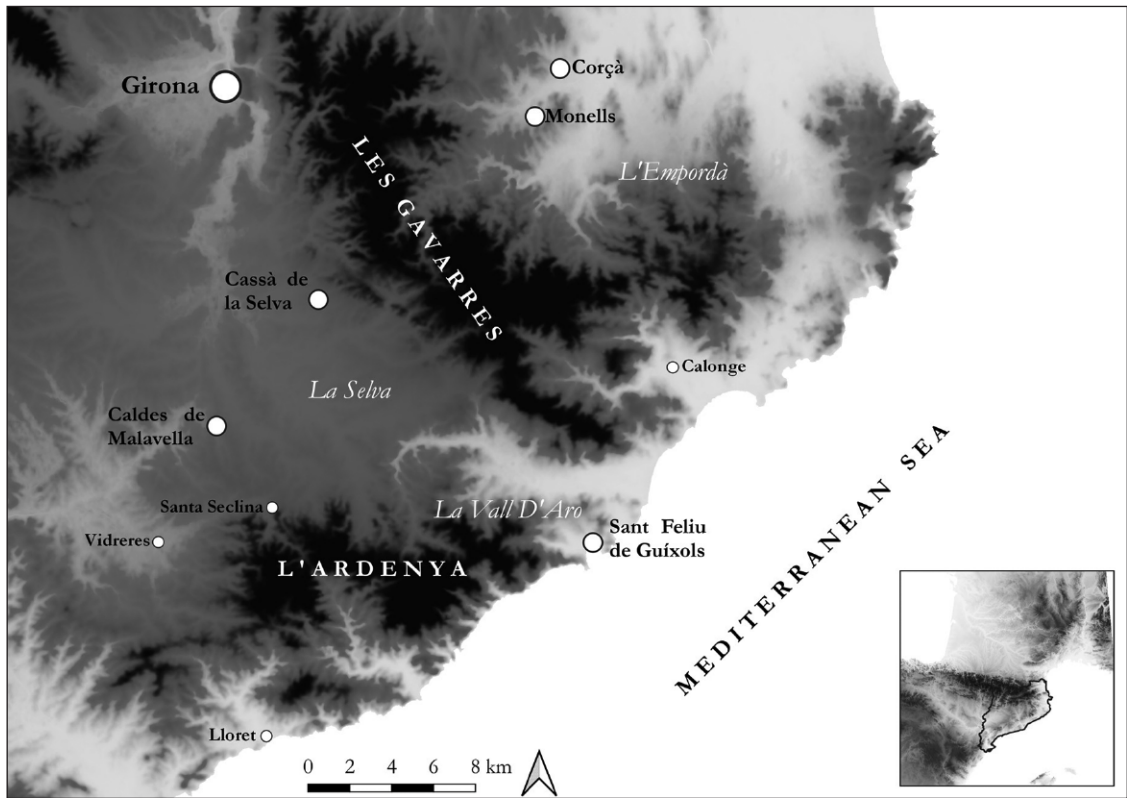
The area under study in this article is the Les Gavarres hills and three of the plains that surround them: La Selva to the west; the lower Ter river basin to the north east; and the valley of Aro to the south (Map 1). Les Gavarres forms an extended terrain of around 39,000 hectares of low Mediterranean mountains in north-eastern Catalonia. The vegetation combines areas of stone pine and cork oak with scrubland filled with arbutus, mastic and spiny broom. The hills stretch from the city of Girona toward the small town of Calonge, which sits on a narrow slope facing the sea.

In the late middle ages, the most densely inhabited spots were the small towns and villages situated in the depressions that surround the higher ground. These undulating plains (Empordà, La Selva, valley of Aro) were home to an intensive fallow agriculture, growing winter-cycle cereals (chiefly wheat, but also oats and barley) and spring crops (millet), along with flax in specific highly irrigated plots. The dwellers of the scattered peasant households in the territory (*mas* sg., *masos* pl.), both in the hills and the plains, were invariably peasants of servile status (*remença*). These men were bound to one single *mas*, owned by a lord, and were obliged to pay a redemption if this wished to leave the tenancy. The lord also enforced a series of personal demands on his peasants, including fines for female adultery, death without a heir or damage to the house from fire.¹¹ Nonetheless, these peasants were allowed to take autonomous economic decisions in regards of their *mas*: selling, renting or using land as collateral in debt contracts land were allowed upon payment of a fine to the lord, and also investment in rural industries (mills, forges, kilns).

The findings of this article arise from an extensive survey of the notarial registers of five of these small towns: Caldes de Malavella and Cassà de la Selva to the west, Sant Feliu de Guíxols in the Vall d'Aro, and Corçà and Monells on the Empordà in the northeast. Before the Black Death of 1348, none of these towns had more than 1000 inhabitants, and some, such as Corçà and Cassà were considerably smaller. Each of these communities used one single notarial office, granted by their jurisdictional lord. For this reason, it can be assumed that all significant economic transactions which took place in these towns appear in the books analysed, which also capture many more inhabitants from the surrounding areas.

All data related to livestock and stockbreeding has been collated from a total of 142 notarial books, comprising on average 150 folios each, of which 47 are from Caldes, 42 from Sant

¹¹ P. Freedman, *The origins of peasant servitude in medieval Catalonia* (1991).



MAP 1. North-eastern Catalonia

Source: AHG, Notarial registers of Cassà de la Selva, Caldes de Malavella, Sant Feliu de Guíxols, Monells and Corçà.

Feliu, 22 from Cassà, 18 from Monells, and 13 from Corçà. The chronology covered by these registers is uneven amongst the five notarial offices. Caldes is the best represented case: out of 492 months between January 1330 and December 1370, the acts of 326 months (66 per cent) are available. Corçà is the worst-represented locality, with only the acts from 112 months (22.7 per cent) surviving, and consistent data just available from 1352 onward.¹²

Sources available suggest an increase of stockbreeding over the fourteenth century, particularly in response to the demand from towns, which were voracious consumers of meat.¹³ The urban centres also hosted some of the productive processes of a growing Catalan drapery industry, as well as tanneries, which required wool and skins respectively.¹⁴

¹² In Cassà, data from 273 months is available, accounting for 55.5% of the time. For this notary, registers are absent between 1343 and 1348. Sant Feliu offers consistent data for 1339 onward, with 240 months available in total (49%). The available registers are more patchy for Monells, where 142 months are preserved (28.8%).

¹³ R. A. Banegas López, *Sangre, dinero y poder: El negocio de la carne en la Barcelona bajomedieval* (2016).

¹⁴ For the wool see M. Gual Camarena, 'Orígenes y expansión de la industria textil lanera catalana en la Edad Media', in M. Spallanzani (ed.), *Produzione, commercio e consumo dei panni di lana nei secoli XII-XVIII* (1976), pp. 511–523 and L. To Figueras,

TABLE 1. Types of documents related to livestock market in the notarial offices of Les Gavarres (1330–70)

	Purchases		Leases
	<i>ex novo</i> debt notes	actual contracts	<i>comandes de bestiar</i>
Cassà de la Selva	37 (11%)	6 (2%)	287 (87%)
Caldes de Malavella	414 (24%)	55 (3%)	1252 (73%)
Sant Feliu de Guíxols	36 (13%)	22 (8%)	216 (79%)
Monells	272 (42%)	36 (6%)	344 (53%)
Corçà	14 (13%)	3 (3%)	88 (84%)
Total	773 (25%)	122 (4%)	2187 (71%)

Source: AHG, Notarial registers of Cassà de la Selva, Caldes de Malavella, Sant Feliu de Guíxols, Monells and Corçà.

Livestock breeding in late medieval Catalonia is demonstrated most clearly through contracts made regarding the leasing, sharing and selling of livestock.¹⁵ Purchases of livestock produced debit notes, and were relatively infrequent. Much more common were livestock leases (*comandes de bestiar*). A total of 3082 contracts of sales and leases types have been collected in the aforementioned notarial registers for the region and period under scrutiny, of which livestock leases, henceforth *comandes*, account for almost three-quarters (Table 1). In the smallest of these settlements, Cassà, as much as 87 per cent of the private contracts in relation to herds were articulated as *comandes*, and these accounted for 53 per cent in Monells.

