

Leaders of the pack?

Village elites and social structures in the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Campine area.

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University of Antwerp
Faculty of Arts
History Department

Leaders of the pack?

Village elites and social structures in the fifteenth- and
sixteenth-century Campine area.

Dissertation for the degree of doctor
in History at the University of Antwerp
To be defended by
Eline VAN ONACKER

Supervisors
Tim Soens
Erik Thoen

Antwerp, 2014

Universiteit Antwerpen
Faculteit Letteren & Wijsbegeerte
Departement Geschiedenis

Hoeders van de dorpsgemeenschap?

Dorpselites en sociale structuren in de vijftiende- en
zestiende-eeuwse Kempen.

Proefschrift voorgelegd tot het behalen van de
Graad van doctor in de Geschiedenis aan de
Universiteit Antwerpen te verdedigen door
Eline VAN ONACKER

Promotores
Tim Soens
Erik Thoen

Antwerpen, 2014

PREFACE.

“When you are in the middle of a story it isn't a story at all, but only a confusion; a dark roaring, a blindness, a wreckage of shattered glass and splintered wood; like a house in a whirlwind, or else a boat crushed by the icebergs or swept over the rapids, and all aboard powerless to stop it. It's only afterwards that it becomes anything like a story at all. When you are telling it, to yourself or to someone else.”

Margaret Atwood (1996), Alias Grace

Four years ago, I embarked on a journey that took me to places I never expected to see. Before I was asked to work on this project, my knowledge of the Campine area was nearly non-existent. I once had visited the charming little village of Vorselaar, which mainly taught me that Campiners are fond of copious meals and I once paid a visit to Turnhout, which mainly impressed me because it is located at the end of the Belgian railway network. Throughout these four years, every now and then someone asked me what my research was about, always followed by the same exclamation: ‘the Campine area, you must be kidding, nothing ever happened there!’. After four years of browsing through books, rummaging in the archives and writing, I must indeed confess that, when it came to the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century, indeed, nothing really happened, but precisely that proved to be the most fascinating aspect of it all.

The journey was long, sometimes difficult, but all in all worthwhile. Many people – colleagues, friends and family – have been hugely important when it came to reaching the final destination, so with this preface I want to take the opportunity to thank them all. First of all I want to thank my supervisor, Tim Soens. His love and enthusiasm for all things countryside have been absolutely inspiring and I often hugely benefitted from his insights, ideas and patience. I must of course also mention my co-supervisor, Erik Thoen, whose almost encyclopaedic knowledge of rural life and inspiring viewpoints have been crucial to achieve a deeper understanding of the structures determining the pre-modern countryside. I was furthermore lucky enough to get the advice of my other commission members. Prof. Dr. Peter Stabel always triggered new thoughts and insights by making me face the urban facts. Prof. Dr. Bas Van Bavel has been another source of inspiration, and I explicitly wish to thank him for his thought-provoking comments, which were of prime importance at several crucial stages of the PhD. Prof. Dr. Paola Malanima, prof. Dr. Maarten Duijvendak and prof. dr. Jane Whittle have assisted me with valuable advice or comments during conferences and workshops, for which I am of course very grateful.

Several of my more direct colleagues have played an important part as well, since many of them were kind enough to share their know-how with me. Special thanks go to my panel of proofreaders: Pieter De Graef, Lies Vervaet and Wouter Ryckbosch, but also to Hadewijch Masure, who did a large part of the analysis for the section on poor relief – something which she undertook with great passion! The History Department of the University of Antwerp is an

all in all wonderful place to work, with equally wonderful people, but the most brilliant of them all can of course be found in the annex – a safe haven for rural historians and all other kinds of charming outcasts. Iason, Botho, Steven, Mirella, Hadewijch, Pieter, Maïka, Ann & Filip: you were the best, simply the best!

Two of my colleagues deserve to be mentioned more elaborately. Since my research was part of a comparative project, I often worked together with Kristof Dombrecht from the University of Ghent, who focussed on rural elites in Coastal Flanders – a region in which quite a lot happened, contrary to the Campine area. This PhD has hugely benefitted from his insights, ideas and countless answers on huge amounts of my e-mails. I must of course also mention my *compagnon de route* (often all too literally), Maïka De Keyzer. This PhD has hugely benefitted from her data and knowledge, culminating in a joint chapter on the Campine commons. Her critical sense and creativity have often been paramount, but she is first and foremost a wonderful person and a precious friend, something for which I sincerely wish to thank her.

I furthermore owe a big thank you to many people who were not closely involved in the research as such, but were perhaps even more important. First of all I want to thank all my wonderful friends, but two of them deserve to be explicitly mentioned: Ann Coenen and Greet De Bock. They are not only top-notch scholars, but also top-notch people and I am very grateful that I can call them my friends. And I think I can safely say that without the (practical) help, encouragement, and trust of my wonderful parents and my equally wonderful brother and sister, I would not have been able to make it work. I want to end by dedicating this work to someone who cannot be categorised. He has been a wonderful colleague, meticulously proofreading this entire work and being the best sounding board one could dream of. He was a wonderful friend, distracting me with whiskey and football when the Campine was troubling me, but he is first and foremost a wonderful boyfriend, providing me with confidence (a lot) and food (even more). So, Filip, I think it is safe to say: I owe you.

Antwerp, March 1, 2014

TABLE OF CONTENTS.

Preface.....	7
Table of Contents.....	10
List of Tables.....	14
List of Figures.....	18
List of maps.....	22
1. Introduction. On perseverance, peasants and power.....	24
1.1 Surprisingly stable structures.....	26
1.2 Explaining change and stability.....	30
1.3 The regional factor.....	31
1.4 The peasant crux.....	32
1.5 Stratification on the countryside.....	36
1.5.1 From a 'coqs de village' elite model.....	36
1.5.2 Towards a peasant model?.....	40
1.6 Outline of the dissertation.....	41
2. The powers that were. Manorial and stately power and (in)equality.....	43
2.1 The Campine seigniorial structure: characteristics and pressure.....	45
2.1.1 The emergence of a complex structure: the Campine seigniorial system.....	45
2.1.2 Seigniorial burdens and their scope.....	48
2.1.3 Other types of seigniorial income: bailiff accounts.....	61
2.1.4 A regional comparison of seigniorial burdens: the Campine area versus Inland Flanders.....	61
2.2 State formation and state taxation.....	63
2.2.1 A modest growth? The evolution of government taxation in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.....	63
2.2.2 The level of taxation: bearable or burdensome?.....	64
2.3 Conclusion.....	69
3. Is property power? On actual and fiscal inequality.....	71
3.1 A short introduction to inequality from a historical perspective.....	73
3.2 'Actual' socio-economic inequality: property distribution.....	75
3.2.1 Acquiring property.....	75
3.2.2 Property distribution.....	78
3.2.3 Property composition.....	96
3.2.4 'Ploughing a lone furrow': access to other production factors.....	100

3.3 Fiscal inequality: micro-level inequality within Campine village communities.....	103
3.3.1 The bumpy road towards the allotment of taxes.....	103
3.3.2 An unequal stability? Two case-studies: fifteenth-century Rijkevorsel and sixteenth-century Brecht.....	105
3.4 Conclusion.....	110
4. Controlling the Campine commons.....	112
4.1 A rough guide to the Campine commons.....	115
4.1.1 Different types of commons: waste / pasture / arable.....	115
4.1.2 The Campine commons and their functions.....	117
4.2 “All commoners are equal, but some commoners are more equal than others”. Participators and beneficiaries of the Campine commons.....	119
4.2.1 Normative sources: framing reality.....	119
4.2.2 The Zandhoven <i>heyboek</i> : a glimpse on the true group of users.....	120
4.2.3 Equality and beyond: the beneficiaries of the Campine commons.....	122
4.2.4 To enclose or not to enclose: the crucial Campine question.....	123
4.3 Control. A common battlefield.....	128
4.3.1 Formal institutions: writing the byelaws.....	130
4.3.2 Informal practices: breaking the byelaws?.....	138
4.4 Conclusion.....	140
5. Campine peasants and market integration. Activities on the pre-modern commodity and factor markets.....	142
5.1 Campine commoners and commodity markets: sheep-breeding, wool production and market opportunities.....	146
5.1.1 Some general remarks on commodity markets and their institutional framework.....	146
5.1.2 Campine villagers and their flocks: a tale as old as times?.....	148
5.1.3 Sheep supply. Campine peasants as sheep-owners.....	149
5.1.4 Making money. The possible profits of sheep-breeding and wool production.....	154
5.2 A mighty mystery: the Campine labour market.....	161
5.3 Proactive peasants. The Campine markets for land and credit.....	165
5.3.1 Facing factor markets.....	165
5.3.2 Institutions and constraints.....	166
5.3.3 Evolution of the Campine land and credit markets.....	167
5.3.4 The role of factor markets: the absence of accumulation.....	170
5.3.5 The relative absence of absentee landowners and capital.....	172
5.3.6 The role of factor markets: part of a peasant strategy.....	175
5.4 Conclusion.....	177
6. <i>Coqs de village</i> or ugly ducklings? Campine tenant farmers and the village community?.....	179
6.1 The extent of leasehold in a peasant society.....	183
6.1.1 Inter-peasant leasehold: numbers and sizes.....	183

6.1.2 Large landowners: numbers and sizes.....	185
6.2 The economic side of the coin: the Campine tenant farmers and their agricultural strategies – commercially and/or landlord-driven.....	188
6.2.1 General sketch of the economic strategies of Campine tenant farmers.....	188
6.2.2 Cattle: the particularities of the Campine leasehold system.....	189
6.2.3 Grain. The lease sum and its impact.....	196
6.2.4 Lease conditions: shared responsibilities.....	201
6.2.5 Peasants vs. farmers: a difference in strategies?.....	203
6.3 The social side of the picture: an archetypical elite?.....	204
6.3.1 An impressive continuity: the village of Tongerlo.....	205
6.3.2 An Inland Flanders model – or not quite? The Wuustwezel tenant farmers.....	206
6.4 Conclusion.....	209
7. Petty politics? Village government and office-holding in the Campine area.....	211
7.1 ‘Intensively governed’. An overview of the political context at the formal level.....	214
7.1.1 A considerable amount of manoeuvring space.....	214
7.1.2 A case-study: the village of Gierle (Land of Turnhout).....	217
7.2 Real power? Office-holding in Campine villages.....	218
7.2.2 Combining sources.....	218
7.2.2 A broad and stable oligarchy: village aldermen.....	219
7.2.3 A broad and stable oligarchy: tax officials.....	226
7.2.4 Accumulation and career plans?.....	229
7.3 The common good? Community involvement in Campine politics: discourse versus practice.....	230
7.3.1 The consent of the community? Discourse on participation and decision-making.....	231
7.3.2 Dealing with dissent.....	232
7.4 Conclusion.....	235
8. Social cohesion and the village community. A focus on poor relief and church life.....	237
8.1 Governing the village’s poor. Formal structures of poor relief: the Campine Holy Ghost tables.....	240
8.1.1 Book-keeping for the poor. Revenues and expenditure of the Campine Holy Ghost tables.....	241
8.1.2 ‘We take care of our own’. The characteristics of the recipients of poor relief in the Campine area.....	245
8.1.3 The nature of help. How substantial was Campine poor relief?.....	251
8.1.4 The reasons behind relief.....	253
8.2 Participation in community life and community building.....	255
8.2.1 ‘No church in the wild’. The Campine church as community builder.....	255
8.2.2 Zooming in on community life and involvement.....	259
8.2.3 Confraternities and community.....	261

8.3 Setting the beacons of belonging. A focus on the decision makers of Campine community life.....	263
8.4 Conclusion.....	265
9. Conclusion. Social balance and structural stability.....	267
9.1 Reconstructing inequality in a peasant-society: delineating an elite.....	268
9.2 Elite characteristics.....	273
9.2.1 Distinction through independency.....	273
9.2.2 Assimilation through a lack of dependency relations.....	277
9.3 A Campine convivium: explaining stability and continuity.....	279
9.4 The Campine area as a laboratory for subaltern history.....	282
Appendix.....	285
Bibliography.....	296
Primary Sources.....	296
Secondary Sources.....	301
Dutch summary.....	323

LIST OF TABLES.

Table 1.1 Population density within the different regions of the Low Countries (inhabitants/km²)

Table 1.2 Index of number of household heads in the village of Brecht (index: 1523=100)

Table 1.3 Size of holdings in Markegem as a percentage of all holdings, 1742-1846

Table 2.1 The different types of seigniories

Table 2.2 Different types of revenue on the ducal domain of Turnhout

Table 2.3 Financial ranking in 1445 compared with population in c. 1470

Table 2.4 Collected taxes in the village of Gierle, 1474-1477

Table 2.5 Taxation burden per household for the village of Gierle

Table 3.1 Gini-indexes based on the sixteenth-century *penningkohieren*, Campine area

Table 3.2 Gini-indexes based on the sixteenth-century *penningkohieren*, Inland Flanders

Table 3.3 Gini-indexes for different European regions in the thirteenth to nineteenth centuries

Table 3.4 Property structure of the ducal part of Bergeyk, 1450 & 1525, based on the rent (*cijns*) registers

Table 3.5 Relative distribution of farm sizes, Gierle (1554)

Table 3.6 Relative distribution of farm sizes, Alphen (1569)

Table 3.7 Relative distribution of farm sizes, Tongerlo (1569)

Table 3.8 Relative distribution of farm sizes, Minderhout (1590)

Table 3.9 Kalmthout, 1518, Amount of rent due per hectare based on rent register (*stuiver*)

Table 3.10 Gierle, 1554, Land value per hectare based on penningkohier (*stuiver*)

Table 3.11 Wuustwezel, 1581, Land value per hectare based on penningkohier (*stuiver*)

Table 3.12 Economic profile of meadow-owners, Gierle, 1554

- Table 3.13 Economic profile of meadow-owners, Alphen, 1559
- Table 3.14 Features of meadows, Gierle, 1554
- Table 3.15 Features of meadows, Alphen, 1559
- Table 3.16 Plough ownership in Loenhout, 1575
- Table 3.17 Plough ownership, Brecht, 1604
- Table 3.18 Plough ownership, Vorst, 1604
- Table 3.19 Social / Fiscal inequality in Rijkevorsel, based on taxation lists (1464-1475)
- Table 3.20 Social / Fiscal inequality in the village Brecht, based on taxation lists (1523-1576)
- Table 4.1 Common vs. private land in a selection of villages, sixteenth century
- Table 4.2 Ratio enclosed versus open land, per type of farmland of the abbey of Tongerlo's tenant farms in 1510
- Table 4.3 Number of households and inhabitants of Zandhoven
- Table 4.4 Animal grazing on the commons of the village of Zandhoven, 1559-1575
- Table 4.5 Enclosure figures in the seigniories of the abbey of Tongerlo
- Table 5.1 Lamb prices and possible profits in the sixteenth century (prices based on Scholliers)
- Table 5.2 Sheep prices and possible profits in the sixteenth century (prices based on the Turnhout domain accounts)
- Table 5.3 Wool prices and possible profits in the sixteenth century – Essen-Nispen (prices and production of wool per sheep based on domain accounts)
- Table 5.4 References to Campine cloth in guild (bye)laws
- Table 5.5 Agricultural labour and wages in the Land of Turnhout, 1551
- Table 5.6 Horse-owners in the village of Rijkevorsel, 1470
- Table 5.7 Villages and cities mentioned in the church accounts for the buying of building material
- Table 5.8 Loaned out sums (in litres of rye)

Table 5.9 Overview of transaction types (absolute & relative)

Table 6.1 Number of tenant farms per village, sixteenth century

Table 6.2 Surface areas of tenant farms in the Campine area (in the villages of Tongerlo and Kalmthout) in the sixteenth century

Table 6.3 Surface areas of tenant farms of the Saint John's and Potterie hospitals in Coastal Flanders in the sixteenth century

Table 6.4 Ratio of arable land and pasture on the tenant farms of the abbey of Tongerlo (in the villages of Kalmthout & Tongerlo), 1510.

Table 6.5 Number of animals for which prices were recorded in the Tongerlo account books, for sample years (fifteenth and sixteenth century)

Table 6.6 Lease pressure on the abbey's tenant farms of the village of Tongerlo (1569)

Table 6.7 Farmers of the abbey's tenant farms in the village of Tongerlo, 1569

Table 6.8 Plough ownership in the village of Loenhout, 1575

Table 6.9 Agricultural labour and wages in the Land of Turnhout, 1551

Table 7.1 Frequency distribution of the aldermen per property class, from a 1450 rent register. The last column gives the relative attendance per class at the aldermen's court of Eersel from 1350-1450

Table 7.2 The socio-economic position of aldermen, Rijkevorsel, 1605-1611

Table 8.1 Poor hearths in the fifteenth century Campine area

Table 8.2 Poor hearths in fifteenth century Brabant

Table 8.3 Sex of relief recipients in Rijkevorsel (money and grain in *karolus stuivers*)

Table 8.4 Sex of relief recipients in Lede (money and grain in *karolus stuiver*)

Table 8.5 The extent of poor relief in the Campine area (Rijkevorsel) and Inland Flanders (Lede) in litres of rye

Table 8.6 Informal Participation in Rijkevorsel, 1464-1475

Table 8.7 The officers of the Rijkevorsel Holy Ghost table

Table 8.8 The mutation rate of the Rijkevorsel Holy Ghost table offices (1490-1529)

Table 8.9 The officers of the Rijkevorsel church fabric

Table 8.10 The mutation rate of the Rijkevorsel church fabric (1493-1525)

Table A.1. Economic position of land market participants (sellers / buyers vs. total population, based on tax registers), Rijkevorsel, 1464-1485

Table A.2. Economic position of land market participators (sellers / buyers vs. total population, based on *peningkohier*), Gierle, 1538-1558

Table A.3. Economic position of credit market participants (sellers / buyers vs. total population, based on tax registers), Rijkevorsel, 1464-1485

Table A.4. Economic position of credit market participators (sellers / buyers vs. total population, based on *peningkohier*), Gierle, 1538-1558

LIST OF FIGURES.

Fig 1.1 Population numbers in the villages of Gierle and Rijkevorsel, 1437-1526

Fig 1.2 The classical historiographical elite model – *coqs de village*

Fig 2.1 Seigniorial structure of the village of Gierle, fifteenth and sixteenth century

Fig 2.2 Horse grazing in Grotenhout forest, 1399-1548

Fig 2.3 Surface of chopped wood in Grotenhout forest, 1399-1445

Fig 2.4 Surface of chopped wood in Grotenhout forest, 1500-1550

Fig 2.5 Five-year moving average of the total rent (*cijns*) sum (in grammes of silver), Gierle, 1403-1600

Fig 2.6 Average rent (*cijns*) per customary rentpayer (in species) converted to litres of rye, Gierle, 1387-1442

Fig 2.7 Average rent (*cijns*) per customary rentpayer (in species) converted into litres of rye, Arendonk, 1387-1514

Fig 2.8 Evolution of domanial income of the Land of Turnhout through the leasing out of domain mills, 1400-1600 (in litres of rye)

Fig 2.9 Total taxation revenues for the *Kwartier van Antwerpen* (in litres of rye and in *schellingen*), 1437-1557

Fig 2.10 Taxation burden per household, in litres of rye (1437-1557)

Fig 3.1 Evolution of rent (*cijns*) (land parcels and rentholders) in the village of Arendonk, 1387-1442

Fig 3.2 Evolution of the rent (*cijns*) sum in the village of Arendonk, 1387-1442

Fig 3.3 Evolution of rent (*cijns*) (land parcels and rentholders) in the village of Gierle, 1340-1442

Fig 3.4 Evolution of the rent (*cijns*) sum in the village of Gierle, 1340-1442 (logarithmic scale)

Fig 3.5 Evolution of rent (*cijns*) (land parcels and rentholders) in the village of Kalmthout, 1362-1518

Fig 3.6 Evolution of the rent (*cijns*) sum in the village of Kalmthout, 1362-1463 (logarithmic scale)

Fig 3.7 Population densities in the Campine area, 1374-1755

Fig 3.8 Relative distribution of farm sizes, Gierle (1554); n=166

Fig 3.9 Relative distribution of farm sizes, Alphen (1569); n=215

Fig 3.10 Relative distribution of farm sizes, Tongerlo (1569); n=72

Fig 3.11 Relative distribution of farm sizes, Minderhout (1590); n=43

Fig 3.12 Horsegrazing in Grotenhout forest, 1399-1548

Fig 4.1 Functionality of the commons based on percentage of commoners using heathlands for grazing and the cutting of peat, Zandhoven, sixteenth century

Fig 4.2 Required vs. achieved hay yields on the tenant farms of the abbey of Tongerlo, 1510

Fig 4.3 Division of tasks in Common Pool Resource Institutions

Fig 4.4 Indices of officials most frequently referred to in byelaws

Fig 5.1 Boxplot of lamb possession, based on the lamb tithes of the abbey of Tongerlo for the villages of Alphen (1514) and Essen-Nispen (1553)

Fig 5.2 Population of Gierle & Rijkevorsel, 1437-1526

Fig 5.3 Boxplot surfaces of immovable goods (in hectare), Rijkevorsel

Fig 5.4 Boxplot number of transactions (land & credit) per year, per Campine village present, 1491-1495 (average = 2)

Fig 6.1 Average number of sheep on tenant farms of the abbey of Tongerlo (for the villages Essen-Kalmthout and Tongerlo), 1402-1554

Fig 6.2 Average number of cattle on tenant farms of the abbey of Tongerlo (for the villages Essen-Kalmthout and Tongerlo), 1402-1554

Fig 6.3 Sheep prices on Tongerlo tenant farms (1402-1554)

Fig 6.4 Sheep prices on the Antwerp market, based on the accounts of the Saint Elisabeth hospital (1426-1599)

Fig 6.5 Cattle prices on Tongerlo tenant farms (1402-1554)

Fig 6.6 Prices of beef cows on the Antwerp market, based on the accounts of the Saint Elisabeth hospital (1426-1599)

Fig 6.7 Lease prices (in *mudde* rye) of Tongerlo tenant farms for the villages of Essen-Kalmthout and Tongerlo (1402-1554)

Fig 7.1 Office-holding in a Campine village, Gierle (sixteenth century)

Fig 7.2 Socio-economic profile of the village aldermen in Rijkevorsel, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, n=36

Fig 7.3 Socio-economic profile of the village aldermen in Brecht, sixteenth century, n=40

Fig 7.4 Socio-economic profile of the village aldermen in Gierle, sixteenth century, n=14

Fig 7.5 Number of offices / person per village alderman, Rijkevorsel (1464-1525)

Fig 7.6 Number of offices / person for village aldermen, Brecht (1521-1573)

Fig 7.7 Socio-economic profile of tax officials, Rijkevorsel (1464-1475), n=34

Fig 7.8 Socio-economic profile of tax officials, Brecht, sixteenth century, n=65

Fig 7.9 Number of offices per person for tax officials, Brecht, sixteenth century

Fig 7.10 Socio-economic position of tax-collectors of 2 seigniories in the parishes of Dudzele and Ramskapelle, 1499-1536 (n=16) and 1537-1580 (n=16).

Fig 7.11 Traces of dissent. Names of dissenters concerning a village loan, Rijkevorsel, 1484

Fig 8.1 Revenues and expenditure of the Rijkevorsel Holy Ghost table (Campine area), in species (*karolus stuiver*)

Fig 8.2 Revenues and expenditure of the Rijkevorsel Holy Ghost table (Campine area), in kind (litres of rye)

Fig 8.3 Revenues and expenditure of Brecht Holy Ghost table (Campine area), in species (*karolus stuiver*)

Fig 8.4 Revenues and expenditure of the Brecht Holy Ghost table (Campine area), in kind (litres of rye)

Fig 8.5 Relative number of group doles (G) vs. individual doles (I) in Rijkevorsel (money + grain)

Fig 8.6 Categories of poor-relief recipients in Rijkevorsel (percentages of the total of the distributed sum)

Fig 8.7 Revenues and expenditure of the Brecht church and chapels (sixteenth century) (*karolus stuiver*)

Fig 8.8 Revenues and expenditure of the Rijkevorsel church fabric (1493-1529) (*karolus stuiver*)

Fig 9.1 Social stratification – The Gierle model

Fig 9.2 Social stratification – The Tongerlo model

Fig 9.3 Social stratification – the Brecht model

Fig A.1. Land transactions in Rijkevorsel (1465-1585)

Fig A.2. Land transactions in Gierle (1471-1558)

Fig A.3. Credit transactions in Rijkevorsel (1465-1585)

Fig A.4. Credit transactions in Gierle

Fig A.5. Revenues and expenditure of the Lede Holy Ghost table (Inland Flanders), in species (*karolus stuiver*)

Fig A.6. Revenues and expenditure of the Lede Holy Ghost table (Inland Flanders), in kind (litres of rye)

Fig A.7. Revenues and expenditure of the Oostkerke Holy Ghost table (Coastal Flanders), in species (*karolus stuiver*)

Fig A.8. Revenues and expenditure of the Oostkerke Holy Ghost table (Coastal Flanders), in kind (litres of rye)

LIST OF MAPS.

Map 1.1 The Campine area

Map 2.1 Map of the Land of Turnhout, 1753

Map 3.1 Mixed farming in Rijkevorsel

Map 4.1 Detail of the *Ferraris* map of Zoersel, showing enclosed arable fields vs. Detail of the *Ferraris* map of Vorselaar, showing (relicts of) open fields

1

INTRODUCTION. ON PERSEVERANCE, PEASANTS AND POWER.

“What had they been doing in Kadis that day? All the people.

They had been to mass, because it was the day of rest.

They had rested after the midday meal, all the hundreds of them that there were; even the children had had to lie down and pretend to sleep for a while.

The women had gone to collect the animals as they came out of the forest. Ten cows had been missing and they'd had to search for them on the common, because there were mushrooms everywhere now, especially the sort called cow-mushrooms.

They had milked all the cows.

The men had met and decided that the cattle should go out again for another ten days. They had decided that it would be winter after that.

They had eaten whitefish and sea-fowl.

They had listened to the priest, who had spoken of the incomprehensible size and fullness of the universe and said that everything is made in wisdom and the earth abounds in laws of nature and of property. Grass grows for the cattle and corn for the people so that they can farm their land till eventide. Peace and order flow from the earth and pour over us like rain.

And they had said: Amen.”

(Torgny Lindgren, 'Light')

When Henrick Stakenbroeck, inhabitant of the Campine village of Gierle, left his house to attend to his duties as village alderman in the early 1550s, he probably headed to one of the village inns – *Den Valk* or *Het Peerdeken*², perhaps – or the house of one of his colleagues. The village communities of the Campine area had extensive duties, largely carried out by the village government. Since Henrick was part of the bench of aldermen, the main governmental institution on village level, he might have spent the day writing up a will, or a land sale, or discussing matters concerning the village commons. On his walk, he might have passed arable land on which rye was cultivated, meadows where hay was grown or cattle was grazing, or the huge common waste – taking up some 75 percent of village territory – used for the grazing of

¹ Lindgren, T. (1992). *Light*. London, Harper Collins: 11

² Kieckens, J.F. (1896) *Recherches sur maitre Pierre Vander Heyden dit Pierre de Thimo de Gierle*. Antwerpen, De Backer; Verheyen, J. (1941). *Gierle, een bijdrage tot de heemkennis*. Turnhout; Van Mierlo-Proost(1913) “Geschiedkundige aantekeningen over Gierle, vooral in kerkelijk opzicht.” *Taxandria*, 1-2 & 3: 117-128 & 129-152

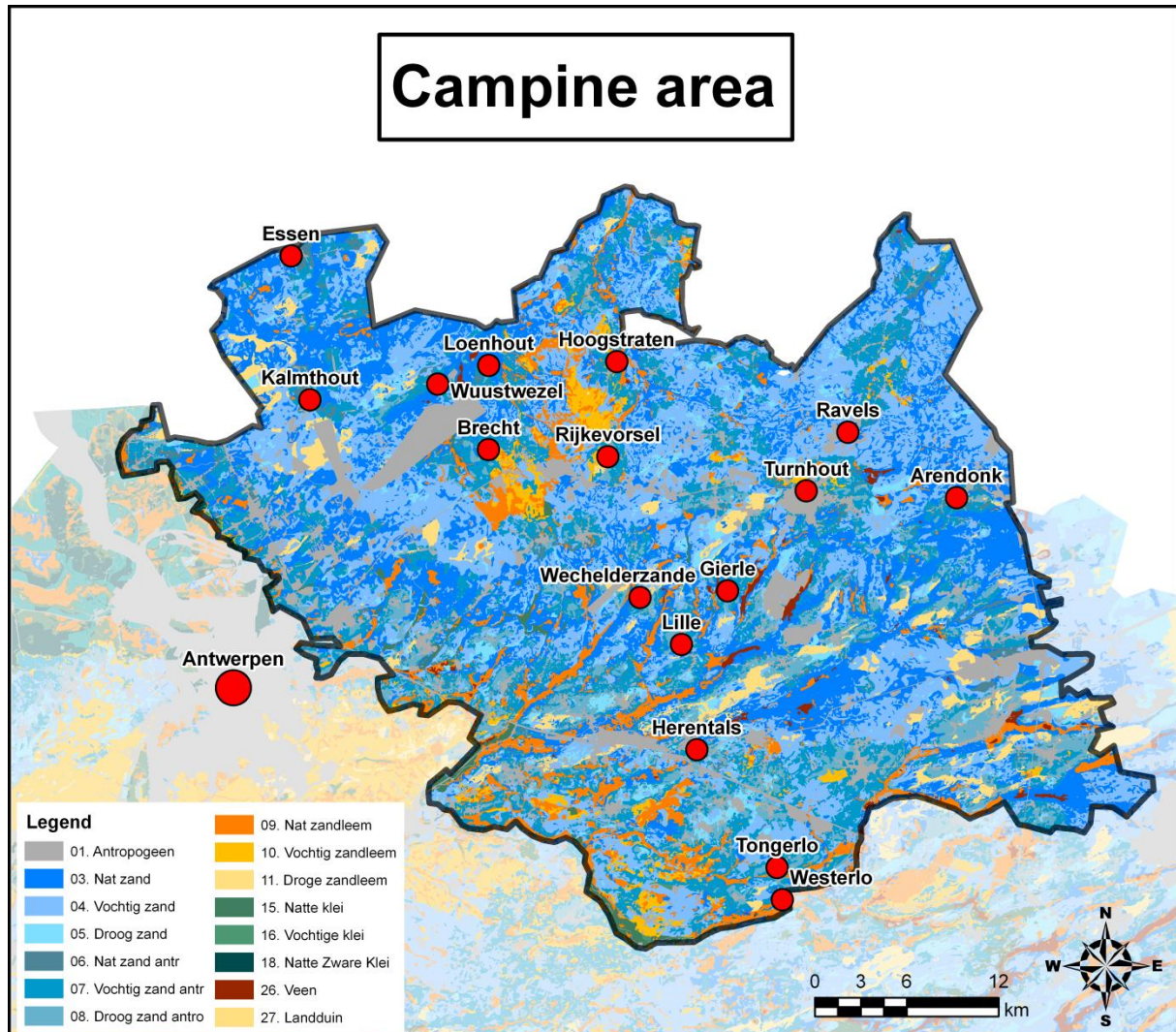
large flocks of sheep, the digging of peat and the cutting of sods. He might have greeted the fellow-villagers he passed, Jan Leysen for example, or Godevaert Wuyts, or one of the approximately 800 other inhabitants. They were smallholders, owning on average between 2 and 3 hectares of land, holding a strong hold on it, since they were customary tenants. Henrick Stakenbroeck was more affluent than his fellow-villagers, tilling almost 10 hectares of land. Henrick Coppens, alias Coutreels, one of the richer inhabitants of Rijkevorsel – another Campine village, some 13 kilometres from Gierle – might have made roughly the same walk some 100 years earlier, around 1464, to attend to the same duties, and around 1744, Clemens Jan Ghijsbrecht, an aldermen living in the village of Minderhout³, might have done the same, encountering arable land sown with rye, meadows with hay and animals, and the enormous common waste. Mixed-farming was as vibrant as ever! His co-villagers were still smallholders, with a strong hold on their land and the village community and government still carried out the same competences.

