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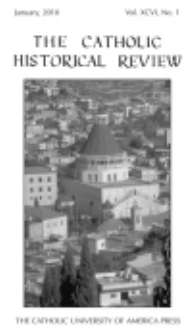
Who Benefited from Tithe Revenues in Late-Renaissance Bresse?

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WHO BENEFITED FROM TITHE REVENUES IN LATE-RENAISSANCE BRESSE?

BY

MATTHEW VESTER*

This examination of the practical functioning of tithe collection and of who specifically benefited from tithe payments shows that structures of ecclesiastical and secular domination continued to be highly fragmented during the late Renaissance. Quantitative and qualitative analysis of episcopal visitation records and other sources from the Francophone province of Bresse reveals, among other things, that the fiscal and political impact of tithe payments was quite complex, that local priests were often not the major beneficiaries, and that tithe grants could serve as a mechanism permitting sovereigns to tax church revenues belonging to actors subject to other sovereigns.

Keywords: absolutism; church revenue; clerical compensation; tithes; visitation records

Tithes figured significantly in the local economic, political, and religious landscapes of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe. Curiously, however, few studies have examined precisely how the general mechanics of tithe collection operated nor have they analyzed the ways in which the institution of the tithe reflected the structure of domination (both ecclesiastical and secular) in late Renaissance Europe. This article considers evidence from early-seventeenth-century visitation records in the province of Bresse (subject to the house of

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Savoy until 1601 and thereafter to the French crown) to elucidate how the tithe functioned in one particular area and to identify the range of political relationships implicit in tithe extraction. This investigation of who benefited from Bresse tithes, and how, raises new questions about the effective organization and application of political power in Europe as a whole. It underscores the degree to which local domination could be exercised by a variety of clerical and nonclerical actors, resulting in a power structure whose fragmentation continues to be underestimated in many histories of early-modern political culture.

Processes of tithe extraction (and resistance) shed some light on the specific nature of this political structure, highlighting its multipolarity and the variety of resources that it offered to actors of all stripes for the defense of their interests. A brief look at tithe payment practices in a few parts of Europe is followed by an examination of the economic and political context in Bresse during the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries, and then by a quantitative analysis of local tithe structures in c. 1613-14.

1. Tithe Payments in Some Other Parts of Late-Renaissance Europe

The organization of tithe payment and collection varied widely throughout premodern Europe and took place on multiple levels (from producer to collector, as well as transfers occurring from collectors either to owners and/or to representatives of other actors who had been granted the right to receive some or all of these tithe revenues). In Castile, the crown was supposed to receive a third of the tithe, but collection was problematic because of variations in annual harvests, evasion, and the difficulties of transporting payments in kind. There, the royal third was farmed out to the highest bidder, who paid his bid in advance to the treasury and then assumed the responsibility of collecting.¹ In the Nuremberg region some tithe revenues belonged to clerical institutions and others to laypeople. Three kinds of tithe payments existed there: the "great" tithe (on rye, wheat, barley, and oats), the small tithe (on millet, peas, hay, and flax), and the living tithe (on livestock).² Throughout Europe, the tithe was in reality subdivided into smaller tithes assessed on specific products.

¹Helen Nader, *Liberty in Absolutist Spain: The Habsburg Sale of Towns, 1516-1700* (Baltimore, 1990), p. 194.

²Lawrence P. Buck, "Opposition to Tithes in the Peasants' Revolt: A Case Study of Nuremberg in 1524," *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 4, no. 2 (1973), 11-22, here 12-13.

In early-modern Württemberg the tithe frequently belonged to the prince and was auctioned off to villagers who were able to estimate the likely size of the harvest. Sometimes groups of villagers interested in bidding would make arrangements beforehand with the local official (the *Schultheiss*) who organized the auctions “so that various interest groups each got their turn at offering the low bid.” Despite the official, thoroughly documented air of the auction process, “in fact the central government was being shortchanged.” But the tithe was a resource to which local factions felt entitled, and the power and prestige of the *Schultheiss* depended on his skill in balancing the interests of these factions.³

There have been few analyses of who actually received what from local tithe revenues. One scholar has suggested that in early-modern France most of the proceeds “went to the clerical hierarchy composed of bishops, archbishops, abbeys, monasteries, and seminaries,” while the local priest was “relatively short-changed by the tithe” and “got no more, and sometimes less, than one sixth.”⁴ As we shall see, such was not always the case in Bresse, although this precluded neither conflicts between priests and villagers over tithe payments nor disputes between parishioners and “the monasteries and urban collegiate churches that held the vast majority of the tithing rights.” In the Archdiocese of Lyon, such conflicts were never the result of rural priests “antagoniz[ing] their parishioners by authoritarian attempts to reform popular religion or popular culture,” since Tridentine reforms would only penetrate the rural parts of the archdiocese during the later seventeenth century.⁵

Tithes first had to be collected from peasant cultivators, a process that has also received scant attention from historians (see below for how this worked in Bresse). When secular lords had been given papal grants for revenues from this collection, these sums then had to be transferred from collectors to clergy representatives or secular officials. The process of assigning collectors and determining modes of payment was an important aspect of tithe politics. Negotiations sur-

³David Sabean, *Power in the Blood: Popular Culture and Village Discourse in Early Modern Germany* (New York, 1985), pp. 193–94.

⁴James C. Scott, “Resistance without Protest and without Organization: Peasant Opposition to the Islamic *Zakat* and the Christian Tithe,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 29, no. 3 (1987), 417–52, here 440.

⁵Philip Hoffman, *Church and Community in the Diocese of Lyon 1500–1789* (New Haven, 1984), pp. 69–70.

rounding the 1570 papal tithe grant to Venice, for example, took into account how the present grant might be used politically in future negotiations, how the assessment and collection was done, and even the precise language used to describe the grant.⁶ In France, where the crown also enjoyed a right to a portion of the tithe revenues, the receiver-general collected payments from the dioceses (once tributes in kind had been converted to cash) with the help of the provincial commissioners and had the money transported to Paris where the rents assigned to the clergy were paid. This involved the receiver in myriad financial interactions with the receivers of the city of Paris and other municipal authorities.⁷

But this extraction of wealth from producer to collector and from collector to ecclesiastical or secular fisci did not occur in an obstacle-free environment. Wherever tithes were collected in premodern Europe, their payment was also resisted. Some scholars have minimized this resistance,⁸ but in many places it was explicit and linked to multilateral regional politics. There were anti-tithe revolts in the Nuremberg area in 1524, and in 1590-91 the kingdom of Naples experienced a vast refusal by its peasantry to pay tithes and rents. In the Veneto, despite the fact that tithe revenues contributed importantly to the budget of the aristocratic republic, even nobles avoided payment.⁹

What is missing in the scholarship is a close examination of how the structure of tithe payments and tithe beneficiaries fit into a specific

⁶See *Nunziature di Venezia*, ed. Aldo Stella, [Fonti per la storia d'Italia 65], (Rome, 1963), 8:227-28, 271, 274, 420, 424.

⁷The first receivers of the French clergy were Lyonnais and were chosen "due to the financial primacy of the city of Lyon in the first half of the sixteenth century, and because the city on the Rhône was the center of financial operations for the French clergy with respect to Rome." Various fees for ecclesiastical paperwork were paid in Lyon, where members of the Italian banking community then transferred payments to Rome. See Claude Michaud, *L'Église et l'argent sous l'Ancien Régime: les receveurs généraux du clergé de France aux XVI^e-XVII^e siècles* (Paris, 1991), pp. 51, 60-61, 80-85.

⁸See Giles Constable, "Resistance to Tithes in the Middle Ages," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 13, no. 2 (1962), 172-85 and Piotr Górecki, *Parishes, Tithes, and Society in Earlier Medieval Poland c. 1100-c. 1250*, [Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 83], (Philadelphia, 1993), p. 116.