The *comanda* contract was widespread throughout southern Europe during the late medieval period.¹⁶ It consisted of a temporary transfer of a herd or an animal from a lessor to a holder,

Note 14 *continued*

‘La comercialització dels draps de llana a Vic: un exemple de la recaptació dels impostos de la bolla de plom i del segell de cera (1363–1364)’, in J. Baget, P. Orti Gost and P. Verdés (eds), *Renda feudal i fiscalitat a la Catalunya baixmedieval* (2018), pp. 253–78. For the leather industry, see R. Salicrú, ‘Los cueros bovinos en el Mediterráneo del siglo XV: retroceso del mercado magrebí y auge de los mercados ibéricos’, in R. Córdoba de la Llave (coord.), *Mil años de trabajo del cuero: actas del IIº Simposium de Historia de las Técnicas* (2003), pp. 169–200.

¹⁵ For a discussion on the types of sources available for studying the peasants’ livestock in this period and region, see E. Mallorquí, ‘Masos agraris o ramaders? El cas de Cruïlles i Sant Cebrià dels Alls a la primera meitat del segle XIV’, in J. Bolòs, E. Jarne and E. Vicedo (eds), *Família pagesa i economia rural: VII Congrés sobre Sistemes agraris, organització social i poder local* (2010), pp. 169–99.

¹⁶ The first documented *comandae* make their appearance in the western Mediterranean around 1230 (M. Le Mené, ‘Les redevances a part de fruits dans l’Ouest de la France au Moyen Age’, in *Les revenus de la terre, complant, champart, métayage, en Europe occidentale (IXe–XVIIIe siècles)*, *Actes des VIIes Journées Internationales d’Histoire de l’Abbaye de Flaran. Septembre 1985* (1987), pp. 22–3). Depending on the ecological contingencies or on the types of animals grazed, they present slightly different legal forms [C. Rendu, ‘Un aperçu de l’économie cerdane à la fin du XIIIème siècle: draps, bétails et céréales sur le marché de Puigcerdà en 1280–1281’, *Quaderns d’Estudis Cerdans*, 1 (1991), pp. 91–2; M. Gómez de Valenzuela, *Documentos sobre ganadería altoaragonesa y pirenaica (siglos XV y XVI)* (2007)]. These contracts were used both in sedentary and extensive pastoralism (R. Soto, ‘Ovelles, vaques, porcs i eclesiàstics (algunes consideracions sobre la ramaderia balear a l’Edat Mitjana, segles XI–XIV)’, *Estudis d’Història Econòmica*, 1 (1992), pp. 13–29), but

in exchange for a quantity of money which may or may not have been proportional to the profit obtained from the exploitation of the stock. This descriptive section focuses primarily on the form of these *comandes* due to their ubiquity in the notarial registers, but also with the purpose of pointing at a significant historiographical void.

During the central decades of the fourteenth century in Les Gavarres *comandes* were either agreed between neighbours – inhabitants of the same parish or vicinity (*veïnat*) – who were either peasants or specialized intermediaries; or secondarily assigned by merchants from towns and cities. The *comandes* of this region dealt with small assemblages of animals that were husbanded by peasant families. These people were a vital joint for an integrated livestock market which reached the urban centres of consumption.

Between 1330 and 1370, two subtypes of *comandes* show up in the notarial manuals. On the one hand was the sharecropping of animals, by which the borrower agreed to the return of the initial capital invested by the lender in the herd, in addition to a proportionate share of the profits that were to be yielded.¹⁷ On the other hand, we encounter simple deposit orders; transfer of livestock with, apparently, no other condition than the restitution of animals at the request of the lender. Both types inevitably relied on informal private arrangements, in which the profits that would be shared, the use to which animals would be put, or the time of their return were agreed. Of the total 2187 *comandes*, 52 per cent utilize the set of clauses specific to sharecropping (1132), while the remaining 48 per cent (1055) were simple deposits.¹⁸ Although the uses to which animals were put are not always evident in the sources, animals that yielded secondary products that could be destined for consumer markets (ovi-caprids, swine, cattle) were preferably borrowed on a sharecropping basis, whilst simple deposits were used to place draught animals on others' hands.

Within any of the subtypes of *comanda*, animals were frequently transferred to third parties. In order to keep track of the herds and to be able to settle the debt when the contract concluded, the animals were identified with some precision, both through descriptions of their physical traits and by ear cuts and brands.¹⁹ The deeds subsequently detailed the obligations

Note 16 *continued*

also as a strategy of feudal lords to favour the installation of peasants in their estates (R. Jean Emigh, 'Loans and livestock: comparing landlords' and tenants' declarations from the Catasto of 1427', *J. European Econ. Hist.*, 25 (2) (1996), pp. 705–23).

¹⁷ As most of these documents read: 'Lucrum quod fecerit animalia supradicta medium per medium dividatur inter me et vos'. This same contract, entitled *gazaille*, has been described for the Languedoc in G. Sicard and M. Sicard, 'Redevances a part de fruits et métayage dans le sud-ouest de la France au Moyen Age', in G. Sicard and M. Sicard, *Les revenus de la terre*, pp. 71–3. The term *gasalla* would precisely name these contracts in north-eastern Catalonia in the sixteenth century. See P. Gifre Ribas, *Els senyors útils i propietaris de mas. La formació històrica d'un grup social pagès (vegueria de Girona, 1486–1730)* (2012), p. 465.

¹⁸ But in two notarial offices in particular that served less dynamic rural markets, Sant Feliu de Guíxols and Corçà, explicit sharecropping became practically hegemonic in the livestock market during the fourteenth century. Distribution of these two subtypes is the following: Monells, 121 simple deposits (35%) and 223 share contracts (65%); Cassà de la Selva, 168 deposits (59%) and 119 share contracts (41%); Sant Feliu de Guíxols, 16 deposits (7%) and 200 share contracts (93%); Caldes de Malavella, 738 deposits (59%) and 514 share contracts (41%); Corçà, 12 deposits (14%) and 76 share contracts (86%).

¹⁹ In 1348 a flock of sheep had circular perforations made in their ears ('cissas in rotundo'), whilst in 1347 a red cow borrowed by a widow had been marked in white ('signis albis'). See, respectively, AHG, Notaria de Monells, Mn 168 (1348-XII-1) and AHG, Notaria de Monells, Mn 281 (1347-II-3).

of the borrower towards the herd. Although a very limited range of verbs is used, the parties seemed to pick the expression according to the activity that best suited the type of livestock or the concrete agreement that had been reached.²⁰

The *comandes* also often include cash loans, in addition to leases of animals. The loan would be subject to the same principles under which livestock were borrowed. In 1350 Bonanat Esteve from the vicinity of Puigmoler, in Cassà, acknowledged receiving from Bonanat Alagot a donkey but also 47 *sous* (s.) on a simple deposit.²¹ Bonanat Alagot was an active local livestock dealer, who mostly employed this mechanism in his business.²² Several interpretations arise from these deals: the loan could provide for the animal's care (such as for fodder, horseshoeing, and so on); it could be a mechanism to secure the commercial relationship between lessor and lessee;²³ or could sometimes even be a disguised capitalization of the lessee's own livestock.²⁴

When these contracts came to an end, the parties calculated the profits to be shared. In explicit sharecropping contracts, the overall profits were the difference between the initial and the sale prices, while the share was generally at halves. In reality the possibilities afforded by *comandes* was endless. *Comandes* did not only deal with fattening cattle intended for slaughtering and selling to butchers, but also other stock that generated by-products were included in informal side-agreements. Details about products such as wool, dairy products or manure are rarely given. When these are recorded, they provide clear examples of the ways in which these animals were used and the potential benefits of leasing. On January 17, 1367, in Cassà de la Selva, the notary registered a contract in which Pere Saulina, from the hamlet of Santa Pellaia, lent ten white sheep to Arnau Geronès, from the vicinity of Llebrers, in Cassà.²⁵ The document states that there was an agreement to share the benefits, but the initial estimated cost of the animals was immediately crossed out by the scribe. Apparently, the parties had reached a more complex arrangement, which required an ancillary document registered on the same day due to clarify the terms of contract.²⁶ Pere Saulina was enabled to recover his

²⁰ E.g. *pensare, custodire, procurare, cibare* (i.e. to pay for, to guard in custody, to take care of, to feed).

²¹ AHG, Notaria de Caldes-Llagostera, CL 36, f. 136r (1350-VI-21). This amount of money was not far from the 36 s. a donkey could cost, on average, between 1348 and 1352 in neighboring Caldes de Malavella.