Even though the Campine area was not immune to change, the structural features of the Campine societal model remained remarkably intact. If Henrick Coppens, alias Coutreels, Henrick Stakenbroeck and Clemens Jan Ghijsbrecht would have met each other, they would have had much to talk about, since their frames of reference were remarkably similar, living in villages with the same structural features and belonging to the same group in society: the village elite. However, up until now, we have known hardly anything about social structures, relations and elite groups in peasant societies. Therefore, in this dissertation, the social structures that underpinned this remarkable stability will be presented, with an emphasis on the groups that steered this type of society. The following key-questions lie at the core of this research: can we discern a clearly distinguishable and persistent village elite or top-layer in Campine peasant communities, with specific characteristics that made them different from their fellow-villagers? How exactly did they coexist with these other social groups? What strategies did they develop to maintain their position? Can we detect any (r)evolutions throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries? Or were the structural features of the Campine village elite as stable as those of Campine society as a whole, suggesting that they formed one of the cornerstones of the –relative – Campine stability?

³ Caluwé, P. (2011). *Lokaal verzet tegen de achttiende-eeuwse ontginningen in de Kempen: een analyse op basis van juridische thoonen*. Departement Geschiedenis, Universiteit Antwerpen: 32

1.1 Surprisingly stable structures

Map 1.1 The Campine area



Map designed by Iason Jongepier

Before we delve deeper into past research on peasant communities and social stratification in the countryside, we will turn to the already-mentioned Campine stability – the region’s most defining feature – its roots, as well as its uprooting. As a whole, the Campine region corresponds with the Maas-Demer-Scheldt zone and is therefore located in both present-day Belgium and the Netherlands. It was mainly characterised by sandy soils and a problematic water balance, which brought about the formation of peat marshes. The basic structures of the Campine area, as present in the region up until 1800, were moulded in the high to late Middle Ages, between 1150 and 1350. Research on this formation period is still scarce, but the general tendencies are, however, quite clear. From the beginning of the thirteenth century onwards, the region witnessed a significant rise in population.⁴ Theo Spek and Daniel Vangheluwe claim that, in 1210, a meagre 20 percent of the total arable area – as present in the fifteenth and

⁴ Leenders, K. A. H. W. (1996). *Van Turnhoutervoorde tot Strienemonde : ontginnings- en nederzettingsgeschiedenis van het noordwesten van het Maas-Schelde-Demergebied 400-1350 een poging tot synthese*. Zutphen, Walburg Pers.

sixteenth centuries – was reclaimed, whereas in 1340 this already amounted to 90 percent.⁵ Karel Leenders labels the period 1245-1350 the ‘explosive period’ of Campine reclamation and identifies immigration as the driving force behind this rise.⁶ The County of Flanders was clearly overpopulated and part of this population surplus, in all likelihood, ended up in the Campine area. This process was probably enhanced by the Brabantine dukes’ politics, actively seeking new inhabitants by founding *nova oppida*, with important advantages and considerable freedom for its inhabitants. This late reclamation and relative ‘freedom’ explains why village communities were, and remained, strong in the Campine area and why Campine inhabitants had a relatively strong hold on their land.⁷ Compared to other sandy regions, such as the Veluwe or Overijssel, the Campine area was quite densely populated, as can be seen in table 1.1. Furthermore, it seems that the great crisis periods of the fifteenth century - the Great Famine (1315-1317) and the Black Death (1347-1348)⁸ had only a very limited impact on the Campine area. Concrete source material is, of course, largely lacking, however, the fast pace of reclamation does strongly suggest that the Campine area was spared a massive mortality. Quite the contrary was probably case: population continuously rose throughout the fourteenth century, as is indeed suggested by rent registers of that period.⁹

Table 1.1 Population density within the different regions of the Low Countries (inhabitants/km²)

Areas	Date	Population density in the countryside
Vlaanderen	1469	44,9
Holland	1514	47
Brabant	1473	27,3
Kempen	1472	19
Friesland	1511	17
Veluwe	1526	10
Overijssel	1474-1475	8
Luxemburg	1495	5,2

Source: W. P. Blockmans, G. Pieters, W. Prevenier and R. W. M. Van Schaik, 'Tussen crisis en welvaart: sociale veranderingen 1300-1500', in D. P. Blok and e.a. eds., *Algemene geschiedenis der Nederlanden* (Bussum, 1980), 42-86., processed by Maïka De Keyzer

Therefore, due to the rising population, more and more wasteland was reclaimed drastically altering the Campine landscape, which was, up until then, still largely characterised by

⁵ Spek, T. and Vangheluwe, D. (2008). "De laatmiddeleeuwse transitie van landbouw en landschap in de Noord-Brabantse Kempen." *Historisch-geografisch Tijdschrift* 26(1): 1-23.

⁶ Leenders, K. A. H. W. (1996). *Van Turnhoutervoorde tot Strienemonde*

⁷ Steurs, W. (1993). *Naissance d'une région: aux origines de la mairie de Bois-le-Duc: recherches sur le Brabant septentrional aux 12e et 13e siècles* Bruxelles, Académie Royale de Belgique.

⁸ There is hardly research dealing with the possible causes for this divergence. One article mentions the presence of different ‘strains’ of *yersinia pestis* as a causal factor: Haensch, S., R. Bianucci, et al. (2010). "Distinct clones of *Yersinia Pestis* caused the Black Death." *PLOS Pathogens* 6(10): 1-8. Other research points to for example differences in population size and organisation, hindering or encouraging diseases to spread: Scott, S. and C. J. Duncan (2001). *Biology of Plagues. Evidence from Historical Populations*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

⁹ Vangheluwe, D. (1999). "Local communities in their landscape in the rent district of Eersel / Bergeyk (14th-16th centuries)." F. Theuws and N. Roymans (eds.) *Land and ancestors. Cultural Dynamics in the Urnfield Period and the Middle Ages in the Southern Netherlands*. Amsterdam, University Press: 349-399.

woodlands. The village centres shifted from the fertile higher grounds to the lower brook valleys, arable land was increasingly enclosed – as Spek and Vangheluwe have indicated, from 20 percent of the total arable surface in 1210 to 90 percent in 1340 – and the woodland slowly transformed into what would become common heath land.¹⁰ This common waste was one of the most defining features of the Campine area. The survival of the Campine commons after the thirteenth century makes this region – together with Drenthe and the Veluwe – different from the core regions of the Low Countries. In Coastal Flanders, Inland Flanders and Holland, commons all but disappeared in the period before the late Middle Ages, leaving the inhabitants without this extra survival-mechanism. In the Campine area, a mixed-farming system, combining arable production (mainly of rye) and animal breeding, came into being. It is precisely this system, which emerged during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, which would remain more or less intact during the entire Ancien Regime.

The structural features of Campine society – the predominance of commons, strong village communities, the continued existence of a mixed-farming system, and the ongoing presence of smallholders with a strong hold on their land – were indeed very persistent, although there were modest changes and adjustments. The first attempts at the depreciation of the Campine model only came about in 1772, when fysiocratic ideas culminated in an edict by Empress Maria-Theresia that attempted to force a – partial – privatisation of the commons.¹¹ However, this attempt quickly fizzled out. Disparate parts of the commons were reclaimed during the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century, but the Campine agrosystem proved quite resilient. Eric Vanhaute, for, example indicates that smallholding was still – and perhaps even more so after the continuous rise in population from the 1750s onwards – predominant in the middle of the nineteenth century, with only 46 percent of villagers owning over 2 hectares. Furthermore, most inhabitants still held their land in customary rent, although a rising proportion of land was leased out (up to 40 percent in 1850).¹² Common heath land remained a determining feature, since between 1772 and 1800, only a quarter of common heath land disappeared because it was privatised and reclaimed or transformed into woodland.¹³ However, from the beginning of the nineteenth century, certain elements emerged, which undermined the Campine system. An ever-increasing amount of people lost their farms, meaning they had to rely on selling their labour to survive in a period with very low real wages.¹⁴ Moreover, the commons were seriously sabotaged during this period eroding many Campine structures. Guy Dejongh identifies several reasons for this, for example, the establishment of a more extensive road network, the introduction of artificial fertilizers, and the growing demand for wood. It was however only after 1850 that the Campine agrosystem finally broke down.

During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in particular, the relative stability of the Campine is a rather intriguing fact. In the Duchy of Brabant in particular, and even more so in the booming metropolis that was sixteenth-century Antwerp, it was a period of growth and

¹⁰ Spek, T. and Vangheluwe D. (2008). 'De laatmiddeleeuwse transitie'.

¹¹ Dejongh, G. (2000). "De ontginningspolitiek van de overheid in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden, 1750-1830. Een maat voor niets?" *Het Tijdschrift van het Gemeentekrediet* 53(210): 31-32

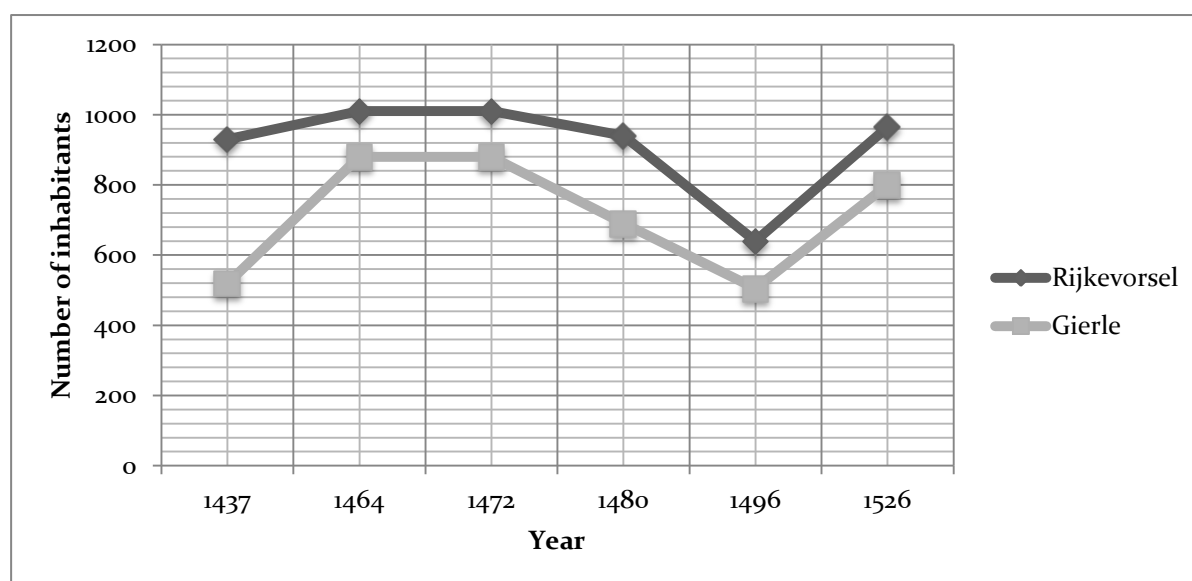
¹² Thoen, E. and E. Vanhaute (1999). "The 'Flemish Husbandry' at the edge: the farming system on small holdings in the middle of the 19th century." B. J. P. Van Bavel and E. Thoen (eds.). *Land productivity and agro-systems in the North Sea area. Middle Ages - 20th century. Elements for comparison*. Turnhout, Brepols: 275-276

¹³ Dejongh, G. (2000). "De ontginningspolitiek: 38

¹⁴ Vanhaute, E. (2010). "De schrikkelijke hongersnood is genadig afgewend. Waarom de Kempen in de jaren 1840 niet verhongerden." *Taxandria*. LXXXII: 267

commercialisation, economic, political and social change, as well as latent possibilities. An important fifteenth- and sixteenth-century evolution was the development and growth of markets. Brabantine annual fairs flourished from the fifteenth century onwards and in the sixteenth century Antwerp rose to become a true commercial metropolis.¹⁵ Furthermore, this period witnessed the remarkable breakthrough of factor markets.¹⁶ It was a decisive period in the development of land, credit and labour markets. The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries also saw state institutions gradually gaining influence. This went hand-in-hand with the rise of formalised institutions in cities as well on the countryside and with more regular taxation.¹⁷ Campine population numbers rose throughout the fifteenth century and were only halted by the crisis of the 1480s and 1490s (Fig 1.1).¹⁸ At the turn of the century, numbers started to rise again, although it took some time to return to the pre-crisis level. Our series ends in 1526, but for the village of Brecht taxation registers allow the near reconstruction of population evolutions for the sixteenth century. Taxation registers are certainly not a perfect reproduction of population numbers, however, it can give an indication of demographic evolutions. Table 2.2 indicates that the sixteenth century – or at least the period before the Revolt – was all-in-all characterised by a relatively stable demographic curve, once the recovery after the dip of the late fifteenth century had taken place.

Fig 1.1 Population numbers in the villages of Gierle and Rijkevorsel, 1437-1526



Source: Cuvelier, J. (1912). *Les dénombrements de foyers en Brabant, 14e-16e siècle* Brussel, s.n.

¹⁵ van der Wee, H. (1963). *The growth of the Antwerp market and the European economy (fourteenth-sixteenth centuries)*. The Hague, Nijhoff, 3 v.

¹⁶ Van Bavel, B. J. P. (2010). *Manors and markets: economy and society in the Low Countries, 500-1600*. Oxford Oxford University Press.

¹⁷ See for example: Dumolyn, J. (2003). *Staatsvorming en vorstelijke ambtenaren in het graafschap Vlaanderen (1419-1477)* Antwerpen, Garant. For taxation, there is: Thoen, E. Soens. T. (2008). The impact of central government taxations on the Flemish countryside (end 13th-18th centuries): some reflections. *Fiscal systems in the European economy from the 13th to the 18th centuries*: 957-971.

¹⁸ This was the period of the civil war against Maximilian of Austria and a period of bad grain harvests, very high prices, and even famine (1481-1482)

Table 1.2 Index of number of household heads in the village of Brecht (index: 1523=100)

Year	Number of household heads
1523	100
1533	105.9
1543	110.7
1555	101
1563	107.7
1576	103.3

Source: RAA, OGA Brecht, 2431-2482. *Accounts of the ducal (later on royal) aides, 1523-1576*

1.2 Explaining change and stability

In historiography we can roughly discern three models identifying the prime movers of change, and therefore, stability. It has always been more popular to attempt to explain change rather than stability, which has led to – in part – an underrepresentation of more stable regions. The 1970s and 1980s were, for example, characterised by an ongoing debate between representatives of these three models on the causes for economic development and change in pre-modern Europe. Neo-Malthusianism, in the field of rural history mainly embodied by M.M. Postan¹⁹ and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie²⁰, strongly emphasised demography as the causal factor behind pre-modern evolutions. The presumed inability of peasants to produce enough in order to sustain the growing demand due to a rising population is at the core of this line of thought. Famines, warfare and disease functioned as a system of checks and balances which put a stop to a self-destructive cycle. Secondly, the neo-Smithian approach can be mentioned. This line of thought highlights markets – an urban phenomenon at its core – as the instigator of economic change. The prime representative of this paradigm, when it comes to explaining evolutions on the countryside, is Jan De Vries. He is most famous for his theory on the ‘Industrious Revolution’, claiming that Dutch peasants chose the path of specialisation in order to meet their consumptive needs.²¹ A recent example of this can be found by the influential urban historian Wim Blockmans and his impressive *‘Metropolen aan de Noordzee’* which identifies urbanity, and more specifically merchant capitalism, as the steering force of the economy.²² However valuable this work is, it neglects the internal dynamics of the countryside to a certain extent, those which do not necessarily stem from urban interference.²³ In this line of thought commercialisation and specialisation are deemed superior strategies, and once countryside inhabitants decided to walk this path, they were able to cast off their ‘peasant-yoke’.

¹⁹ Postan, M. M. and J. Hatcher (1985). Population and class relations in feudal society. T. H. Aston and C. H. E. Philpin (eds.). *The Brenner Debate. Agrarian class structure and economic development in pre-industrial Europe..* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 64-78.

²⁰ See for example: Le Roy Ladurie, E. (1996). *De boeren van de Languedoc*. Amsterdam, Ooievaar.

²¹ De Vries, J. (1974). *The Dutch rural economy in the Golden Age, 1500-1700*. New Haven, Yale University Press.

²² Blockmans, W. (2010). *Metropolen aan de Noordzee: de geschiedenis van Nederland, 1100-1560*. Amsterdam, Bakker.

²³ As was argued in: Soens, T., E. Van Onacker, et al. (2012). "Metropolis and hinterland? A comment on the role of rural economy and society in the urban heart of the medieval Low Countries." *Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 127(2): 82-88.

Neo-Marxists point to social structures as the driving force of historical development. Within rural history, the approach of Robert Brenner in particular has inspired many rural historians. His central aim was to explain the different growth-patterns of pre-modern French and English agriculture. He identified differences in social property relations as the main explanatory factor. French peasants had a much stronger grip on their land, whereas the English ones lost theirs, clearing the way for capitalist development. Another influential neo-Marxist historian is Guy Bois. Bois points to inequalities in the world of feudal production as lying at the root of the divergence of rural economies. According to his views, the divergence between England and France can be explained by a diversifying impact of the so-called *Crise du féodalisme*, or the crisis of feudal income which, broadly speaking, spared England but hit France hard.

Neo-Smithian and Neo-Malthusian approaches focus on entirely anonymous driving forces such as the market and demography which are seen to determine the lives of a vague mass of peasants. Only the neo-Marxist line of thinking pays attention to social differences as a driving force, identifying social groups (for example 'lords' or 'peasants') as actors, nonetheless with the tendency of seeing social groups as homogenous units, sharing identical characteristics over time and space. In this dissertation a 'fourth road' is suggested, one which examines stability and change and steps away from a focus on these large macro-evolutions, moving down the ladder to look at different social groups as actors in this process. The roles of different social groups – and especially the dominant one – in past rural societies needs more texture and depth, which will be achieved via two channels, discussed in 1.3 and 1.4.

1.3 The regional factor

An extra dimension enabling us to deepen our insight in past rural societies can be derived from Bas Van Bavel's 'Manors and Markets', namely the need for a regional perspective. He portrays a rural-inspired vision of medieval developments, merging the social-property perspective of Brenner with the institutional framework of neo-institutional economists. He departs from the outspoken regional differences that characterised the Low Countries which could, according to Van Bavel have never been caused by differences in market structure or demography. He states that the origins of these outspoken regional differences were linked to differences in the socio-institutional context of regions which came into being in the reclamations-period. These socio-institutional structures were based on property relations²⁴ and on the institutional framework which determined where the surplus eventually ended up.²⁵ This bears a striking resemblance to Erik Thoen's vision who states that the Low Countries were characterised by a multitude of different social-agrosystems. A social-agrosystem is defined as a:

*"[...] rural production system based on region-specific social relations involved in the economic reproduction of a given geographical area".*²⁶

²⁴ Not only those concerning land, but also other natural resources

²⁵ Van Bavel, B. J. P. (2010). *Manors and markets*

²⁶ Thoen, E. (2004). "'Social agrosystems' as an economic concept to explain region differences. An essay taking the former county of Flanders as an example (Middle Ages - 19th century)." P. Hoppenbrouwers and B. J. P. Van Bavel

The building blocks of these systems are rather diverse, suggests Thoen. He mentions soil and physical environment, social property relations and power structures, size of holdings, labour relations and income strategies, agricultural technologies and traditions, and finally, links with other regions. Thoen has focussed mainly on the social-agrosystems of the former County of Flanders, noting that its two constituting parts followed different paths: Coastal Flanders evolved to a commercial business economy, whereas a still peasant-dominated Inland Flanders to a commercial survival economy.

Thanks to the insights of Thoen and Van Bavel, therefore, we know that different regions had varying internal logics, defined, broadly speaking, by specific regional social structures, hence my decision to focus on a clearly defined region, namely the Campine area, which would – according to Erik Thoen – certainly qualify as a distinct social agrosystem. On a regional macro-level, the main focus points have been demographic evolutions, power balances, movements of prices, wages, lease sums and tithes, and on property relations, all subjects which feature in the works of Thoen and Van Bavel. However, we do not know how these regional macro-differences were translated into differences in the social and political structures of everyday village life. We also do not know how they may have affected peasants themselves, their lives, relations, and decisions. In order to assess this, we must prise open the black box of the macro-level and descend to the meso-level, the level of social structures, that is, social relations within Campine villages. Based on the macro-theories of Thoen and Van Bavel, we would expect social stratification and elite formation to be different in peasant-dominated regions from regions embracing a fully commercially-oriented agriculture. However, even regions dominated by peasants might have differed to some extent due to diverging regional structures, for example, either the presence or absence of commons. The macro-level black box lies before us, waiting to be opened, to shed light on the social structures of peasant communities.

1.4 The peasant crux

Peasants, however, have not always been treated as real agents in the bulk of past research. They were often portrayed as the playthings of their environment, dominated by the lords. For many years the neo-Marxist view of the field was, furthermore, dominated by a very Chayanovian approach. Chayanov, an early twentieth-century Russian agronomist, saw subsistence-orientation as the primary quality that defined peasants. They were depicted as shunning markets and being conservative. Robert Brenner, linking the rise of European capitalism to agrarian property structures²⁷ saw the breaking-up of property-structures in the English countryside - where peasants lost their strong hold on land - as a key factor in enabling the rise of capitalism. According to his theory, peasants were focussed on self-sufficiency and prone to extreme self-exploitation including some additional lordly exploitation which completed the picture.

(eds.). *Landholding and land transfer in the North Sea area (late Middle Ages - 19th century)*. Turnhout, Brepols: 102-157

²⁷ For a summary of Brenner's theory: Aston, T. H. and C. H. E. Philpin (1985). *The Brenner Debate. Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

As Peter Hoppenbrouwers and Jan Luiten Van Zanden have indicated, the neo-Marxist and neo-Smithian approach suffers from the same flaw. Both saw the enlargement of farms as a necessary prerequisite for a rise in productivity and thus economic growth.²⁸ Since peasants were therefore perceived as not being able to contribute to economic growth, they were often treated insensitively and branded not only conservative but also irrational. A counter-argument was, however, presented in the 1990s by Robert Allen who built on the work of, among others, D. McCloskey.²⁹ Allen states that grand-scale agriculture was not necessarily a prerequisite for an increase in productivity but that the seventeenth-century yeomen – mid-scale to larger freehold farmers – working in the open-field system of the South Midlands were equally capable of producing impressive surpluses. Enclosure, often hailed as the driving force behind commercialisation and a more capitalist agriculture, is deemed almost irrelevant by Allen.³⁰

When Sheilagh Ogilvie, therefore, claimed in 2001 that “[...] a stubborn affection for distinctive peasant economic mentalities survives”³¹, she was tilting at windmills, as Paul Warde rightly claims.³² When she states that many historians (among whom Peter Kriedte, Jürgen Schlumbohm and Heide Wunder, including many others that are mentioned) deny the fact that peasants were unable to grasp modern economic concepts, such as opportunity costs, Warde points out that she is not entirely right. Hardly any rural historian would think of denying that peasants were able to grasp the concept of profit, they merely state that they were not necessarily profit *maximizers*. This is a first indication of the fact that, in recent years, the concepts ‘peasant’ and ‘peasant society’ have been filled in much more pragmatically and dynamically, not only by historians, but also by sociologists and anthropologists. Peasants are no longer (solely) portrayed as conservative, market-shunning crofters, struggling to make do with the meagre proceedings of their subsistence-oriented farms. Recent research has indicated that there is much more to being a peasant than that.

In 2009 Jan Douwe Van der Ploeg published ‘The New Peasantries’, a work reviving and updating the old Chayanovian concept of the peasant.³³ Van der Ploeg identifies several weaknesses in preceding peasant-theories. He claims, for example, that:

“[...] peasant studies have generally been weak in acknowledging agency, which evidently is an (unintended) consequence of their epistemological stance. Thus, peasants often figure as ‘passive victims’.”³⁴

He then proceeds to formulate an alternative for past theories, by building a new, operational definition for what he labels: ‘the peasant condition’. This condition is applicable to many rural

²⁸ Hoppenbrouwers, P. C. M. and J. L. Van Zanden (2001). “Restyling the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Some critical reflections on the Brenner-thesis.” P. C. M. Hoppenbrouwers and J. L. Van Zanden (eds.). *Peasants into farmers? The transformation of rural economy and society in the Low Countries (Middle Ages-19th century) in light of the Brenner debate*. Turnhout, Brepols: 19-40.

²⁹ See for example: McCloskey, D. (1991). “The Prudent Peasant: New Findings on Open Fields.” *The Journal of Economic History* 51(2): 343-355.

³⁰ Allen, R. C. (1992). *Enclosure and the yeoman. The agricultural development of the South-Midlands 1450-1850*. Oxford, Clarendon Press Oxford.

³¹ Ogilvie, S. (2001). “The economic world of the Bohemian serf: economic concepts, preferences, and constraints on the Estate of Friedland, 1583-1692.” *The Economic History Review* 54(3): 433

³² Warde, P. (2006). “Subsistence and sales: the peasant economy of Württemberg in the early seventeenth century.” *Economic History Review* LIX(2): 292

³³ Van der Ploeg, J. D. (2009). *The new peasantries: struggles for autonomy and sustainability in an era of empire and globalization*. Abingdon, Earthscan.

³⁴ Van der Ploeg, J. D. (2009). *The new peasantries*: 21

regions, linking smallholding peasants – objects of a re-peasantization process in Catacaos, Peru – to Italian, parmesan-producing peasants and to Frisian dairy cattle-breeders. This basic definition is not only applicable to present-day societies, but also proves useful for understanding past communities. Van der Ploeg defines the peasant condition as follows:

*“Central to the peasant condition is the struggle for autonomy that takes place in a context characterized by dependency relations, marginalization and deprivation. It aims at and materializes as the creation and development of a self-controlled and self-managed resource base, which in turn allows for those forms of co-production of man and living nature that interact with the market, allow for survival and for further prospects and feed back into and strengthen the resource base, improve the process of co-production, enlarge autonomy and, thus, reduce dependency. Depending upon the particularities of the prevailing socio-economic conjuncture, both survival and the development of one’s own resource base might be strengthened through engagement in other non-agrarian activities. Finally, patterns of cooperation are present which regulate and strengthen these interrelations.”*³⁵

Van der Ploeg, furthermore, stresses something which he considers an essential feature of peasants: he identifies their production processes as *a potentially dynamic praxis*, firmly denying an intrinsic tendency for stagnation. He depicts peasants as striving for autonomy and being a firmer resource base as well as a potentially important power group.

Furthermore, many historians have come to apply – although not always as explicitly – a more dynamic definition of - and view on - peasants and their communities, embracing the concept of peasant agency. Paul Warde, for example, can be inferred. His article ‘Subsistence and sales: the peasant economy of Württemberg in the early seventeenth century’ is a prime example of a nuanced and dynamic view on the specifics of peasants and their communities, focussing on the precise nature of their market relations. However, perhaps the most relevant name in this respect is Chris Dyer, whose body of work is very much focussed on restoring the capacity of agency for late medieval peasants. He firmly emphasises that peasants and their communities were able to adapt themselves and their institutions in order to change.³⁶ His research, focussing on a wide variety of topics ranging from consumerism regarding sizes of holdings to taxation, strongly embodies this viewpoint.³⁷ This same tendency can be found in the works of Miriam Müller who focuses on the subtleties and interactions of day-to-day English late medieval village life.³⁸ However, even though scholars’ views on peasants and their communities have become much more nuanced and dynamic by, for example, focussing on the

³⁵ Van der Ploeg, J. D. (2009). *The new peasantries*: 23

³⁶ Dyer, C. (2010). *English peasant agriculture in an age of crisis*, lecture, Brighton, Rural History Conference, 15 september 2010

³⁷ Some of his key-works are: Dyer, C. (1989). "The consumer and the market in the later middle ages." *Economic History Review* XLII(2): pp. 305-327; Dyer, C. (1995). "Were peasants self-sufficient? English villagers and the market." E. Mornet (ed.) *Campagnes médiévales: l'homme et son espace. Etudes offertes à Robert Fossier*. Paris: 653-666; Dyer, C. (1996). "Taxation and communities in Late Medieval England." H. Britnell and J. Fletcher (eds.). *Progress and Problems in medieval England. Essays in honour of Edward Miller*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 168-190; Dyer, C. (2004). "The Political Life of the Fifteenth-Century English Village." L. Clark and C. Carpenter (eds.). *Political Culture in Late Medieval Britain*. Woodbridge, The Boydell Press. 4: 136-157 & Dyer, C. (2007). "Conflict in the landscape: the enclosure movement in England, 1220-1349." *Landscape History* 29: pp. 21-33.

³⁸ As for example in: Müller, M. (2005). "Social control and the hue and cry in two fourteenth-century villages." *Journal of Medieval History* 31: 29-53 & Müller, M. (2007). "A Divided Class? Peasants and Peasant Communities in Later Medieval England." C. Dyer, P. Coss and C. Wickham. (eds.). *Rodney Hilton's Middle Ages. An Exploration of Historical Themes*. Oxford, Oxford University Press: 115-131.

agency of peasants, some pieces of the peasant-puzzle are still missing. The internal stratification of peasant societies still remains enigmatic.