⁹Buck, "Opposition to Tithes," pp. 12, 18-20; Rosario Villari, *The Revolt of Naples*, trans. James Newell and John Marino (Cambridge, UK, 1993), pp. 37-38, 175-77; Giuseppe Del Torre, *Venezia e la Terraferma dopo la guerra di Cambrai: Fiscalità e amministrazione (1515-1530)* (Milan, 1986), p. 97.

local political environment during the late Renaissance.¹⁰ One area for which we have some information about how the tithe mediated political relations between local clergy and the secular ruler is the province of Bresse, located on the east bank of the Saône River between the Franche-Comté and Dauphiné. Bresse and the neighboring smaller province of Bugey in the Jura foothills were among the states ruled by the dukes of Savoy until 1601, when the Treaty of Lyon handed them over to the king of France in exchange for the Alpine marquisate of Saluzzo. Existing research on political relations between the clergy assembly of Bresse and Bugey and Duke Emanuel Filibert of Savoy during the later sixteenth century shows that the clergy of this area (located within the Archdiocese of Lyon¹¹) exercised considerable control over their own ecclesiastical revenues. Still, the clergy assembly willingly honored papal grants providing for the payment of a significant portion of these to the duke of Savoy, largely because of the military protection offered by the duke of Savoy during the period of the French wars of religion.¹² But what was the local political impact of such payments to secular rulers such as the duke of Savoy or the king of France? Answering this question requires a more detailed examination of tithes in Bresse during this period, which in turn invites preliminary consideration of the local economic and political context.¹³

¹⁰Most of the contributions in the volume *Les fluctuations du produit de la dîme. Conjoncture décimale et domaniale de la fin du Moyen Age au XVIII^e siècle*, ed. Joseph Goy and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie (Paris, 1972) use tithe records to construct a macro-level economic history of early-modern Europe. However, the contribution of J. Vogt ("Pour une étude sociale de la dîme. Esquisse de la tenure de la dîme en Alsace XVI^e-XVIII^e siècles") focuses on the social impact of tithe collection, looking at conflicts among those to whom tithe owners farmed out collection rights, disputes between co-owners of tithes, and the identities of tithe farmers; see esp. pp. 105-07, 123, 126-33.

¹¹Much of Bugey lay within the Diocese of Belley, whose bishop from 1536 to 1575 was Antoine II de La Chambre (member of one of the most illustrious Savoyard noble houses), followed from 1576 to 1604 by Jean-Geoffroy Ginod (a jurist from the Val d'Aosta), and then by Jean-Pierre Camus (1608-29). Very few records survive for the history of this diocese during this period; see Louis and Gabrielle Trenard, *Le diocèse de Belley* (Paris, 1978), and Louis Alloing, *Le diocèse de Belley: histoire religieuse des Pays de l'Ain* (Belley, 1938). The Diocese of Belley also included parishes located in Dauphiné and others located in Savoie; references in this article to ecclesiastical structures in "Bresse and Bugey" refer to the province of Bresse and those parts of Bugey located within the Archdiocese of Lyon.

¹²See Matthew Vester, "The Bresse Clergy Assembly and Tithe Grants, 1560-1580," *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 35, no. 3 (2004), 771-94; and *Id.*, "Perché l'autonomia istituzionale non significò meno tasse nella Bresse savoiarda (1560-1580)," *Quaderni storici*, 40, no. 1 (2005), 41-72.

¹³For older works on tithes in late-Renaissance and baroque France, see G. d'Avenel, "La dîme sous Richelieu," *Académie des sciences morales et politiques*, n.s., 28 (s.d.,

2. Economics and Politics in Late-Sixteenth-Century Bresse

Bresse seems to have been relatively better suited to agriculture than many of the other mountainous transalpine provinces that had been subject to the duke of Savoy prior to 1601. Grain from Bresse was transported not only to Lyon when food shortages struck there but also to other Savoyard provinces and even to Piedmont when necessary. The population of Bresse and Bugey was also large with respect to the rest of the transalpine domains, perhaps accounting for 200,000 inhabitants out of a total transalpine population of around 500,000.¹⁴ The rule in economic relations between the Lyonnais and Bresse was free exchange of grain, goods, and people, Lyon's 60,000 inhabitants (c. 1550) depending on grain imports from surrounding areas and Bressan peasants seeking opportunity in the city.¹⁵

Richard Gascon argued that Bresse and Bugey were favorably located geographically to benefit from the export of local products to Lyon and the transport of goods across its territory.¹⁶ Denise Turrel paints a different picture of the Bressan economy. She has emphasized the peripheral and divided status of Bresse, the southern portion of

1916?), 690–704 and Paul Viard, *Histoire de la dîme ecclésiastique en France au XVI^e siècle* (Lille, 1914). These studies do not analyze who specifically owned or benefited from tithes. For works focusing on the eighteenth century, see P. Gagnol and H. Marion, whose early-twentieth-century articles were reprinted in *La dîme ecclésiastique en France au 18^e siècle* (Geneva, 1974).

¹⁴Venetian ambassadors to Turin during Emanuel Filibert's reign estimated the population of the transalpine domains at 500,000. Beloch thinks that the population probably dropped 20 percent by 1600 or so, due to war and famine, and also estimates an average of about thirty-three inhabitants per square kilometer in these lands. He refers to a 1601 Venetian ambassador's report to suggest that the loss of Bresse, Bugey, and Gex to France during that year meant a population loss of 200,000; see Karl Julius Beloch, *Bevölkerungsgeschichte Italiens* (Berlin, 1961), 3:282–83. Denise Turrel identifies thirteen Bressan towns with more than 1000 inhabitants in 1561: in Montluel there were around 5400 inhabitants and about 4000 in Bourg, but the next most populous town had only 1400 inhabitants. In Bugey, the largest towns were Belley (with about 2100 inhabitants in 1670) and Seyssel (about 1200 inhabitants in 1605). There were about 4600 residents of Chambéry, the capital of the transalpine provinces, in 1561; see Denise Turrel, *Bourg en Bresse au 16^e siècle* (Paris, 1986), pp. 122–25, here 125n48.

¹⁵Turrel, *Bourg en Bresse*, p. 109; Timothy Watson, "The Lyon City Council, c. 1525–1575: Politics, Culture, Religion" (PhD dissertation, Oxford University, 1999), pp. 31, 44.

¹⁶Richard Gascon has documented the extensive commercial interactions among Bresse and Bugey and French, Imperial, and Swiss territories; see Gascon, *Grand commerce et vie urbaine au XVI^e siècle. Lyon et ses marchands (environs de 1520–environs de 1580)*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1971), 1:116–17, 165–67.

which was oriented toward Lyon and the western portion toward the Saône River. Turrel finds that the swampy province was “completely off of the beaten path” until the eighteenth century, due in part to the fact that the roads were so bad there that traffic was really only possible between May and September.¹⁷

Differences in these assessments of the sixteenth-century Bressan economy could be partly due to the changing fortunes of the Lyonnais economy during the sixteenth century. Of regional significance was the meltdown in the municipal finances of Lyon in 1557–58. King Henry II had increasingly relied on the good credit of the city to broker loans for him (underwritten by municipal taxes) for use during his wars against the Habsburgs. By the late 1550s, tax revenues were no longer sufficient to make interest payments to bondholders. The city had borrowed more (in the form of bond sales) than it could pay back. As a result, during the 1560s and 1570s Lyon lacked public confidence and was unable to reorganize a system of public credit, and the city was reduced to borrowing from wealthy individuals.¹⁸

The fiscal crisis of 1558 also had a political dimension. A central conflict in Lyonnais politics was between the merchant-dominated city council and the canon-counts of the chapter of St. Jean. After 1558 the city needed to create new taxes to fund its debt. A city council proposal for new excise taxes on merchandise sold in the city infuriated the clergy, since this would have burdened clerics who produced food and wine on their rural lands for sale in the city. The clergy accused the city council of creating an exemption regime that benefited sales of their own products (cloth, spices). In the end the clergy agreed to a new tax in exchange for exemptions for the products of clerical lands. “[The clergy] even went so far as to exploit this exemption by importing duty-free wine into Lyon and selling it at the tax-inflated price.”¹⁹

Because of these new taxes, commercial transit formerly carried by the Rhône was diverted, and the province of Bresse was bypassed: one alternate route for goods such as spices was Nice-Piedmont-Chambéry-Geneva. Thus, the financial-fiscal crisis in Lyon destabilized the Bressan economy. On the other hand, the decline of the Lyon fairs

¹⁷Turrel, *Bourg en Bresse*, pp. 26, 29, 110.

