

## BOOK REVIEW

**Milan Pajic**, *Flemish Textile Workers in England, 1331–1400. Immigration, Integration and Economic Development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. xvii + 332pp. 1 figure. 4 maps. 27 tables. Bibliography. £100.00 hbk. £95.00 ebk. doi: [10.1017/9781108774215](https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108774215)  
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As long ago as 1655, Thomas Fuller praised fourteenth-century Flemish immigrants to England for ‘bringing industry and wealth along with them’, a view supported by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century historians such as William Ashley. Subsequent economic historians, however, have mostly been sceptical of the impact of Flemish immigration on the English cloth industry, while the absence of numerical data has hindered any critical reassessment. Although recent research, most notably the ‘England’s Immigrants 1330–1550’ project at the University of York, has highlighted the diversity of the medieval immigrant experience, this is the first detailed study of Flemish immigrants to England in the fourteenth century. Pajic’s work examines the period from the exile of numerous textile workers from Flanders in 1351 to the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381.

One of the outstanding strengths of this book is Pajic’s ability to combine documentary research from both continental Europe and England to provide new insights into the nature and extent of the Flemish immigration. Archival materials in Belgium and France, including sentences of banishment of rebels from Flanders and the city accounts of Ghent and Bruges, are cross-referenced with English sources, to reveal that of more than 1,200 artisans who immigrated to England between 1351 and 1381, at least 200 had been banished after the rebellion of 1351. Pajic charts how Flemish weavers became increasingly discontented in the face of social inequalities and lack of political representation, resulting in major revolts and the banishment of numerous individuals who subsequently received asylum from Edward III. In addition to being offered royal protection, favourable economic conditions, including the availability of high-quality wool and established urban networks, drew the migrants to England.

Pajic focuses particularly on London, Colchester and Great Yarmouth, using the plentiful judicial records of the courts of the two East Anglian boroughs, and the plea and memoranda rolls and letter books in London. There is also detailed analysis of the immigrants in other urban centres including Boston, Bristol, Lincoln, Lynn, Norwich, Winchester and York. Drawing on borough court rolls as well as documentation in The National Archives, notably the courts of King’s Bench and Common Pleas and the particulars of customs and alnage accounts, the study examines to what extent the immigrants became integrated within their local economies and societies. Pajic finds that London attracted the highest number of

immigrants, although these seem to have been primarily those of better standing from Ghent, Bruges and Ypres. They produced higher-quality cloths and were the only group in England to organize themselves into a separate guild. Colchester, positioned on the east coast with strong trade links to Flanders, proximity to London and with no occupational institutions that could exclude outsiders from participation, also attracted large numbers of immigrants. Flemish and Brabantine textile workers and their families may have made up to 10 per cent of the town's population in the 1350s. Examining the social relationships and business networks of the immigrants across their urban bases reveals connections with English sheep farmers, drapers and merchants, which enabled the Flemings to market their cloth. Women from the Low Countries who migrated to England engaged in brewing and retailing ale, and in prostitution, as well as working within the cloth industry. The massacre of Flemings in London in June 1381 during the Peasants' Revolt is seen as a turning point, reducing the numbers and importance of textile workers from the Low Countries in England. Although immigration continued, artisans were now engaged in the production of beer and ale and in leather working, rather than in textiles.

The key question addressed in this book is how the immigrant textile workers influenced the development of the English woollen cloth industry which grew exponentially from the mid-fourteenth century. When the commons in parliament petitioned in 1333 to protect foreign cloth-workers from arrest, they believed that the immigrants could 'teach the people of this land to work the cloth'. Pajic explores the quantities and types of cloth produced by the immigrants, and their interactions and occasional confrontations with the native population. The immigrants brought with them not only their craft skills but also practices in organizing manufacturing, through elements of a putting-out system, that were subsequently to be adopted by English clothiers in the fifteenth century. Pajic offers a major new contribution to our understanding of the role of Flemish immigrants in the growth of the English textile industry in the fourteenth century, as well as offering a valuable historical case-study to inform current debates about immigration and integration.

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