As already mentioned, historiography has not yet fully embraced the concept of stratification or 'elite presence' within peasant societies.³⁹ Peasants have often been perceived as a homogenous mass. Internal differentiation, the presence of different groups within the larger amalgam of peasants, had hardly been recognised. The prime dichotomy discussed by many of these researchers is the tension existing between lords and peasants who are presented as two coherent groups. This is the case in Brenner's works, but in many others as well. For many years, peasants have been portrayed as 'one', unified because they had a common antagonist: the lordly class. Rodney Hilton, an eminent rural historian, undertook a groundbreaking study on the 1381 rural revolt, identifying lords and peasants as 'natural' antagonists.⁴⁰ The only diverging opinion can be found in the studies of members of the 'Toronto school'. This group of scholars, dominated by J.A. Raftis, have made a point of emphasising the unity between lords and peasants and the dominance of peace in the pre-Black Death English countryside. Raftis and his disciples even went as far as to suggest that inter-peasant stratification was much more present and delineated than the differences between lords and peasants as a group.⁴¹ Their viewpoints were, however, strongly criticised and, later on, mostly ignored. According to Zvi Razi, for example, this presupposed unity was an ill-founded suggestion. As he puts it:

*"The tensions and conflicts generated within the village community were mitigated by a strong element of cooperation and mutual assistance. Rich no less than poor peasants were oppressed and exploited by the seigniorial regime, and therefore when tensions erupted in medieval rural society in the form of violent uprisings, they were not directed by the poor peasants against their better-off neighbours, but by the village community as a whole against the seigniorial ruling class."*⁴²

The focus on the importance of intra-community social stratification has up until now, therefore, been treated somewhat insensitively, to say the least, by the dominant views within this field. Peasants as a group clearly had agency, as recent research suggest, but the level or amount of agency might have differed among different social groups. To refine our understanding of the functioning of a rural society and village life in the late medieval and early modern countryside, it seems essential to step away from viewing peasants as one class or one group. Social stratification and the presence of certain elite-groups in a peasant-dominated countryside is a wasteland, waiting to be rec

³⁹ An interesting summary of the neo-marxist (vs. Neo-Smithian) approach, especially concerning market integration, can be found in: Vermoesen, R. (2008). *Markttoegang en 'commerciële' netwerken van rurale huishoudens: de regio Aalst, 1650-1800* History Department. Antwerp, University of Antwerp: 23-27. For a more general overview, I refer to: Scott, T. (1998). *The peasantries of Europe: from the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries*. London, Longman.

⁴⁰ Hilton, R. H. (1973). *Bond men made free: medieval peasant movements and the English rising of 1381*. New York, Viking Press.

⁴¹ Some examples of the Toronto-school literature: Raftis, J. A. (1974). *Warboys. Two hundred years in the life of an English medieval village*. Toronto, Pontifical institute of mediaeval studies; Raftis, J. A. (1965). "Social Structures in Five East Midland Villages - A Study of Possibilities in the Use of Court Roll Data." *Economic history review* XVIII(1): 83-100; Britton, E. (1977). *The Community of the Vill. A Study in the History of the Family and Village Life in Fourteenth Century England*. Toronto, Macmillan & Dewindt, A. (1976). "Peasant Power Structures in Fourteenth-Century King's Ripton." *Mediaeval Studies* XXXVIII: 236-267.

⁴² Razi, Z. (1979). "The Toronto School's Reconstitution of Medieval Peasant Society: a Critical View." *Past and Present* 85: 156

1.5 Stratification on the countryside

1.5.1 From a 'Coqs de village' elite model...

What we talk about when we talk about rural elites

Research on social stratification in the countryside is rare therefore, however, there have nonetheless been some initial attempts. In 2007, a Flaran conference volume was published⁴³, entitled: *Les élites rurales dans l'Europe médiévale et moderne*. A multitude of the contributors focus on late medieval and early modern France, but other cases are put forward as well, England for example, or Italy. In the introduction of this work, Jean-Pierre Jessenne and François Menant define rural elites as follows:

"[...] l'expression 'élites rurales' désigne en revanche le groupe social intermédiaire [...] entre la paysannerie d'une part, et d'autre part l'aristocratie, ou plus largement les seigneurs et autres propriétaires d'une certaine envergure, généralement non exploitants et non résidents, les citadins notamment. Les élites rurales comprennent ainsi à la fois des agriculteurs aisés et des petits notables, marchands, notaires, agents seigneuriaux, curés ou aubergistes, et cette diversité justifie largement le pluriel de l'expression."⁴⁴

In this overview, they very much emphasise the increasing importance of markets from the late medieval period onwards as an accelerator for elite potential, since it created opportunities for accumulation; this clearly emerges from their definition of elites as well since, for example, merchants and innkeepers are clearly mentioned.

They furthermore established a 'typology of the formation and reproduction processes of elites', discerning four main types. The first rests on the system of **agricultural exploitation**, which mainly refers to farm size. Secondly, **wealth** is mentioned – very much linked to the emergence of markets and accumulation, mainly by acting as creditors – which created options for living off one's own private means. Thirdly, formation and reproduction could also occur through the filling-in of **intermediary functions**, acting as a middleman between the lord and his subjects. And finally, they mention the importance of **socio-political organisational systems**, such as the state, the seignior, or the village community. These different types are often merged, thereby implying that elites were formed and reproduced in different ways.

Jessenne and Menant are, of course, not the first to note this multifaceted power base; this is part of a much older and wider sociological tradition. Most notable is of course Max Weber's work on the differences and importance of class, status and power.⁴⁵ Sociology and anthropology have built further upon these basic concepts and these present-day theories are, of course, based on present-day power and decision-making processes which makes them hard to apply to past societies. However, the fact that elite-membership has an economic, political, and even cultural aspect is an important feature of pre-modern societies as well. An

⁴³ Menant, F. and J. P. Jessenne (2007). *Les élites rurales dans l'Europe médiévale et moderne: actes des 27es Journées internationales d'histoire de l'abbaye de Flaran, 9,10,11 septembre 2005*. Toulouse, Presses Universitaires du Mirail: 7-52.

⁴⁴ Jessenne, J. P. and F. Menant (2007). "Introduction." F. Menant and J. P. Jessenne (eds.). *Les élites rurales dans l'Europe médiévale et moderne: actes des 27es Journées internationales d'histoire de l'abbaye de Flaran, 9,10,11 septembre 2005*. Toulouse, Presses Universitaires du Mirail: 8

⁴⁵ See: Gerth, H. H. and C. W. Mills, Eds. (1970). *From Max Weber: essays in sociology*. London, Routledge & Kegan.

operational definition of a pre-modern rural elite, based on the Flaran-volume, can therefore be formulated as follows:

*“An elite is a group of people able to distinguish themselves and control and mobilise a more than proportional part of the (non-)material resources of a community, via economic, political and / or cultural tracks, creating power or dependency relations.”*⁴⁶

This definition is represented in fig 1.2.

The Flaran elite-conference proceedings also point to different studies focussing on groups that are deemed representative of what consisted a ‘rural elite’, a group that ticks the above-mentioned boxes. A prime example of this is the comprehensive study of Jean-Marc Moriceau on the fifteenth- to eighteenth-century ‘*Fermiers de l’Île de France*’.⁴⁷ These *fermiers* could be labelled – according to Marc Bloch – *coqs de village* – or according to Lucien Febvre – *la bourgeoisie rurale*. These ‘*fermiers à grandes bottes*’ are the prime archetype of rural elites in French historiography, tilling large, commercial farms and using this economic power base to – economically and politically – control their fellow-villagers. Another archetype is that of the English yeoman, as described by the already-mentioned Robert Allen.⁴⁸ Yeomen, middle- to larger sized freeholders, were of prime importance in the seventeenth-century South Midlands and had, according to Allen, quite a significant influence on village opinion. The characteristics and potential of this elite are, however, only half-heartedly addressed, since the scope of Allen’s research lies elsewhere. Recently William Hagen suggested using the term ‘yeoman’ for all holders of self-sufficient family farms. These were, according to him, the stable forces within European agrarian history, however, his ideal-typical approach lacks depth and empirical testing.

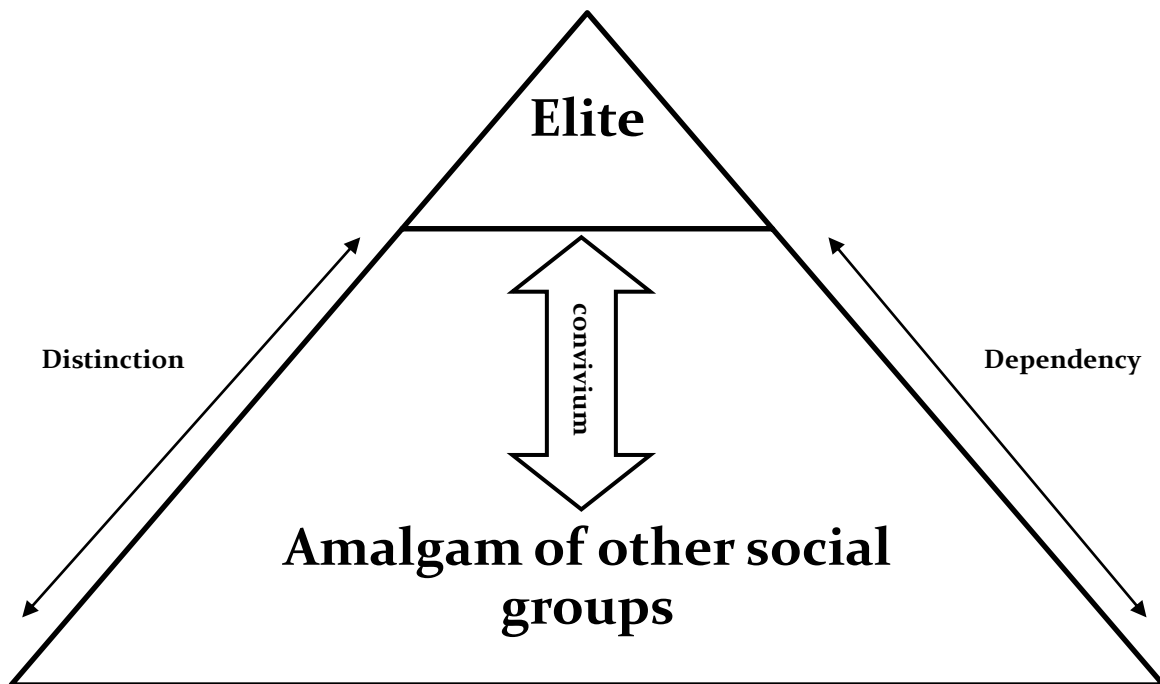
The above-mentioned archetypes – the *coq de village* or the yeoman – are by no means convertible to other regions or other periods. If rural research has taught us one thing in the last decade, it is that regional differences matter and they are even authoritative. There is of course no such thing as stratification in ‘the’ countryside. The differences in socio-institutional structures probably also translates into differences in terms of social stratification and elite characteristics, however, the precise nature of this needs to be looked into. In Van Bavel’s point of view, the fact that different regions are characterised by different socio-institutional structures, most likely impacted social structures in general, and elite formation in particular. On the other hand, following Erik Thoen’s social-agrosystemic approach, the commercial business economy of Coastal Flanders had very different structural features than the commercial survival economy of Inland Flanders or the peasant- and commons-dominated Campine region. This must have had repercussions on the micro-level of the village, its social structures and its leading groups.

⁴⁶ Dombrecht, K.; Van Onacker, E.; Soens, T. and Thoen, E. (2010). *Rural elites, local power and rural capitalism (medieval-early modern period)*. State of the art of a research project and perspectives for comparative research, lecture, Rural history Conference 2010, Brighton

⁴⁷ Moriceau, J. M. (1994). *Les fermiers de l’Île-de-France - XVe-XVIIIe siècle*. Paris, Fayard.

⁴⁸ Allen, R. C. (1992). *Enclosure and the yeoman*

Fig 1.2 The classical historiographical elite model – *coqs de village*



An inland Flanders model of elites

When it comes to the countryside in the Low Countries only one model of elite formation and reproduction has been identified and thoroughly researched: that which Reinoud Vermoesen labelled the eighteenth century Inland Flanders horse farmers (or *paardenboeren*).⁴⁹ Inland Flanders was, according to Erik Thoen, a peasant-dominated society, a ‘commercial survival economy’, where peasants combined the tilling of ever-smaller plots of land with the growth of industrial crops and proto-industrial activities in order to secure their survival.⁵⁰ This group is beautifully depicted in the writings of the already mentioned Reinoud Vermoesen⁵¹ and Thijs Lambrecht⁵². In the eighteenth century, and especially after the continuous rise in population from 1750 onwards, the countryside in Inland Flanders became increasingly polarised. The gap between an ever-larger group of smallholders and a limited top-layer of tenant farmers tilling huge farms, became larger and larger. This is illustrated by the findings of Thijs Lambrecht for the Flemish village of Markegem where Gillis Coucke, the tenant of the 50 ha farm of *Ter Hoye*, was the village’s main *coq de village*. According to Lambrecht’s findings, an increasing number of smallholders appeared throughout the eighteenth century, whereas middling groups deteriorated rapidly. The *coqs de village* were, however, able to strengthen their position as can be seen in table 1.3.

⁴⁹ Vermoesen, R. (2010). "Paardenboeren in Vlaanderen. Middelaars en commercialisering van de vroegmoderne rurale economie in de regio Aalst 1650-1800." *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis* 7(1): 3-37.

⁵⁰ See for example: Thoen, E. and E. Vanhoute (1999). "The 'Flemish Husbandry' at the edge": 271-295.

⁵¹ His most essential Works are: Vermoesen, R. (2010). "Paardenboeren in Vlaanderen": 3-37 & Vermoesen, R. (2008). *Markttoegang en 'commerciële' netwerken*

⁵² See for example his dissertation: Lambrecht, T. (2002). *Een grote hoeve in een klein dorp: relaties van arbeid en pacht op het Vlaamse platteland tijdens de 18e eeuw*. Gent, Academia Press. & Lambrecht, T. (2003). "Reciprocal exchange, credit and cash: agricultural labour markets and local economies in the Southern Low Countries during the eighteenth century." *Continuity and Change* 18(2): 237-261.

Table 1.3 Size of holdings in Markegem as a percentage of all holdings, 1742-1846

	1742	1800	1846
0-0.9 ha	20.0	34.9	70.3
1-1.9 ha	13.8	10.7	3.3
2-3.9 ha	32.5	18.5	8.2
4-4.9 ha	15.0	11.7	3.3
5-5.9 ha	12.5	18.5	10.4
> 10 ha	6.3	5.8	4.4
Total number of holdings	80	103	182

Source: Lambrecht, T. (2003). "Reciprocal exchange, credit and cash: agricultural labour markets and local economies in the Southern Low Countries during the eighteenth century." *Continuity and Change* 18(2): 239

These eighteenth-century large tenant farmers, of which Gillis Coucke was a prime example, derived their power over their less well-off counterparts and thus their elite-position, from their favourable position vis-à-vis political structures (i.e. the lord and the state) and economic structures (i.e. the market). The aforementioned Gillis Coucke was, for example, the bailiff of the village of Markegem as local tradition had it.⁵³ The research of Lambrecht and Vermoesen furthermore indicates that these big-shot farmers acted as middlemen between peasants and the market. In this regard, Wouter Ronsijn talks about 'mediated market dependence', for the peasants in the vicinity of the city of Oudenaarde.⁵⁴ These tenant farmers not only distributed peasant-produced goods on the urban markets, they were also the main creditors of the village and this credit was often repaid by labour. Vermoesen and Lambrecht furthermore both also mention the lending out of horses and ploughs – hence the name horse farmers – which occurred because ploughing with a horse was apparently better than ploughing manually and ordinary Flemish peasants could not afford the costs of a traction animal. Yet again this was often repaid in the form of labour on the tenant farm.

Nonetheless, for several reasons this eighteenth-century Inland Flanders model cannot be extrapolated to the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Campine area. First of all, there are some indications that fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Inland Flanders might have had a different social structure, social stratification, and upper-layer than in the eighteenth century. Vermoesen, for example, indicates that the number of smallholders (< 1 ha) in 1569-1571 was somewhat lower than in the second half of the eighteenth century. He furthermore mentions that in 1650 one third of all households still owned a horse, whereas this number plummeted to 18 percent in the second half of the eighteenth century, in all likelihood forcing more villagers into dependency. Furthermore, the eighteenth century, with its gigantic population increase, its strong state structures and relatively well-developed economy, was by no means comparable to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. There is still more that suggests why the Campine area might be different.

⁵³ Lambrecht, T. (2003). "Reciprocal exchange": 240

⁵⁴ in his dissertation: Ronsijn, W. (2011). *Commerce and the countryside: the role of urban weekly markets in Flemish rural society, 1750-1900*. Gent, Universiteit Gent

1.5.2 Towards a peasant model?

As has been mentioned before, the Campine area was a peasant society, characterised by the continued presence of commons, strong village communities, and a predominance of smallholders engaged in mixed-farming. In the presentation of the elite models so far the importance of wealth has mainly been emphasised and the accumulation and the creation of dependency as tools of elite creation and continuation. The opportunities created by markets were of prime importance for this process. For peasant regions, a structural model, a typology, is therefore still missing. Hagen's yeoman-model might serve as a first indication of the possibilities, but a more thorough approach is still lacking. Research specifically focussing on the top-layer of peasant societies is very rare, and often limited in focus. Sherri Olson, for example, has written a number of articles about village elites in Huntingdonshire, however, her main criterion for belonging is the occupation of a function in the governing of a village which more or less ignores what Weber labelled the 'class' aspect of social stratification. Olson therefore limits herself to saying only something about the elite's strong activity within land and credit markets.⁵⁵ The same tendency can be found in a more recent article by Jan Pitman although relating to a rather more commercialised region.⁵⁶ Although based on in-depth research of local worthies and their activities, many studies of elites in village X or Y merely confirm that, without sufficiently framing elites in the entire complex of social relations within the local community, the analysis usually lacks explanatory force. When it comes to the Low Countries, the works of Peter Hoppenbrouwers on the Land of Heusden and Jan Bieleman on the sandy region of Drenthe point the presence of different social groups within peasant communities, indicating the existence of a top-layer. Their works are – though very relevant and intriguing – still rather classical 'region studies', which attempt to reconstruct the functioning of regional macro-structures and focus less on social groups in the shaping of these structures.

A more structural, in-depth approach can pay off, one which focuses on the specifics of elites within a peasant region, dominated by commons, strong communities and smallholders. Throughout this dissertation I will try to form a typology for the village elite in a peasant society with commons. Historiography clearly suggests that elite membership rests on different pillars, some economic, some political, others cultural. These pillars differed greatly according to the socio-institutional substructure of a given region. Therefore, elite membership will be addressed on two levels: a socio-economic and a socio-political one. I will focus on the socio-economic stratification of Campine villages and make an assessment of the features of an economic top-group, examining their control over economic resources and reconstructing the level of economic dependency of other villagers on this group. Secondly, I will address the socio-political level, focussing on the group who had a say in political government and decision-making, exerting political power and thus creating some sort of socio-political dependency. We must, finally, take into account the temporal dimension of elite membership and formation and assess whether and how elite membership, characteristics

⁵⁵ Olson, S. (1991). "Jurors of the Village Court: Local Leadership Before and After the Plague in Ellington, Huntingdonshire." *The Journal of British Studies* 30(3): pp. 237-256. & Olson, S. (1992). "Family linkages and the structure of the local elite in the medieval and early modern village." *Medieval Prosopography* 13(2): 53-82.

⁵⁶ Pitman, J. (2004). "Tradition and exclusion: parochial officeholding in Early Modern England, a case-study from North Norfolk, 1580-1640." *Rural History* 15(1): 27-45.

and strategies were as constant as the Campine structures or whether they were indeed liable to change.

When it comes to source material, it is by no means evident to focus on social relations in a region without a large landowner-dominance. Lords, be it secular or ecclesiastical ones, and their institutions are often the main notaries of rural life. A prime example of this are the English manor courts, lordly institutions, registering the 'highlights' of peasants' lives. Since the lordly grip on the Campine area was rather modest, 'grand' series of sources shedding light on social relations are almost entirely absent. A specific archival strategy will therefore be employed to put this research into operation. Due to the specific Campine situation, I will not be able to carry out a real micro-study, focussing on the social structures of one specific village. No one village provides me with enough material allowing the reconstruction of all aspects of social relations and social stratification. Therefore, I have decided to focus on the meso-level, that is, not on one specific village but villages as a group. For every village, one or several aspects of social stratification can be investigated. Since Campine villages shared the same structural features, this approach is, in my view, entirely defensible although I will of course, whenever necessary, point out subtle differences. Two villages function as the main points of focus: Gierle (in the Land of Turnhout) and Rijkevorsel (in the Land of Hoogstraten). For these villages it has been possible to make an economic cross-section and thus reconstruct social stratification, based on taxation records, at a given moment in time and link this to other types of sources. In most chapters, the core focus is therefore on these two villages. Nonetheless, a wide range of additional information from other villages will be added to this foundation in order to account for temporal and spatial deviation.

1.6 Outline of the dissertation

Quite self-evidently, the dissertation will therefore consist of two main parts. In the first, longest part, I will focus on socio-economic (power) structures, whereas in a second – somewhat shorter – part the socio-political (power) structures will be put to the fore. The socio-cultural level is, unfortunately, left out of this dissertation, since source material shedding light on this fascinating aspect of the Campine peasant society is lacking. There is, furthermore, another limitation to this research. The present-day Belgian part of the Campine area – situated in the current-day Province of Antwerp – will be central, mainly for practical, source-related reasons, however, source material is extremely scattered and often requires extensive analysis. Therefore, in order to increase the feasibility of this study, I have decided to use the current boundary as a research-demarcation as well. However, the Northern-Brabant part of the Campine area is often referred to, through literature or a number of primary sources.

The Campine area therefore acts as the 'laboratory' in which our elite-experiment will take place, although the meso-level of the region (or the level of the social agrosystem, as Erik Thoen would label it) is clearly does not constitute the main unit of analysis. To obtain a clear view of Campine elites, we must descend to the level that mattered the most in the minds of the Campiner: the micro-level, that of the village community. The villages that will be central

in this dissertation are mainly Gierle and Rijkevorsel, but findings for other villages will be added to this, in order to sharpen and nuance our analysis, namely Brecht, Tongerlo, Essen, Kalmthout, Wuustwezel, Loenhout, Arendonk, Minderhout, Alphen-Chaem as well as a number of others. Source material concerning these villages will be used to sketch a nuanced image of the characteristics and strategies of the Campine village top-layers.

In the first part, the focus will be on socio-economic stratification and power strategies. First of all, it is relevant to sketch the framework in which peasant actions and strategies could be deployed, namely that of the seigniorial (and later on) stately structures and the ways in which they weighed on these peasants and their communities. This will mainly be undertaken by making use of the domain accounts of the ducal domain of Turnhout and the taxation revenues of the Burgundian and Habsburg state apparatus. Secondly, a chapter will be devoted to the reconstruction of Campine social stratification and property relations and the isolation of an economic elite-group, mainly through the use of rent registers and tax registers (especially the sixteenth-century *penningkohieren*). Thirdly then, the grip of the 'economic elite' on the quintessential Campine commons will be reconstructed, by comparing normative sources (i.e. mostly byelaws) with evidence from the daily, actual practice. Subsequently, the relation of the economic upper-layer with the markets for goods, land and credit will be reconstructed in order to shed light on the role of these markets in peasants' lives and check if we can detect the presence of certain accumulation strategies. Land and credit transactions will be reconstructed by using the registers of the bench of aldermen, whereas for the reconstruction of the market for goods, sheep-breeding will serve as a case-study. And finally, the socio-economic part will be completed by examining the only group that might have functioned as true *coqs de village*, the Campine tenant farmers who were only present in a limited number of villages, by using the archives of the main landlord, that is, the abbey of Tongerlo. The second part of this study will focus on the socio-political aspect of elite-membership and the political and social control of the village community. Source material for this part of the research is somewhat harder to come by, and it is therefore also somewhat briefer. In first instance I will focus on village politics and the holding of offices, mainly by using the registers of the benches of aldermen. Secondly, the 'village social' will be reconstructed, whereby the procedures of poor relief and church government will be examined in order to detect traces of social cohesion and elite dominance.

2

THE POWERS THAT WERE. MANORIAL AND STATELY POWER AND (IN)EQUALITY.

*“Where shall we robb, where shall we reve,
Where shall we bete and bynde?”*

...

*“But loke ye do no husbonde harme
That tilleth with his ploughe
No more ye shall no gode yeman
That walketh by grene-wode shawe
Ne no knight ne no sqyer
That wol be a gode felawe”*

*These bisshopes and these archebishoppes
Ye shall them bete and bynde
The hye sherif of Notyngham
Hym holde ye in your mynde”*

(Source: The Gest of Robyn Hode)⁵⁷

It would be an understatement to say that in the *Gest of Robyn Hode*, the subsequently romanticised story of the outlaw Robin Hood, the relationship between the lord and his peasant-subjects is, portrayed in a rather negative way. The legend of Robin Hood, beautifully depicted by Rodney Hilton in his 1958 article, suggests a rather turbulent and conflict-ridden image of the lord-peasant interactions.⁵⁸ As already mentioned in the introductory chapter, this troublesome relationship between the lord and his peasant-subjects has been at the core of – mainly – (neo-) Marxist inspired historiography. Especially in the ‘Brennerian’ tradition, lords were portrayed as surplus-extractors, whereas peasants were the producers of these lordly extras.⁵⁹ Robert Brenner was convinced of the coercive nature of feudal surplus extraction. Due to the fact that peasants had a strong grip on their land, lords simply had to use force to skim off the surplus. Furthermore, from the fifteenth century onwards, the Burgundian state apparatus can be seen as an extra or newly dominant surplus extractor, since it incessantly strived for additional income, mainly through taxation. A multitude of historians

⁵⁷ Citation coming from: Hilton, R. H. (1958). "The origins of Robin Hood." *Past and Present* 14: 39

⁵⁸ Hilton, R. H. (1958). "The origins of Robin Hood": 30-44

⁵⁹ See for example Aston, T. H. and C. H. E. Philpin (1985). *The Brenner Debate. Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

emphasise the inextricable link between the growing state apparatus and its inexhaustible – yet not always successful – attempts to derive more income from taxation, to pay for the ever-extending state apparatus and military campaigns.⁶⁰

This dichotomy between lord and peasants and the level of surplus-extraction, two of the basic concepts of rural history, will function as the point of departure of this dissertation. The seigniorial and stately structures shaped the institutional framework in which peasant communities were formed. These overarching structures strongly determined social, economic and political life in the countryside, and, in turn, social stratification and elite formation. The seigniorial and the state could weigh down on peasants and their communities, by burdening them with taxes and chores. However the true scope of the impact of manorial and stately structures on peasant societies remains somewhat enigmatic. When it comes to the ‘classical’ manorial burdens, even Rodney Hilton nuances the impact of surplus extraction. He states: “*It is true that the lord could affect, usually in a negative sense, the resources of the peasant holding by his demands for rents and services. He could also (though never as much as he hoped) control the movement of the dependent population. But he was not able to determine the application of labour and other resources within the economy of the holding*”.⁶¹

The nature of seigniorial impact could furthermore differ greatly between regions – regional variety being another prime focus of rural research in the last few years. In medieval Holland for example, feudal structures were nearly absent, which led Jan De Vries to label it ‘a land without feudalism’.⁶² In Flanders too, they were not of extreme importance. In the sandy parts of the Low Countries, the Veluwe, Drenthe and the Campine area, seigniorial structures were rather limited as well, according to Bas Van Bavel. In other regions, feudal burdens were more significant, for example, in the Gelders river area, or in the Haspengouw region.⁶³ The exact range of surplus extraction was in all likelihood more limited within regions with a weak seigniorial structure, as for example the Campine area, but in-depth research is still lacking. The precise extent of the Campine seigniorial structures and the impact these had on their ‘subjects’ – peasant communities and their inhabitants – thus remains enigmatic. This prompts the following crucial set of questions: what was the impact of Campine seigniorial structures on its inhabitants and to what extent were the Campine communities burdened or hindered by these seigniorial structures? Or in other words: how were they ‘framed’ by them?

The impact of the state - as expressed by stately taxation - on the countryside in general and the Campine area specifically, is another historical enigma. As the Burgundian dukes extended their powers and their grip on the Low Countries, the previously ‘extraordinary’ taxes, needing the Estates’ assent, had a tendency to become increasingly regular.⁶⁴ Still, the Dukes were, and remained, heavily dependent on the Estates of Flanders and Brabant, which were – especially in Flanders – dominated by the powerful and confident cities. A clash between the

⁶⁰ As is described by: Boone, M. (1993). "Overheidsfinanciën in de Middeleeuwse Zuidelijke Nederlanden." *Tijdschrift voor Fiscaal Recht* 117: 105-115. & Haemers, J. and B. Lambert (2009). "Pouvoir et argent. La fiscalité et la consommation du crédit des ducs de Bourgogne (1384-1506)." *Revue du Nord* 91: 35-59.

⁶¹ Hilton, R. H. (1978). "A Crisis of Feudalism." *Past and Present* 80: 9

⁶² In: De Vries, J. (2001). The transition to capitalism in a land without feudalism. P. Hoppenbrouwers and J. L. Van Zanden (eds.) *Peasants into farmers? The transformation of rural economy and society in the Low Countries (Middle Ages - 19th century) in light of the Brenner debate*. Turnhout, Brepols: 67-84.

⁶³ Van Bavel, B. J. P. (2010). *Manors and markets: economy and society in the Low Countries, 500-1600*. Oxford, Oxford University Press: 76-82

⁶⁴ For more information, read for example: Dumolyn, J. (2007). "The Political and Symbolic Economy of State Feudalism: The Case of Late Medieval Flanders." *Historical Materialism* 15: 105-131.

growing state and the still vehement cities thus seemed inevitable and did indeed occur, for example, in the ever-rebellious city of Ghent.⁶⁵ The impact of taxation on the late medieval and early modern countryside however, has received little or no attention. A first attempt to make a statement on the social and economic impact of taxation on the countryside was undertaken by Erik Thoen and Tim Soens. They focussed on fifteenth and sixteenth century Coastal and Inland Flanders. According to their findings, the *aides* did indeed tend to become a more regular instrument, but, in general, they never became a very real burden. Therefore, the crucial question seems to be: how substantial was the impact of government taxation on the Campine countryside and its communities?