¹⁸Roger Doucet, *Finances municipales et crédit public à Lyon au XVI^e siècle* (Paris, 1937), pp. 75, 81.

¹⁹Hoffman, *Church and Community*, p. 17.

and the new tax burden had the effect of transferring some manufacturing activity (such as the production of dyed thread) to the Bressan countryside.²⁰

Bresse was part of the Archdiocese of Lyon, except for 1515–16 and 1521–35, when there was a bishopric at Bourg.²¹ From its origin, the city of Lyon had to contend with a powerful archbishop. In fact, the city was given legal autonomy by permission of the archbishop, Pierre de Savoie, in 1320. But since the king of France did not wish to see the archbishop become the head of an urban principality, especially in the territory of the old kingdom of Arles, he set about establishing jurisdictions near Lyon and eventually in the city (the *sénéchal*). Royal power grew in Lyon at the expense of the church, which lost most of its temporal power in the city over the course of the fifteenth century. As the Lyonnais clergy declined, a new mercantile oligarchy seized power in the city. By the early 1500s, “the clergy had almost no part in the political life of the city,” except on extraordinary occasions, after civic assemblies barred attendance by the clergy, and clerics were not invited to council elections. During the sixteenth century the city council regularly received royal exemptions from dues owed to the church. The archbishop remained an important national figure during the sixteenth century, but his official’s tribunal “was staffed largely by bourgeois officials and was subject to appeals to the *sénéchaussée*.” Complaints by the city council resulted in the suppression of the court under King Francis I in 1531, but it was “restored by Henri II in 1547 as a personal favour to the archbishop Hippolyte d’Este, and survived as an independent body until the outbreak of the religious wars.” Since there was no *parlement* in Lyon, “the most significant powers in the region were personal rather than institutional.” However, the weakening of ecclesiastical privileges and the archbishops’ frequent absences from the city during the sixteenth century created a power vacuum. Este was archbishop from 1540 to 1550 and was followed by François de Tournon (1550–62), Antoine d’Albon (1562–73), and Pierre d’Epinac (1574–99).²²

²⁰Doucet, *Finances municipales*, pp. 90–91. On the issue of trade routes, see Marc Brésard, *Les foires de Lyon au XV^e et XVI^e siècles* (Paris, 1914).

²¹Turrel, *Bourg en Bresse*, pp. 11, 97. In 1515 the bishop of Bourg was Louis de Gorrevod. On the delayed impact of Trent in the Lyonnais, see Hoffman, *Church and Community*.

²²Watson, *Lyon City Council*, pp. 10–11, 57, 79, 81–82; Jean-H. Mariéjol, *Charles-Emmanuel de Savoie duc de Nemours. Gouverneur du Lyonnais, Beaujolais et Forez (1567–1595)* (Paris, 1938), p. 3.

Although it may have lost political influence, the cathedral chapter of St. Jean “remained the richest proprietor in the region, and all Lyon’s collegiate and parish churches enjoyed significant income from real estate.” Property and tax disputes frequently arose between the clergy and the laity, especially renters of ecclesiastical land. As taxation levels increased after the 1540s, the clergy made a bid to reacquire its political role, portraying itself as the defender of the commoners against the merchant-dominated council and demanding the right to examine the city’s accounts. In December 1558 the clergy made an official accusation against the council and won the right to attend the council election. A compromise was reached in April 1559, the council agreeing “to respect the clergy’s traditional tax exemptions, to invite them to general assemblies of more than twelve notables, and to permit them to inspect the council’s accounts of the ‘deniers patrimoniaux.’” For its part, the clergy waived its right to attend the election. By the mid-1560s, “representatives of the upper clergy were also included in the Lyon *conseil d’état*, a new and important council of local notables” designed to reorganize Catholics in Lyon following the Protestant takeover of the city (1562–63). For Richard Gascon, the rapprochement between the urban elite and the clergy was a “miracle.”²³

Thus, despite some setbacks, “the canon-counts of Saint-Jean were, in fact, the preeminent lords of the region.” Evidence of their strong position in Bressan tithe structures (described below) reinforces this assessment. Within Bresse itself, political institutions were marked by local control and the absence of commanding leadership. The duke of Savoy appointed a governor (Laurent de Gorrevod for most of Emanuel Filibert’s reign), but his role was not highly visible. The capital of the province, Bourg, was slightly larger than other Bressan towns and barely attained the role of a regional relay node between the rest of Bresse and Chambéry. Youngsters from Bresse had to go to Chambéry to attend a *collège*. During the late-fifteenth century the dukes of Savoy differentiated Bourg from other Bressan towns by granting its syndics the ceremonial privilege of wearing green robes. By exercising this privilege, the Bourgeois simultaneously demonstrated their town’s role as regional capital and affirmed their allegiance to their sovereigns, since their green robes provided “an explicit reference and a pledge of fidelity to the Savoyard dynasty, through the constant commemoration of the Green Count [of Savoy, Amadeus VI, 1334–83].” The presence of

²³Watson, *Lyon City Council*, pp. 55, 58; Gascon cited in Hoffman, *Church and Community*, pp. 34–35.

a lower appellate court in the town and the construction of a fortress there in the 1570s further solidified Bourg's leading role in Bresse.²⁴

According to Jean-Pierre Gutton, few communities in early-modern Bresse had much in the way of communal property: usually there was no town hall, there were few or no archives, and there were elected officials only from time to time. The chief function of town leaders was tax collecting. Despite this absence of formal political structures, these communities had a collective life, in which confraternities, such as that of the Holy Spirit, played a central role. The confraternities owned property, "facilitated the consolidation of communal autonomy" and "permitted a local group to arrange and to serve an apprenticeship in municipal life," meeting at the place where the fiscal community also assembled. In fact, the procurators of the confraternity were often the procurators of the community also, and all three collectivities [parish, village assembly, and confraternity] typically gathered in the house of confraternity, "beneath its primitive frescoes of the Holy Spirit and the parish patron saints" (Hoffman). At Ceyzériat, in 1601, "entry into the resident community and use of common lands were tied to admission . . . to the confraternity of the Holy Spirit."²⁵

Historians differ in their assessment of the pace of religious change in the archdiocese. Gutton argues that from the 1560s onward, in the French part of the Archdiocese of Lyon, royal officials began to suppress the confraternities and that bishops and priests sought to purify and transform them. He claims that records of conflict between parishioners and priests show "that villagers were not happy to accept assaults by Tridentine curés on ancient customs and institutions."²⁶ Hoffman emphasizes continuities in local forms of religiosity until at least 1650. He points to the existence of "societies" of priests,

²⁴Hoffman, *Church and Community*, p. 13; Turrel, *Bourg en Bresse*, pp. 26, 29, 110, 116–17; *Id.*, "L'Identité par la distinction: les robes syndicales des petites villes de Bresse (XV^e–XVIII^e siècle)," *Cahiers d'histoire*, 43, nos. 3–4 (1998), 475–87, here 477.