²² Most of the examples from Cassà of this type correspond to provisions made by Alagot.

²³ For the late medieval Treviso contracts 'de depositi et salvamenti' have been described, in which livestock was borrowed along with cash, as a way of allowing the purchase of the animal by the lessee, and thus being a preamble of a sharecropping contract (*soccida*). See G. Cagnin, 'Pro bono et fino amore, de iusto et vero capitali et vera sortex: documentazione notarile e credito a Treviso (secoli XIII-XIV)', in F. Menant and O. Redon (eds), *Notaires et crédit dans l'Occident médiéval* (2004), p. 114.

²⁴ Sixty-five of the total 2187 (2.9%) *comandes*

analyzed include a resale agreement as an ancillary clause, in which it is significantly set forth that the return of, only the loan, would settle the whole contract. The conversion of livestock into capital still shows up in another circumstance. In the livestock sharecropping contracts, the instruments attest the initial investment – which was to be entirely recovered by the lender – through alternative formulae. Here, it is common for the same sharecropper to unfold as the salesman (*que animalia a nobis emistis*), assessing again that a lien had been put on the peasant's livestock in order to raise funds. This is mentioned in 219 of the total 2187 contracts (10%). In conclusion, almost 13% of the *comandes de bestiar* considered here were a form of capitalizing assets by peasant households.

²⁵ AHG, Notaria de Caldes-Llagostera, CL 78, f. 6v (1367-I-17).

²⁶ *Ibid.*

sheep the following March or April and, with them, all the sheared wool. For his part, the borrower could keep the milk and cheese (*caseos et late*) obtained during this time.

By the mid-fourteenth century, *comandes de bestiar* had generated a small market, which even had some impersonal traits. As in the financial market as a whole, the share in the contracts could be split and transferred. The property rights over the animal, or a fraction of it, frequently ended up in the hands of holders who were physically far from the space where the custody and grazing of the flocks took place. These individuals were not involved in livestock farming and would merely expect the punctual return of their profits. For this reason, the basic clauses of the *comandes* achieved a certain level of standardization in Les Gavarres, and possibly throughout the *vegueria* of Girona that made them virtually identical regardless of the authenticating notary. This uniformity made the contract highly attractive and was key to its wide diffusion. These *comandes* were highly portable, and debts could be transferred to third parties or settled by a foreign authority.

Unlike real property purchases and leases in emphyteusis – that required the lord's permission and the payment of a perpetual rent – livestock could be transferred by these peasants to third parties without having to meet tax obligations or any legal impediments. This created an important dynamism in the livestock market. For example, in acquiring, pawning, or even seizing animals in a suit, it was not mandatory to ask for the lord's permission. In this regard, the *comandes de bestiar* were an adaptable product, which allowed, for instance, complex operations of debt compensation (such as meeting other debts with a share of a *comanda*) within the rural communities and beyond.

The presence of livestock in Les Gavarres was notable during the late Middle Ages. By the fourteenth century, single animals and small herds were put in the hands of peasant families, mostly through the system of *comandes*. Almost three-quarters of the contracts relating to livestock were, in fact, leases of this sort. Animals were guarded by the peasantry, who would fatten them to be sent off to the market. After the breeding of livestock, possible subsequent phases of this business (such as sending off the animals toward the city for slaughtering) are documented far less by local sources. As an example, in 1348, the acts of termination of a commercial company between three local intermediaries from Cassà and Caldes assessed that it was owed a certain amount of money from Guillem Gros, a butcher from Perpignan. The company would have been sending cows and calves – their main object of trade – reared by Les Gavarres peasants, to the Roussillon.²⁷ Other animals would be used to feed the household, to plough their plots or to load their goods. Given that the *comanda* became such a frequent contract in the peasant economy, the scarcity of existing studies is startling. Future comparisons with other cases in Catalonia and beyond will shed more light on this ubiquitous system of leasing animals.

²⁷ AHG, Notaria de Caldes-Llagostera, CL 33, f. 102v (1348-IX-1). These arrangements were probably more frequent with butchers and tanners from nearby Girona.

II

In this section the livestock market of Les Gavarres is assessed by estimating the volume of business that must have been transacted there and by defining its dynamics in relation to economic and social trends. To do this, all documented livestock contracts are taken into account, including leases and purchases. Pastoralism is interpreted here as a contingent activity that helped peasants overcome troubling periods in an arable-led economy.

In order to address how many animals were involved in the *comanda* contracts on average, it is necessary to remind ourselves that the livestock farming evaluated in this article does not include forms of transhumance. Livestock breeding in Les Gavarres was at the time a complement to sedentary farming, an activity with which it was positively related (for example, through selective soil fertilization which increased crop productivity) but also often conflictingly (such as the frequent invasion of farmland by small domestic animals).²⁸ In this sense, it cannot be denied that the nature of most of the *masos* in northeastern Catalonia – including those of these coastal hills – imposed certain ecological limits to large herds. Yet however modest, the available sources demonstrate that every *mas* had a contingent of animals, either owned as full property or leased through *comandes*.²⁹

As a consequence, fourteenth-century inhabitants of the area of Les Gavarres took part in minor transfers of livestock. More than 80 per cent of the documented contracts, for example, at Monells, mobilized one or two animals (Table 2). The dynamics documented there can be extrapolated to the other localities. However, as the number of transferred heads of livestock increases, the number of documents declines.

Nine out of ten *comandes de bestiar* include fewer than ten animals.³⁰ One single *comanda* could combine different types of animals or include animals of different ages. Similarly, debt notes arising from purchases reflect transactions in which only a single animal was involved. However, here the animals were less diverse in character. Purchases were used only to transfer the most valuable animals in their optimal state of maturity (i.e. adults), which could render the operation profitable right from its beginning. These transactions appear almost entirely to have been restricted to oxen, cows, donkeys, mares and mules.

Although the number of animals in each transaction was rather modest, the documents show that, between 1330 and 1370, this area was home to constant livestock breeding, fattening, leasing and selling. The intensity of this trade, adjacent to the city of Girona, made Les Gavarres an area coveted by both feudal lords and urban capital. These actors were interested

²⁸ Ordinances or bylaws related to these trespasses can be found at AHG, Notaria de Caldes-Llagostera, CL 45, f. 23 (1354-III-4); CL 45, f. 26 (1354-III-18); CL 58, f. 62 (1359-VII-29); CL 58, f. f. 67v (1359-VIII-19); CL 70, f. 138v (1365-VIII-9); Notaria de Monells, Mn 215 (1368-VIII-16); Mn 215 (1370-VI-17).

²⁹ P. Orti Gost and L. To Figueras, 'Serfdom and Standards of Living of the Catalan Peasantry before and after the Black Death of 1348', in S. Cavaciocchi (ed.), *Schiavitù e servaggio nell'economia europea secc. XI-XVIII. Atti della 'Quarantacinquesima Settimana di*

Studi' 14-18 aprile 2013 (2014), pp. 155-72.

³⁰ The average observed number of animals per contract ranges from 6.1 to 3.7 depending on the location. In Corçà there were 6.1 animals on average per contract; in Sant Feliu, 5.8; in Cassà and Caldes, 3.7 both; and in Monells, 3.4. *Comandes* including sheep, goats or both imply the mobilization of a larger volume of livestock (they generally grazed in larger herds); the higher presence of sheep in the markets of Corçà and in Sant Feliu explains the differences.

TABLE 2. Head of livestock transferred in Monells (1330–69)

Number of animals	0.5–1 (%)	1.5–2 (%)	2.5–3 (%)	3.5–4 (%)	5–10 (%)	11–20 (%)	21–39 (%)	≥40 (%)	Total
Number of <i>comandes</i>	161 (47)	92 (27)	17 (5)	13 (4)	28 (8)	19 (6)	13 (4)	1 (0.3)	344
Number of debt notes	201 (86)	25 (11)	2 (1)	0 (0)	2 (1)	0 (0)	3 (1)	1 (0.4)	234
Number of purchase contracts	4 (22)	0 (0)	2 (11)	0 (0)	0 (0)	5 (28)	5 (28)	2 (11)	18
Total	366 (61)	117 (20)	21 (4)	13 (2)	30 (5)	24 (4)	21 (4)	4 (0.6)	596

Source: AHG, Notarial registers of Monells

in direct extraction of rents, along with being able to graze and fatten livestock so close by. The trend possibly dated back several decades.³¹

Interpolating the partial data available for the five markets and the four decades under study, perhaps as many as 6200 contracts, involving some 25,000 heads of livestock, and an investment of 600,000 *sous* (s) would have been recorded.³² Although the actual trend is described below, the average is of about 600 head of livestock transferred annually in these towns.