The prime goal of this chapter is therefore the reconstruction of the seigniorial and stately impact on the Campine peasant communities. First of all, the Campine seigniorial system will be presented. When it comes to the feudal structures, the domain accounts of the Land of Turnhout, which was ducal property, will allow the extent and types of revenues to be assessed, thereby providing us with an indication of the feudal pressure on the Campine commoners. It will be argued that the Campine area was by no means a seigniorial 'no man's land' – as, for example, medieval Holland – however, Campine communities as a whole were relatively sheltered from excessive seigniorial burdens. Secondly, the impact of state formation will be dealt with. When it comes to these stately structures, the evolution of the tax burden will be used as a proxy to assess the effect of taxation, which was, as I will suggest, relatively moderate on the aggregate level of the village community. By focussing on these two aspects, the extent of the room for manoeuvre for the Campine communities will be demarcated, thus functioning as a starting point for the rest of this dissertation.

2.1 The Campine seigniorial structure: characteristics and pressure

2.1.1 The emergence of a complex structure: the Campine seigniorial system

General evolution

When it came to the emergence and formation of a seigniorial structure, the Campine area was clearly a late bloomer. As Bas Van Bavel indicated in his 'Manors and Markets' "the precise organization of the manors showed wide regional differences, depending on the extent of large properties, the power of the lords, and the former position of the serfs. There were many degrees of freedom or lack of freedom, resulting in diversity, in law and in practice, even after people were integrated into a manorial regime".⁶⁶ When the 'manoralisation' process initially emerged in the ninth century, the Campine area – as the other sandy parts of the Low Countries, such as the Veluwe, Salland, and Drenthe – was not affected to any great extent; manors were rather scarce and quite small. When it came to the reclamations of the eleventh,

⁶⁵ Blockmans, W. (1978). *De volksvertegenwoordiging in Vlaanderen in de overgang van middeleeuwen naar nieuwe tijden, 1384-1506*. Brussel, Paleis der Academiën: 353-355; Boone, M. (2003). "Gavere 1453: een onvermijdelijke etappe in het Bourgondisch staatsvormingsproces?" *Handelingen: Zottegems genootschap voor geschiedenis en oudheidkunde* 11: 213-214 & Haemers, J. (2004). *De Gentse Opstand van 1449-1453. De strijd tussen rivaliserende netwerken om het stedelijke kapitaal*. Heule, UGA.

⁶⁶ Van Bavel, B. J. P. (2010). *Manors and markets*: 75

twelfth and even thirteenth centuries, the infertile Campine soils were not hugely popular. Reclamation started relatively late and moved at a slow pace. Manors were present, but never managed to become really powerful. The Campine peasants were therefore somewhat shielded from manorial pressure, according to Van Bavel.⁶⁷

Karel Leenders has devoted an enormously detailed study to the early stages of Campine (manorial / seigniorial) development, ranging from the post-Roman period to 1350. He distinguishes several development stages.⁶⁸ The first one, ranging from 1000 to 1150 was characterised by the relative abundance of *allodia*, or freehold land, not held in rent or fief from an overlord. Some Campine inhabitants grew to be relatively powerful, owning whole villages, which in turn they were able to rent out to other Campiners. As time went by, several of these *allodia* developed into genuine *seigneuries foncières*, with their own tiny courts. Some of these *allodia* even turned into real seignories, containing various degrees of judicial power. Leenders distinguishes 5 types of seignories, each including their own judicial competences (table 2.1).

Table 2.1 The different types of seignories

English term	Dutch term	Clarification
High seignory, with the right to execute	<i>Hoge heerlijkheid met executie</i>	Seignory including all types of jurisdiction, including the execution of capital offenders
High seignory, without the right to execute	<i>Hoge heerlijkheid zonder executie</i>	Seignory including all types of jurisdiction, however, only the overlord had the right to decide on the death sentence
Middle seignory	<i>Middelbare heerlijkheid</i>	Not qualified to punish capital offences
Low seignory	<i>Lage heerlijkheid</i>	Offences up to fines of 3 <i>schellingen</i>
<i>Seigneurie foncière</i>	<i>Grondheerlijkheid</i>	Transactions bound to land

Source: Leenders, K. A. H. W. (1996). *Van Turnhoutervoorde tot Strienemonde : ontginnings- en nederzettingsgeschiedenis van het noordwesten van het Maas-Schelde-Demergebied 400-1350 een poging tot synthese*. Zutphen, Walburg Pers.

From 1150 onwards, the Campine area witnessed a gradual process of feudalization. These *allodia* were increasingly incorporated in a feudal system. The Duke of Brabant and the Duke of Breda in particular bound the former independent lords to them. Local lords ‘gave’ their *allodia* and the rights that went along with it to the duke and received it back, as a fief. Furthermore the duke often ‘sold’ or ‘pledged’ (part of) his judicial powers to his new vassals. A.J.A. Bijsterveld claims that the Dukes aimed for this strategy, not in order to ‘own’ the land or jurisdiction directly, but mainly because they wanted these local rulers and their ‘domains’ opened up for their administration and taxation. For the regional lords, this feudalization

⁶⁷ Van Bavel, B. J. P. (2010). *Manors and markets*: 83-86

⁶⁸ For far more detailed information on the reclamation and early development of the Campine area (or the Meuse-Demer-Scheldt region, as Leenders calls it), see: Leenders, K. A. H. W. (1996). *Van Turnhoutervoorde tot Strienemonde : ontginnings- en nederzettingsgeschiedenis van het noordwesten van het Maas-Schelde-Demergebied 400-1350 een poging tot synthese*. Zutphen, Walburg Pers.

process, proved to be a viable strategy to uphold their position.⁶⁹ The Duke of Brabant furthermore attempted to strengthen his position in the area by the foundation of the so-called *nova oppida*. These newly founded cities or *vrijheden* were meant to attract new inhabitants, by offering them considerable liberties. Turnhout, Arendonk and Hoogstraten are some examples of this foundation-wave.⁷⁰ This amalgam of developments brought into being a complex manorial patchwork, with shattered competences and landownership, which was never really able to control the Campine peasantry entirely.

Gierle: small, but complex

The complexity and nuances of the Campine seigniorial system can best be explained by focusing on a specific case-study. The village of Gierle, situated some 8 kilometres to the south-west of the small city of Turnhout, serves as an example of the Campine structures. It was a small village, with 161 households in 1437 and 160 in 1526.⁷¹ In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Gierle – and the entire Land of Turnhout, of which Gierle was a part – belonged to the Berthouts, the lords of Duffel.⁷² At the end of the thirteenth century the Duke of Brabant targeted the Campine area. The Berthout family lost its power to the Brabantine Duke. From the thirteenth century onwards Gierle (and the rest of the Land of Turnhout) remained part of the Ducal domain. For a short period, between 1347 and 1356, it was pledged to Mary of Gelre, when she married Reinoud of Gelre, but it became a ducal fief from 1356 onwards and fully returned to the Duke in 1399, when Mary passed away. When the Duchy of Brabant became part of the Burgundian realm, the Land of Turnhout became part of the Burgundian, and later on Habsburg, ‘property’. In 1445 Gierle, Lille and Wechelderzande were pledged to Ambrosius de Dynther, Philip the Good’s secretary. At some point – although it is not precisely clear when exactly – the Duke obtained control over the entire Land of Turnhout yet again. In 1546, Emperor Charles V, ‘gave’ the Land of Turnhout to his sister and governess of the Low Countries, Mary of Hungary. In 1558, at Mary’s death, the Land of Turnhout yet again returned to the landlord.

This remains ‘manorialism’ at a macro-level, since it is all about entire seignories and judicial competences. However, at the village level things were a bit more complicated (Fig 2.1). In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the village of Gierle in essence belonged to the ducal domain, which was in the hands of the Burgundian Dukes from 1430 onwards. One third of the village was directly ‘rented out’ to the peasants of Gierle, who held their land directly in rent from the Duke of Brabant. Some villagers even held some land in fief. Another part of Gierle was a ducal fief, held by the Lords of Tielen (the Van Ransts, and later on the Van Leefdaels)⁷³ and the last section was also a ducal fief, held by the Lords of Poederlee (first the Van Vriessele family, later on the family de Brimeu).⁷⁴ The lords of Tielen and Poederlee rented these lands out or gave parts of it in fief to villagers. Furthermore, both these lords had their own manor

⁶⁹ Bijsterveld, A. J. A. (1989). "Een zorgelijk bezit. De benedictijnenabdijen van Echternach en St. Truiden en het beheer van hun goederen en rechten in Oost-Brabant, 1100-1300." *Noordbrabants Historisch Jaarboek*: 27-29

⁷⁰ For a very detailed account of the foundation of these *nova oppida*, consult: Steurs, W. (1993). *Naissance d'une région: aux origines de la mairie de Bois-le-Duc: recherches sur le Brabant septentrional aux 12e et 13e siècles* Bruxelles, Académie Royale de Belgique.

⁷¹ Cuvelier, J. (1912). *Les dénombremments de foyers en Brabant, 14e-16e siècle* Brussel, s.n.

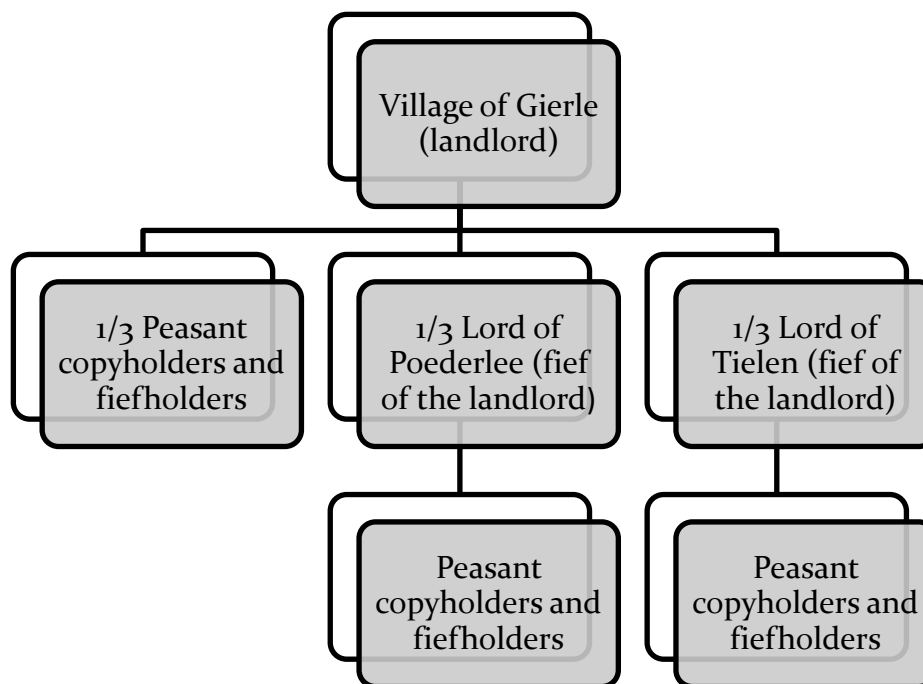
⁷² "Geschiedkundige aantekeningen over Gierle, vooral in kerkelijk opzicht." *Taxandria*, 1913 (1-2 and 3), 117-128 and 129-152

⁷³ Koyen, A (1980). *Tielen mijne vriend*, Kasterlee, Gemeentebestuur Kasterlee: 39-58

⁷⁴ RAM, Archive of the family d'Olmen de Poederlé, 751. Description of the seignior, 17th century

court to register transactions linked to land.⁷⁵ The Gierle inhabitants were thus confronted with three landowning lords. Lower, middle and higher jurisdiction however, were firmly in the hands of the monarch, apart from 1445 onwards when he ‘pledged’ it – which is to say he bestowed all rights he had to it – to Ambrosius de Dynther. The situation in Gierle was not very different from what we can perceive in other villages. The neighbouring village of Lille for example, was also characterised by the same complexity. The Duke also directly rented out part of his possessions to the Lille inhabitants, but also donated a manor court to the chapter of Saint-Gummarus in the small city of Lier in 1457.⁷⁶

Fig 2.1 Seigniorial structure of the village of Gierle, fifteenth and sixteenth century



2.1.2 Seigniorial burdens and their scope

Literature convincingly suggests that seigniorial structures in the Campine area were rather weak, when compared to other regions in the Low Countries. Still, such grand, general statements do not really unveil the day-to-day impact of the seigniorial on the lives of its inhabitants. And the seigniorial or lordly domain was indeed essential during the later medieval and early modern period. As Tim Soens has pointed out in relation to fourteenth and fifteenth century Flanders: “*on a pu démontrer que les finances des ducs de Bourgogne de la maison de Valois se basent pour une partie importante, mais variable, sur leur propre domaine et ce malgré le démarrage simultané de la fiscalité d’Etat en Europe occidentale*”.⁷⁷ So, even when state

⁷⁵ RAA, OGA Gierle, 627. Charters of the manor court (*laathof*) of lord Daneel van Ranst, 1454-1497 & RAA, OGA Gierle, 630. Charters of the manor court (*laathof*) of lord Peeter van Brimeu, 1471-1501

⁷⁶ Van den Branden, W. and F. Verbiest (1982). "Het Laathof van het Kapittel van de Lierse Sint-Gummaruskerk te Lille." *Jaarboek van de Heemkundige Kring Norbert De Vrijter*: pp. 15-36.

⁷⁷ Soens, T. (2001). "Evolution et gestion du domaine comtal en Flandre sous Louis de Male et Philippe le Hardi (1346-1404)." *Revue du Nord* 83: 25

Turnhout. This domain encompassed the city of Turnhout and the villages Oud-Turnhout, Arendonk, Gierle, Lille, Wechelderzande, Vlimmeren, Beerse, Vosselaar, Merksplas, Poppel, Weelde, Ravels and Baarle. Van Cauwenberghe discerns different ‘customary’ income types, subdivided into two categories: ‘old-type income’ and ‘new-type income’. A detailed overview can be found in table 2.2. For the Turnhout domain Van Cauwenberghe recorded a clear dominance of **old-type income**. This can broadly be described as income that was not derived from leased-out property or functions. In the Duchy of Brabant – as opposed to the County of Flanders – several domains still collected certain entries in kind, mostly grain (rye, oats, etc.) and sometimes even poultry or beeswax. Different subdivisions can be discerned in this old-type income. First, there are the hereditary rents in kind and in species. Next, we have income derived from the ducal forests, consisting mainly of the sales of wood. Furthermore, income originating from the ducal hunting and fishing rights and excises can be pin-pointed. The most significant category is perhaps that of ducal rents, collected in kind, but directly sold on the market, meaning they were recorded in species.⁷⁹ In other domains another type of income can be added to this list, namely *pontgeld*, a five percent taxation on land transactions. This was for example the case in some villages of the Land of Herentals⁸⁰, where the *pontgeld* was collected by the duke and in the Land of Westerlo, owned by the Merode family.⁸¹ In the Land of Turnhout this *pontgeld* was however not collected in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The **new-type income**, which clearly dominated the domains of the County of Flanders, were less significant for the Turnhout accounts. Leased-out pasture, arable land or farmsteads were only of limited importance. Income was, however, derived from leasing out the ducal wind- and watermills, the leasing-out of offices (mainly the office of *vorster*, responsible for the surveillance of the commons) and levying toll.

Table 2.2 Different types of revenue on the ducal domain of Turnhout

Nature	Revenue type	Specifications
Revenues in species (<i>ponden groten</i>)	Customary rent	Collected on Bamise, Saint Dionysus, Saint Maarten and the Sunday after Saint Maarten
	Customary rent	Other collection dates
	Customary rent	Collected on the Sunday after <i>Lichtmis</i>
	Customary rent on reclaimed parcels of peat	
	Customary rent on reclaimed pieces of rent (= new rents)	Only for the hamlet of Oosthoven
	Tax on the annual fairs of the Land of Turnhout	
	Revenue from ‘ <i>accidenten, breuken ende bastaergoeden</i> ’	Usually uncollected
	Revenue from leased out	Tolls and weighs (mainly in the town of

⁷⁹ Van Cauwenberghe, E. (1982). *Het vorstelijk domein en de overheidsfinanciën in de Nederlanden (15de en 16de eeuw)*. *Een kwantitatieve analyse van Vlaamse en Brabantse domeinrekeningen*. Brussel, Pro Civitate: 52-107

⁸⁰ See for example: ARA, *Chambre de comptes*, 4957. Volume contenant six comptes, dont un rendu par Pierre Vander Keelen, de la St Jean 1436 à la St Jean 1437, et cinq par Jean de Meyer, de la St Jean 1437 à la St Jean 1442

⁸¹ ARA, Archive of the de Merode family, 281-300. *Pontboecken Westerlo, Olen en Hulshout*

	goods	Turnhout)
	Office of clerk	Is usually given to someone as a reward, so no revenues
	<i>Vogelrien ende visserien</i>	Hunting rights, especially in the sixteenth century no-one is apparently interested, so no revenues
	Farm in Turnhout	
	Revenues from byelaws	When a byelaw is written, a sum has to be paid to the lord, but this occurs only rarely
	<i>Vorsterien</i>	The <i>vorster</i> was the officer responsible for the control of the byelaws
	Revenues from the selling of grain, beeswax, etc.	
	Revenues from the sale of wood from Grotenhout forest	Not every year, very irregularly
	Revenues from the sales of meadows in Grotenhout forest	
	Revenues from the pasturage of horses in Grotenhout forest	
	Revenues from timber	
	Revenues from <i>wolwerken</i>	The Duke was entitled to part of the fines of the wool guilds
	Grinding of mill stones	
Revenues in kind	Leasing out of mills	Revenue in rye
	Customary rent (in <i>kapoenen</i>)	Revenue in fowl
	Customary rent in beeswax	Revenue in beeswax

Source: ARA, *Chambre de comptes, 5182-5225. Domeinrekeningen Land van Turnhout, 1404-1600*

The evolution of manorial revenues in the domain of Turnhout

Let us first sketch the general evolutions of the revenues of the ducal domain of Turnhout, as described by Van Cauwenberghe.⁸² Broadly speaking, income derived from a small domain, such as the Land of Turnhout, was characterised by a general increase of revenues throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Since a significant part of (old-type) revenues was collected in kind (whether directly sold on the market or not), the total income was strongly dependent on contemporary grain prices. Furthermore, ducal revenues were equally dependent on the harvest. Crop failure resulted in a lower ducal income, since the ducal steward usually granted his 'subjects' extension of payment, whenever the harvest fell short. Revenues of this old type were therefore particularly vulnerable to the economic climate. New-type revenues rose up until 1435, but from then onwards, they decreased, plummeting in the 1480s, a period of severe crisis. From that point on, an increase could be perceived, lasting until the 1530s and decreasing again from 1540 onwards. The subsequent recovery lasted until the

⁸² Van Cauwenberghe, E. (1982). *Het vorstelijk domein: 52-10*

Dutch Revolt caused upheaval and chaos in the 1570s. Three revenue types will be addressed in detail, revenues coming from the ducal Grotenhout forest, revenues from rents, and revenues from the leasing out of mills, since these were not only the most important revenue types (in absolute and relative terms), but also shed light on the diversity and evolution of seigniorial strategies and their impact on the Campine peasants.

Grotenhout forest

The Grotenhout forest was the only forest in the entire Land of Turnhout and mainly served as a ducal hunting ground. Usage rights for Campine peasants were limited and rather strict. Inhabitants of the Land of Turnhout were allowed to gather dry sticks, but only in a limited way, since they were not allowed to use carts or other tools to transport them. Or as the Grotenhout decree of 1572 expresses it:

“ [...] maar zullen alleenlijck op den vors Bosch dorre ofte verstorven hout mogen raepen dwelck zoude mogen aff gewayt liggen ter eerden zonder te mogen raepen eenigh groenhout bij tempeest van winde aff gevallen of ter aerde liggende welck dorre ende vestorven hout sij niet en sullen mogen haelen doen ofte laeten haelen met eenige waegens, cortewaegens, karren ofte peerden op de verbeurte van dien maert tselve in busselen te halven mogen 't huyswaerts draegen met stroobanden ofte coren gebonden”⁸³

This means that inhabitants of the Land of Turnhout were only allowed to gather wood that had been blown off the trees during a storm. Furthermore, they were not allowed to use wheelbarrows, carts or horses, only being able to take what they could carry themselves. Apart from this, no other usage rights were in place as can be derived from the ducal accounts and the Grotenhout decree of 1572, and as also evidenced by the imposition of severe punishments and fines.⁸⁴

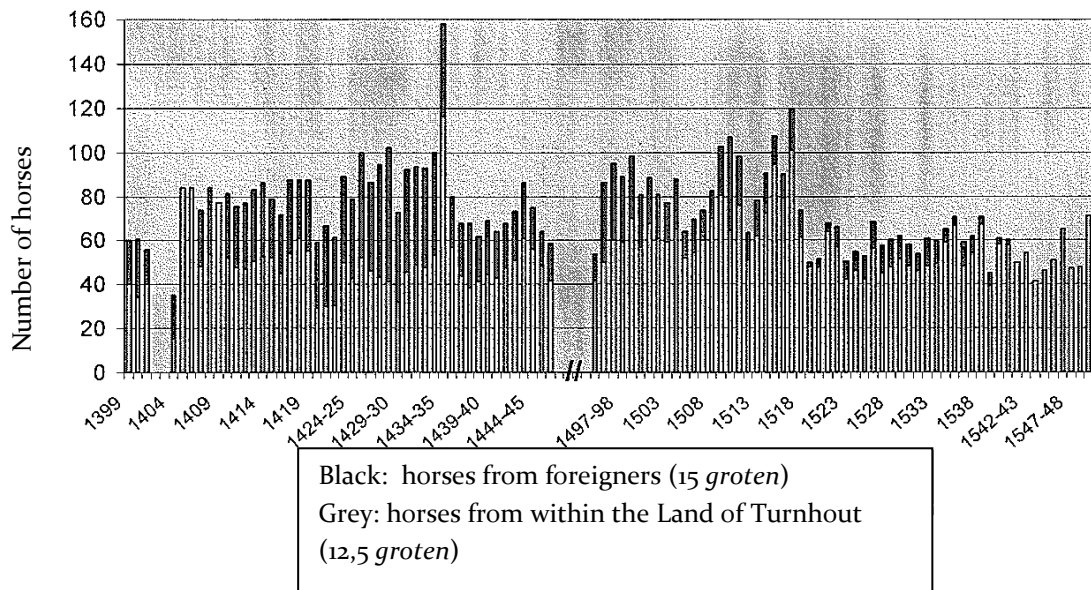
Nonetheless, inhabitants of the Land of Turnhout as well as ‘foreigners’ (people from outside the Land of Turnhout), were allowed to graze horses in Grotenhout forest (from the month of May onwards), if they paid a sum per animal (which was higher for foreigners – 15 groats instead of 12.5 groats). However, the amount of horses grazing in Grotenhout forest started to decline from the 1520s onwards (Fig 2.2), and the practise was completely abolished in 1730. Hilde Verboven refers to Hein Vera, who claims that forest pasturage saw a steep decline due to agricultural reforms (mainly the introduction of clover), but also a general tendency to diminish forest pasturage, since it was detrimental to the – financially more important – production of wood.⁸⁵

⁸³ SA Turnhout, collection of decrees, ‘*Ordonnantie ende edict gemaect op 't stuck van bosche van Turnhout genoempt Grootenhout naervolgende der welcken officiers aldaer dekinregard ende alle andere hun sullen schuldigh zijn te reguleren*’, 02-08-1572

⁸⁴ SA Turnhout, collection of decrees, ‘*Ordonnantie ende edict gemaect op 't stuck van bosche van Turnhout genoempt Grootenhout naervolgende der welcken officiers aldaer dekinregard ende alle andere hun sullen schuldigh zijn te reguleren*’, 02-08-1572

⁸⁵ Verboven, H. V., K en Hermy, M. (2004). *Bos en hei in het Land van Turnhout (15de-19de eeuw). Een bijdrage tot de historische ecologie*. Leuven, Laboratorium voor Bos, Natuur en Landschap: 125-129

Fig 2.2 Horse grazing in Grotenhout forest, 1399-1548

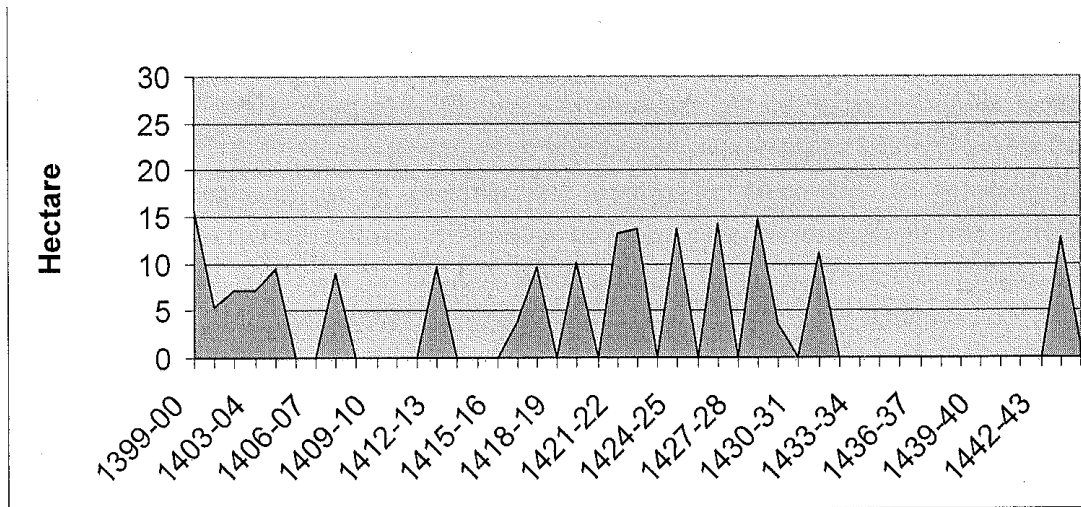


Source: Verboven, H. V., K en Hermy, M. (2004). *Bos en hei in het Land van Turnhout (15de-19de eeuw). Een bijdrage tot de historische ecologie*. Leuven, Laboratorium voor Bos, Natuur en Landschap, 128

The production of wood and its revenues was, however, not extremely steady or stable. Fluctuations were quite substantial throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. According to the findings of Verboven and Hermy, the amount of chopped wood (in hectares) differed greatly from year to year. In some years a substantial amount of wood was chopped – to be sold on the market or to be used on the domain itself (for reparations, etc.), but in other years hardly any wood was cut (Fig 2.3 & 2.4). In the first half of the sixteenth century, the marketing of wood became less and less important, but after 1546 a great deal of wood was chopped. This was, however, not sold on the market, but used on the domain itself, since Mary of Hungary, who was Lady of Turnhout from 1546 onwards, pursued a very active domain policy. She decided to install a sheep-breeding enterprise on part of the commons of Arendonk and Turnhout and these activities required huge amounts of wood, hence the rise in chopped surface. However, the chopping and selling of wood only became a regular activity from the seventeenth century onwards.⁸⁶ Furthermore, Grotenhout forest was more than just a collection of trees – within the forest, several smaller plots of heathland could be found as well. The heather was mown every three or four years – called *maaisel* – and sold also on the market.

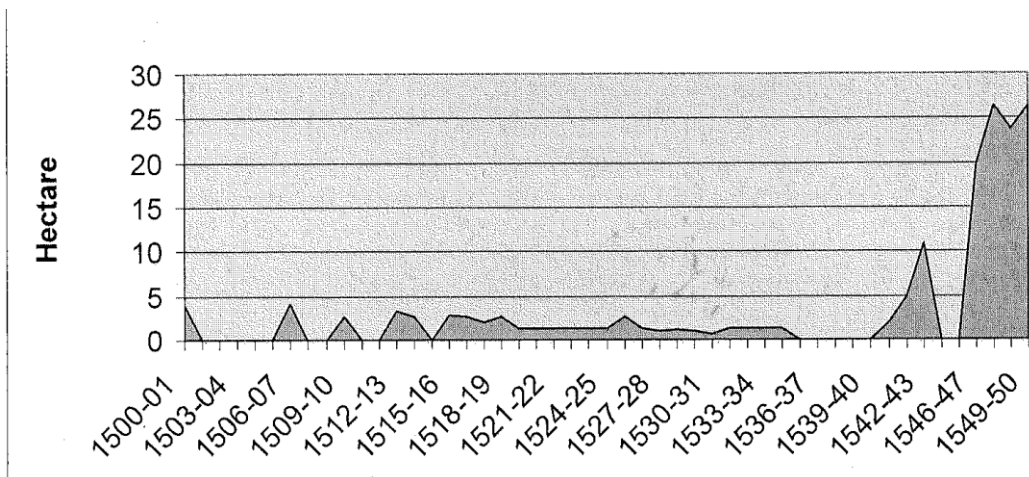
⁸⁶ Verboven, H. V., K en Hermy, M. (2004). *Bos en hei*: 130-133

Fig 2.3 Surface of chopped wood in Grotenhout forest, 1399-1445



Source: Verboven, H. V., K en Hermy, M. (2004). *Bos en hei in het Land van Turnhout (15de-19de eeuw). Een bijdrage tot de historische ecologie.* Leuven, Laboratorium voor Bos, Natuur en Landschap, 130

Fig 2.4 Surface of chopped wood in Grotenhout forest, 1500-1550



Source: Verboven, H. V., K en Hermy, M. (2004). *Bos en hei in het Land van Turnhout (15de-19de eeuw). Een bijdrage tot de historische ecologie.* Leuven, Laboratorium voor Bos, Natuur en Landschap, 130

The management of Grotenhout forest and the sale of its proceeds thus only reached a level of regularity and strong market-orientation in the seventeenth century. It would appear that, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the hunting function of the forest remained predominant. Moreover, Grotenhout forest apparently played a significant part largely in terms of the needs of the management of the domain itself. When the domain mills, the castle or, for example, Mary of Hungary's agricultural enterprise were in need of wood, more wood was chopped to meet these requirements. We can presume, therefore, that the Grotenhout forest did not play an exceptionally large role in the lives of the Campine peasants. As it happens, usage rights were limited, but it seems quite likely that only some inhabitants of the Land of Turnhout made use of the horse pasturage possibilities. When it came to the selling of wood destined for the market, Verboven and Harmy state that a group of 'specialised' wood buyers could be distinguished. Between 1402 and 1432 only 12 people were recorded as buyers of wood.

Moreover, three of them were responsible for the purchase of 62 percent of the total surface.⁸⁷ The ducal rights on Grotenhout forest prevented the inhabitants of the Land of Turnhout from making free use of its resources, which was disadvantageous. Punishments for trespassing were severe, although this might also indicate that it was hard to control trespassing and enforce the rules. Still, apart from this hindrance, the Turnhout peasants were not strongly affected. The true exploitation of the forest as a wood reserve only took off from the seventeenth century onwards, so any impact on Campine society might well have increased from that point on.