²⁵Jean-Pierre Gutton, "Confraternities, Curés and Communities in Rural Areas of the Diocese of Lyons under the Ancien Régime," in *Religion and Society in Early Modern Europe, 1500–1800*, ed. John Burke (London, 1984), pp. 202–03, 205; Hoffman, *Church and Society*, pp. 59–60. For more discussion of the ecclesiastical culture in Bresse and Bugey (societies of priests and their revenues, collegial chapters, confraternities, relations between Huguenots and Catholics in the early-seventeenth century, and the 1613–14 Bressan visitation of Denis-Simon de Marquemont, the archbishop of Lyon), see Alloing, *Le diocèse de Belley*. For some details on the title in Ceyzériat, see J. Manissier, *Histoire de Ceyzériat* (Bourg-en-Bresse, 1967), pp. 61, 84.

²⁶Gutton, "Confraternities," pp. 209–10.

established to perform liturgical duties for pious foundations in small towns and villages throughout the Lyonnais countryside. Usually members of these societies were natives of the locales where they served, were close to their flocks, and often lived with relatives. These priests played little role in local politics and virtually none in confraternity affairs. In Hoffman's judgment, rural Bressan clerics "were as yet hardly affected by the Counter Reformation" during the first half of the seventeenth century. He states unequivocally that "the end of the sixteenth century definitely witnessed no dramatic rise in pious bequests in the countryside."²⁷

In the Archdiocese of Lyon, certain products were tithed, and others (such as the produce of one's *jardin*, newly planted vines, certain fallow or nonfertile lands, and the livestock of other parties under the care of villagers) were exempt. At the time of the harvest, the farmer was supposed to leave what he produced in the field for twenty-four hours before bringing it into his barn, so that the tithe collector would have time to gather up his portion. Marie-Thérèse Lorcin found that by the end of the medieval period, the tithe rate in the archdiocese was generally about a tenth and never less than a twelfth, but that by the late-eighteenth century, it was slightly lower (between an eleventh and a thirteenth).²⁸

Peasants in the archdiocese sought to minimize their tithe payments in several ways. They tried to extend as much as possible the list of exempted products and expanded their definition of what constituted their "*jardin*" when these were tithe-free. When new vines were exempt, they planted them along with old ones and claimed exemptions for the whole lot. They argued about what was fallow or infertile and about what percentage was due for such plots. As their crops matured, villagers all harvested at the same time, making it more difficult for the tithe collector to complete his rounds in twenty-four hours. The villagers of Firminy (c. 1450) argued that if they owed the tithe, it could only be to their parish priest, "*ubi omnia sua sacramenta ecclesiastica recipient*," and not to the monastery that claimed to own their tithes. Above all, the peasants endeavored quietly to introduce new practices resulting in lower payment rates so that they could later argue that such practices were customary (and therefore legitimate).

²⁷Hoffman, *Church and Community*, pp. 48, 50, 52-53, 57, 65-66.

²⁸Marie-Thérèse Lorcin, "Un musée imaginaire de la ruse paysanne. La fraude des décimables du XIV^e au XVIII^e siècle dans la région lyonnaise," *Études rurales*, 53 (July-September, 1973), 112-24, 112-19, 124.

Such actions were referred to by James Scott as resistance without protest and without organization. Scott makes the important point that although such resistance is often invisible to modern researchers (because its very success depends on the failure of authorities to notice and document it), it was probably the most effective form of peasant resistance in the premodern world. Through techniques such as those described here, peasants in Bresse and elsewhere were able “to keep much of the tithe for themselves and sometimes avoid payment altogether.” Lorcin summarizes:

In their patient nibbling, the peasants benefited occasionally from disputes between co-collectors of tithes, or between collectors and the local priest. They were frequently supported by the bourgeois or nobles who owned farms or estates and also wanted to avoid tithe payments. However, the strongest support of those who owed tithes was . . . the inequality of custom: what was taxable, rates, and collection mechanisms were variable and exposed the tithe to all manner of attacks.

According to Lorcin, the Archdiocese of Lyon experienced four “agitated periods” of tithe resistance: 1450–1500, 1500–66, 1633–66, and 1750–1800. Thus, from the end of Emanuel Filibert’s reign until the second third of the seventeenth century, the tithe regime in Bresse changed little.²⁹

The final issue to be addressed in this brief sketch of the economic and political impact of the tithe on the Bressan countryside is who actually collected the tithes. Archival sources permitting a comprehensive quantitative analysis of this question have not been located (in Lyon, Bourg, Chambéry, or Turin); at best, the departmental archives in Lyon provide occasional anecdotal references to some tithe beneficiaries and/or collectors in specific localities.³⁰ Therefore, the question

²⁹Lorcin, “Un musée imaginaire,” pp. 112–19, 122–23; Scott, “Resistance without Protest.”

³⁰In the Archives Départementales du Rhône (hereafter, ADR), there are forty-three registers of ecclesiastical insinuations for the *officialité* of the diocese, for the years 1554–1614 (4G 78 through 120). They have been microfilmed and contain notarial acts of various sorts (appointments of priests to parishes; awards of benefices; resignations; decisions made by the *chamariers*, who shared temporal jurisdiction with the bishop; *prises de possession* of churches and chapels; sales of annuities; testaments; and so forth), some in French, some in Latin, and some copies of acts issued in Rome. These were sampled, as was 4G 185 (a register that deals specifically with acts regarding Bresse, from 1558 to 1559), but no references to tithe disputes were found. The ADR also holds a few surviving records documenting disputes between inhabitants of Bressan parishes and tithe-owning church bodies from Lyon; see 10G 1593 (for a dispute

of who benefited must be addressed from sources not normally associated with the study of tithes. For late-Renaissance Bresse, the most useful source has proved to be episcopal visitation records.³¹

3. Tithe Beneficiaries in Bresse, c. 1613–14

On July 11, 1613, Denys Simon de Marquemont, the archbishop of Lyon, began visiting parishes in Bresse as part of his visitation of the Archdiocese of Lyon as a whole. The visitation of Bresse (and of a few localities in the Franche-Comté) lasted until early October and was then finished up in early May 1614. The records of this visitation contain many details concerning the local structure of ecclesiastical domination in Bresse during the general period of its transition from Savoyard to French rule.³² Although it is possible that between the death of Emanuel Filibert in 1580 and the visitations of 1613–14 the structure of tithe ownership or local religious organization changed somewhat, it is unlikely that these changes would have been significant.³³ The 1613–14

between a village in the parish of Bâgé-la-Ville and the canons of St. Jean of Lyon in 1586); 10G 2054 (for early 1540s conflicts between the same canons and the parishioners of Balan and Nievre); 10G 3281 (for a 1553 compromise between the canons of the collegial church of St. Martin de l'Isle Barbe and the parishioners of Birieux); and 10G 3316 (for another compromise between the canons of l'Isle Barbe and the parishioners of St. Julien de Baynost). For a number of years during the late Renaissance, there was also a dispute between the curé of Cormoranche (supported by the clergy assembly of Bresse) and the sacristan of the church of St. Etienne of Lyon, over claims of wax owed by the former to the latter; see 10G 1713.