Comparison with the results obtained by Christian Guilleré for the city of Girona between 1341 and 1348 – who collected information from approximately half of the notaries acting in the city at that time, but strikingly documented fewer than 600 animals in only 100 *comandes* for this period – suggests how proportionally much more vigorous these rural trading nodes were compared with a city of around 10,000 inhabitants in terms of livestock transactions.³³ As a consequence, it can be deduced that most of the peasant families in the territory met their needs in the rural markets to which they were relatively close. In turn, Girona was the destination for some of the fattened animals and their by-products, although during this period it does not appear to have been the main supplier for the peasantry. In terms of livestock, the rural markets analysed here had a catchment area of less than ten km, although the most active could attract customers from as far as 25 km away seeking the most valuable animals.³⁴

³¹ As an early example, in 1151, the officials of the count Ramon Berenguer IV summoned as much as 440 swine as the annual rents paid by the *masos* of Caldes and nearby Llagostera. See T. N. Bisson, *Fiscal accounts of Catalonia under the early count-kings: 1151–1213* (1984), p. 44.

³² L. Sales i Favà, 'Crèdit i morositat a la Catalunya del segle XIV. El cas de la baronia de Llagostera' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Girona, 2019), p. 290–3.

³³ C. Guilleré, *Girona al segle XIV* (2 vols, 1993), I, 371–80.

³⁴ In order to complete an estimation for the whole perimeter of Les Gavarres it should also be taken into account the volume of transactions in the four eastern-most markets (La Bisbal d'Empordà, Peratallada, Palafrugell and Calonge), but this exercise is unachievable due to mostly fragmentary or simply non-existent notarial ledgers.

Two of these markets stand out above the rest: Caldes de Malavella and Monells, for which there may have been over 4500 contracts.³⁵ They draw our attention to several factors: the number of protocolized contracts, the diversity of business, the volume of heads of livestock which transited through town, the diversity of animals, and the turnover that all this implied.

Thus three-quarters of the business in this ecological space would have taken place in the markets of Caldes and Monells. Between the two localities, they could have absorbed the traffic of about 16,500 animals during this period. Of similar size, the towns are located at opposite ends of the massif. Well connected with the city of Girona, other small towns, and the main trade roads, they had the advantage of acting as a hinge joint between immediate *masos*, those inside the massif, and the Empordà and the Selva plains. In other words, they brought together different habitats and products, which was possibly the key to their success as trade centres.

The animals traded in the markets and towns around Les Gavarres were of all types of domestic livestock, including cattle, horses, mules, goats, sheep, swine, geese, and even beehives (Table 3). Cattle – both oxen and cows – appear frequently and were present in similar proportions in all markets. These were the most common type of livestock in the late medieval *masos* due to their versatility, providing dairy products, meat and skins, reared calves, and draught power. The breeds that show the biggest divergence between zones were swine, and especially the sheep and goats. The latter two constituted an important part of the volume of trade: logically, goats and sheep were integrated into larger herds. However, certain areas witnessed a greater presence of these animals than others. In Sant Feliu and Corçà, sheep and goats represented 60.3 per cent and 67.5 per cent of the total number of documented animals respectively.³⁶ In Cassà and Caldes they accounted for 36.1 and 43 per cent, showing that they were more central to the commercial and domestic economy in the north-east and in the maritime Gavarres than in the western La Selva. It is likely that the topography of the upper Les Gavarres, with pronounced slopes and ravines, determined this distribution.³⁷

Donkeys and mules were much rarer. In addition to agricultural tasks, they were used in carrying heavy loads, and thus their physical deterioration as a result of work could be significant and fast. Therefore, these animals, as well as oxen, were most frequently purchased rather than leased. Horses (draft horses and mares) are grouped under the heading ‘other equines’ in Table 3 along with male and female foals (the exact nature of which is unknown). Other animals such as geese and beehives appear only infrequently.³⁸

³⁵ Inferred data provides 2537 livestock contracts for Caldes and 2080 for Monells. This balance is surpassed in terms of heads of livestock: 9304 for the former, 7167 for the latter. As mentioned above, the operations in Caldes involved a higher number of animals (3.7) than in Monells (3.4).

³⁶ In Sant Feliu the number of goats was double that of the sheep, while in Corçà the former appeared to be irrelevant.

³⁷ Slavin has detected a sharp negative correlation between pig- and sheep-herding. In late medieval England, swine herds were related to intensive legume-based arable regimes or woodland, whilst sheep

were more prevalent on poorer soils of labour-extensive systems. See Slavin, ‘Peasant livestock husbandry’ pp. 16–18 and 23.

³⁸ Poultry is generally absent in the notarial documents. Although they were bred for the consumption of eggs and ultimately, feathers and meat, they seldom entered the commercial circuits. Their presence in most *masos* is assessed by widespread and customary emphyteutic rents that ought to be rewarded with chicken or eggs. To this regard, see M. Wilmart, ‘Du poulailler au marché. Esquisse d’une économie volaillière médiévale (XIII–XVIe siècle)’, *Revue d’ethnoécologie*, 12 (2017).

TABLE 3. Total head of livestock documented in notarial deeds (1328–71)

Market	Contracts	Oxen	Cows and other bovines ^a	Donkeys and jennets	Male and female mules	Other equines ^e	Goats ^b	Sheep ^c	Swine ^d	Beehives	Geese	n.i.	Total
	n.	n. (%)	n. (%)	n. (%)	n. (%)	n. (%)	n. (%)	n. (%)	n. (%)	n. (%)	n. (%)	n. (%)	n.
Caldes de Malavella	1681	298 (4.8)	914 (14.8)	463 (7.5)	56 (0.9)	35 (0.6)	1079 (17.5)	1601 (26)	1654 (26.8)	0 (0)	34 (0.6)	29 (0.5)	6163
Cassà de la Selva	326	86.5 (6.9)	175 (14)	68 (5.5)	42.5 (3.4)	4 (0.3)	141 (11.3)	309 (24.8)	410 (32.9)	10 (0.8)	0 (0)	1 (0.1)	1247
Monells	596	96.5 (4.5)	414 (19.3)	133 (6.2)	62 (2.9)	50 (2.3)	334 (15.6)	843 (39.4)	205.5 (9.6)	0 (0)	0 (0)	2 (0.1)	2140
Corçà	105	18 (2.9)	95.5 (15.5)	16 (2.6)	9 (1.5)	4 (0.6)	22 (3.6)	393 (63.9)	48 (7.8)	0 (0)	0 (0)	10 (1.6)	615.5
Sant Feliu de Guíxols	269	29 (1.9)	221.5 (14.2)	18 (1.2)	25 (1.6)	4 (0.3)	629.5 (40.3)	318 (20.3)	284.66 (18.2)	30 (1.9)	0 (0)	3 (0.2)	1563

Notes:

^a Including male and female calves (*vedells*, *vedelles*), non-castrated male and female after they are weaned (*braus*, *braves*) and individuals between one and two years (*jònecs*).

^b Including bucks and young goats (*cabrits*).

^c Including rams, ewe lambs and lambs (*anyells*, *anyelles*).

^d Including gilts (*porques*), sows (*truges*), male and female piglets (*porcells*, *porcelles*).

^e Including draft horses (*rossins*), mares (*eugues*), male and female foal (*pollins* or *pollres*, *pollines*).

Source: AHG, Notarial registers of Cassà de la Selva, Caldes de Malavella, Sant Feliu de Guíxols, Monells and Corçà.