Rent

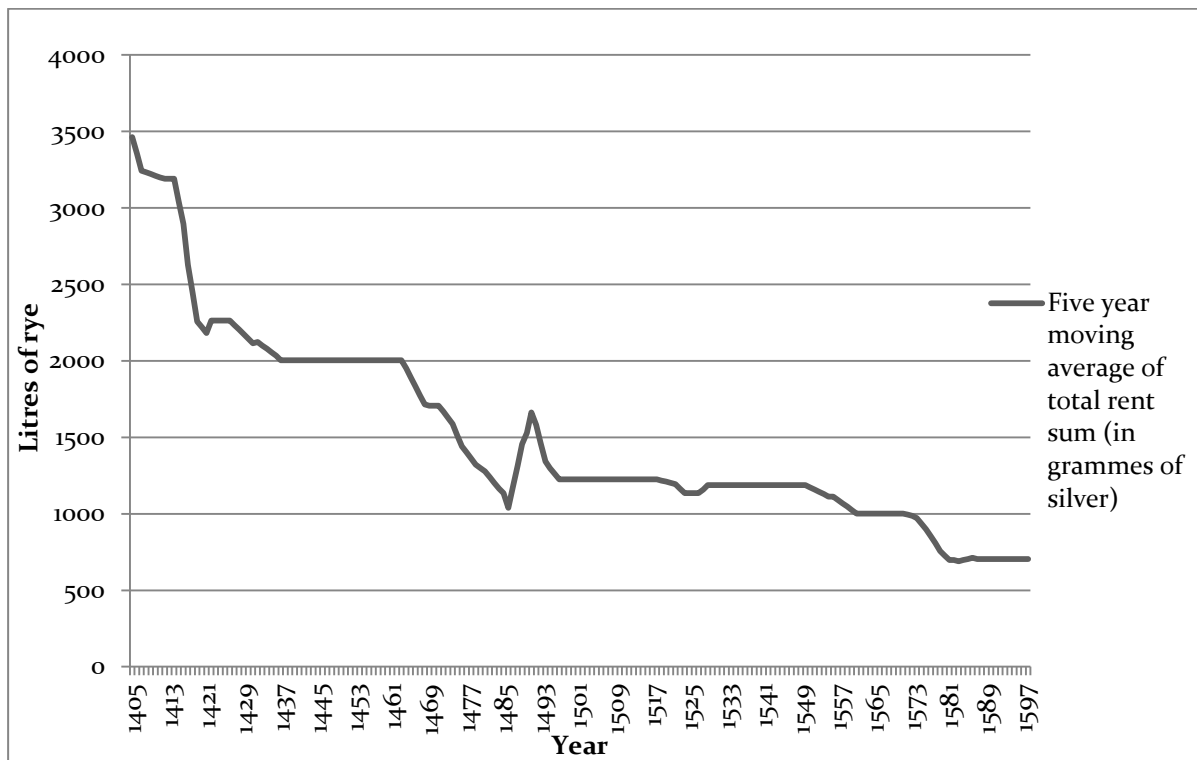
The income derived from Grotenhout forest appears not to have been excessively burdensome on the Campine peasants, and other ducal revenues seem to have had a potentially far larger impact on the lives of ordinary Campine commoners. Customary rent (or *cijns*, as it was labelled in the accounts) can be cited as an example. The ducal domain accounts lists, per village, the total amount of rent collected, in species or in kind. An example, are the rents collected for the village of Gierle. Rents in species were recorded in three categories, according to the collection date. The first group of rents was collected on *Bamisse, Saint Dionysius, Saint Maarten* and the Sunday after *Saint Maarten*. A second group was collected on *Bamisse*, and a third group (limited to the hamlet of Dingdonk), was collected on the Sunday after *Lichtmis*. A minority of rents was still collected in kind, but this was limited to the yearly receipt of ten chickens and 2 pounds of beeswax.⁸⁸ But, of course, the Campine area was not immune to its own variant of the *crise du féodalisme*.⁸⁹ Income derived from rent (in species or in kind, sold directly on the market) was of course very sensitive to inflation. In the village of Gierle the majority of villagers paid their rent in species. The total rent sum collected in species remained constant throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and amounted to 15 pounds (*pond*) 8 sixpence (*schellingen*) 15.5 penny (*penningen*). This implies that the amount of money collected through rents in species, was caved, due to inflation. The total rent sum (in species), converted to grammes of silver clearly illustrates the declining 'real' value of the ducal customary rents, throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Fig 2.5).

⁸⁷ Verboven, H. V., K en Hermy, M. (2004). *Bos en hei*: 131-312

⁸⁸ See for example, ARA, Chambre de comptes, 5183. Domain account, 1409-1410. This amount remains the same throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

⁸⁹ As described by Guy Bois in: Bois, G. (1976). *Crise du féodalisme: économie rurale et démographie en Normandie orientale du début du 14^e siècle au milieu du 16^e siècle*. Paris, Ecoles des hautes études en sciences sociales.

Fig 2.5 Five-year moving average of the total rent (cijns) sum (in grammes of silver), Gierle, 1403-1600

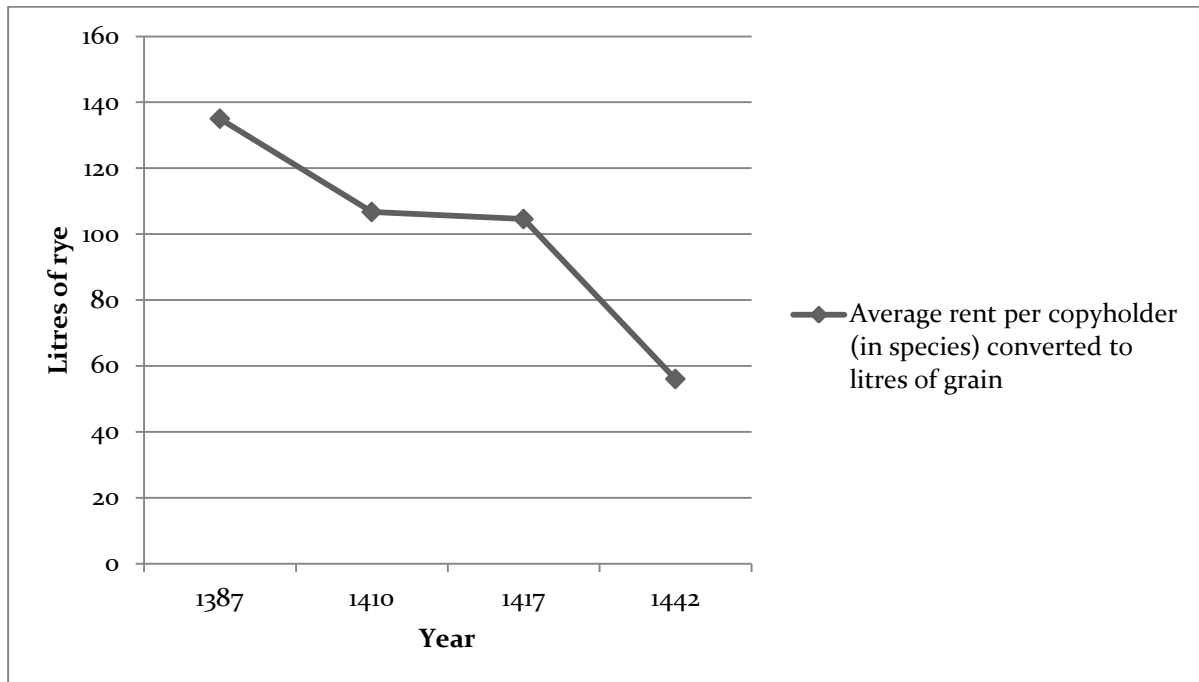


Source: ARA, *Chambre de comptes*, 5182-5225. Domain accounts of the Land van Turnhout, 1404-1600. Grammes of silver derived from van der Wee, H. (1963). *The growth of the Antwerp market and the European economy (fourteenth-sixteenth centuries)*. The Hague, Nijhoff, processed by Jord Hanus.

This diminution of income derived from customary rents did, of course, affect not only the lord, it also had a clear impact on Campine rent-payers, the peasants. In ‘real’ terms, the amount of rent that needed to be paid declined continuously. This is illustrated by the graphs (Fig 2.6 & 2.7) representing the average amount of rent per household head for the villages of Gierle and Arendonk, converted to rye, which indeed show an almost continuous decline from 1387 to 1442.⁹⁰ In all likelihood, this decline carried on throughout the sixteenth century too, however, no ducal rent registers from this period have survived the ravages of time.

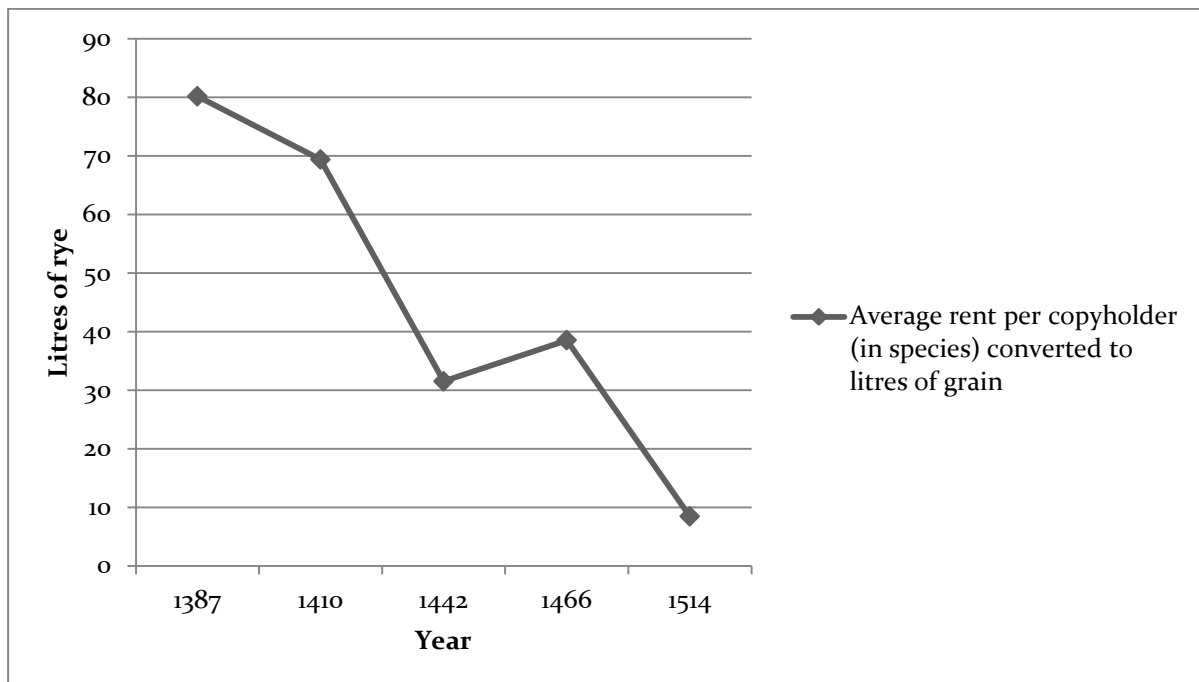
⁹⁰ Based on: ARA, *Chambre de comptes*. 45016, 45017, 45018, 45019, 45026 and 45027. Ducal rent registers, 1387-1514

Fig 2.6 Average rent (cijns) per customary rentpayer (in species) converted to litres of rye, Gierle, 1387-1442



Source: ARA, *Chambre de comptes*. 45016, 45017, 45018, 45019, 45026 and 45027. Ducal rent registers, 1387-1514. Rye prices: van der Wee, H. (1963). *The growth of the Antwerp market and the European economy (fourteenth-sixteenth centuries)*. The Hague, Nijhoff, processed by Jord Hanus.

Fig 2.7 Average rent (cijns) per customary rentpayer (in species) converted into litres of rye, Arendonk, 1387-1514



Source: ARA, *Chambre de comptes*. 45016, 45017, 45018, 45019, 45026 and 45027. Ducal rent registers, 1387-1514. Rye prices: Rye prices: van der Wee, H. (1963). *The growth of the Antwerp market and the European economy (fourteenth-sixteenth centuries)*. The Hague, Nijhoff, processed by Jord Hanus.

Milling

Thus far, the picture we have formed of the ducal revenues does not come across as flourishing particularly. Forestry generated important revenues from time to time, however, it was not cultivated to maximise profits, rather merely to meet the needs of the domain. The income derived from customary rent on the other hand, completely plummeted and became almost irrelevant over the centuries. Still, we must be careful not to underestimate the vitality of lordly strategies. Indeed, it is quite striking how, for example, rent-income plummeted, yet other revenues were not necessarily subject to the same trend. Van Cauwenberghe has pointed out that the landlord was able to expand other revenue-sources. The leasing-out of ducal wind and water mills – for which lease was paid in kind – is the most striking example, since it proved to be ever more profitable. The ducal mills in the Land of Turnhout were *banmolens*, which implies that the inhabitants were forced to use them to grind their grains, and were not allowed to use their own hand mills.

Villages were rather keen on possessing their own windmill. In the earliest domain accounts, from the early fifteenth century, four mills were in good working order. In the sixteenth century two extra windmills were put into operation, one in Oud-Turnhout and one in Gierle. The village of Gierle, for example, saw its windmill inaugurated in 1500 on Christmas Eve, after several years of lobbying the landlord.⁹¹ The villagers of Wechelderzande convincingly pleaded for their own mill in 1626, arguing⁹²:

“... dat wij by faute van eenighe moolen binnen onsen voorseyden dorpen ende mits groot ongerieff op gene wij hadden door groote distantie, quaden wegh van morasch ende andere diversche perijckelen, die wij met dese conjunctive van oorlooghe daer door onderworpen waeren...”⁹³

In a swampy, sandy region such as the Campine area, it was extremely inconvenient to have to drag one's grain to a neighbouring village. The villagers were thus eager supporters of their own mills, but for the lord as well, this was a profitable undertaking. Van Cauwenberghe states that – due to the diminishing rent burden – peasants were able to produce more surplus, which they had to bring to the domain-mill. According to Van Cauwenberghe this increased mill-activity made the leasing of a mill a more profitable activity, causing a rise in lease sum.⁹⁴ Scrutinising the fifteenth and sixteenth century accounts (with sample periods every other 20 years) we can indeed prove Van Cauwenberghe's statements (See fig 2.8). The rise in income was only halted after the 1560s – when the Netherlands was in the grasp of the Revolt and its bloody consequences. In the 1590s one mill in the city of Turnhout was no longer in operation and the Gierle mill was burnt down by 'rebels'.⁹⁵

⁹¹ Verdegem, A. J. C. (1989). "De banmolen van Gierle." *Jaarboek van de Heemkundige Kring Norbert De Vrijter*:. 5-6

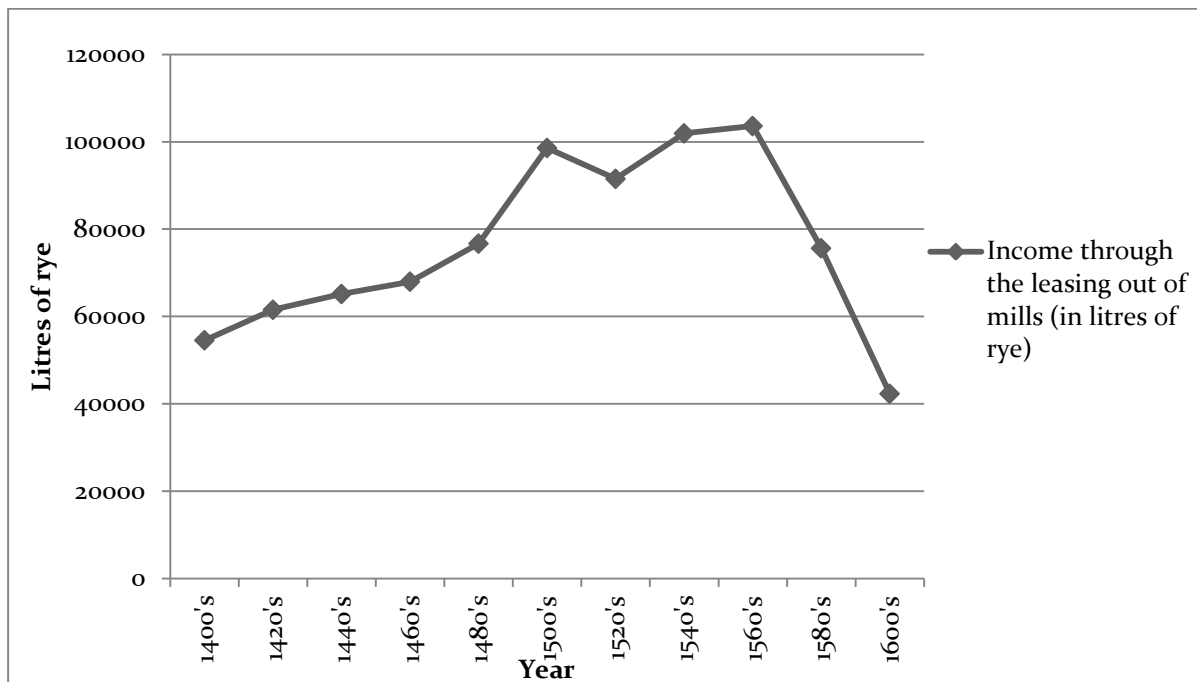
⁹² Verdegem, A. (1990). "De oudste molen van Wechelderzande." *Jaarboek van de Heemkundige Kring Norbert De Vrijter*: 91

⁹³ Free translation: "... that we, by lack of our own mill within our own village and because of the huge discomfort due to a large distance, a crummy road through the swamps and other, many diverse problems, caused by the war."

⁹⁴ Van Cauwenberghe, E. (1982). *Het vorstelijk domein en de overheidsfinanciën in de Nederlanden (15de en 16de eeuw)*. *Een kwantitatieve analyse van Vlaamse en Brabantse domeinrekeningen*. Brussel, Pro Civitate: 264-265

⁹⁵ ARA, Chambre de comptes, 5225. Domain account, 1598-1600

Fig 2.8 Evolution of domanial income of the Land of Turnhout through the leasing out of domain mills, 1400-1600 (in litres of rye)



Source: ARA, *Chambre de comptes, 5182-5225. Domain accounts for the Land van Turnhout, 1403-1600*

What did the continuous rise of the mill lease sums (only halted by the consequences of the Dutch Revolt) really mean to the inhabitants of the Land of Turnhout? Did this increase reflect a growing impact on the Campine peasants – and thus, an increasing burden for them? These questions are exceptionally hard to answer, since many aspects of mill leasing remain somewhat shadowy, but I will put forward some bits and pieces, which might – if combined – shed at least some light on this question. First of all, it is important to stress the fact that the mills of the Land of Turnhout were *banmolens*, meaning that subjects of the duke were in fact obliged to use these mills. When compared to Inland Flanders the rise in the number and produce (more specifically, the amount of ground grains) of these ducal banmills can strike us as rather odd. Erik Thoen ascertained that the Count of Flanders's '*banal*' rights (including *banmills*) were already severely eroded in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. He suggests that the high costs of maintenance and the need for heavy investments associated with mills played an important part in the decreasing enforcement of *banal* rights. However, Thoen firmly states that this was not necessarily beneficial for the ordinary Flemish peasant. In all likelihood, the nobility's dominance over the countryside's inhabitants was merely replaced by an ever-growing urban influence, which was hardly less invasive.⁹⁶ In the Campine area, things apparently evolved in a very different way. The sixteenth century for example was characterised by the erection of two additional banal windmills. Therefore, it seems quite possible that the lord – or in reality, his steward – introduced a much more active 'milling policy' throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, with a stricter control of the abundance

⁹⁶ Thoen, E. (1988). *Landbouweconomie en bevolking in Vlaanderen gedurende de late middeleeuwen en het begin van de moderne tijden. Testregio: de kasselrijen van Oudenaarde en Aalst*. Gent, Belgisch Centrum voor Landelijke Geschiedenis: 550-560

of the banal obligations concerning milling. Perhaps this was a strategy, developed to counter the decreasing revenues stemming from other income-types (such as customary rents). Following this line of thought, the pressure on the Turnhout peasants might indeed have increased, since they were, in all possibility, increasingly obliged to use the banal mills.

Indeed, peasants making (forced) use of these banal mills had, of course, to pay the miller a fee, called the *molster*. In the Land of Turnhout the *molster* amounted to 1/24 (or 4.2 percent) of the total amount of grain that needed grinding. This is comparable to the case of Inland Flanders.⁹⁷ Nick Van den Broeck argues in his master's thesis that the miller makes an assessment of his incomes (and thus the amount of *molster*) he will receive, to determine the lease price he will propose. The fact that the *molster* remains constant, regardless of the economic climate, is in theory beneficial for the miller (since he could profit from a rise in grain prices). And, indeed, during the crisis of the 1480s, notably in 1482 when the grain harvest proved to be disastrous, millers were able to keep their head above water, thanks to the impressive rise in grain prices.⁹⁸ The same processes might be quite detrimental to peasants, who would lose more of their precious rye during economically testing times.

However, the circumstances under which the Campine millers had to operate could also be quite challenging. A miller's life was not always easy, which is illustrated by the domain accounts. Arrears in payment occurred every now and then, due to a wide variety of reasons. In Gierle, for example, *de haestighe sieckte*⁹⁹ raged through the Campine countryside in 1518. Daily life would probably have come to a halt and the Turnhout mills had almost no clientele left during this time. The lord's steward was lenient and reimbursed part of the lease sum. In 1532 another miller of the Gierle mill, Arnoldt Avonts was allowed to pay only half the lease as his mill could not function due to a windless period of nine weeks, something clearly quite inconvenient for a windmill.¹⁰⁰ Still, the lenient attitude of the domanial steward and the high grain prices during periods of crisis were clearly advantageous for the Campine millers. Van den Broeck suggests that, during periods of harvest crises, mill leases were dominated by 'speculators', who aspired to profit from rising prices, combined with relatively resilient Campine grain production.¹⁰¹ The Campine millers were indeed a relatively versatile group, popping up in different villages and on different mills every year, combining the lease of mills with other leases (for example of tolls and weighs), and often belonging to the same families.¹⁰² It would therefore seem that the near-irrelevance of customary rent was somewhat countered by an increasing pressure to use banal mills. This was of course disadvantageous, but the lack of other types of pressure and surplus-extraction probably compensated for this. Furthermore, we must keep in mind that these milling activities also created possibilities for those wishing to engage in a – theoretically – lucrative undertaking.

⁹⁷ Van den Broeck, N. (2013). *Graancrisis in de Kempen. Sociale allocatie op het vorstelijk domein te Turnhout (1470-1490)*. Departement Geschiedenis. Antwerpen, Universiteit Antwerp: 22

⁹⁸ Van den Broeck, N. (2013). *Graancrisis in de Kempen*: 24-26

⁹⁹ Translation: 'the quick disease'

¹⁰⁰ Verdegem, A. J. C. (1989). "De banmolen van Gierle." 5-7

¹⁰¹ Van den Broeck, N. (2013). *Graancrisis in de Kempen*: 29

¹⁰² Family relations are of course hard to track down, but many millers share the same surnames which, at the very least, is an indication of kinship ties.

2.1.3 Other types of seigniorial income: bailiff accounts

Of course the ducal domain accounts is not the only source which gives us access to an overview of seigniorial income. Another source type is relevant in this matter too, namely bailiff accounts. The bailiff accounts register all revenues collected by the bailiff (or *schout*), the lordly court officer.¹⁰³ Most revenues registered in these accounts, however, were compositions or *composities*. *Composities* were the result of a compromise between the officer and the defendant or culprit, resulting in the payment of a sum of money to the bailiff (and thus to the lord), which made them different from real fines, since these were not negotiable of course. The *compositie* was advantageous for the bailiff, since he avoided law costs and it was also advantageous for the culprit, since he was spared a much heavier fine.¹⁰⁴ However, this does not really qualify as a seigniorial burden weighing down on peasants, so it will not be taken into account. Apart from this, the bailiff accounts only contain the revenues coming from new *poorters*, or official burghers from the city of Turnhout. No other revenues were listed, indicating that peasants of the Land of Turnhout were relatively well off. In the bailiff accounts of, for example, the Land of Herentals, several other revenue types were listed, but were mostly only collected for the town of Herentals and not for the surrounding countryside.

2.1.4 A regional comparison of seigniorial burdens: the Campine area vs. Inland Flanders

Literature has often referred to the Campine area as a region of low ‘manoralisation’ or feudalization. The introduction of the feudal system occurred relatively late and never got hold of society in the way it did in, for example, Haspengouw or the Gelders river area. Nonetheless, certain seigniorial properties and rights clearly impacted Campine society and its inhabitants and, in some cases, somewhat burdened the Campine peasants. Let me summarise some of the most essential features of the Turnhout domain (compared to other regions) and sketch their impact on Campine peasants and their communities as a whole. First of all, the ducal domain of Turnhout was clearly different from e.g. Flemish domains, since it still derived a significant type of its income for ‘old type’ posts. Customary rent (in species and in kind) remained important (at least in nominal terms), whereas the leasing out of (plots of) land remained virtually absent – something which became increasingly predominant in the County of Flanders during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In a way this may have made the Turnhout domain more vulnerable to a so-called *crise du féodalisme*, since rent-income completely plummeted during this period. However, the ‘managers’ of the Turnhout domain were able to derive more income from other sources, to compensate for these losses. A more intensive policy concerning the leasing out of banal mills, proved to be quite successful, quickly turning (wind)mills into the most important income post of the Land of Turnhout. Campine peasants therefore profited from decreasing customary rents, but this effect was probably evened-out by a possible increase in the control of compliance of this banal right. The ducal domain managers thus were apt to develop new, adapted income strategies, as was also

¹⁰³ ARA, Chambre de comptes, Bailiff accounts of the Land of Turnhout, 1403-1600

¹⁰⁴ Van Rompaey, J. (1961)., “Het compositierecht in Vlaanderen van de veertiende tot de achttiende eeuw.” *Tijdschrift voor rechtsgeschiedenis*: 44: 43

suggested by Soens in his article on the domain of the Burgundian Dukes in the County of Flanders.¹⁰⁵

So, the peasants of the Land of Turnhout were indeed confronted with a viable domain. However, especially when compared to other (sub)regions, pressure was still relatively modest. *Mortemain* rights or *pontgeld* (a tax on the transfer of immovable goods) were either completely absent or of more limited importance than, for example, within the domains of the Count of Flanders.¹⁰⁶ The same can be said for the *schoofrecht* (= the lord's right to 8 percent or one twelfth of the proceeds of land he gave up for reclamation). In Herzele, in the vicinity of the city of Alost, this right was still collected in the fifteenth century. Furthermore, on some Flemish domains, its inhabitants were obliged to perform chores on the lordly premises.¹⁰⁷ And the Campine peasants probably had another benefit, compared to their Flemish counterparts. While in the County of Flanders more and more townspeople looked to the countryside as an ideal place for investment (i.e. the buying up of land and even complete estates), thus adding an extra surplus-extractor to the stage, this trend was nearly – although of course not completely – absent in the Campine area. As Hugo Soly¹⁰⁸ and Michael Limberger¹⁰⁹ have pointed out, for example, most Antwerp merchants invested in the countryside, however they mostly limited this to Antwerp's immediate surroundings or the much more fertile polder region, around the river Scheldt. Sixteenth-century Campine *penningkohieren*, containing a tax on immovable property, confirm that most land in Campine communities was indeed owned by locals (or regionals). A more detailed analysis of the presence of townsmen on the Campine countryside will be presented in chapter 5. Urban, usually Antwerp, institutions sometimes owned some land in the region, but not on a grand scale. Flemish cities were of course not merely parasites, benefitting from surplus extraction from the countryside without giving anything in return. Thoen, for example, has also referred to the fact that many, particularly the better-off countryside inhabitants were *buitenpoorter* or absentee burghers of one of the numerous Flemish cities (both large and small), in order to escape seigniorial jurisdiction and burdens.¹¹⁰ It is, in this respect, striking that this concept was absent from the small Campine towns. Apparently, the triangular relations between sovereign, nobility and cities¹¹¹ had a different outcome on the relatively sheltered Campine countryside than those of Inland Flanders, where on-going struggles between sovereign and the often-vehement cities represented a more equal match.

¹⁰⁵ Soens, T. (2001). "Evolution et gestion du domaine comtal": 25-64.

¹⁰⁶ See for example: Thoen, E. (1988). "Rechten en plichten van plattelanders als instrumenten van machtspolitieke strijd tussen adel, stedelijke burgerij en grafelijk gezag in het laat-middeleeuwse Vlaanderen. Buitenpoorterij en mortemain-rechten ten persoonlijke titel in de kasselrijen van Aalst en Oudenaarde, vooral toegepast op de periode rond 1400." *Les structures du pouvoir dans les communautés rurales en Belgique et dans les pays limitrophes (12e-19e siècle): actes du 13e Colloque international, Spa, 3-5 sept. 1986*. Brussel, Gemeentekrediet: 469-490. However, Thoen also points out that this type of seigniorial pressure was lower on domains of local lords or ecclesiastical lords on the Flemish countryside.

¹⁰⁷ Daelemans, F. and F. Scheelings (1988). De economische impact van de heerlijkheid op het platteland. *Les structures du pouvoir dans les communautés rurales en Belgique et dans les pays limitrophes (12e-19e siècle)*. Brussel, Gemeentekrediet: 456-457

¹⁰⁸ See for example: Soly, H. (1977). *Urbanisme en kapitalisme te Antwerpen in de 16de eeuw: de stedenbouwkundige en industriële ondernemingen van Gilbert van Schoonbeke*. Brussel.

¹⁰⁹ As described in: Limberger, M. (2008). *Sixteenth Century Antwerp and its Rural Surroundings*. Turnhout, Brepols.

¹¹⁰ Thoen, E. (1988). "Rechten en plichten van plattelanders": 469-490

¹¹¹ As for example described by: Van Uytven, R. (1976). "Vorst, adel en steden: een driehoeksverhouding in Brabant van de twaalfde tot de zestiende eeuw." *Bijdragen tot de geschiedenis* 59(1-2):93-122

2.2 State formation and state taxation.

2.2.1. A modest growth? The evolution of government taxation in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries another level was added to the seigniorial one: that of the state. The Burgundian, and later on Habsburg, state formation process did not only have a potentially important impact on village politics – as will be discussed in chapter 7 – creating new institutions or re-fashioning old ones, but it may also have had repercussions for the finances of the village and its inhabitants. In his ‘Seeing like a state’, James Scott compared the (pre-)modern nation-state to a beekeeper. “From the beekeeper’s point of view, the modern hive is an orderly ‘legible’ hive allowing the beekeeper to inspect the condition of the colony [...]”.¹¹² Pre-modern state formation is thus often linked to the stately desire for a constant flow of income, on a regular, institutionalised basis. This constant pursuit of extra income was required for the building of a state apparatus as well as for the ever-growing military costs, and revealed itself inter alia, by the attempts to turn the *aides* into a real state finance system.¹¹³ These *aides* or *beden* were an irregular taxation mechanism. According to feudal law, the lord was entitled to levy an *aide* or *bede* in the following cases: when he was held hostage and a ransom had to be paid, when his eldest son was knighted, when his eldest daughter got married or when he embarked on a crusade. If the lord required money for other purposes he was, of course, allowed to ask for it, but the sum and conditions had to be negotiated with the regional ‘parliaments’, the ‘estates’ (for example the so-called *Staten van Vlaanderen* and *Staten van Brabant*). Needless to say, the lord was not always successful. The pre-modern state might have attempted to control its bees in an orderly beehive, his subjects proved to be rather stingy sometimes.¹¹⁴ Government taxation created tensions, especially with the cities who strove to maintain their independence and grip on the allotment of taxes.