³¹Visitation records have been used by historians in a remarkable variety of ways, although, to my knowledge, they have not yet been used to study tithes. Like any source, they have their limitations, most obviously in their tendency to reinforce claims of episcopal authority (they were obviously never intended to provide a clear picture of “actual practice”). But this bias does not seem to have created distortions in terms of the visitation records’ picture of tithe revenue distribution. We will see below that these records show, surprisingly, that nonclerical actors were significant beneficiaries of tithe revenues, despite the fact that the bishop might have been expected to reinforce the claims of clerical beneficiaries at the expense of secular ones. This study’s heavy reliance on visitation records—a source that might be expected to skew the evidence in favor of clerical claims to tithe revenues—actually shows the opposite, validating the appropriateness of using these records to study this problem. For a brief overview of different historical uses of visitation records, see Angelo Torre, *Il consumo di devozioni: Religione e comunità nelle campagne dell’Ancien Régime* (Venice, 1995), pp. 5–11.

³²ADR, *Recueil des visites pastorales du diocèse de Lyon aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles (1613–1614)*, vol. 1 (Lyon, 1926) (hereafter, *Recueil*). The visits of the Bressan parishes appear on pp. 79–189, 214–16, 231–54, 262–63, 273–98, 304–05, 334–38, and 341–47.

³³Note that Hoffman mentions no significant changes in church structures in the Archdiocese of Lyon until the later seventeenth century.

visitation records remain our best barometer of religious life in Bressan parishes during the half century after the Council of Trent.

The data concerning the distribution of power and privilege in early-seventeenth-century Bressan parishes have been grouped into 128 separate tithe units (usually parishes, but occasionally there were parishes that were subdivided into one or more tithe regimes). For each tithe unit, a number of questions were asked and responses (when available) recorded:

- Whether anyone (or any institution) from Lyon received a portion of the tithe or enjoyed patronage rights in the parish. In thirty-nine out of 128 cases (30.5 percent of the time), it was possible to establish that a person or group from Lyon benefited from Bresse tithe arrangements.
- Whether anyone enjoying a portion of tithe receipts or patronage rights was a noble. This was the case in thirty-two out of 128 cases (25 percent).
- Whether the curé was present in the parish (he was present 70.3 percent of the time).
- How many ways the tithe receipts were divided (see below).
- How many different tithes were mentioned (this information was imperfect, however, since it is clear that a comprehensive list of kinds of tithes was rarely, if ever, given).
- What percentage of tithe receipts was kept by the curé.
- The identity of the curé.
- The identity of the person or group that received the largest portion of the tithe receipts for the tithe unit (the tithe was often split in two or three equal portions).
- Whether the person or group receiving the largest portion resided outside of the lands subject to Savoyard jurisdiction prior to 1601.
- The identity of the person or group enjoying patronage rights in the parish and whether that person or group resided outside of the lands subject to Savoyard jurisdiction prior to 1601.
- Whether the curé counted among his revenues collections in cash or kind taken from parishioners on a per-hearth basis.
- When available, the total value of the tithe; the total value of the curé's revenues; the number of communicants in the tithe unit; and the number of hearths in the tithe unit. For the value of the tithe, see below. The total numbers of communicants were given for eighteen out of 128 cases and ranged from fifty to 3500. The numbers of hearths were given on four occasions and ranged from sixty to 296.

This information can be analyzed from a variety of perspectives to shed light on how the tithe fit into structures of ecclesiastical domination in Bresse during the sixteenth- and early-seventeenth centuries. To begin with, although it is very difficult to establish an average value of the tithe per tithe unit, the few numbers provided by the 1613–14 visitations (the values of only fifteen tithe units were given) provide a mean of £328 (*livres tournois*). Since some of these total values came from obviously wealthy tithe units, an extremely conservative estimate of the average value of a tithe unit could cut this average in half, to £164. If this average is relatively accurate, then the total tithe revenues for early-seventeenth-century Bresse (128 tithe units) would have amounted to £20,992, or roughly 72,160 Savoyard florins.

This figure can be compared to the amount of tithe revenues transferred by the clergy assembly of Savoyard Bresse and Bugey to Filibert on the occasion of papal grants to the duke of Savoy during the late-sixteenth century. While there were significant inflationary pressures between the end of Filibert's reign (1580) and 1614, there would also presumably have been underreporting of total tithe values. Tithe revenues disbursed to ducal treasurers by the clergy assembly of Bresse and Bugey between 1564 and 1580 ranged from 19,100 to 24,200 florins.³⁴ What was the total value of tithe revenues in Bresse compared to the amounts transferred from ecclesiastical to secular officials? If one takes the conservative estimate of 72,160 florins for Bresse tithes alone (c. 1613) and cuts it in half (to 36,080), without taking into account the revenues that also would have been collected from Bugey, then the portion of the tithe revenues from the Savoyard part of the Archdiocese of Lyon transferred to the duke of Savoy in the late-sixteenth century probably constituted between 53 and 67 percent of all tithes collected. It seems more likely that the percentage was actually far smaller, somewhere between a quarter and a third. Thus, in the late-sixteenth century the dukes of Savoy were clearly not the only beneficiaries of Bresse tithe revenues, despite papal grants of these revenues in their favor.

A political analysis of tithe revenues and their transfer to secular authorities should identify who benefited and who suffered in this process. The first, most obvious way in which groups benefited from tithes was through the collection of the actual revenues themselves. The visitation records indicate that in ninety-four cases there was a

³⁴Vester, "Bresse Clergy Assembly," p. 790.

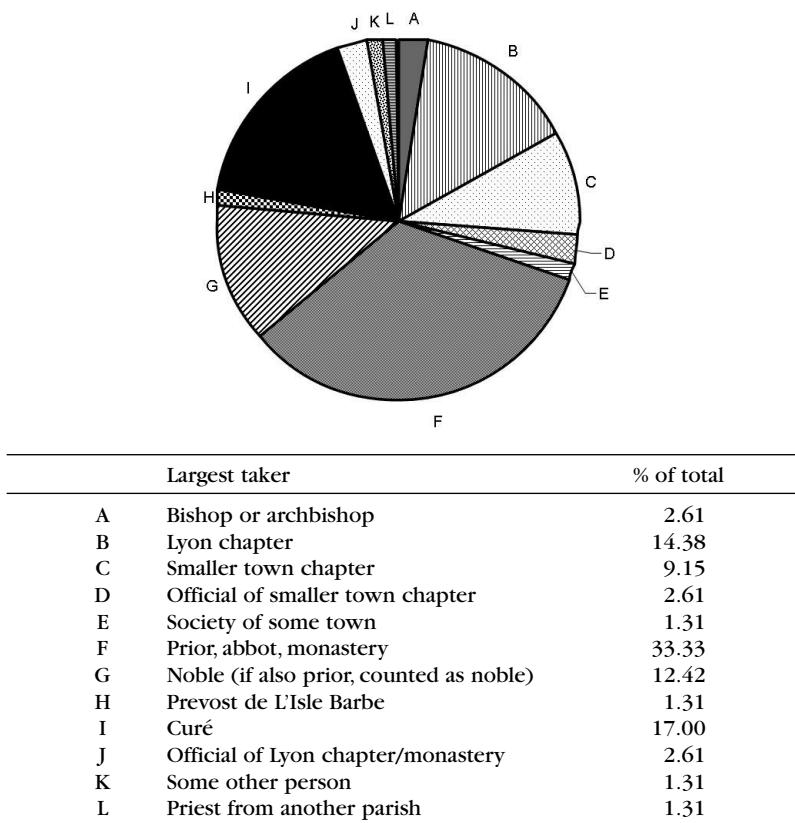


FIGURE 1. Identities of largest beneficiaries of Bresse tithes. Source: *Recueil*.