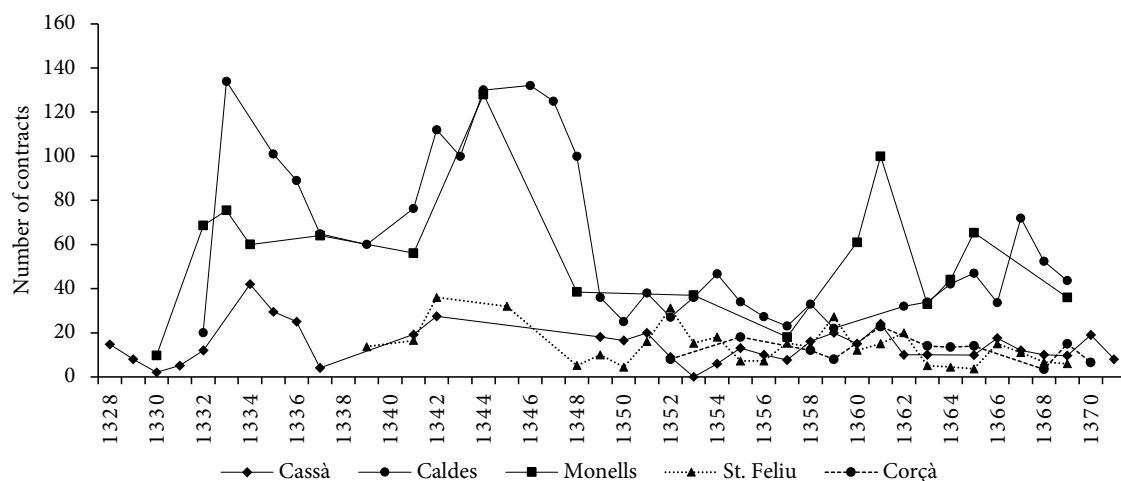


FIGURE 1. Amount of documented livestock contracts in the notarial offices of Les Gavarres (leases and purchases)

This market performed several economic functions: it replenished livestock of each family; but it also assigned animals for fattening within a broader commercial operation. In addition, as assessed for the real estate market, the livestock market allowed the *mas* to adapt to a context of crisis by selling, mortgaging, or on the contrary incorporating more adaptable breeds.³⁹ These operations are interpreted below in relation to social and economic trends.

The data analysed for Monells, Cassà and Caldes, from which the oldest serial documentation is available, indicate that the commerce in livestock – both purchases and leases – experienced a sudden rise during the early 1330s (Figure 1). In Caldes, only 20 contracts were recorded in 1332, but there was a sharp increase the following year to 134 contracts. In Cassà, 12 contracts were listed in 1332, and the sources suggest that around 40 would have been made in 1334.⁴⁰ In Monells, a similar increase is registered between 1330 (10 contracts), 1332 (69) and the following years.

This activity declined from the middle of the decade until the beginning of the 1340s, although with some variations across the region. In Caldes, 65, 60 and 76 contracts were registered in 1337, 1339 and 1341 respectively. For Cassà, data is only available for the first and the last years (4 contracts in 1337 and 19 in 1341). In Monells, where the sample is also scarce for this period, the trend appears even more stable after the initial rise of the early 1330s. Sixty contracts were recorded in 1334, 67 in 1337, and 56 in 1341. From 1341 on, a general flourishing of the activity is again apparent. This is also seen in Sant Feliu, for which data survives from this period. The figures provided by four notarial offices indicate that the period 1341–48 was of

³⁹ A. Furió, 'Reproducción familiar y reproducción social: familia, herencia y mercado de la tierra en el País Valenciano en la Baja Edad Media', in F. García González (ed.), *Tierra y familia en la España meridional, siglos XIII–XIX. Formas de organización doméstica y reproducción social* (1998), pp. 25–43.

⁴⁰ Data for 1334 in this town is weak: the notarial deeds are only available for to the last two months of the year, during which up to 7 livestock contracts were registered. In 1335, with 11 months documented, the sources provide 27 acts.

intense activity, with peaks by the central years of the decade: Monells registered 128 contracts in 1344, and Caldes 132 in 1346.⁴¹

The catastrophic mortality of 1348 and the abandoning of many *masos* resulted in severe contraction of the livestock market. In Monells and Caldes, this activity was reduced to approximately one-fifth of the turnover that was being achieved before the Black Death. In the notarial office of the latter town only 25 deeds were registered in 1350 whilst in Monells in 1353, 37 were recorded. This trend stretched throughout the decade after the Plague and is seen, albeit with some local differences, for the whole of the territory under study. The early 1360s saw a recovery in activity. Aggregated data for the set of notaries suggest a rise at the beginning of the decade (1360–61), and another in the latter part of the decade.

It is noticeable that the four cycles for which significant – but relatively short – increases in commercial livestock activity is detected (1332–34, 1341–48, 1361 and 1366–69) coincide with short crises, during which existing literature has demonstrated the rise of grain prices, wheat shortages and famines, spread of disease and mortality, and periods of warfare.

A sharp increase in the number of contracts is seen shortly before and during 1333, known as ‘lo mal any primer’, a year in which severe drought combined with a crisis of cereal distribution, the consequences of which were prolonged to 1334, with a significant rise in agricultural prices.⁴² There are also well-known reports of droughts, bad harvests and scarcity preceding 1348, which would have weakened the population in Europe before it was decimated by the Black Death.⁴³ In particular, the periods 1340–41 and 1345–47 would have been of years of crisis in the food supply.⁴⁴

Difficulties persisted after the Plague. The ‘mortaldat dels infants’ of 1362 had been preceded by a grain crisis on a continental scale between 1360 and 1362.⁴⁵ Although we have no specific troubles documented in the production or distribution of cereals by the end of that decade, episodes of war between Aragon and Castile, and the increased fiscal pressure by the Crown, could have brought difficulties to the countryside. The incursions by military companies hired

⁴¹ Boost of the livestock market in this same period was also assessed by Guilleré, *Girona*, I, p. 374.

⁴² P. Orti Gost, ‘El forment a la Barcelona baixmedieval: preus, mesures i fiscalitat (1283–1345)’, *Anuario de Estudios medievales*, 22 (1992), pp. 415; T. López Pizcueta, ‘El ‘mal any primer’: alimentación de los pobres asistidos en la Pia Almoina de Barcelona: 1333–1334’, in *Actes del Ier Col·loqui d’Història de l’Alimentació a la Corona d’Aragó* (2 vols, 1995), I, pp. 613–23; P. Benito i Monclús and J. Maltas i Montoro, ‘Fams immortalitzades. El “mal any primer” (1333–1334) dins l’annalistica catalana de la baixa edat mitjana’, in G. Castelnovo and S. Victor (eds), *L’Histoire à la source: actes, comptes, enregistres (Catalogne, Savoie, Italie, XIIe–XVe siècle). Mélanges offerts à Christian Guilleré* (2 vols, 2017), I, pp. 503–20; J. Maltas i Montoro, “Del cot fet per lo senyor infant en Pere en la ciutat de Leyda”. Una iniciativa general para Cataluña contra la hambruna de 1334’, in L. Palermo, A. Fara and P. Benito (eds), *Políticas*

contra el hambre y la carestía en la Europa medieval (2018), pp. 81–119.

⁴³ J. Valdeón, ‘La crisis del siglo XIV en Castilla: Revisión del problema’, *Revista de la Universidad de Madrid*, 79 (1971), pp. 169–72.

⁴⁴ The drought in the summer of 1339 implied new scarcity in 1339–40. Still an important increase in the prices of cereal is documented by 1345, that would lead to a crisis of supplies during the two following years. See J. Càceres Nevot, ‘La participació del consell municipal en l’aprovisionament cereal a la ciutat de Barcelona, (1301–1430)’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Barcelona, 1999), pp. 133 and ff., and Benito i Monclús, P., ‘Crisis de subsistència i polítiques frumentàries a la Barcelona medieval’, in M. Renom (ed.), *Proveir Barcelona: el municipi i l’alimentació de la ciutat, 1329–1930* (2016), p. 30.