However, several aspects of late medieval and early modern taxation remain somewhat enigmatic. For example, the exact impact of taxation on the late medieval and early modern countryside has never been systematically reconstructed or researched. One notable exception is an interesting article by Erik Thoen and Tim Soens who focussed on fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Coastal and Inland Flanders.¹¹⁵ According to their findings, the *aides* did indeed tend to become a more regular instrument, but, in general, they never became a real burden. Only in wartime, or during other severe crises, did the taxation level rise, for example, during the revolt against Maximilian of Austria (1482-1492). Up until the 1580s the tax burden in the regions of Audenaerde and Alost consistently remained under ten, and mostly even under five percent of total produce. Wim Blockmans also suggests that the financial burden

¹¹² Scott, J. C. (1998). *Seeing Like a State. How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven, Yale University Press: 2-3

¹¹³ A very nuanced overview can be found in: Haemers, J. and B. Lambert (2009). "Pouvoir et argent": 35-59. For a more detailed view on the income portfolio of the Burgundian dukes (mainly focussing on the County of Flanders), see Blockmans overview: Blockmans, W. (1999). "The Low Countries in the Middle Ages." R. Bonney (ed.). *The Rise of the Fiscal State in Europe, c.1200-1815*. Oxford, Oxford University Press: 281-308.

¹¹⁴ Boone, M. (1993). "Overheidsfinanciën": 105-115.

¹¹⁵ Thoen, E. and S. T. (2008). "The social and economic impact of central government taxation on the Flemish countryside (end 13th-18th centuries): some reflections". *Fiscal systems in the European economy from the 13th to the 18th centuries*: 957-971.

was relatively low in Flanders.¹¹⁶ He furthermore claims that Brabant and Limburg were even better-off (Table 2.3).

Table 2.3 Financial ranking in 1445 compared with population in c. 1470

Region	Total revenue (in litres)	Population	Per capita (in groats)
Flanders and Lille	121.941	705.000	6.9
Burgundy and f. Comté	96.300	?	?
Brabant and Limburg	62.189	399.000	6.2
Holland and Zeeland	60.710	339.000	7.2
Artois	58.782	176.000	13.3
Picardy	51.965	184.000	11.3
Hainault	37.563	202.000	7.4
Namur	14.080	17.500	32.2

Source: Blockmans, W. (1999). *The Low Countries in the Middle Ages. The Rise of the Fiscal State in Europe, c.1200-1815*. R. Bonney. Oxford, Oxford University Press: 295

These broad findings for the whole Duchy of Brabant and Limburg lack the detail to enable an insightful comment to be made on the impact of taxation on the Campine countryside. The question that I would therefore like to answer – albeit it perhaps only a preliminary one – is: exactly how big was the impact of government taxation on the Campine villages? Were taxes really a burden that weighed on the Campine commoners, or was it – as Thoen and Soens claim for the County of Flanders – bearable and only a small inconvenience?

2.2.2 The level of taxation: bearable or burdensome?

Whenever the Duke of Brabant (or from 1430 onwards the Burgundian and later on Habsburg lords) was in need of money, he could ask the Estates of Brabant for the allotment of an *aide*. The total taxation sum and the term in which it had to be redeemed, were thus subject to a negotiation process between the lord and his ‘parliament’, consisting of nobility, clergy and the Brabantine cities. When the sum was fixed, every town and village was obliged to contribute. The total sum was divided among the Brabantine sub-regions: *het Kwartier van Antwerpen, de Ammanie van Brussel, het Kwartier van Leuven, de meierij Tienen, het Land van Breda, het Baljuwschap van Waals-Brabant* and *de meierij ‘s Hertogenbosch*. And, within each of these administrative regions, the taxation sum was distributed amongst its villages and cities. The allotment of the bulk sum was based on the hearth counts. Every now and then the total number of hearths per village were registered and used as a parameter for the allotment of the *aides*. Cuvelier published the hearth counts for the years 1437, 1464, 1472, 1480 and 1526 at the beginning of the twentieth century.¹¹⁷ Surprisingly enough, the Brabantine ducal taxation has never been thoroughly researched. For the County of Flanders, some – albeit it often only partial – studies on the Burgundian and Habsburg taxation have been undertaken, but for

¹¹⁶ Blockmans, W. (1999). *The Low Countries*: 281-308

¹¹⁷ Cuvelier, J. (1912). *Les dénombremens de foyers*

Brabant, there is virtually nothing.¹¹⁸ To gain some insight into the tax burden on the Campine countryside, I have selected four sample periods, for which the total tax burden of the *aides* has been reconstructed. In the archives of the *Chambre de compte* in Brussels, several accounts of the revenues of these fifteenth and sixteenth centuries *aides* have been preserved. The sample periods were chosen as to make a link with the hearth taxes. I have therefore analysed the total ducal revenue of the *aides* (registered per individual village / town) for 1437-1440¹¹⁹, 1470-1472¹²⁰, 1515-1517¹²¹ and 1553-1555¹²². For each of these sample periods, the average taxation sum per villages has been calculated. Several years were combined to exclude the impact of outliers.

When looking at the total revenues of these *aides* (Fig 2.9) they have been converted to rye in order to be able to compare it in real terms¹²³, and from this we can clearly establish that the general trend was one of increase. Furthermore, this rise in taxation revenues is consistent with what Wim Blockmans has noted for the County of Flanders in his work, where he recorded an increase of revenues of 173.7 percent between the reigns of Philip the Bold (1384-1404) and Philip the Fair (1493-1506).¹²⁴ Jelle Haemers and Bart Lambert formulate it as follows: “*Pour les ducs, ce types de revenus ‘extraordinaires’, présentait donc une certain marge de croissance, dont ils ont largement profité*”.¹²⁵ The Burgundian dukes can thus quite rightly be labelled as the fathers of a more regular taxation regime. Charles the Bold for example, needing money to finance his continuous warfare with, among others, the Duke of Guelders, was eager to impose more taxes. Haemers and Lambert mention the fact that Charles tried to impose several tolls, for example on the sale of fish, or on wool and alum, but these attempts for the most part foundered in the face of opposition from the Estates.¹²⁶

¹¹⁸ One notable exception, but only for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: Coppens, H. (1985). *De plattelandsfiscaliteit in Brabant tijdens de 17de en 18de eeuw*. H. Coppens (ed.). *De plattelandsfiscaliteit tijdens het Ancien Régime*. Antwerpen, Vlaamse Vereniging voor Archief- en Documentatiewezenen: 7-23.

¹¹⁹ ARA, *Chambre de comptes*, 15722. Account of a general tax, 1436-1441

¹²⁰ ARA, *Chambre de comptes*, 15764. Volume with three tax accounts for the city and the *kwartier* of Antwerp, 1464-1472

¹²¹ ARA, *Chambre de comptes*, 15766. Volume with tax accounts for the city and the *kwartier* of Antwerp, 1515-1526

¹²² ARA, *Chambre de comptes*, 15746-15747. General taxation accounts, 1552-1558

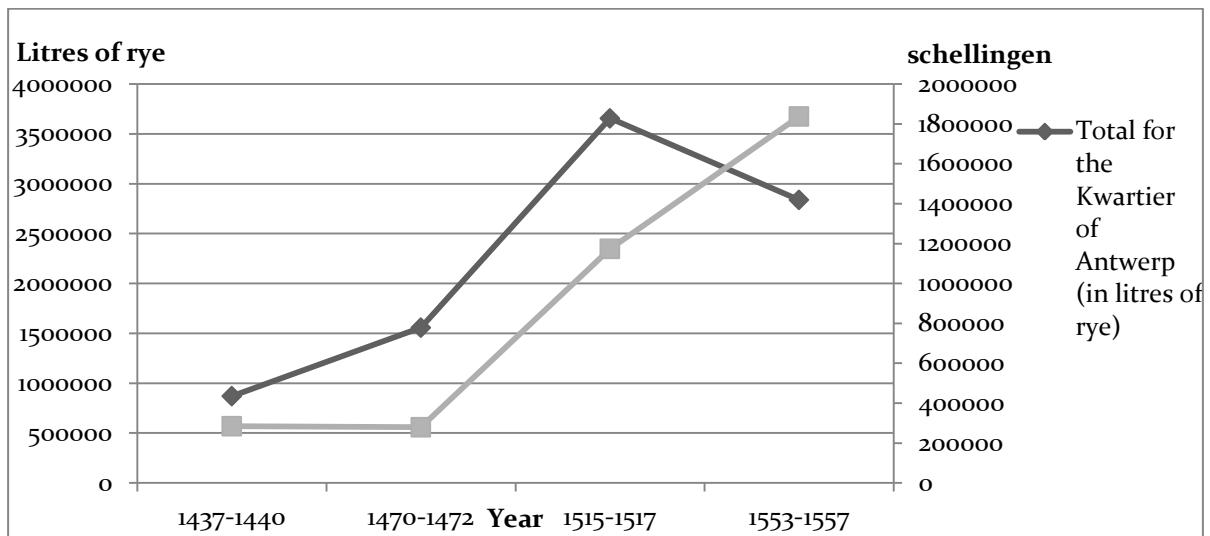
¹²³ Conversion based on the Antwerp rye-prices: van der Wee, H. (1963). *The growth of the Antwerp market and the European economy (fourteenth-sixteenth centuries)*. The Hague, Nijhoff.

¹²⁴ Blockmans, W. (1978). *De volksvertegenwoordiging in Vlaanderen in de overgang van middeleeuwen naar nieuwe tijden, 1384-1506*. Brussel, Paleis der Academiën: 632

¹²⁵ Haemers, J. and B. Lambert (2009). "Pouvoir et argent": 40

¹²⁶ Haemers, J. and B. Lambert (2009). "Pouvoir et argent": 42

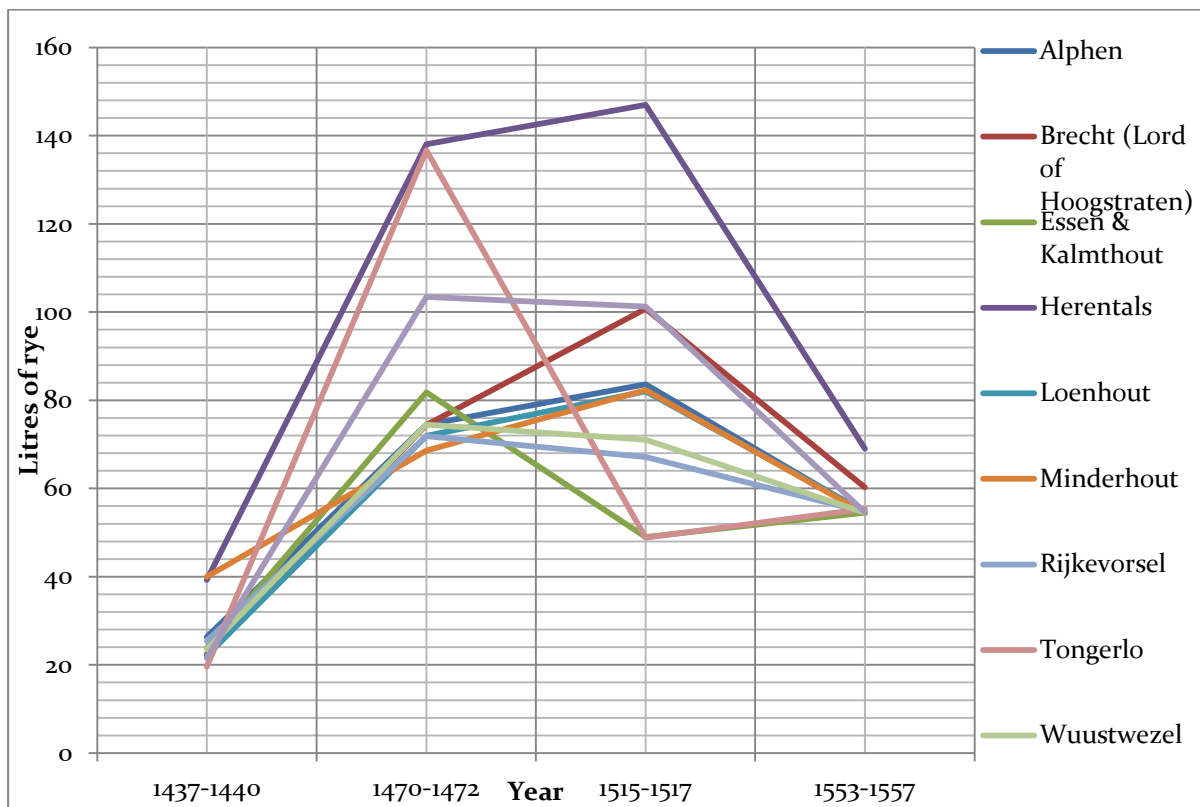
Fig 2.9 Total taxation revenues for the *Kwartier van Antwerpen* (in litres of rye and in schellingen), 1437-1557



Sources: ARA, *Chambre de comptes*, 15722. *Account of a general tax, 1436-1441*; ARA, *Chambre de comptes*, 15764. *Volume with three tax accounts for the city and the kwartier of Antwerp, 1464-1472*; ARA, *Chambre de comptes*, 15766. *Volume with tax accounts for the city and the kwartier of Antwerp, 1515-1526*; ARA, *Chambre de comptes*, 15746-15747. *General taxation accounts, 1552-1558*. Rye prices: van der Wee, H. (1963). *The growth of the Antwerp market and the European economy (fourteenth-sixteenth centuries)*. The Hague, Nijhoff, processed by Jord Hanus.

It is furthermore interesting to note that Brabantine cities were relatively more heavily burdened than the countryside. Theoretically, the hearth counts served as the basic tool to divide the total taxation sum among the villages and cities of the Antwerp *kwartier*. Population numbers thus appear to have been the prime criterion for the allotment of taxes. Almost all rural dwellings paid a percentage of the total taxation sum that nearly perfectly overlapped with their share in the total population of the Antwerp *kwartier*. However, the Brabantine cities paid (much) more than their population numbers (based on the hearth taxes) necessitated. Antwerp is the prime example of this urban overcharge, but the same can be said for Herentals, Breda and Bergen-op-Zoom. In 1515-1517 Antwerp, for example, housed approximately 24.9 percent of the *kwartier's* population, whereas it paid 38.5 percent of the total *aide*. For the smaller town of Herentals, much the same can be said, since it housed 1.5 percent of the total population, but paid 2.2 percent of the taxes. This might, however, be quite reasonable, since cities were very probably richer than villages. Little is known, however, about the exact allotment of the taxation sum in the Duchy of Brabant. This would, in my opinion, merit a great deal more attention and will hopefully be the subject of future research.

Fig 2.10 Taxation burden per household, in litres of rye (1437-1557)



Sources: ARA, *Chambre de comptes, 15722. Account of a general tax, 1436-1441*; ARA, *Chambre de comptes, 15764. Volume with three tax accounts for the city and the kwartier of Antwerp, 1464-1472*; ARA, *Chambre de comptes, 15766. Volume with tax accounts for the city and the kwartier of Antwerp, 1515-1526*; ARA, *Chambre de comptes, 15746-15747. General taxation accounts, 1552-1558*. Rye prices: van der Wee, H. (1963). *The growth of the Antwerp market and the European economy (fourteenth-sixteenth centuries)*. The Hague, Nijhoff, processed by Jord Hanus. Population numbers are based on the heart counts.¹²⁷

When looking at the evolution of the taxation burden for individual Campine villages (expressed in real terms, more specifically rye), it becomes quite clear how most of them followed the general trend that was described above (Fig 2.10). There were, however, exceptions to this rule, but for nearly all case-studies, it can be noted that taxation weighed them down the most during the 1470s and / or during the 1510s. For these two sample periods the differences between villages were also notable, whereas in the early period (1437-1440) and the later period (1553-1557), villages (and village households) were more evenly burdened. My research of course only focuses on four time-frames, which somewhat limits our scope. A more detailed analysis of the taxation revenues might broaden our insights. Recently, a detailed study of the taxation burden during the crisis period, mostly due to disastrous grain harvests of the 1480s, has been undertaken by Nick Van den Broecke. He reconstructed the taxation burden for a relatively dense sample period (1474-1487), for the village of Gierle, as can be seen in table 2.4.

¹²⁷ Cuvelier, J. (1912). *Les dénombrements de foyers*

Table 2.4 Collected taxes in the village of Gierle, 1474-1477

Harvest year	Brabantine groats	Brabantine groats/hearth	In litres of rye
1474	924	5.3	15.5
1477	8181	46.5	130.6
1478	5340	30.3	68.8
1479	135	1.3	2.6
1480	3222	31.6	64.2
1481	2868	28.1	33.2
1482	468	4.6	3.8
1483	3129	30.7	67
1484	2964	29.1	85.7
1484 (12 th penny)	10260	100.6	228.2
1485	9055,5	88.8	201.4
1486	1647	16.1	20.7
1487	8191,5	80.3	112.8

Source: Van den Broeck, N. (2013). *Graancrisis in de Kempen. Sociale allocatie op het vorstelijk domein te Turnhout (1470-1490)*. Departement Geschiedenis. Antwerpen, Universiteit Antwerp: 33. Grain prices are based on the ryeprice in the town of Turnhout in the month of January (as found in the domain accounts)

In some years, notably 1477, 1484, 1485 and 1487, the *aides* were remarkably high. However the true impact on the Campine peasants was not only determined by the extent of the taxation sum, but to an even greater extent by proceeds of the grain harvest. As Van den Broecke states: if a bad harvest coincided with increasing grain prices and high taxes (as in 1477), the impact might have been much larger than in periods of ordinary or good harvests, rising prices and high taxes (as in 1485).¹²⁸

We can, of course, also ponder upon the ‘real’ impact of taxation on the Campine area in general, and not only in a period characterised by severe grain crises. Was the sum an average household had to pay a big fraction of an average family’s income or not? It is, obviously, virtually impossible to make a complete and quick assessment of the average Campine household-income.¹²⁹ I can therefore only make a preliminary estimate of the precise extent of the taxation burden, based on indirect findings. Thoen and Soens suggest that, for the sandy arable lands of Inland Flanders, an average net yield of 1326 litres of rye per hectare was obtained in the period between 1541 and 1566.¹³⁰ We know furthermore that in the village of Gierle inhabitants on average worked 1.8 hectares of arable land.¹³¹ If we use the Inland Flanders numbers to assess the Campine net yields, an average *Gierlenaar* was, theoretically, able to produce 2386.8 litres of rye. In theory, therefore, the ordinary level of taxation thus was not an enormous burden. Thoen and Soens established for Inland Flanders that the taxation never exceeded 5 (to at its most extreme 10) percent.¹³² For the Campine area, numbers are

¹²⁸ Van den Broeck, N. (2013). *Graancrisis in de Kempen*: 39

¹²⁹ Craig Muldrew has made a succesful attempt at reconstructing individual and household production and consumption in one of his most recent works, attempting to demonstrate how food was the ‘fuel’ of the pre-industrial age: Muldrew, C. (2012). *Food, energy, and the creation of industriousness: work and material culture in agrarian England, 1550-1780*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

¹³⁰ Thoen, E. and Soens, T. (2012). *Land use and productivity: Low Countries 1000-1750*. Lecture, Corn workshop, 13-09-2012

¹³¹ Based on: RAA, OGA Gierle, 344. Pieces concerning the 10th and 20th penny tax (*penningkohier*), 1554

¹³² Thoen, E. and Soens. T. (2008). “The social and economic impact of central government taxation”: 957-971.

even lower, never exceeding 5 percent (Table 2.5). The findings of Thoen and Soens for Inland Flanders, in all likelihood also hold true for the Campine area; on average the taxation burden of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was indeed relatively moderate.

Table 2.5 Taxation burden per household for the village of Gierle

	Average tax burden per household (in litres of rye)	Median tax burden per household (in litres of rye)	Percentage of average yearly produce per household
1437-1440	25.7	25.2	1.2%
1470-1472	96.2	85.7	4%
1515-1517	83.3	79.7	3.5%
1553-1557	58.3	54.7	2.4%

Source: Van den Broeck, N. (2013). *Graancrisis in de Kempen. Sociale allocatie op het vorstelijk domein te Turnhout (1470-1490)*. Departement Geschiedenis. Antwerpen, Universiteit Antwerp: 33. Grain prices are based on the ryeprice in the town of Turnhout in the month of January (as found in the domain accounts)

2.3 Conclusion

What is there to say, therefore, about the seigniorial and stately pressure on the Campine countryside? First of all, the Campine area was less burdened than other regions, for example inland Flanders. Seigniorial revenues such as *mortemain* rights or *pontgeld* occurred significantly less frequent in the Campine area. Also, a first impression of the Campine area seems to indicate that it was less ‘exploited’ by cities in general and certain townsmen in particular, than, again, Inland Flanders, where urban surplus-extractors were a factor of importance. Add to this the late development of the seigniorial / feudal system and its fractured character, with property and jurisdiction divided among many different (types of) lords, it would appear that the Campine area was relatively less influenced by seigniorial burdens than other regions.

Furthermore, the most typical seigniorial burden, customary rent, continuously declined from the fourteenth century onwards, due to inflation, which was advantageous to the Campine peasants, among whom customary rent was and remained the predominant way of owning land (cfr. chapter 3). However, the decreasing importance of this type of revenue might have been offset by the increase of other income types. It appeared for example that the ducal administration more eagerly enforced the *banalité* of the ducal mills, which implied that peasants had to pay a fee to get their grain ground. Perhaps even more important, from the second half of the fifteenth century onwards, state taxation became increasingly regular. However, we must be careful not to overestimate the impact of these burdens on the countryside. When it came to taxation, for example, the contribution never exceeded 4 percent of the annual proceeds of the average household.

So, all in all, Campine village communities were not overly burdened by these overarching structures, leaving them with quite a significant amount of economic room for manoeuvre. However, some essential remarks need to be made. As already indicated, the

impact of seigniorial burdens and state taxation was not a stable, unchanging given, but could become either more bearable or burdensome depending on the economic circumstances and, most notably, grain yields. When government taxation was combined with other burdens such as rent, the *molster* that had to be paid, and even tithes, some years might have been harder than others. Under ordinary circumstances the Campine countryside might have been relatively well off, but when times got bad, these taxes could make a peasants' life much more difficult. A final, essential remark - one which leads us directly to the central theme of this dissertation - must be made. The notion of an 'average household' is, of course, an artificial creation. Not all social groups suffered equally from these burdens and pressures, indeed, some might even have seized the opportunities that arose from these overarching structures. This brings us to the following pressing issue: the social stratification of Campine village communities and the identification of an economic top-layer.

3

IS PROPERTY POWER? ON ACTUAL AND FISCAL INEQUALITY.

“Property as the dominant category for peasants explains, however, at once too much and too little”

(David Sabeau, 1984)¹³³

After focussing on the Campine area at the macro-level, that of the seigniorial and stately structures looming over the Campine countryside, it is now time to descend to the Campine micro-level, that of the village community. As we have seen, the Campine area was relatively sheltered from radical seigniorial or stately burdens, meaning that village communities had considerable room to manoeuvre, albeit within the boundaries set by these macro-structures. The seigniorial and stately structures did indeed shape the framework in which social relations and social differentiation took place. Social inequality on a micro-level, on the level of the village community, is the main focus of this chapter, and serves as a first step in the identification and characterisation of the Campine village elites and their (economic) strategies. Social structures obviously need to be reconstructed, through the demarcation of different social groups, before we can identify a village elite.

When studying the late medieval and early modern countryside, most historians are unanimous regarding the underlying basis of social differentiation: private property and its distribution. Since land is, quite self-evidently, the main production factor in a rural society, those who own most of it are easily defined as the village elite. Within historiography, an above-average farm size has often been linked to an above-average amount of power and influence in villages. In the Low Countries, this interest is clearly reflected in, for example, the works of Erik Thoen¹³⁴, Tim Soens¹³⁵, Peter Hoppenbrouwers¹³⁶ and Bas Van Bavel¹³⁷. Each of these scholars has focussed on a particular region in the Low Countries, and they all consider

¹³³ Sabeau, D. W. (1984). Young bees in an empty hive: relations between brothers-in-law in a south-German village around 1800. H. Medick, H. & D.W. Sabeau (eds.) *Interest and Emotion*. Cambridge: 171

¹³⁴ Thoen, E. (1988). *Landbouweconomie en bevolking in Vlaanderen gedurende de late middeleeuwen en het begin van de moderne tijden. Testregio: de kasselrijen van Oudenaarde en Aalst*. Gent, Belgisch Centrum voor Landelijke Geschiedenis.

¹³⁵ Soens, T. (2009). *De spade in de dijk? Waterbeheer en rurale samenleving in de Vlaamse kustvlakte (1280-1580)*. Gent, Academia Press.

¹³⁶ Hoppenbrouwers, P. C. M. (2000 / 2001). "De middeleeuwse oorsprong van de dorpsgemeenschap in het noorden van het hertogdom Brabant." *Noordbrabants Historisch Jaarboek 17-18*: 45-90.

¹³⁷ Van Bavel, B. J. P. (1999). *Transitie en continuïteit: de bezitsverhoudingen en de plattelandseconomie in het westelijke gedeelte van het Gelderse rivierengebied, ca. 1300- ca. 1570*. Hilversum, Verloren.

land and its division as a crucial means to understand the late medieval and early modern countryside.

The best-known countryside elite-model depicts the village elite as *coqs de village*, tilling a much larger farm than their neighbours, thus enjoying a much more beneficial 'economic' position. Their fellow-villagers, labouring on much smaller plots of land, increasingly became more economically dependent on them. The ownership or lease of an above-average sized farm is thus seen as a starting point or the basic economic substructure, the *condition sine qua non* for elite membership. Most other aspects of power – other economic assets, but also political, social – and even cultural power – are often portrayed as stemming from this advantageous 'landed position'. This depiction of a village elite is also what emerges from the few studies on social stratification within the countryside of the Low Countries, mainly in eighteenth century Inland Flanders, where village communities were dominated by large tenant farmers, wielding elaborate economic and political powers.¹³⁸ But what about peasant societies? What part does land (or more specifically farm size) play in a society dominated by customary rent, smallholding peasants and commons? Rodney Hilton states for the medieval English countryside:

*"It is also the case, of course, that at most times there was considerable inequality in the size of family holdings. The basic core of family farmers, those with enough land, equipment and labour to sustain the family and its helpers, to provide for the reproduction of the economy and to pay the rent, usually had above them a few more prosperous families – freeholders, allodiarium and the like. More important, there was below them a fluctuating periphery of smallholders inevitably thrown off from the main mass of peasant producers".*¹³⁹

In the following chapter I would, first of all, like to shed light on actual inequality on the Campine countryside and argue that there is clearly a group in Campine society which distinguished itself by a specific economic substructure, not only through the sizes of their farms, but also through the specific composition of their holdings, making them the ultimate mixed farmers, and this continuously throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries – as will be described in section 3.2.

We can also look at inequality from a different angle – one strongly present in the historical research of the last few years¹⁴⁰ – one which focuses on taxation and fiscal inequality. Actual inequality was thus translated into fiscal inequality. When it comes to the countryside, most historians acknowledge that landed property or land use was the main basis for taxation, becoming ever more recurrent throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. As Chris Dyer suggests for fifteenth century England, it seems quite likely that the use of land and the possession of animals were the most important, but not the only, criteria.¹⁴¹ This was also the case in the County of Flanders. Antoine Zoete suggested that land use and other means of

¹³⁸ Lambrecht, T. (2002). *Een grote hoeve in een klein dorp: relaties van arbeid en pacht op het Vlaamse platteland tijdens de 18e eeuw*. Gent, Academia Press. & Vermoesen, R. (2008). *Markttoegang en 'commerciële' netwerken van rurale huishoudens: de regio Aalst, 1650-1800* History Department. Antwerp, University of Antwerp: 440.

¹³⁹ Hilton, R. H. (1978). "A Crisis of Feudalism." *Past and Present* 80: 5

¹⁴⁰ A prime example of this can be found in: Hanus, J. (2010). *Affluence and Inequality in the Low Countries. The City of 's-Hertogenbosch in the Long Sixteenth Century, 1500-1600*. History Department. Antwerpen, University of Antwerp, but also Jan Luiten Van Zanden's oeuvre needs to be mentioned. A starting point might be: Van Zanden, J. L. (1995). "Tracing the beginning of the Kuznets curve: western Europe during the early modern period." *Economic History Review* XLVIII(4): 643-664.

¹⁴¹ Dyer, C. (1996). "Taxation and communities in Late Medieval England". R.H. Britnell & J. Hatcher (eds.). *Progress and Problems in medieval England. Essays in honour of Edward Miller*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 168-190.

income were the main basis for assessment at the end of the fifteenth century¹⁴², something confirmed by Nicolaas Maddens for the sixteenth century.¹⁴³ Fiscal inequality as a reflection of actual inequality will therefore also be analysed. However, I will argue that fiscal inequality (and taxation) on the countryside was not a direct or literal reflection of inequalities in the economic substructure. ‘Actual’ inequality was somewhat distorted, since the allotment of taxation was subject to an intra-village negotiation process, influenced not only by an ‘economic reality’, but also by other considerations. This serves as a prime example of the subtleties of the Campine system. Sources unveil only the top-layer of the Campine system, but the mechanisms and complex cogwheels behind it are not as easily recognisable. Fiscal inequality, as represented by tax registers are a prime example of this and will be discussed in section 3.3.

3.1 A short introduction to inequality from a historical perspective

Inequality is not only the concern of economists and sociologists; many historians have also set out on a quest for the ‘historical roots’ of inequality. Predominantly they have attempted to find the holy grail of social and economic history: the origins of the Kuznets curve. Simon Kuznets hypothesised that inequality rose during the first period of ‘modern’ economic growth (roughly from the Industrial Revolution up until the 1920s), followed by a continued decline in inequality. Kuznets’s findings have been severely criticised, for example by Nobel prize laureate Joseph Stiglitz, who refers to the recent East-Asian miracle, which does not fit within Kuznets’s model and nuances the overall link between the first stages of economic growth and a rise in inequality.¹⁴⁴ However, several historians have pondered upon the possibility that the starting point of economic growth and the accompanying rise in inequality started much earlier than the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century.