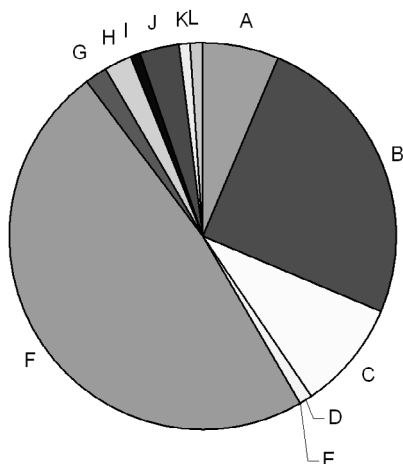
single largest beneficiary from tithe revenues in a given tithe unit. In seventeen cases there were two largest beneficiaries (when tithe revenues were split fifty-fifty, for example), and in eight cases there were three largest beneficiaries. The total number of largest beneficiaries amounts to 152. The identities of these beneficiaries are broken down in figure 1.

According to figure 1, the greatest beneficiaries of Bresse tithes were religious houses or their heads, followed by curés, religious chapters from Lyon, and nobles. However, it should also be noted that on ten out of the twenty-six times that the curé was identified as the largest beneficiary, the curate was actually held by a religious society from the same parish (three times), by a member of a chapter from a

nearby town (four times), by a chapter in a different town (one time), or by a priest from a different parish (two times). If the seven cases in which the curé is from outside of the parish are removed, then on only nineteen out of 152 occasions (12.5 percent of the time) was a local priest one of the largest beneficiaries of the tithe. Those groups that benefited most consistently from Bresse tithes were clearly religious houses or their heads (the abbot of Ambronay, the abbot of St. Claude, the abbot of Tournus, the prior of Nantua, and the prior of Gigny) and religious chapters from Lyon (together these two groups were the largest beneficiaries about 48 percent of the time).

Groups also benefited from tithes in a second, less direct way: through patronage rights over the parish in question. Out of the ninety-six cases in which the identity of the person or group who exercised the right to name curés to specific parishes was indicated, 47.9 percent of the time the patron was a religious house or its head, and 25 percent of the time it was a religious chapter from Lyon. Together, these groups exercised patronage rights 72.9 percent of the time (see figure 2).

Taken together, the data on who received the largest portion of tithe revenues and who exercised patronage rights in Bresse parishes suggest that the groups that had the most to lose from the transfer of tithe revenues to secular authorities (whether the duke of Savoy during the late-sixteenth century or the king of France after 1601) were religious houses and their heads, and religious chapters from Lyon. Also, while the transfer of tithe revenues undoubtedly made patronage rights less valuable, it is not clear how this transfer affected the various beneficiaries of actual tithe income in a particular tithe unit. As the preceding discussion indicates, a single beneficiary hardly ever collected tithe revenues: out of 112 cases, the mean number of ways in which a tithe was divided was 2.3, and 24 percent of the time it was divided between three and six ways. As indicated above, the exact portion of the total Bresse tithe revenues that was delivered to ducal treasurers is not known (although 25–30 percent seems a reasonable estimate), nor do we know how this portion was divided up among the beneficiaries of a particular tithe. For example, if in a given parish 50 percent of the tithe revenues were collected by the abbot of Ambronay, 25 percent by a local noble, and 25 percent by the curé, and if 30 percent of the tithe revenues of the parish as a whole were transferred to the duke, did this 30 percent come from the abbot's, the noble's, or the curé's portion (or from some combination of them)? It seems proba-

FIGURE 2. Patron identities. Source: *Recueil*.

ble that tithe income would most likely be transferred from the percentage of the tithe allotted to the beneficiary without a local presence in the parish. In other words, in the parish described above, if the abbot (who resided in another town) collected £50 worth of products annually in tithe revenues, a local noble £25, and the curé £25, and if the duke's portion of the tithe was set at £30, it seems likely that this £30 would be taken out of the £50 owed to the abbot. On the other hand, if the abbot of Ambronay were involved in drawing up the registers upon which the tithe receivers based their collections, he would presumably endeavor to shift the burden to parishes from which he did not collect part of the tithe. Unfortunately, the documentary record

does not provide this level of detail, so our analysis must remain somewhat speculative.

But what is clear is that non-Savoyards (individuals or groups residing outside of lands subject to Savoyard jurisdiction in 1601) figured significantly amongst the largest beneficiaries of tithe revenues and amongst those exercising patronage rights. At least sixty-five out of the 152 identified largest recipients of tithe revenues (42.76 percent) were non-Savoyard. Likewise, out of the ninety-five cases in which it could be ascertained, on sixty-two occasions (65.3 percent of the time) the patron of the parish was non-Savoyard. The bulk of these non-Savoyard beneficiaries were Lyonnais. Again, it is possible that between 1580 and 1613–14 (and especially after 1601, when Bresse was attached to the kingdom of France), more Lyonnais acquired Bressan ecclesiastical privileges, but it seems unlikely that the structure of ecclesiastical domination in the region (which had already been part of the Archdiocese of Lyon) would have changed much during that period.

A closer look at the relationship between curés and tithe regimes again shows, from a slightly different perspective, that they were only one party among others who benefited from ecclesiastical extractions. Out of the ninety-nine cases in which the curé's portion was identified, the mean percentage of the tithe collected by him was 35.6 percent. This percentage varied somewhat according to a variety of parameters (selecting only those cases in which someone from Lyon benefited; in which a noble benefited; in which the curé was unambiguously "local"—that is, when the curé was held by a "society" or a member of a "society" from the same parish or from a nearby town; in which the curé was an unaffiliated individual; and in which the patron was non-Savoyard). A graphic representation of the results is provided in figure 3.

The most striking indication here is that for the twenty-seven occasions on which the curé was unambiguously "local" (21.1 percent of the time), the average percentage of his portion of the tithe increased to 49.8 percent. When the curé was local, the identities of the largest beneficiaries and the patrons also shift significantly (see figures 4 and 5).³⁵ Under local curés, patrons were clearly non-Savoyard only 33.3

³⁵For the largest beneficiaries when the curé was local, there were twenty-six responses (one missing). For the patron identities under a local curé, there were nineteen responses (eight missing).

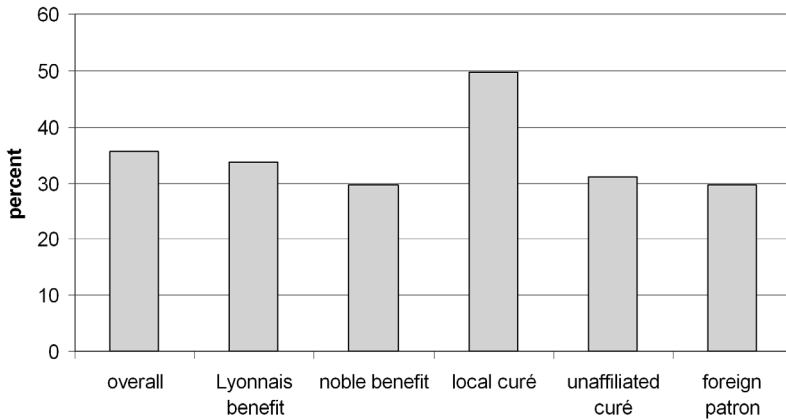


FIGURE 3. Portion of tithe kept by curé. Source: *Recueil*.

percent of the time. This reinforces the link between territorial location and one's ability to exploit one's claims. When local religious societies are closely involved in local ecclesiastical decision-making, the distribution of ecclesiastical benefits differs considerably. This seems intuitive; the evidence from the 1613–14 visitations bears it out. The question of how local religious societies managed to acquire such influence is a separate one. For present purposes, one is limited to the suggestion that if territorially-distant beneficiaries were more likely to bear the brunt of tithe transfers to secular authorities when the curé was not local, they were probably even more likely to do so when local religious societies were generally able to retain more local ecclesiastical benefits for themselves.