⁴⁵ B. Sharp, *Famine and scarcity in late medieval and early modern England* (2016), pp. 93–4 and J. Drendel,

by Peter III of Aragon into the surrounding territories of Les Gavarres in 1365, and by Castilian partisan troops in 1368–69, are all well documented.⁴⁶ Both forays by these *companyies estranyes* fostered episodes of violence with the local population, damage to houses and infrastructure, and most likely, looting of crops.⁴⁷ On Saint Stephen's day in 1365, for instance, the notary of Caldes, Dalmau Jaspert, testified through a deed that more than 15,000 men had ridden through the territory led by a certain “deventera del pillatge”, quod dominus rex eis concesserat de omnibus bonis et rebus que et quas invenire possent extra forcias.⁴⁸

The correlation between increasing periods of activity in the livestock market and short crises, largely related to dearth, offers insight into how livestock rearing and pastoral husbandry fitted within peasant economies. Economists of developing countries today have observed that food shortages often lead peasant families to raise money from their own livestock.⁴⁹ Actors are pushed to enter the market to sell or mortgage their domestic animals in order to acquire grain. In agricultural economies, livestock can serve as a buffer to overcome grain shortages, a phenomenon which may explain the tendency to resort to this market in times of insufficient harvests, rising agricultural prices or endogenous economic difficulties on the *masos*. The latter was the particular case of a sale of a donkey between the Reig brothers of Sant Cebrià dels Alls in 1341.⁵⁰ The salesman, Pere, who was about to enter the Campins *mas* in Cruïlles as the new husband of its heiress, alleged that he had nothing to eat and that, given the great *inopia* of his living, was obliged to sell the animal to his relative for a price of 50s. But beyond any specific case, we must also explain the correlation between crisis and the rise of the livestock market more generally, taking into account the contracts and the types of animals involved.

The peasants who, in the context of pasture shortages and rising fodder prices, acted as lenders in animal leases could have been attempting to unburden their own costs of guarding the animals. But what were the incentives of the borrowers? It has previously been stressed that some *comandes* were in reality a mechanism through which livestock were mortgaged. In other cases, a fictitious purchase of the animals was followed by a *comanda* by which the seller would continue to look after them. But the evidence shows that most of these operations must have involved, effectively, a temporary delivery of new animals to the stock of a *mas*.⁵¹ Although pastoral husbandry was a structural activity that allowed for a regular source of income, it

Note 45 *continued*

‘Les disettes en Provence’, in M. Bourin, J. Drendel and F. Menant (eds), *Les disettes dans la conjoncture de 1300 en Méditerranée occidentale* (2011), pp. 263–75.

⁴⁶ Some references to the former incidents are found in AHG, Notaria de Caldes-Llagostera, CL 71, f. 100v–101r (1365–XII-24); CL 71, f. 102r (1365–XII-25); CL 70, f. 396v–397v (1366–I-5); CL 72, f. 126v–127r (1366–VIII-5), and to the latter, in AHG, Notaria de Caldes-Llagostera, CL 583, f. 20r (1368–VIII-14) i CL 583, f. 45v (1368–XII-11). Under the same circumstances, in Monells, on August 1368 an ordination was decreed for which anyone having a window on the town defensive wall itself was to repurpose it as an arrowslit, along with forbidding the circulation of swine through the streets of the town. See AHG, Notaria de Monells, Mn

215 (1368–VIII-30).

⁴⁷ AHG, Notaria de Caldes-Llagostera, CL 76, f. 39v–40r (1367–I-25)

⁴⁸ AHG, Notaria de Caldes-Llagostera, CL 71, f. 102r (1365–XII-26). For the consequences of the entry of these military companies see M. Sánchez Martínez, “‘Les villes’ de Catalogne et les Grandes Compagnies (1365–1366)”, in Ch. Raynaud (ed.), *Villes en guerre XIVe – Xve siècles* (2008), pp. 43–62.

⁴⁹ H. Binswanger and J. McIntire, ‘Behavioral and material determinants of production relations in land-abundant tropical agriculture’, *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 36, 1 (1987), pp. 73–99.

⁵⁰ AHG, Notaria de Monells, Mn 165 (1341–I-31).

⁵¹ See note 24.

could also become a contingent activity in difficult times. Livestock required less investment in time and resources than crops; herding and maintaining animals could be assigned to the less productive members of the *mas* such as children and the elderly; it was less affected by dearth, as most animals could adapt to several types of vegetation available; and it was a more practical activity in times of attack and uncertainties.⁵²

III

The trends in livestock leasing indicate the development of a strong and active market for livestock. These animals could be sold or, more often, leased by peasants who then tended and fattened them, and took the ancillary products that they produced. The trends in activity in this market for leasing livestock, the times at which it appears most intense, and fluctuations in the type of animals leased, strongly indicate that sedentary pastoral husbandry was a dynamic response by peasants to short-term crisis.

In fourteenth-century Les Gavarres peasants made decisions to diversify their investments in order to guarantee the continuity of their *mas* or even their own survival.⁵³ This is assessed through the types of animals chosen. The next paragraphs deal with the sheep and goats that appear to have been closely connected with the strategies for mitigating cyclical hardships. These animals were predominantly traded through *comandes* and fattened for market.

Domestic ovi-caprids (goats and sheep) are well adapted to long dry seasons and to shrublands, which are the main features of this coastal Mediterranean habitat. They provided regular milk and, eventually, hides and meat. The latter, from ram and buck, was consumed by the urban lower classes. Wool was mostly supplied by ewes, which were the great majority in flocks. This was the result of a deliberate process of selection to create flocks of a size appropriate to the land-ownership structure and the ecosystem.⁵⁴

Sheep and goats appear in Les Gavarres as a business operated locally, often by intermediary inhabitants of the towns, and by well-off peasants. This specific market did not involve significant concentration of capital. Unlike the market for other animals, in which capital concentration was more intense, in Caldes one man, Simó Prat, managed to monopolize 8 per cent of sheep and goats *comandes* (12 of 150) during the 1340s. The rest of the contracts took place among local petty operators.⁵⁵

The origin of the livestock borrowers indicates that there was a high propensity to place goats in steep areas, while sheep were grazed in all habitats, although preferably in flat zones

⁵² A. Riera Melis, 'La ramaderia pagesa als comtats catalans (segles IX–XI)', *Estudis d'Història Agrària*, 17 (2004), pp. 751–64.

⁵³ In extremely adverse circumstances, it is known that peasants could even decide to reduce the cultivated area, allocating all the grain available for their own food and for the supply of livestock. In 1358, an entry relating to a private account of Bonanat Vila, of Cassà, and drawn up on the occasion of an outstanding debt he had with his neighbor Pere Sala, revealed that in

1349, for instance, no one ploughed the fields in the region including, apparently, those who had oxen to do so. See AHG, Notaria de Caldes-Llagostera, CL 55, f. 72r–72v (1358-I-22).

⁵⁴ J. Medrano Adán and M. L. Cercós Vallés, 'La crisis bajomedieval en las sierras turolenses, un modelo de análisis local (Puertomingalvo, 1400–1500)', *Anuario de estudios medievales*, 34, 1 (2004), pp. 237–8.

⁵⁵ Sales i Favà, 'Crèdit i morositat', pp. 379–87.

such as fallow land with nearby cereal crops. Perhaps to prevent conflicts arising from trespass, the number of sheep delivered to each *mas* of the flat lands was generally small. In Caldes, of 75 contracts that included goats during the period under study, the animals were delivered to *masos* in Caulès 11 times, 8 in Lloret, 7 in Santa Seclina and 6 in Vidreres (a total of 32 cases, 42.6 per cent). These scarcely populated parishes stretched through the steep hills of the Ardenyes, adjacent to Les Gavarres. This pattern is also reproduced in the other four localities under study.

Goats are voracious animals which could easily come into conflict with agriculture; they were a specialization of the mountain *masos*, where they had access to shrubland.⁵⁶ They are also the most resilient of all documented breeds.⁵⁷ As shown in Table 4 for Caldes de Malavella, transactions involving these animals, best adapted to adverse conditions, and in particular to droughts, increased in critical periods: the dearth of the 1340s and the onset of the Plague (goats account for 49 per cent of the animals leased in 1345, 43 per cent in 1348, and 46 per cent in 1350) and the troubled period of the late 1360s (with 40 per cent in 1367).⁵⁸ Data from Caldes and Monells, where the samples are most robust, indicate that the number of goats in each remittance was between 7 and 16 per cent higher than that of sheep.⁵⁹ No significant alterations in these proportions were observed throughout the period studied.

Although goats were particularly traded during periods of crisis, these periods also saw an increase in transactions of ovi-caprid herds as a whole, as sheep and goats were often involved in the same transaction (Table 5, from index n. 86.3 to 130).⁶⁰ It is clear that peasants responded to a series of poor consecutive harvests (1340s) or to the desolate scenario of the years after the Black Death, in which labour was in short supply, by resorting to ovi-caprids. Thus, some families chose a type of production that required less investment in labour and time, and which also did not depend as much on forage as other animals did, for they could be fed with the vegetation of the garrigue and at the margins of cropland. In the case of Monells, for example, the herds traded contained an average of 16 head of livestock between 1330 and 1337, whilst between 1340 and 1348 the average climbed to 22.5. Table 5 illustrates the upward trend in the volume of these remittances, followed by declines once the crises had subsided.