Jan Luiten Van Zanden, for example, introduced the concept of the ‘Super Kuznets curve’: “with an upward phase from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth and a downward phase in the twentieth century”, mainly based on findings for the present-day Netherlands and additional data from England, Germany and Italy.¹⁴⁵ Van Zanden was not alone in suggesting a rise in inequality in the Low Countries from the sixteenth century onwards. Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly, for example, had already suggested that the growing importance of markets caused a growth in urban inequality from the sixteenth century onwards.¹⁴⁶ More recently Milanovic, Lindert and Williamson have wondered: ‘is inequality largely the result of the Industrial Revolution? Or, were pre-industrial incomes as unequal as they are today?’. In their article on ‘Pre-Industrial Inequality’ they attempted to answer these questions by looking at macro-data,

¹⁴² Zoete, A. (1994). *De beden in het Graafschap Vlaanderen onder de hertogen Jan zonder Vrees en Filips de Goede (1405-1467)*. Brussel, Paleis der Academiën: 58-61; 112-113

¹⁴³ Maddens, N. (1978). *De beden in het graafschap Vlaanderen tijdens de regering van Keizer Karel V (1515-1550)*. Heule, UGA: 174-203

¹⁴⁴ Stiglitz, J.E. (1996). "Some Lessons From The East Asian Miracle". *The World Bank Research Observer* 11 (2): 151-177.

¹⁴⁵ Van Zanden, J. L. (1995). "Tracing the beginning of the Kuznets curve: 650

¹⁴⁶ Lis, C. and H. Soly (1986). *Armoede en kapitalisme in pre-industrieel Europa*. Antwerpen, Standaard.

reconstructing GDIs from the Roman Empire up until the period of colonial India, concluding that inequality was as much a part of pre-modern societies as of current ones.¹⁴⁷

Micro-studies, which might be able to further nuance or add information to this somewhat bulky macro-image are, however, still quite rare. Guido Alfani recently wrote about the evolution of wealth inequality in Ivrea, a medium-sized city in north-western Italy during the early modern period. His findings very much emphasise the role of demography and rural-urban migration in the fluctuations of inequality. And, even more interestingly, he also makes very clear how 'the measures of wealth concentration [...] show an exceptional resilience over time'. Apparently, the early modern rise in inequality was not a European-wide phenomenon, not even in the cities of that time – something that is not always clear when only looking at the macro-data.¹⁴⁸ Another study, carried out by Jord Hanus, has focused on the development of inequality in the city of 's Hertogenbosch. Looking at the aggregate figures, it seems, at first sight, that the sixteenth century was a period of dearth and drama. Real income declined throughout the century and the Gini index was very high; around 0.75. However, Hanus suggests there is more to it than the classic story of the – still rather modest – development of capitalism and a rise in inequality. He argued that broad middling groups remained present and relatively strong in sixteenth century 's Hertogenbosch.¹⁴⁹ It is a nuanced story, to say the least. Juul Hannes and Erik Vanhaute have analysed income inequality in several nineteenth century Flemish cities. Their conclusions mainly emphasise the fact that criteria to measure income inequality can often be deceptive. A careful approach, combining different measures, is necessary, which is something I will attempt to do by combining sources on property distribution with taxation lists. Inequality, and the way it evolves, is a complex matter and by no means easy to grasp or measure. This type of micro-studies is, however, still scarce and moreover, mainly, or even solely, focussed on pre-modern cities, often hailed as the main carriers of growth. However, as Van Zanden alleges, for example, the countryside, and the so-called agrarian revolution of the early modern period, played a significant part in the increasing inequality he perceived.¹⁵⁰ He refers to Robert Allen's famous work: 'Enclosure and the yeomen', which provides us with a classical analysis of the agricultural revolution and its effects on income and inequality.¹⁵¹ Detailed studies on inequality on the countryside are however still lacking.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁷ Milanovic, B., P. H. Lindert, et al. (2011). "Pre-Industrial Inequality." *The Economic Journal* 121: 255-271.

¹⁴⁸ Alfani, G. (2010). "Wealth Inequalities and Population Dynamics in Early Modern Northern Italy." *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* XL(4): 545:546

¹⁴⁹ Hanus, J. (2010). *Affluence and Inequality*.

¹⁵⁰ Van Zanden, J. L. (1995). "Tracing the beginning of the Kuznets curve: 658

¹⁵¹ Allen, R. C. (1992). *Enclosure and the yeoman. The agricultural development of the South-Midlands 1450-1850*. Oxford, Clarendon Press Oxford

¹⁵² One of the few examples perhaps is: Van Schaik, R. (1987). *Belasting, bevolking en bezit in Gelre en Zutphen (1350-1550)*. Hilversum, Verloren

3.2 'Actual' socio-economic inequality: property distribution

As for the Campine area, the most noteworthy aspect of this society – when it comes to landholding and property – was the significant importance of common (waste) land. Private land – arable as well as pasture – was a rare and precious asset in a society in which up to 75 percent of village territory was made up of common heathland, which was unsuitable for agricultural production. Indeed, if one had wandered through the late medieval Campine area, one would be struck by the endless stretches of heath and moorland, reducing villages to little islands surrounded by an ocean of sandy dunes and marshes. These commons were not only huge in terms of surface, they were furthermore hugely important to the Campine agro-system. To do them justice, a separate chapter will be devoted to them (chapter 4). Private land was therefore much less ubiquitous – amounting to more or less 25 percent of village surface – but by no means less significant. Private arable land and private meadows were self-evidently of key importance to the Campine villagers. In a society dominated by peasant smallholders, the use of, and access to, arable land and pasture was of prime importance for survival. In what follows, a reconstruction of Campine property relations and farm sizes – the prime distinguishing categories of social stratification in the countryside – will be attempted. Some attention will also be paid to the ownership of other means of production, i.e. the ownership of ploughs, since these were inextricably linked to the tilling of land. By doing this I hope to provide a socio-economic stratification of Campine village communities and piece together an initial image of the economically better-off part of Campine society: Can we perceive possibilities for distinction on the level of acquiring land, on the level of farm sizes and of property composition? And can we thus distinguish an 'elite', clearly different from other groups in society?

3.2.1 Acquiring property

Before we turn to farm sizes and property relations in detail, it seems fitting to pay some attention to the ways in which the Campine peasants acquired their private land and possible indications of social distinction linked to this aspect. First of all, there were several ways by which Campine commoners could acquire private land. The first – and probably most prevalent – way of acquiring land was, of course, through inheritance, which was relevant for allodial (freehold) land, as well as land held in fief or customary rent. Many historians, especially in the wake of Jack Goody¹⁵³, have in the past emphasized the paramount importance of inheritance as a means of obtaining land.¹⁵⁴ Since most Campine commoners held their land in customary rent, they could pass it on to their children, without undergoing many constraints. The ducal domain accounts, for example, contained no evidence of a tax levied on the passing on of copyhold-land after death – the so-called *mortemain*. The Campine peasants thus enjoyed strong property rights on their land and could dispose of it as they wished.

The only clear exception to this rule was land held in fief. Peasant fief-holding was quite common in the Campine area as already indicated in the previous chapter (section 2.2.1). Fiefs

¹⁵³ J. Goody (1976), *Production and Reproduction: A Comparative Study of the Domestic Domain*, Cambridge

¹⁵⁴ For an overview, see: Smith, R. M. (1984). Some issues concerning families and their property in rural England 1250-1800. R. M. Smith (ed.) *Land, Kinship and Life-Cycle*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 1-21

could not be split up in order to be divided among one's entire offspring, but – theoretically – had to be passed on to one's eldest son. Feudal law, however, strongly varied from lord to lord and law court to law court. An in-depth study on the specificities of the Brabantine feudal law is sadly lacking and is clearly beyond the scope of this research. It is, however, quite likely that the basic concepts were similar to those described by, for example, Peter Hoppenbrouwers in relation to the Land of Heusden. He states that feudal law could vary according to the liege lord, but that some general tendencies were nevertheless quite clear. In general, men were given undue preference. If a son was present, he usually inherited the fief. Only when there was no male heir to take over the fief, were daughters sometimes considered as possible heiresses. However, in some cases, the fief was a *kwaad leen*, which meant that only men could inherit it. This type of fief returned to the lord when no male heirs were available.¹⁵⁵ Since a minority of the fief-holders of the village of Gierle were women (32.4 percent), it seems quite likely that a preference for male heirs was predominant, but when these were lacking, girls were also considered legitimate heiresses, so the concept of *kwaad leen* was probably unknown in the Campine area. It is also interesting to note that – even though it was not possible in principle – fiefs were split up, very occasionally. If and how this happened strongly depended upon how obliging the liege lord was.

Fiefs are inextricably linked to noble / lordly strategies and relations. As has been mentioned before, the Duke of Brabant, for example, used fief-holding as a way to bind his vassals to him, creating a dependency relation and thus obtaining a grasp on the vast possessions of the Campine local lords. Fief-holding however was not limited to the upper-strata of medieval society, the so-called *boerenlenen* or peasant-fiefs were important as well. Several 'ordinary' Campine peasants can be found in the ducal fief registers and *dénombrements*. They were the lord's direct vassals, but only held very tiny plots of land in fief – contrary to the Campine local lords who often held entire seignories. For the village of Gierle, I have reconstructed the sizes of these peasant fiefs, and they were, indeed, rather small. On average they measured 0,8 hectares, with a median of 0,7. In total 46 plots of land are mentioned in the 1530 register as being 'owned' by 37 different villagers.¹⁵⁶

The fact that these fiefs were not subject to partible inheritance made them mostly attractive to the upper-strata of peasant society. Unfortunately it has been impossible to link the names of the 1530 Gierle fief-holders to a socio-economic cross-section of about the same period, since no tax findings were preserved. I can, however, make some, somewhat less detailed, statements about the profile of these fief-holders. Two out of twenty-five male fief-holders, Johannis – Jan – Leysen and Sijmon Proest, were active as village aldermen, between 1512 and 1558, the period for which the registers of the bench of aldermen were preserved. Moreover, 10 out of 37 fief-holders (27 percent) bore the same family name as a sixteenth century village aldermen. This does, of course, not necessarily imply that these people were related, as identifying family linkages can be a rather daring task, something Peter Hoppenbrouwers has proved in his study on the Land of Heusden, in his attempt to try and find out 'who Willem Wouterse was'.¹⁵⁷ Still, the name-resemblance might serve as an

¹⁵⁵ Hoppenbrouwers, P. C. M. (1992). *Een middeleeuwse samenleving: het Land van Heusden (ca. 1360-ca. 1515)* Wageningen, Landbouwniversiteit: 243-246 & Roes, J. S. L. A. W. B. (2006). *Het naaste bloed erfde het goed. De periode van het 'oud-vaderlandse' recht (tot 1809)*, Kluwer: 241-244

¹⁵⁶ Based on: RAAnd, Cour féodale de Brabant, 30. *Denombrements*: Antwerpen, Bossche, 1530

¹⁵⁷ Hoppenbrouwers, P. C. M. (1992). *Een middeleeuwse samenleving*: 139-145

indication which could suggest at least an overlap between the politically dominant families and fief-holding. Furthermore, several of these surnames were already present in the village's eldest rent registers, dating from 1340. This holds true for 24.3 percent of all fief-holders, thus also suggesting a link between fief-holding and what we could label - in the wake of Sherri Olson - 'well-established' families, families with a longstanding presence in village life, continuously dominating and steering it.¹⁵⁸ However scattered and indirect this evidence may be, when taken together, it does indeed suggest a connection between elite-membership and fief-holding.

When it comes to freehold land and land held in customary rent, medieval and early modern inheritance systems were notoriously complicated and marked by an almost mind-blowing regional divergence. Even in the Campine area itself, inheritance practices could vary from village to village, according to local customs. For example, in villages following the *costuymen* of Antwerpen, Herentals, Kasterlee, Zandhoven, Mol, Balen and Dessel, male and female descendants were entitled to equal parts of moveable and immovable goods, whereas in villages following the *costuymen* of Geel – Geel itself and its hamlets – rules were somewhat more misogynistic. There it is stated that: '*in scheijdinghe ende deijlinghe, den broeder deijlt teghens twee susters inde erffelijckheijdt*', which implies that men were entitled to double the amount as women.¹⁵⁹ Nonetheless, there were ways around this rule. More wealthy parents often made a will, in which they deliberately chose to divide their possessions equally, creating very complex packages of land and rents to distribute among their children. As in, for example, Inland Flanders, this system of partible inheritance encouraged the ongoing fragmentation of land, since it had to be divided among all children.

The scattered wills and the *scheydinghen ende deylinghen*¹⁶⁰ registered by the village aldermen reflect the main concern of wealthier inhabitants to divide property equally among all children.¹⁶¹ It seems that, richer peasants in particular, often made up wills because they owned a fief which was unable to be split up, however, they wanted their other children to be compensated for this by giving them other assets. In the village of Gierle in 1542, for example, the legacy of Sebastiaen Jacops needed to be divided among his substantial offspring. His 5 sons and 5 daughters each received a certain *kavel*, a package consisting of pieces of land and annuities of approximately the same value. Soon – somewhat predictably – a row commenced regarding the exact division of *kavels*. Matheus, the eldest son, called on his right of primogeniture to pick the most interesting *kavel*, but this request was rejected by the bench of aldermen, who stated that the siblings must come to a negotiated solution.¹⁶² In 1554 we find Matheus Jacops in a *penningkohier*, where it is listed that he owns 5,6 hectares of land, making him one of the better-off inhabitants (cfr. *infra*).¹⁶³ There are several other examples of these types of complex divisions to be found in the registers of the bench of aldermen of Gierle. When Henrick Stakenbroeck, former aldermen of the village, died in 1556, his estate needed to

¹⁵⁸ Olson, S. (1992). "Family linkages and the structure of the local elite in the medieval and early modern village." *Medieval Prosopography* 13(2):53-82.

¹⁵⁹ As can be found in: de Longé, G. (1878). *Coutumes d'Hérentals, de Casterlé, de Moll, Balen et Desschel, de Gheel, de Hoogstraten, de Befferen et de Putte, et féodales du pays de Malines*. Bruxelles, Gobbaerts.

¹⁶⁰ In which property was split up after the death of the owner

¹⁶¹ Thoen, E. and T. Soens (2011). "The family or the farm: a Sophie's choice? The late medieval crisis in the former County of Flanders.", lecture *North Sea area vs. Iberian Peninsula – Social dynamics of pre-modern peasant communities*, 8-12-2012

¹⁶² RAA, OGA Gierle, 350. Registers of the bench of aldermen, 1538-1559: 110 & 115

¹⁶³ RAA, OGA Gierle, 344. Pieces concerning the 10th and 20th penny tax (*penningkohier*), 1554

be split up among his children, Henrick junior, Roeloeff, Magdalena, Catharina and Clara. Henrick Sr. was one of the 'richest' inhabitants of Gierle. The *penningkohier* of 1554 mentions that he tilled almost 10 hectares of land and that only 11 villagers held larger holdings.¹⁶⁴ The eldest son, Henrick Jr. was entitled to his father's fief, but had to compensate his siblings for this advantage by paying them a considerable sum of money. Furthermore 37 pieces of land and 56 annuities were more or less equally divided among the heirs.¹⁶⁵

Still, the possession (and inheritance) of allodial land or land held in customary rent or in fief, was not the only gateway to the use (or ownership) of land. Lease-holding was also an option, albeit not an extremely predominant one, even in the sixteenth century (cfr. chapter 6), when in Gierle only 18.36 percent of land was leased.¹⁶⁶ In the village of Minderhout, the number amounted to 25 percent, but this was an absolute maximum.¹⁶⁷ This is yet another indication of the strong grip Campine peasants had on their land. The limited importance of leaseholding is quite typical of communally organised peasant regions, if we are to believe the limited evidence at our disposal. In his work on seventeenth-century Drenthe, Jan Bieleman states that in 1630, a still respectable 61 percent of all farms was directly 'owned' by the peasants.¹⁶⁸ It is self-evident that one last option remained for peasants wishing to gain access to land, namely the land market. Since customary rent was predominant, most peasants had a strong enough grasp on their land to be able to decide to sell it. The functioning of the land market is the subject of a separate chapter (chapter 5, section 5.2), in which the importance and social functioning of this factor market will be addressed.

3.2.2 Property distribution

We know now, therefore, through which channels peasants could acquire private land, and have already we detected some traces of social differentiation on this level. Based on literature, it seems that the most outspoken differentiation is, however, mostly linked to farm size. Property and its distribution have been at the core of rural history ever since Robert Brenner formulated his pioneering thesis singling out the loss of direct access to land (and hence means of subsistence) by large parts of the rural population, and its redistribution on a competitive base to leasehold farmers as the offset for more capitalist developments. Brenner placed a great deal of emphasis on the way peasants managed, or did not manage, to maintain property rights on the land they owned, thus securing a direct, non-market access to their means of existence.¹⁶⁹ Erik Thoen¹⁷⁰ and Bas Van Bavel¹⁷¹, among others, have elaborated on his

¹⁶⁴ RAA, OGA Gierle, 344. Pieces concerning the 10th and 20th penny tax (*penningkohier*), 1554

¹⁶⁵ RAA, OGA Gierle, 350. Registers of the bench of aldermen, 1538-1559: 368

¹⁶⁶ Based on: RAA, OGA Gierle, 344. Pieces concerning the 10th and 20th penny tax (*penningkohier*), 1554

¹⁶⁷ SA Hoogstraten, KA Minderhout, H9. List of owners for the 100th penny tax (*penningkohier*), 1569 & SA Hoogstraten, KA Minderhout, H10. List of tenants for the 100th penny tax (*penningkohier*), 1569

¹⁶⁸ Bieleman, J. (1987). *Boeren op het Drentse zand 1600-1910. Een nieuwe visie op de 'oude' landbouw*. Utrecht, HES Uitgevers: 252

¹⁶⁹ Brenner, R. (2001). The Low Countries in transition to capitalism. P. Hoppenbrouwers and J. L. Van Zanden (eds.). *Peasants into farmers? The transformation of the rural economy and society in the Low Countries (Middle Ages - 19th Century) in the light of the Brenner Debate*. Turnhout, Brepols: 169-241.

¹⁷⁰ Thoen, E. (2004). 'Social agrosystems' as an economic concept to explain regional differences. An essay taking the former county of Flanders as an example (Middle Ages - 19th century). P. Hoppenbrouwers and B. J. P. Van Bavel (eds.) *Landholding and land transfer in the North Sea area (late Middle Ages - 19th century)*. Turnhout, Brepols.

¹⁷¹ Van Bavel, B. J. P. (2010). *Manors and markets: economy and society in the Low Countries, 500-1600*. Oxford Oxford University Press.

thesis by focussing on the Netherlands and pointing out the existence of regional social agrosystems in which diverging property and power structures overlapped with diverging paths of social and economic development.

The Campine area was clearly determined by the predominance of smallholders who had a relatively strong grip on their land – mostly held in customary rent.¹⁷² Smallholding is inextricably linked to peasant communities. All peasant-scholars, both past and present, ranging from the Russian agronomist Alexander Chayanov to the renowned anthropologist James Scott, have greatly emphasised this aspect of peasant societies. For the Low Countries, Jan De Vries was one of the first to comment on social polarisation within peasant societies, differentiating them from market-oriented farms. According to De Vries, peasants maintained a mixed farming model with lower investment rates and labour productivity and they did this on much smaller holdings than their commercial counterparts. Consequently De Vries portrayed these societies as less polarised than their commercial counterparts.¹⁷³

The abundance of smallholders, the low polarisation De Vries attributed to this, and the strong communal characteristics of this society might give us the impression that the Campine was some sort of sandy Shire – minus the hobbits. But even these small-holding, communal societies were characterised by a certain level of inequality, especially when it came to their most essential feature: land. The fact that hierarchies and differences played a significant part in peasant communities has been suggested by researchers of peasant communities past and present. Christopher Dyer and Miriam Müller, for example, significantly emphasise the existence of different social strata in late medieval English village communities.¹⁷⁴ The same has been noted by James Scott¹⁷⁵ and George Varughese and Elinor Ostrom¹⁷⁶ for contemporary peasant villages. Within historiography, farm sizes are used as the primary indicator of elite(economic) status. Research has, furthermore, precisely indicated that the differences in farm size could be significant in peasant societies too. In sixteenth century Inland Flanders, a peasant society without commons, for example, we can discern a clear gap between large tenant farmers – true *coqs de village* – and small-scale peasants. In 1571, 38 percent of the inhabitants of the Flemish village of Lede, for example, owned less than 1 hectare, whereas 5 percent of them worked farms of over 15 hectares.¹⁷⁷ I would like to elaborate this research line by focussing on the differences in farm sizes in these Campine communities. First of all, I will sketch the farming system in which the Campine peasants functioned, and illustrate its impressive stability throughout our research period. The central research questions informing this sub-section will be presented: exactly how '(un)equal' was Campine society when compared with other rural societies in Europe? What was its social stratification? Can we delineate a group in Campine society that clearly distinguishes itself via its 'landed position' and what were the characteristics of this group?

¹⁷² Van Bavel, B. J. P. (2010). *Manors and markets*: 99-100 & 242-252; Bieleman, J. (2008). *Boeren in Nederland: geschiedenis van de landbouw, 1500-2000*. Amsterdam, Boom: 121-128

¹⁷³ De Vries, J. (1974). *The Dutch rural economy in the Golden Age, 1500-1700*. New Haven, Yale University Press.

¹⁷⁴ Dyer, C. (1994). "The English Medieval Village Community and Its Decline." *The Journal of British Studies* 33(4): 407-429. & Müller, M. (2007). "A Divided Class? Peasants and Peasant Communities in Later Medieval England". C. Dyer, P. Coss and C. Wickham (eds.) *Rodney Hilton's Middle Ages. An Exploration of Historical Themes*. Oxford, Oxford University Press: 115-131.

¹⁷⁵ Scott, J. C. (1985). *Weapons of the weak: everyday forms of peasant resistance*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 68-70

¹⁷⁶ Varughese, G. and E. Ostrom (2001). "The Contested Role of Heterogeneity in Collective Action: Some Evidence from Community Forestry in Nepal." *World Development* 29(5): 747-765.

¹⁷⁷ Thoen, E. (1988). *Landbouweconomie en bevolking*: 863

The best of both worlds? The Campine area and its mixed farming system

When it comes to the farming system of the Campine area, it might come across as some sort of misfit within the Low Countries. During this period some regions witnessed a transition to a very commercial, even 'capitalist' type of agriculture, as was the case in, for example, the Gelders river area¹⁷⁸ or Coastal Flanders.¹⁷⁹ It was there that a more market-oriented economy emerged, dominated by large tenant farms, which opted for a specialised agriculture. The former peasant-population slowly transformed into an agricultural labour force. In other regions, peasant-societies were able to keep their head above water by cultivating industrial crops and / or engaging in proto-industrial activities. Inland Flanders is an outstanding example of this evolution, with its flax-producing and linen-weaving inhabitants.¹⁸⁰ The Campine area was somewhat different in this respect, since it maintained its mixed farming system, combining arable production with animal breeding, until the end of the Ancien Regime.

Our knowledge of the Campine farming system is rather limited, since the last in-depth study carried out already dates back to 1952 and is predominantly based on eighteenth century findings which cannot simply be extrapolated to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.¹⁸¹ What we do know is that the Campine area was characterised by an impressive equilibrium between common (heath)land, pastures and arable land. When it comes to arable land, new crops and fertilisers were only adopted in order to enhance the existing system and cope with challenging ecological circumstances.¹⁸² The main crop was of course rye, but barley, oats and - from the sixteenth century onwards - buckwheat also played their part. Spurrey was another vital crop, mainly sown as stubble after the harvest and serving as green manure. It was furthermore used as animal fodder, mainly for cattle. Spurrey added a distinct, and much appreciated, taste to Campine butter which was, from the sixteenth century onwards, increasingly sold on the Antwerp market.¹⁸³ Since the soil characteristics restricted arable production, the eighteenth-century Campine area was characterised by a well-developed animal husbandry, where cattle was kept in stables – the so-called *potstallen* – to produce enough manure. A surprisingly fierce debate is currently waging within scholarship on the precise origins of these *potstallen*, with Bastiaens en Verbruggen¹⁸⁴ tracing it back to the thirteenth century and Vera¹⁸⁵ insisting that it only came into being in the eighteenth century. This clearly indicates the difficulties one encounters when trying to reconstruct the late medieval farming system, since most information is limited to the eighteenth century and cannot simply be extrapolated to an earlier period. However, it is beyond doubt that the Campine peasants already collected manure and heather in some way in the medieval period – as was indicated in the village byelaws – to fertilise the infield. In the sixteenth century 45 to 65 percent of private farmland was dedicated to the production of grain, while the rest was

¹⁷⁸ Van Bavel, B. J. P. (1999). *Transitie en continuïteit*

¹⁷⁹ Soens, T. (2009). *De spade in de dijk? & Dombrecht, K. (forthcoming). Plattelandsgemeenschappen, lokale elites en ongelijkheid in het Brugse Vrije (14de-16de eeuw). Casestudie: Dudzele ambacht.* Gent, Universiteit Gent

¹⁸⁰ Thoen, E. (1988). *Landbouweconomie en bevolking.*

¹⁸¹ Lindemans, P. (1952). *Geschiedenis van de landbouw in België.* Antwerpen, De Sikkel.

¹⁸² Lindemans, *Geschiedenis van de landbouw in België.*

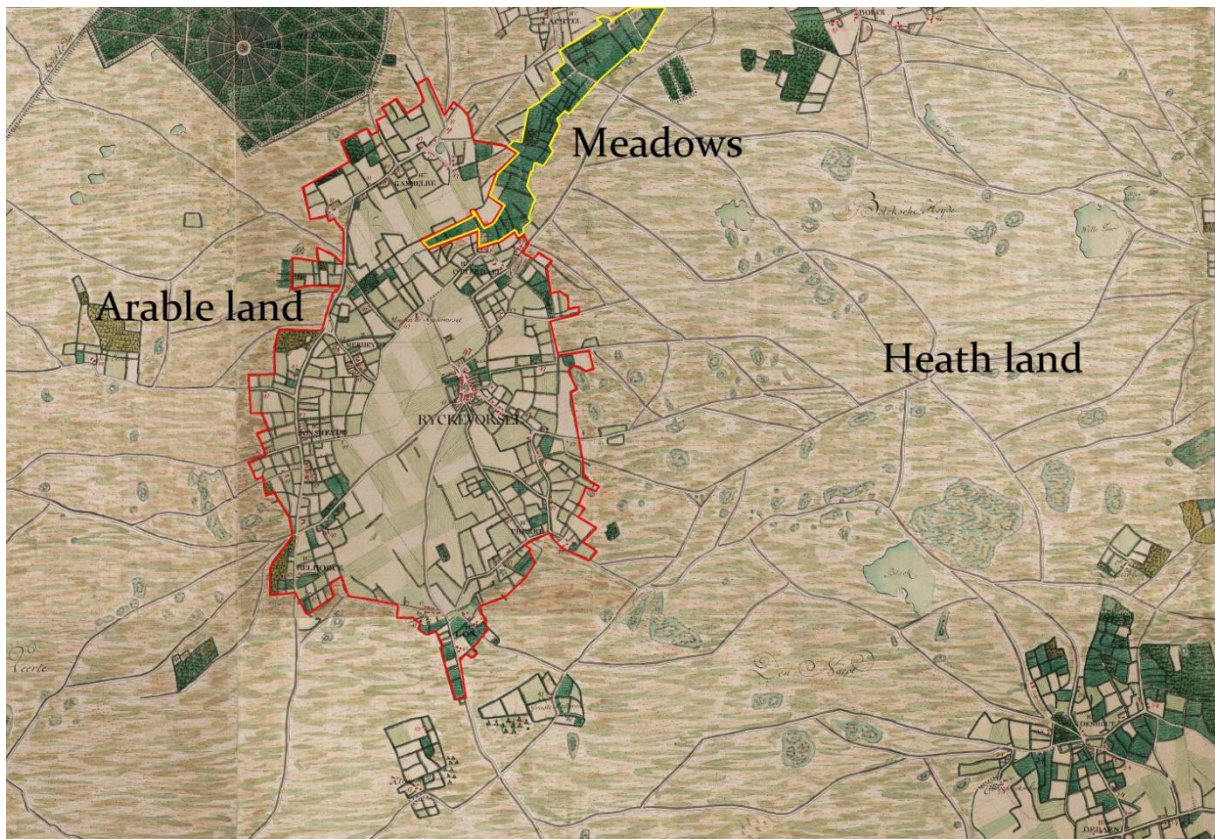
¹⁸³ Bieleman, J. (2008). *Boeren in Nederland: 123-124*

¹⁸⁴ Bastiaens, J. and C. Verbruggen (1996). "Fysische en socio-economische achtergronden van het plaggenlandbouwsysteem in de Antwerpse Kempen." *Tijdschrift voor Ecologische Geschiedenis* 1(1): 26-32.

¹⁸⁵ Vera, H. (2002). "Potstallen en esdekken. Een kritisch onderzoek naar het Brabantse landschap." *Brabants heem* 54: pp. 55-66.

employed as pasture/meadow.¹⁸⁶ These grazing lands, due to their high quality, were mainly reserved for cattle and horses. The grazing of villagers' flocks of sheep was restricted to the common waste lands. These waste lands were moreover used for the cutting of sods, which were used to fertilise the sandy infield, but also for collecting wood and digging peat (as will be discussed in chapter 4).¹⁸⁷

Map 3.1 Mixed farming in Rijkevorsel



Source: Adaption of the *Carte de Cabinet des Pays-Bas autrichiens (Carte Ferraris)*

A stable structure. Campine farm sizes throughout two centuries

Before turning to the micro-level, I would like to put forward some broad observations regarding the evolution of farm sizes throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, to point out and emphasise the continuous dominance of smallholding in this society, which actually increased throughout this period. Reconstructing farm sizes for the period before the middle of the sixteenth century is a rather complicated undertaking. The most important sources revealing information on landholding for this period are the rent registers or *cijnsboeken* (listing all *cijnshouders* or people holding their land in customary rent), but these do not systematically list the surfaces of the plots of land. Therefore I can only make an assessment of the general trend throughout these two centuries. For the villages of Arendonk (Fig 3.1 & 3.2),

¹⁸⁶ AAT, II, 292 & 293. *Fines Culturam*, 1510-1653.; RAA, OGA Gierle, 344. Pieces concerning the 10th and 20th penny tax (*penningkohier*), 1554.; RAA, OGA, Loenhout, 3823.