One might suspect that if cases in which the curé is local provide evidence of a slightly different structure of ecclesiastical domination, cases in which hearth-based collections were made might do the same. Hearth-based collections were made in seventeen out of 128 cases, or 13.3 percent of the time, in a geographic region concentrated in the Jura foothills of northeastern Bresse. The phenomenon of hearth-based tithe collection is interesting, since in this model the curé extracts wealth in the name of the church from individual families, in the same way that the secular authority operates. However, data collected from the seventeen cases in which this kind of ecclesiastical extraction took place do not bear out the suspicion that this phenomenon is indicative of a different kind of culture of domination. Most of the numbers from these cases resemble the overall numbers from the

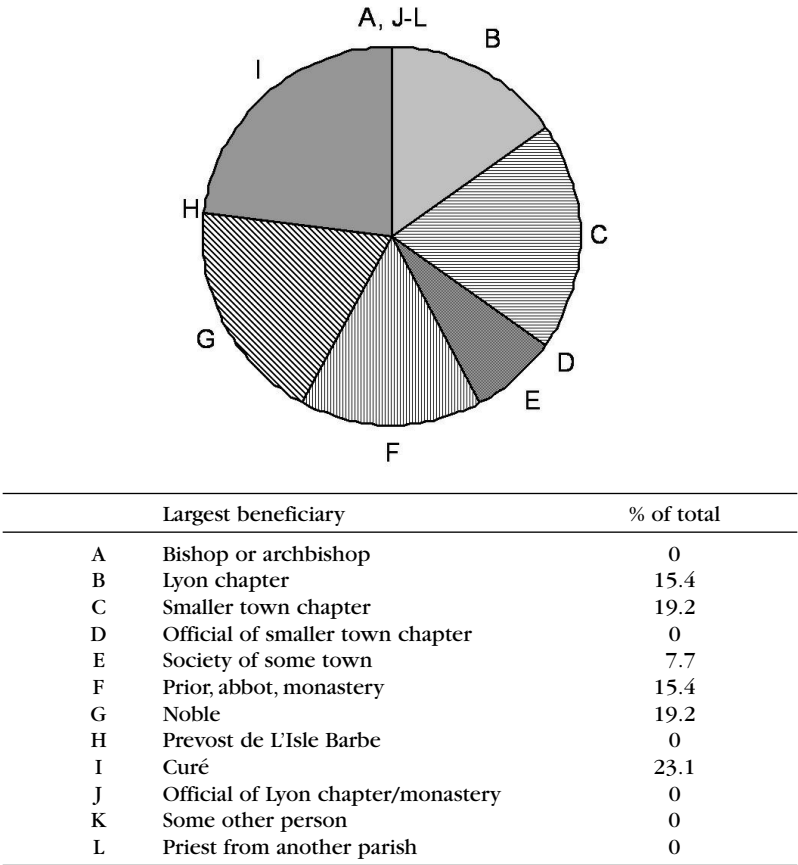
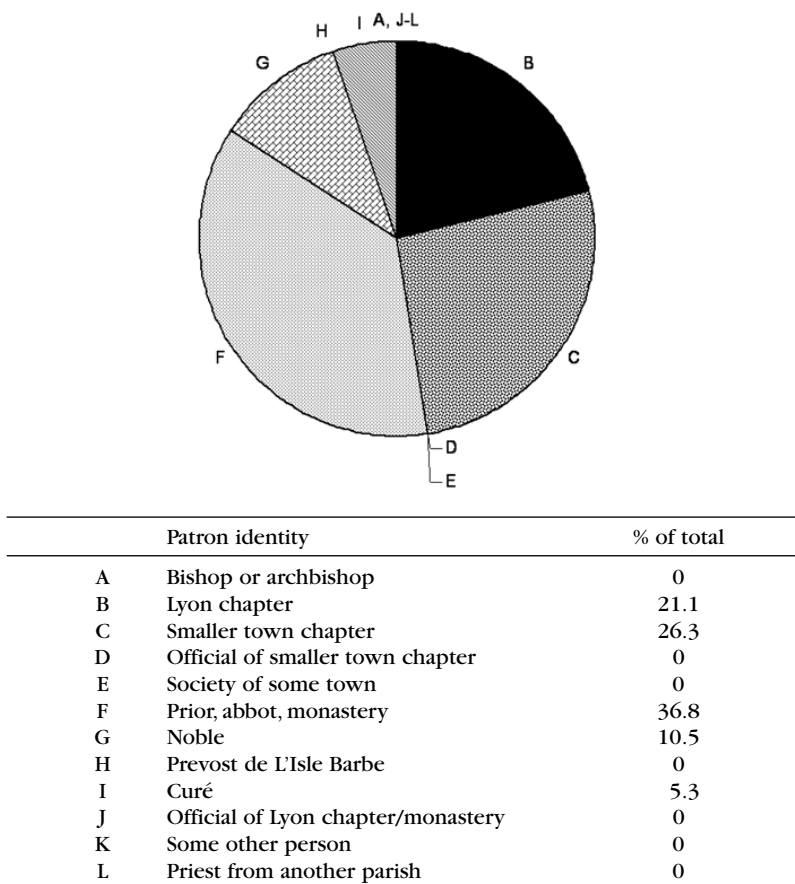


FIGURE 4. Largest beneficiaries when the curé is local. Source: *Recueil*.

region, with a few exceptions. In 70.6 percent of these seventeen cases the curé was an unaffiliated individual (as opposed to 63.9 percent of the time otherwise); in 55.6 percent of the cases the largest recipient of tithe revenues was a religious house or its head, or a religious chapter from Lyon (as opposed to 48 percent otherwise); in 50 percent of the cases the largest recipient was non-Savoyard (as opposed to 42.8 percent otherwise); and in 85.7 percent of the cases the patron was a religious house or its head, or a religious chapter from Lyon (as opposed to 72.9 percent of the time otherwise). For six out of these seventeen cases the number of communicants was indicated; the mean number was 395. Thus, despite the fact that curés from tithe units in which hearth-based collection took place were slightly more likely to

FIGURE 5. Patron identities when the curé is local. Source: *Recueil*.

be unaffiliated individuals; religious houses, chapters from Lyon, and non-Savoyards exerted slightly more influence in these more remote areas of Bresse than in other parts of the region.

Quantitative evidence from the visitation records permit four general conclusions, several of which are also sustained from qualitative evidence from the same records. First, the fragmentation of tithe receipts in a given parish (both in terms of different kinds of tithes and in terms of multiple beneficiaries) underscores the complexity of the political and fiscal impact of tithe payments. This complexity is immediately apparent in the case of the parish of Isernore. There, the bishop

of Belley exercised patronage rights over the parish, but tithe receipts were divided between the lord of Vologna and the lord of Heyria (who had in turn mortgaged part of it to the monks of the abbey at Nantua). The curé, Jean Chardon, benefited from some other parish revenues, as did another vicar in the parish, which was formed by eight different villages (including an annex church at the village of Gevreyssia). The precise nature of tithe extractions varied from village to village within the parish of Isernore, including in some locations a flat rate per hearth, in others a percentage of the harvest of different kinds of products, in others different elements that came due at different moments during the calendar year, and in others the transmission of tithe dues in the form of a banquet (on the day of the malt harvest, for example). There was also some disagreement about whether the revenues of the office of bell-ringer (*mariglerie*) or candle-overseer (*luminaire*) were included in the tithe. A memoir prepared by Chardon for the archbishop declared further that

the papers and documents regarding the rights of the curate of Isernore have been scattered and lost, either because of the passing of time or due to the malice and connivance of those who owed payments, such that the curé and priests are obliged to refer themselves to the word and prudence [integrity] of the parishioners.³⁶

The Isernore case was further complicated by the fact that in the village of Gevreyssia Chardon was involved in a dispute over the office of bell-ringer. Pierre Reydellet, a notary, held the office in the name of his son, Jean Reydellet, “clerc.” Pierre then subcontracted the job of ringing on his own, without Chardon’s knowledge, collecting twelve measures of oats from the Gevreyssiet tithe as his payment. Pierre had also held the office of bell-ringer of Isernore, for which he collected another set of revenues (and subcontracted the job), since 1578, when Pierre’s brother, François, obtained it from another Pierre Reydellet, who had at that time been curé of Isernore:

And since that time [in Chardon’s words] the office had always been held and occupied under the title of a simple benefice by those of the house of Reydellet, even though it is only a rural office, as it is easy to see, that is [rightfully] dependent on the charge and dignity of the curate, who more than anyone else in the parish should name the servants of his church and not be served at the discretion of a particular member of the parish.³⁷

³⁶*Recueil*, pp. 179–84.