Assuming the enlargement of the herds after the Plague, with the available documentation and for this same period – when in principle less productive lands were employed as pastures – it cannot be proven that these were occupied by more ovi-caprids overall (Table 4). The increase in ovi-caprids after the Black Death was, strictly, of the size of the herds. Sheep and goats accounted for 41.9 per cent of all animals traded in Caldes between 1331 and 1349,

⁵⁶ By 1513, the Castilian humanist and agronomist Alonso de Herrera, indicated that 'quien quisiere tener éste ganado guarde d-ella qualsequier arboledas y lugares sembrados, que la cabra es muy comedera y golosa', and advised that they ought to be grazed in mountain pastures. See A. de Herrera, *Libro de agricultura que es de labrança y criança* (1539), f. 154v.

⁵⁷ Herrera underlined that 'por comer de todas las yervas en los años fortunosos se sostenien muy bien y mejor que los otros ganados' and further commenting 'que ninguna cabra se vida muerta de hambre, que de

todo comen'. Ibid.

⁵⁸ In Caldes de Malavella, data for only 2 months of 1345 is available, for 10 months of 1348, whilst the whole year is available in 1350. The deeds corresponding to 11 months are usable for 1367.

⁵⁹ The documented flocks of sheep, goat or of both breeds range from 11 to 20 heads depending on the town, and rarely exceeded 40 individuals.

⁶⁰ Only the herds transferred through a *comanda* (the great majority) have been taken into account.

TABLE 4. Proportion of marketed domestic animals in Caldes de Malavella (1332–69)

	<i>Oxen</i>	<i>Cows and bovines</i>	<i>Equines</i>	<i>Sheep</i>	<i>Goats</i>	<i>Swine</i>	<i>Others</i>	<i>Total</i>
	n. (%)	n. (%)	n. (%)	n. (%)	n. (%)	n. (%)	n. (%)	n. (%)
1331–34	8 (2.9)	38.5 (14)	29 (10.5)	78 (28.3)	30 (10.9)	90 (32.7)	2 (0.7)	275.5
1335–39	38 (6.2)	78 (12.7)	80.5 (13.1)	175 (28.5)	70 (11.4)	163.5 (26.6)	10 (1.6)	615
1340–44	61 (4)	179.5 (11.9)	152.5 (10.1)	438 (29.0)	185 (12.3)	475 (31.5)	17 (1.1)	1508
1345–49	48 (3)	166.5 (10.2)	121 (7.4)	345 (21.2)	420 (25.8)	516 (31.7)	10 (0.6)	1626.5
1350–54	40 (6.8)	136.5 (23.2)	33 (5.6)	83 (14.1)	110 (18.7)	176 (29.9)	11 (1.9)	589.5
1355–59	29 (7.8)	88 (23.7)	41 (11)	116 (31.2)	60 (16.1)	38 (10.2)	0 (0)	372
1360–64	26 (7.8)	56.5 (16.9)	35 (10.5)	129 (38.6)	16 (4.8)	72 (21.5)	0 (0)	334.5
1365–69	48 (5.7)	173 (20.5)	61 (7.2)	237 (28.1)	188 (22.3)	123.5 (14.6)	13 (1.5)	843.5

Source: AHG, Notarial registers of Caldes-Llagostera.

TABLE 5. Evolution of the size of ovi-caprine deliverances (1330–69) (index n. 16=100)

	<i>Caldes de Malavella</i>	<i>Cassà de la Selva</i>	<i>Monells</i>	<i>Corçà</i>	<i>Sant Feliu de Guíxols</i>	<i>Total</i>
1330–1339	97.5	61.3	100	No data	No data	86.3
1340–1349	98.1	No data	140.6	No data	116.3	118.3
1350–1359	135.6	118.8	No data	125	140.6	130.0
1360–1370	120.6	75.6	94.4	118.1	138.8	109.5

Source: AHG, Notarial registers of Cassà de la Selva, Caldes de Malavella, Sant Feliu de Guíxols, Monells and Corçà.

and they experienced an insignificant rise between 1350 and 1369, when they accounted for 43.4 per cent of the total number of animals. In Monells, the number of ovi-caprids declined as a proportion of the total animals grazed after the Black Death, from 65.6 per cent in 1330–49 to 43.6 per cent in 1350–69.

Moreover, the intensification of ovi-caprids breeding by some peasants, perhaps in preference to arable agriculture, was not a general pattern. Rather it applied specifically in certain circumstances in which cultivation of the *mas* was especially difficult, as for lone widows, adolescents and orphans, and the elderly. For example, in Caldes, of the 79 women who appear alone as borrowers of livestock during the period under scrutiny, 59 (75 per cent) did so during one of

the four mentioned periods of subsistence crisis or conflict.⁶¹ Most of these women acted by themselves because they had been widowed or because their husbands were unfit to work on the farmstead.⁶²

Thus, alterations to the types of production pursued during short crises were not consolidated in the long term. This was due in large part to ecological and institutional conditions which discouraged the growth of livestock beyond certain limits: fragile coexistence with agriculture in a land of poor soils, the dispersed nature of plots belonging to a single household, fees imposed on access to woods and waste controlled by territorial lords (*emprius*) in Les Gavarres, along with the overall scarcity of communal land (*deveses*) for pasture. This makes a sharp contrast with northern Europe, where during the second half of the fourteenth century the decrease in available labour and the fall in cereal prices caused by the demographic catastrophe of the Black Death led to a contraction in the land under arable cultivation, and an increase in pastoral husbandry.⁶³ The result was the shift by both peasants and lords from labour-intensive arable land to pastures and pastoral agriculture.

Such a radical change in patterns of production might be convincing for the northern-Atlantic Europe.⁶⁴ However, in Mediterranean Iberia, especially away from the Pyrenees, changes were likely gradual and in dialogue with cultivation. Still, from the data analysed, it is clear that crisis had also an impact on the types of specific contracts chosen, either as purchases or *comandes*. This is particularly apparent with the plague of 1348, and in the markets to the west of Les Gavarres.

As noted above, in all five localities, most peasants involved in the livestock market chose to tend the animals *in comanda* instead of purchasing them outright. This was a general trend in north-eastern Catalonia in the late middle ages. Instead, purchases were restricted to the most valuable animals (oxen, cows, equines). The cost of the latter generally had to be met in a short period of time. An unequal balance between purchases and *comandes* is thus to be found in the sources prior to 1348.

The Plague marked a change of strategy on the western slopes of Les Gavarres. From that period on the purchasing of animals became rare in the markets of Cassà and Caldes. In Caldes, between 1349 and 1369 – the last year with data available – it can be estimated that only four purchases on average were recorded annually, with never more than 10 estimated purchases in one single year, whereas before the Black Death there had been on average 35 sales of livestock annually, accounting for 11.7 per cent of the deeds referred to livestock during this period, after the Black Death these purchases accounted for 33.7 per cent of all transactions.

⁶¹ In Caldes, women alone borrowed livestock in the following occasions: 1333 (2 contracts), 1335 (4), 1336 (5), 1341 (5), 1342 (6), 1343 (3), 1344 (12), 1346 (8), 1347 (11), 1348 (4), 1349 (1), 1350 (1), 1351 (5), 1354 (2), 1358 (1), 1365 (1), 1367 (3), 1368 (1) and 1369 (4).

⁶² Discussion about single women and specialization on livestock can also be found in Slavin, 'Peasant livestock husbandry', pp. 19–20.

⁶³ See N. Morard, 'L'élevage dans les Préalpes fri-bourgeoises: des ovins aux bovins (1350–1550)', in

G. Fournier (ed.), *L'élevage et la vie pastorale dans les montagnes de l'Europe* (1984), pp. 15–26 and B. Campbell, *English seigniorial agriculture, 1250–1450* (2000).

⁶⁴ G. Sivéry, 'Le passage de l'élevage extensif à l'élevage intensif et l'évolution des paysages forestiers dans le Sud-Est du Hainaut à la fin du Moyen Âge', *Hommes et Terres du Nord*, 2–3 (1986), pp. 172–6 and G. Bois, *La gran depresión medieval: siglos XIV–XV. El precedente de una crisis sistémica* (2001), pp. 79–80.