³⁷*Ibid.*

It was impossible to separate the question of tithe payments from the other elements of local religious politics in the village of Isernore, making it difficult for the researcher to generalize about how tithe structures and practices affected tithe owners, parish priests, and local residents (and thus about how tithe transfer payments to the secular ruler affected the same groups).³⁸

Second, the quantitative evidence shows that since local priests were often not the major beneficiaries of tithe revenues (indeed, according to the visitation records they were absent from the parish 30 percent of the time), the burden of papal tithe grants to secular authorities often fell on the more powerful institutions (cathedral chapters, monasteries, bishops, and so forth) that did in fact benefit from these revenues. However, the unavailability of the actual tithe registers that indicated precisely which tithe beneficiaries were supposed to contribute how much to these revenue transfers makes a definitive claim impossible. It does seem likely, however, that these powerful beneficiaries would have had the most to lose from a Huguenot victory in the region and would thus have been willing to pay a secular ruler (whether the duke of Savoy or the king of France) for protection.

A third general conclusion afforded by the quantitative evidence is that it is quite likely that during the late-sixteenth century non-Savoyard actors had actually borne an important part of the cost of tithe transfer payments to the dukes of Savoy. The visitation records provide no direct qualitative support for this conclusion since they were created in post-Savoyard Bresse, but if in 1613–14 the beneficiaries of Bressan tithes included actors such as the prior of Gigny (in the

³⁸Since tithes were often farmed out by owners to collectors, these tithe farmers must also be taken into account as yet another group that benefited from tithe structures, further complicating our picture. J. Vogt has shown that tithe farmers in early-modern Alsace could be inhabitants of either rural or urban areas (see Vogt, "Pour une étude social de la dîme," pp. 127–33). This was also true in Bresse: in 1565 the "revenu de Roan [taken from the communities of St Martin de Miribel, St Julien de Beynost, St Maurice, Tramoyes, and other places]," which belonged to the church of St. Jean of Lyon and most likely included tithe revenues, was farmed out to "honneste homme Claude Brun laboureur de Miribel, Jehan Brun de Tremoye, et George Brun dudit Miribel, ses enfans," for an annual sum of 60 *livres*. Five years later the revenues were farmed by Ennemond Perret, a dyer from Lyon, and Philibert Ballufier, ducal notary and castellan of Miribel; see ADR, 10G 965. In 1567 the canons of the collegial church of l'Isle Barbe farmed out one-third of the tithe of Bressolles to Sr. Annemond Chevillard (ADR, 10G 3253), and in 1621 they farmed one-sixth of the tithe of Bussige [?] to Francoys Gourdan, a grain merchant from Lyon (ADR, 10G 3249).

Franche-Comté), it is likely that thirty to fifty years earlier Bressan tithes were also owned by a number of individuals and groups from outside of Bresse.³⁹ The fact that, in the case of Bressan tithes, non-Savoyard actors were subsidizing a foreign sovereign (by seeing some of their tithe revenues delivered to the duke of Savoy) is perhaps not so strange—after all, even today one pays taxes to foreign sovereigns for property held in that sovereign's territory. But this phenomenon seems more indicative of a different, late-Renaissance kind of sovereignty in which borders were ill defined and porous, and authority was shared by a variety of actors. When the archbishop and his suite was received in Bourg (and in smaller towns like Poncin and Nantua) in 1613, they were honored with elaborate entries and processions of the sort usually associated with princes or provincial governors.⁴⁰ These processions demonstrate that in 1613 the archbishop of Lyon exercised a kind of authority over Bresse and Bugey whose quality differed little from that of the secular sovereign, at least if representational forms are any measure.

The fourth conclusion supported by the quantitative evidence is that while local political structures affected the impact of church authority on localities, the variability of local practices (such as hearth-based collection) did not always make a difference when it came to who benefited from tithes. The visitation records suggest that there were more shared religious practices than diverse ones in Bresse and Bugey. For example, almost everywhere, everything seemed to be rentable. Not only tithes but also the curate itself was frequently rented out in Bresse parishes. Another shared practice was the use of information (or its absence) to improve one's fiscal status. In addition to the example of Isernore mentioned above, in the village of Tossiac, the contracts regarding the *luminaires* of one of the chapels were lost during the religious wars, such that in 1613 the *luminaires* only enjoyed £6 in annual revenues.⁴¹ This meant that villagers in Tossiac

³⁹In 1567 the monastery of l'Isle Barbe paid to Savoyard agents 186 *livres* "pour les décimes de Bresse," and in 1574 they paid another 172 *livres* for the same reason. The 1574 payment was received by the canons of Pont de Vaux, by "la vefve de Claude Bocher," and by a "Monsieur Dufour" (ADR, 10G 3253). Between 1608 and 1631 there was litigation between the archbishop of Lyon and the clergy of Bresse, Bugey, Valromey, and Gex concerning whether and how much those clergy were required to contribute to the *décimes* transferred from the province of Lyon to royal officials, since their *décime* contributions to the duke of Savoy had been structured differently (ADR, 7G 87).

⁴⁰For the Bourg entry, see *Recueil*, pp. 129–30; for Poncin, see *ibid.*, pp. 160–63; for Nantua, see *ibid.*, pp. 171–73.

⁴¹*Recueil*, pp. 154–56.

had the wit and the wherewithal, as did political actors at all levels of society throughout early-modern Europe, to take advantage of missing information to restructure more favorably the relations of domination in which they found themselves.

Political relationships at the beginning of the age of European absolutism thus remained extremely fragmented, and (if the evidence from Bresse is at all representative) nowhere is this more obvious than in the organization of one of Europe's most basic and widespread extractive institutions—the tithe. One way to measure the degree to which “absolutism” altered concrete political relationships would be to measure changes in the structure and practice of tithe payments in the mid-eighteenth century. Were beneficiaries more rationally distributed, and local priests, rather than absentee patrons, increasingly able to use these revenues to meet parish needs? Was the strong link between the territorial location of tithe beneficiaries and their ability to assert fiscal claims (or resist those of others) discontinued? It is possible that the answer to questions like these is “yes,” but in the absence of actual studies, one may reasonably be skeptical. It seems more likely that the fragmentation of local political life—as reflected by the division of tithe revenues and by the variegated political impact of the transfer of some of those tributes to secular rulers—persisted well into the eighteenth century. The structure of domination reflected in the institution of the tithe in late-Renaissance Bresse was subdivided in multiple ways and fraught with internal contradictions and external obstacles. Neither the house of Savoy nor the house of Bourbon was able simply to seize control of this institution and instrumentalize it for the purposes of state-building. Rather, to receive some benefit from the Bresse tithe, these sovereign dynasties were obliged to respect the autonomy of what amounted to a separate structure of locally determined power relations that remained beyond the control of the state.