Although the data is more fragmentary for Cassà, it is worth mentioning that, during the period 1328–42, purchases constituted 22 per cent of all transactions of domestic animals. After a documentary gap between 1343 and 1348, from 1349 onward purchases virtually disappeared from the local market.

Comandes may have been an arrangement better suited to *masos* that, post-1348, were in the process of resizing.⁶⁵ These were generally also short of labour due to depopulation caused by the catastrophe.⁶⁶ The *comanda* was a cheaper and more flexible option than selling, allowing the lessee the use of the livestock to obtain derived products and, after remunerating its owner, to return it without a significant investment. In addition, Caldes and Cassà experienced a greater influx of capital from Girona from an early stage and the livestock business was also concentrated in fewer hands.⁶⁷ These actors would also have preferred *comandes* to selling, since the former was a contract by which the peasantry tended the animals with no expense on the part of the dealer, and were ultimately reintroduced into the commercial circuit supplying meat and other products to the city.

On the northern slopes of the Gavarres, and to a lesser extent also in the Vall d'Aro, the solution adopted after the Plague was one of continuity. Here a certain equilibrium was reached between purchases and leases, with some years even registering a higher number of the former contracts than the latter.⁶⁸ The appearance of a significant number of sales reflects that there indeed existed buyers, generally peasants of servile status, inclined to deal with the relatively high cost of animals such as oxen or mules in a single installment. It has to be taken into account that most debt notes in Monells and elsewhere settled a single payment term (193 of 234 contracts), which did not usually exceed half a year.

Different amount of purchases between zones could be an indication that the *masos* on the Empordà were positioned to act more vigorously in the new post-plague era than those of La Selva (although the latter appear less integrated with urban demands). Further studies on the consequences of the Black Death in the towns and *masos* of the region of Girona, could shed further light on the extent to which this was true cross the region.⁶⁹

This section has highlighted the important role of livestock in peasant economies during the fourteenth century. Although many of the animal products were destined for urban

⁶⁵ Ferrer i Mallol, M. T., 'Establiments de masos després de la Pesta Negra', in M. T. Ferrer i Mallol, J. Mutgé i Vives and M. Riu i Riu (eds), *El mas català durant l'Edat Mitjana i la Moderna (segles IX– XVIII). Aspectes arqueològics, històrics, geogràfics, arquitectònics i antropològics. Actes de Col·loqui celebrat a Barcelona del 3 al 5 de novembre de 1999* (2001), pp. 189–241.

⁶⁶ Evidence is provided by A. Serra Clota, 'Reaccions senyoriales a la crisi agrària a Catalunya, a la baixa edat mitjana: els remences', *Anuario de Estudios Medievales*, 29 (1999), pp. 1018.

⁶⁷ See L. Sales i Favà, 'Crédito y redes urbanas: el caso de Girona y las pequeñas ciudades de su entorno en el siglo XIV', in D. Carvajal de la Vega, J. Añíbarro

Rodríguez and I. Vitores Casado (eds), *Redes sociales y económicas en el mundo bajomedieval* (2011), pp. 129–50 and Sales i Favà, 'Crédito i morositat', pp. 286–449.

⁶⁸ For example, in 1357 and 1361, in Monells, more purchases than *comandes* are detected. Eleven purchases and 7 *comandes* are registered throughout 1357, whilst in 1361 (with data from 9 months), the sources provide 48 purchases and only 27 *comandes*.

⁶⁹ See J. Trenchs Òdena, 'Documentos pontificios sobre la peste negra en la diócesis de Gerona', *Cuadernos de trabajos de la Escuela Española de Arqueología e Historia en Roma*, 14 (1980), pp. 183–230 and C. Guilléré, 'La peste noire a Gérone (1348)', *Annals de l'Institut d'Estudis Gironins*, 27 (1984), pp. 87–161.

consumption, this asset was originally traded in small towns, where it shaped a very active market. For peasants, crisis fostered different transformations of this economic activity. This included dedicating more resources overall to livestock, increasing emphasis on certain breeds in different regions, and a tendency to use flexible contracts. It is likely that these strategies were adopted to help farmsteads overcome periods of scarcity of other resources such as crops and labour, although without consolidating its pre-eminence in the long term.

IV

In 1332 Gilabert de Cruïlles, the local lord of the eponymous town, invited over to his castle the count of Empúries to enjoy a meat feast. This same count, Pere d'Aragó, had taken part in a reception (*comviviolo*) five years earlier that had been organized by Ot de Montcada in the fortress of the latter in Caldes de Malavella. In this gathering the source tells us that a whole calf was served.⁷⁰ During the first years of the 1340s, Guillem Ramon de Montcada – possibly the brother of the above-mentioned Ot – visited the town of Caldes several times in order to bathe (*balneabat se*) in the house of one Bonanat Boïga. A local tradesman, Boïga had a thermal pool inside his own residence. The hot spring water, still used today in local spa resorts, emanated from underground. During his stays, the convalescent lord also made sure that the local butcher supplied him with enough meat.⁷¹ These and numerous other available examples provide information about the consumption patterns of the nobility along with the role of lavish meat consumption as a social marker among higher social strata.⁷² But as for the interest of this article, these particular cases reveal that Les Gavarres and the surrounding territories were a well-stocked area of domestic animals. Livestock served not only to fill the table of the feudal lords in their sporadic stays in their domains, but principally to supply the urban markets and also to feed the peasant population.

This article has demonstrated a system through which leased livestock were kept on *masos* for commercial purposes, i.e. to be sent to urban markets. Overcoming the dissociation between arable agriculture and livestock breeding so often attributed to Mediterranean farming, peasants managed to consolidate a scheme of custody, fattening and marketing of animals that in Les Gavarres acquired significant dimensions. It must be acknowledged that this activity was not free of conflict, either of ecology, spatial coexistence with cultivation, or of overlapping labour cycles, in addition to droughts, crises and pandemics during the challenging fourteenth century.

In this respect, livestock rearing could have taken on a convertible nature. That is, the peasantry was more or less actively engaged in it depending on broader climatic and social circumstances, in addition to the specific circumstances of each *mas*. The peasantry could also modify the type of livestock raised depending on the life cycle of the *mas* or perhaps

⁷⁰ See, respectively, AHG, Notaria de Monells, Mn 162 (1332-III-30) and Notaria de Caldes-Llagostera, CL 3, f. 92r (1329-V-8).

⁷¹ AHG, Notaria de Caldes-Llagostera, CL 21, f. 122v (1341-XI-26); CL 25, f. 110v (1343-XI-18).

⁷² A. Riera Melis, 'Jerarquía social y desigualdad alimentaria en el Mediterráneo Noroccidental en la Baja Edad Media. La cocina y la mesa de los estamentos privilegiados', *Acta Historica et Archaeologica Mediaevalia*, 16–17 (1995–1996), pp. 181–205.

on changing market demand. The mechanics of the *comanda de bestiar*, which allowed both lending one's own livestock and tending those of others, was the legal solution that facilitated the entire development of this system.

The needs of the peasantry to diversify their investments converged with the favorable conditions of the region for livestock rearing, including proximity to market and the integration of marketing into the peasant economy. In addition to acting as livestock borrowers, peasant families were also the regular clientele of commodities and money markets. In practice, these markets are not indistinguishable from one another, as shown for example by the cash loans which accompanied the assignment of animals in *comandes*. These were complex operations that most likely resulted in the strengthening of the customer-supplier relationships.

This study of livestock rearing has also uncovered the means by which the unfree Catalan peasantry may have been able to find some measure of economic autonomy. To some degree, livestock grazing escaped the limitations imposed by lords over other economic activities, most notably the land market and pawning. In this respect, access to the market and the quota of livestock grazed on each *mas* can also be used as a marker for assessing social inequalities within peasant communities, along with other indices usually chosen by the scholarship, such as the size of dowries and land holding. The possession of a significant amount of stock improved the well-being of families. In fact, evidence from this territory shows that the amount of livestock accumulated by a few *masos* allowed them to lease surplus animals to the neediest neighbours.⁷³

⁷³ As we have assessed in L. Sales i Favà 'Mercado ganadero y estratificación social en el medio rural catalán (s.XIV)', *Historia Agraria* (forthcoming, August 2022).