¹⁸⁷ De Moor, M., L. Shaw-Taylor, et al. (2002). Comparing the historical commons of north west Europe. L. Shaw-Taylor, M. De Moor & P. Warde (eds.) *The management of common land in north west Europe, c. 1500-1800*. Turnhout, Brepols: 15-31.

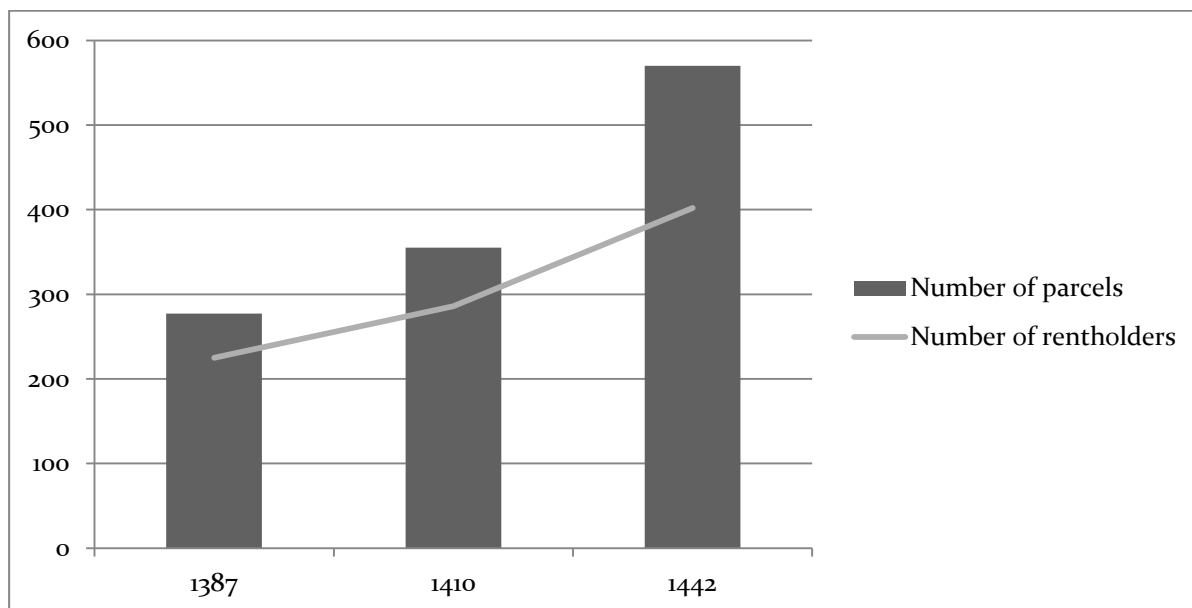
Gierle (Fig 3.3 & 3.4) and Kalmthout (Fig 3.5 & 3.6) I have analysed fifteenth century rent registers; for Arendonk and Gierle those of the Duke of Brabant, the most important landowner in both of these villages and for Kalmthout those of the abbey of Tongerlo. These findings roughly suggest the same evolutions in all three villages. In the first half of the fifteenth century the number of parcels that were 'rented' out rose in all three villages, as did the number of rent-payers. Simultaneously, the average and median rent sum dropped. The total acreage of land that was rented out in this way did not significantly increase (apart from some minor piecemeal reclamations of the common heathland, which are usually explicitly identified as such in the rent registers). As a consequence this suggests that, as the population increased, parcels of land were split up, thereby causing a diminution in terms of the average farm size. As has been mentioned before, partible inheritance was more or less the norm in the Campine area, enabling the splitting-up of land to continue unhindered.

For the second half of the fifteenth and the first half of the sixteenth century, the evidence becomes more fragmented and less expressive. Only some findings for the village of Kalmthout (Fig 3.5) can shed light on this somewhat enigmatic period. The rise in number of parcels and owners and the drop in rent sum continues up until 1463. The hearth taxes¹⁸⁸ for the last quarter of the fifteenth century clearly indicate a significant decline of population numbers, due to the warfare, crisis and disease that spread throughout the southern Low Countries – as can be seen in Fig 3.7. It is therefore possible that farm sizes augmented somewhat during this period, due to the lower amount of possible *cijnshouders*, however, sources do not allow me to be more precise on this. The findings for Kalmthout in 1518, do indeed confirm this hypothesis, since they indicate a lower amount of land parcels and landowners than the ones in the previous rent register of 1463. Indeed, the population numbers in the first half of the sixteenth century were recovering, but they still did not reach the heights of the first half of the fifteenth century. This is more or less confirmed by the findings of Daniel Vangheluwe for the ducal rent-payers of the villages of Eersel and Bergeyk in North-Brabant. In 1450, 212 rent-payers could be identified, whereas in 1525 this number was somewhat lower, and amounted to 199¹⁸⁹, which is consistent with the above-mentioned thesis.

¹⁸⁸ Cuvelier, J. (1912). *Les dénombrements de foyers en Brabant, 14e-16e siècle* Brussel, s.n.

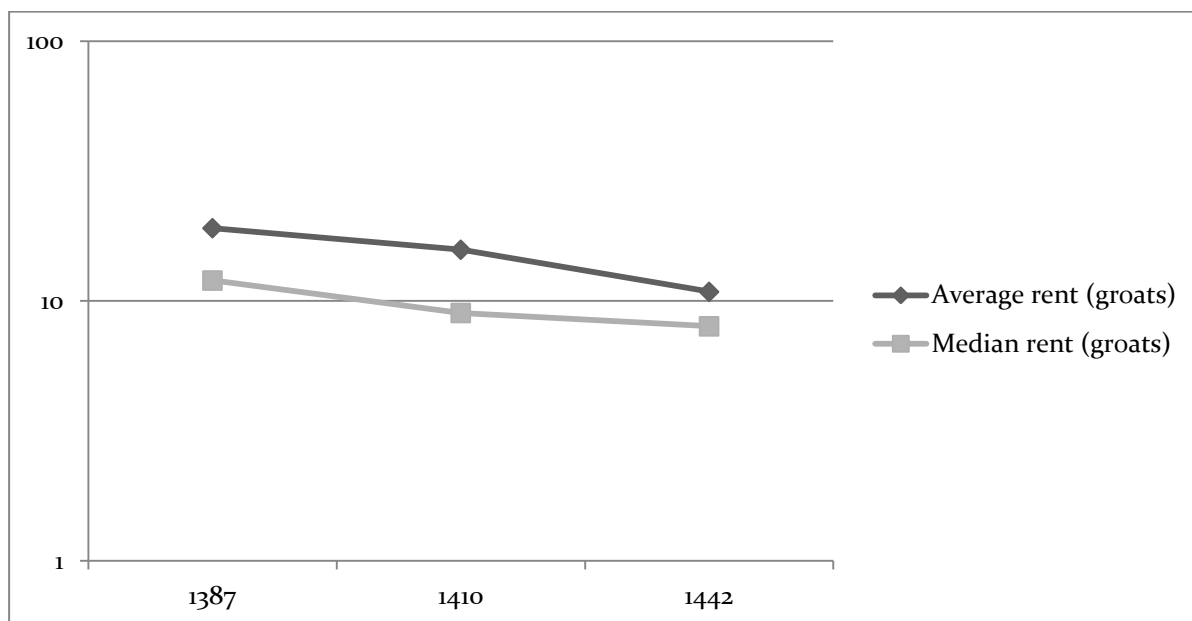
¹⁸⁹ Vangheluwe, D. (1999). "Cijzen en belastingen in de dingbank van Eersel: de ontwikkeling van een plattelandsgemeenschap tussen 1350 en 1569." *Brabants heem* 51(3): 105

Fig 3.1 Evolution of rent (*cijns*) (land parcels and rentholders) in the village of Arendonk, 1387-1442



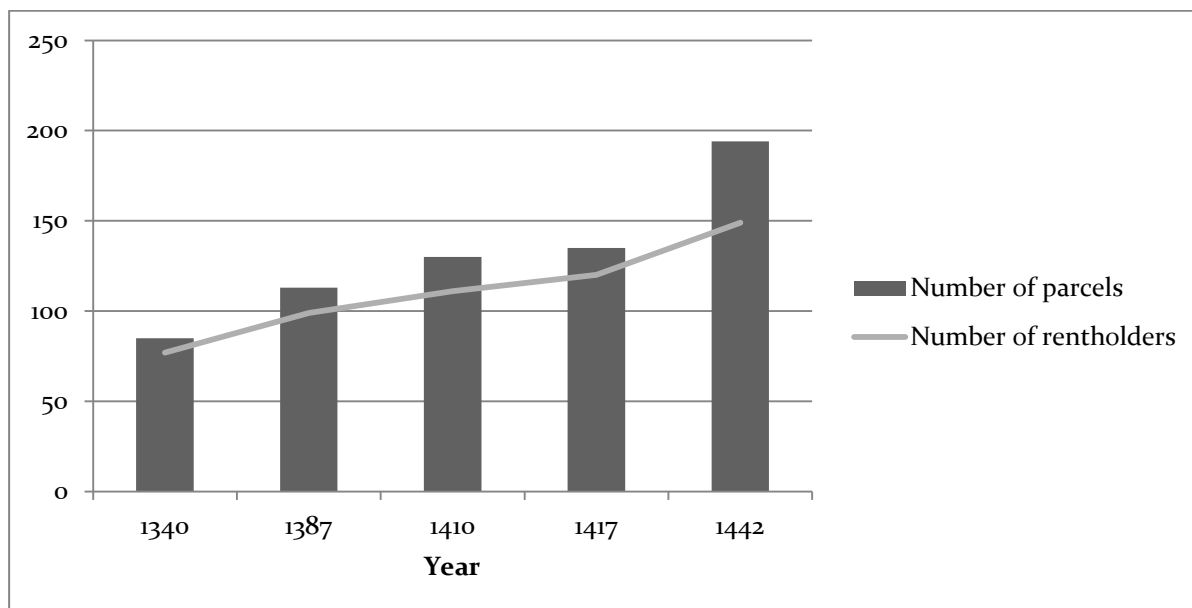
Source: ARA, *Chambre de compte*. 45017, 45018, 45019. Ducal rent registers, 1387-1442

Fig 3.2 Evolution of the rent (*cijns*) sum in the village of Arendonk, 1387-1442



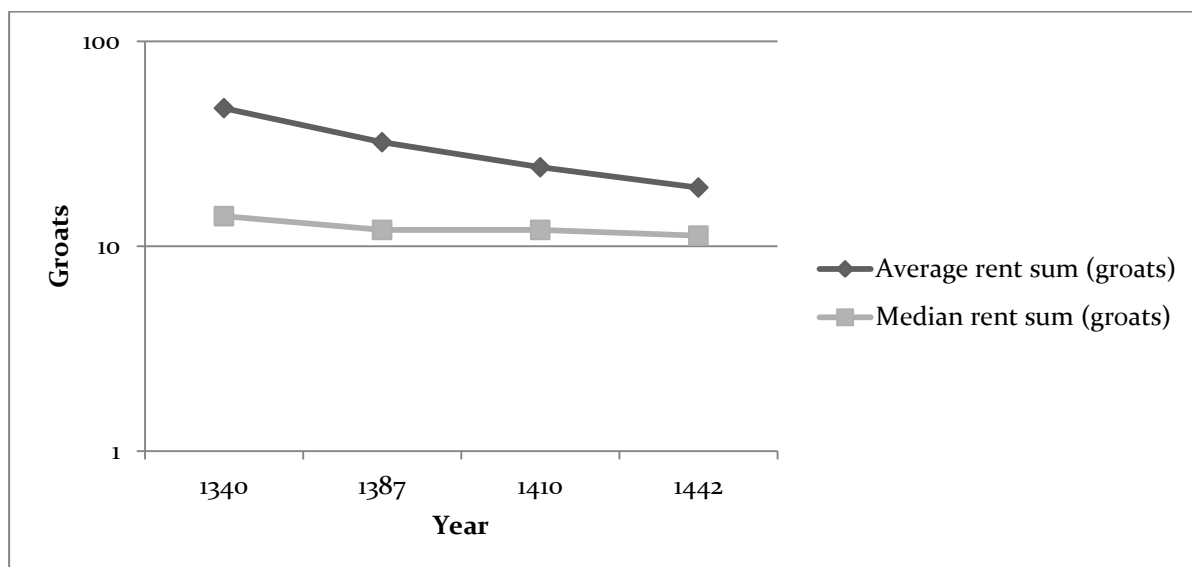
Source: ARA, *Chambre de compte*. 45017, 45018, 45019. Ducal rent registers, 1387-1442

Fig 3.3 Evolution of rent (*cijns*) (land parcels and rentholders) in the village of Gierle, 1340-1442



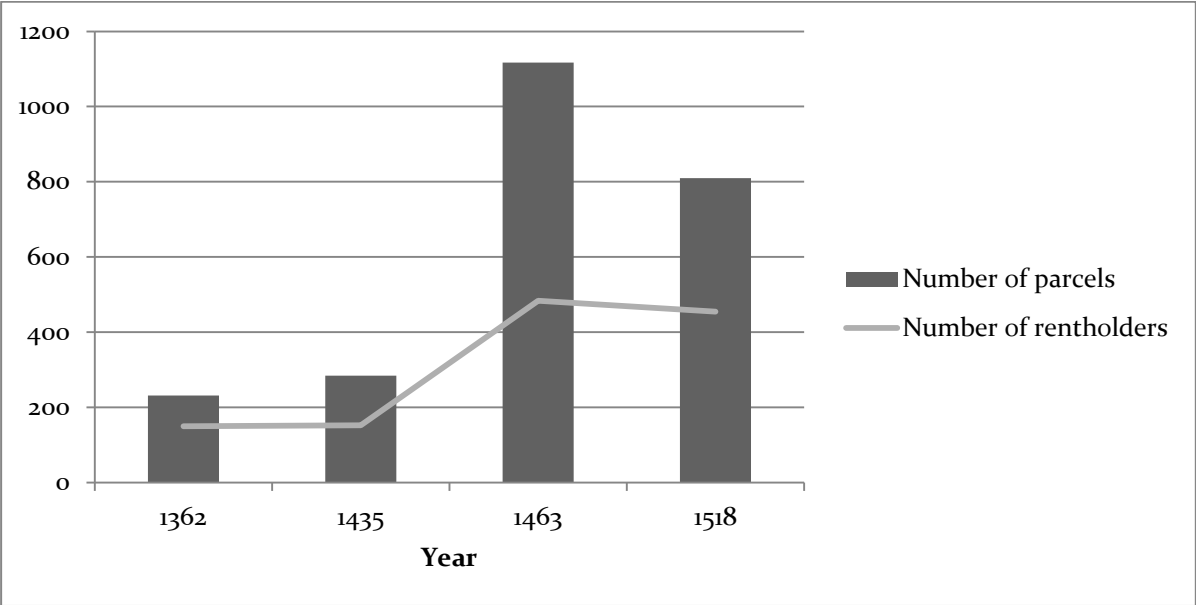
Source: ARA, *Chambre de compte*. 45016, 45017, 45018, 45019, 45026. Ducal rent registers, 1340-1442

Fig 3.4 Evolution of the rent (*cijns*) sum in the village of Gierle, 1340-1442 (logarithmic scale)



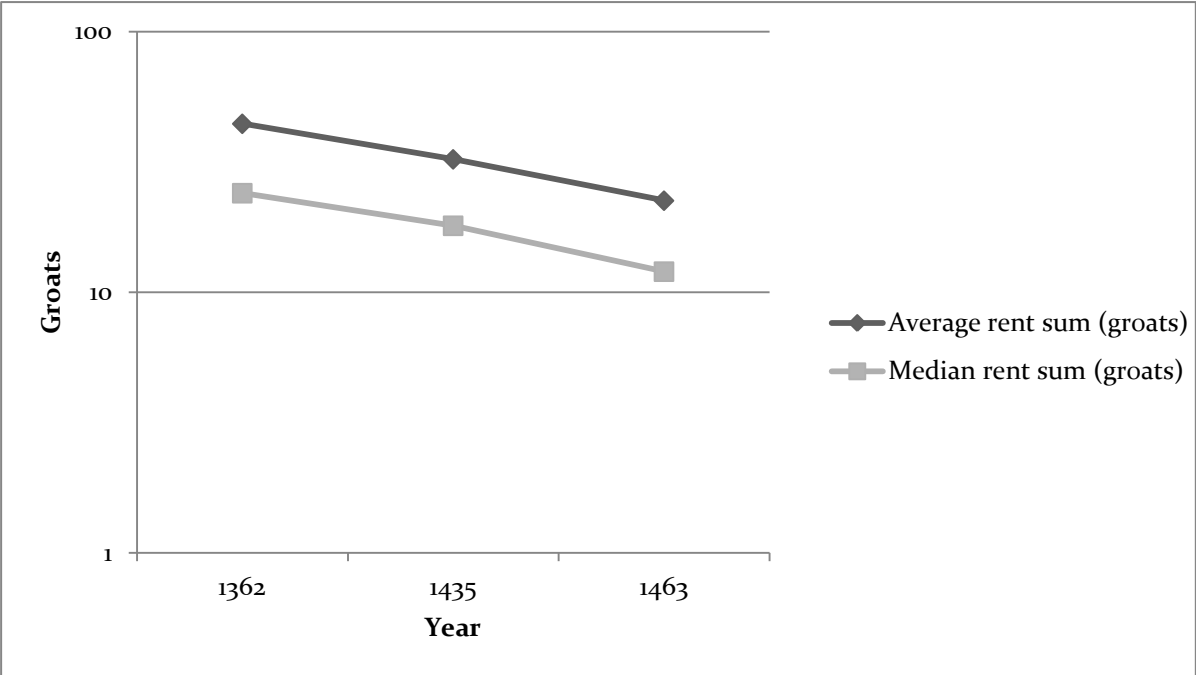
Source: ARA, *Chambre de compte*. 45016, 45017, 45018, 45019, 45026. Ducal rent registers, 1340-1442

Fig 3.5 Evolution of rent (cijns) (land parcels and rentholders) in the village of Kalmthout, 1362-1518



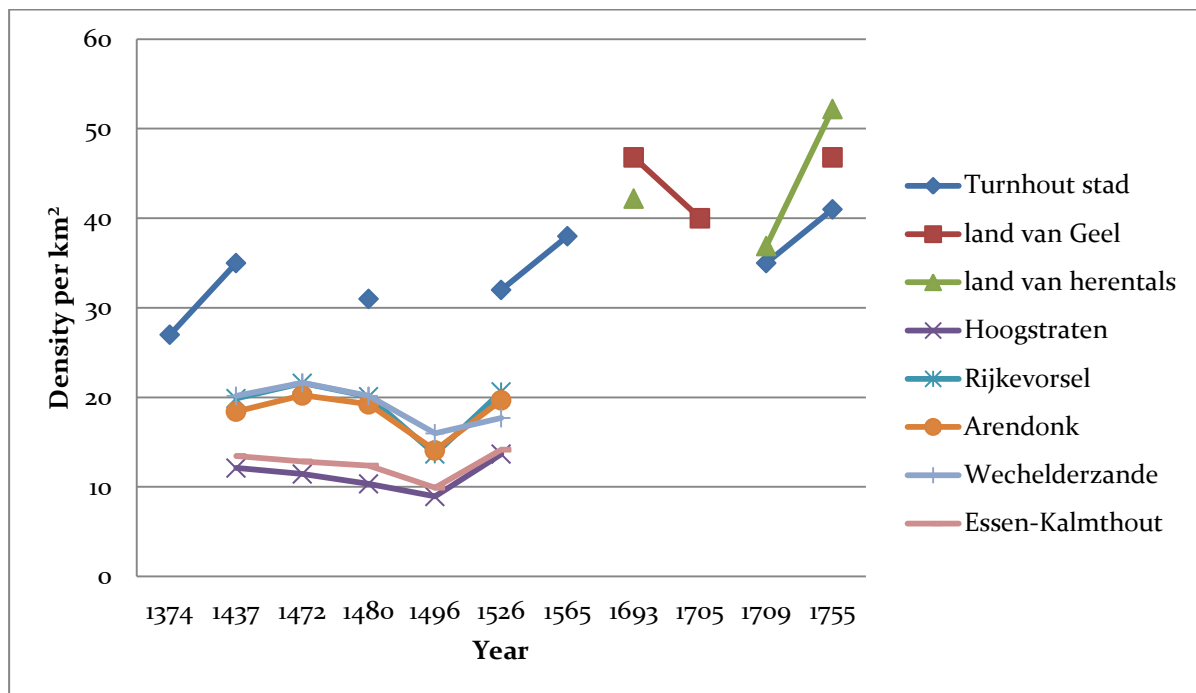
Source: Analysis of J. Bastiaensen, based on the Tongerlo rent registers, unpublished

Fig 3.6 Evolution of the rent (cijns) sum in the village of Kalmthout, 1362-1463 (logarithmic scale)



Source: Analysis of J. Bastiaensen, based on the Tongerlo rent registers, unpublished

Fig 3.7 Population densities in the Campine area, 1374-1755



Source: Graph made by Maïka De Keyzer

Smallholders and inequality

Thus far, we have seen that the Campine area was clearly, and indeed continuously, dominated by smallholders. Was this peasant-smallholders society less polarised than other rural societies, with a more commercialised agriculture, as Jan De Vries suggests? Or was even a society like this characterised by significant internal differences? Daniel Curis has suggested a tool for comparing inequality between different regions. It offers the possibility of a structured way of comparing social relations based on the ownership of land in different regions, namely the use of Gini-indexes based on property distribution.¹⁹⁰ A Gini-index of 1 suggests complete inequality, whereas a Gini of 0 suggests complete equality. An easy way of doing this would be by comparing Gini-indexes based on the value of land, as registered in the *penningkohieren*. This type of source was present in many of the very diverse regions of the Low Countries and is therefore ideal for comparing property relations and their degree of inequality.

Due to the continuous warfare with France, Emperor Charles V (1500-1558) found himself in the position of an ever-growing need for money. The 'old' medieval taxation system, the so-called *beden* or *aides*, no longer sufficed to provide for rising costs and, in addition, was increasingly considered as rather unjust. The biggest setback – from the government perspective at least – was the fact that the 'old' system necessitated permanent parliamentary negotiation, which was a thorn in the flesh of the Emperor. The governess of the Habsburg Netherlands, Mary of Hungary attempted to install a new taxation system, one no longer based on the old repartition system. Part of this new taxation model was the imposition of the tenth penny, a tax on the yearly income of all immovable goods. When the 'iron duke' of Alva was transferred to the Netherlands to set things right and found the public treasury empty, he

¹⁹⁰ Curtis, D. (2013). "Trends in Rural Social and Economic History of the Pre-Industrial Low Countries." *Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 128(3): 92

quickly decided to take the taxation reform a number of steps further. In 1569, he introduced the hundredth penny, a tax of 1% on the value of all moveable and immoveable goods. His other reforms, transaction taxes on the sale of moveable and immoveable goods, met with severe resistance from the Estates of Flanders and Brabant, but the hundredth penny was introduced relatively smoothly.¹⁹¹ The *penningkohieren* are the written result of this wave of enthusiasm for developing taxation. Users (be it owners or leasers) of all plots of land in a village were recorded in them, with specifications on the nature of the land, its location (although very imprecise) and – every now and then – their surface area. Furthermore, they noted the value of these immovable goods, related to their yearly profit and the tax that had to be paid, notably 100th of its total value. This makes them ideal in serving as a basis for the calculation of Gini-indexes, since they provide us with the value (and sometimes surface area) of all land used by all individual households.

However, this type of research is still in its infancy. Luckily, some preliminary findings, stemming from the research of Wouter Ryckbosch are at our disposal, as listed in table 3.2.¹⁹² I have calculated the Gini indexes for 4 Campine villages based on their *penningkohieren* (as listed in table 3.1). I have only selected those land-users owning a house (*hofstede*) in the village, opting to leave out those who only owned a plot of pasture or arable land, but living elsewhere (often in a neighbouring village).

Table 3.1 Gini-indexes based on the sixteenth-century *penningkohieren*, Campine area

<i>Penningkohier</i>	Gini index
Gierle, 1554	0.56
Alphen, 1559	0.50
Minderhout, 1569	0.51
Tongerlo, 1569	0.51

Sources: RAA, OGA Gierle, 344. Pieces concerning the 10th and 20th penny tax (*penningkohier*), 1554; AAT, II, 689. 100th penny register (100ste *penningkohier*) for the village Alphen, 1559-1578; SA Hoogstraten, KA Minderhout, H9. List of owners for the 100th penny tax (*penningkohier*), 1569 & H10. List of tenants for the 100th penny tax (*penningkohier*), 1569

Table 3.2 Gini-indexes based on the sixteenth-century *penningkohieren*, Inland Flanders

Village	Subregion	Gini index
Desteldonk	Oudburg	0.51
Pittem	Kasselrij Kortrijk	0.53
Kotrijk Buiten	Kasselrij Kortrijk	0.62
Deerlijk	Kasselrij Kortrijk	0.56
Moen	Kasselrij Oudenaarde	0.62
Avelgem	Kasselrij Oudenaarde	0.55

¹⁹¹ Stabel, P. & F. Vermeylen (1997). *Het fiscale vermogen in Brabant, Vlaanderen en in de heerlijkheid Mechelen: de Honderdste Penning van de hertog van Alva (1569-1572)*, Brussel, Paleis der Academiën: 9-10; Grapperhaus, F.H.M., (1982). *Alva en de tiende penning*, Zuthpen, Walburg Pers/Kluwer: 97; Maddens, N. (1985). "De plattelandsfiscaliteit in het Graafschap Vlaanderen van de 16-de tot de 18-de eeuw", *De plattelandsfiscaliteit tijdens het Ancien Regime*, Vlaamse Vereniging voor Archief- en Documentatiewezenen: 69.

¹⁹² Research project, executed by Wouter Ryckbosch (wouter.ryckbosch@uantwerpen.be) focussing on a comparison of the property and social structures of different villages, based on *penningkohieren*

Wannegem	Kasselrij Oudenaarde	0.58
Erpe & Mere	Land van Aalst	0.69
Uxem	Sint-Winnoksbergen	0.61

Sources: Research project – dr. Wouter Ryckbosch

When looking at the findings relating to Inland Flanders, it would seem that the Campine coefficients are certainly comparable to those of several Flemish villages. This firmly suggests that private land was not necessarily more equally divided in a society with commons, compared to one without. Furthermore, the differences between various Flemish villages is also quite striking. The suggestion of an explanation for this phenomenon would be beyond the scope of this research, but it does illustrate the need for a more detailed analysis of this type of source material. When we extend our scope to other regions as well, Dan Curtis's PhD-dissertation offers common ground and therefore useful material for comparison. In his thesis he focuses on the reasons behind what he labels 'the resilience or vulnerability' of different regions and while doing this, he takes a great deal of trouble to assess the (in)equalities in property distribution as an explanatory factor by calculating Gini indexes based on landed property.

It is, first and foremost, interesting to note that he considers a Gini of 0.65 as the demarcation between unequal and egalitarian societies, based on the 'average score of all the Gini indexes recorded for the entire world in Ewout Frankema's¹⁹³ table of distribution of landholding by country'.¹⁹⁴ Based on Curtis's definition, all Campine villages pass the test for equality, since all Gini indexes were below 0.65. The Flemish villages can be labelled 'equal' as well, with the exception of Erpe & Mere. Curtis has, in addition, calculated Gini-indexes based on property distribution for several other rural regions, all over Europe (table 3.3). Some of these had a very polarised distribution of land, as was the case in Ascoli Satriana, the Betuwe, the Florentine Contado, East Chilford and the Oldambt in 1832. Other regions can be labelled as having a more equal distribution (Bourn Valley, Casentino Valley, Locorotondo and the Oldambt in 1630). Curtis links these differences in Gini indexes to differences in land distribution. The more 'equal' regions were characterised by 'high levels of local ownership over land', whereas polarised regions were characterised by absentee owners.¹⁹⁵

Table 3.3 Gini-indexes for different European regions in the thirteenth to nineteenth centuries

Region	Year	Present-day Country	Gini index
Ascoli Satriano (Italy)	1753	Italy	0.97
The Betuwe (The Netherlands)	1550	The Netherlands	0.85
Florentine Contado (Italy)	1427	Italy	0.80
East Chilford (UK)	1280	Great Britain	0.70

¹⁹³ Frankema, E. (2009). *Has Latin America always been unequal? A comparative study of asset and income inequality in the long twentieth century*. Leiden, Brill: 212-217

¹⁹⁴ Curtis, D. (2012). *Pre-industrial societies and strategies for the exploitation of resources. A theoretical framework for understanding why some settlements are resilient and some settlements are vulnerable to crisis*. History Department. Utrecht, University of Utrecht: 286

¹⁹⁵ Curtis, D. (2012). *Pre-industrial societies and strategies*: 289

Bourn Valley (UK)	1280	Great Britain	0.59
Casentino Valley (Italy)	1427	Italy	0.58
Locorotondo (Italy)	1929	Italy	0.56
The Oldambt (The Netherlands)	1630	The Netherlands	0.54
The Oldambt (The Netherlands)	1832	The Netherlands	0.81

Source: Curtis, D. (2012). *Pre-industrial societies and strategies for the exploitation of resources. A theoretical framework for understanding why some settlements are resilient and some settlements are vulnerable to crisis*. History Department. Utrecht, University of Utrecht: 289

The Campine area was thus a ‘relatively equal’ society, especially when compared to regions dominated by absentee landowners and an often very commercialised or market-dominated agriculture. Its level of inequality was furthermore not very different from that of Inland Flanders, suggesting that commons did not make an essential difference on this level. However, the comparable Gini-indexes for the Campine area and Inland Flanders do not indicate a entirely similar property structure, since – as I have already mentioned – there were some very relevant differences between the regions as well. Furthermore, even though the Campine area was more egalitarian than many other regions, this does not mean that internal differences were trifling or irrelevant. Farm sizes and the composition of peasant’s landed portfolio could be decisive in determining the success and even survival of the family. Gini-indexes can indeed help us sketch a broader picture and facilitate comparison, but we must be careful not to lose sight of small nuances that might actually mean a lot in terms of day-to-day reality and might distinguish the village’s upper-layer from their less well-off counterparts.

Size matters: farm sizes and their social implications

Up until now the only findings shedding light on farm sizes in the Campine area were those of Daniel Vangheluwe, based on the ducal rent registers of the villages of Eersel and Bergeyk (situated in North-Brabant), for 1450 and 1525.¹⁹⁶ His findings, which can be found in table 3.4, suggest some clear differences in social position within Campine society. There was a rather substantial group, working somewhat less than 1 hectare, and a still significant group owning between 1 and 3 hectares. Those inhabitants working over 3 hectares – and especially those working over 5 – had, under normal circumstances, no problem securing their survival. In 1450 the group working over 3 hectares amounted to 19.3 percent. In 1525 this number augmented to 25.1 percent.

¹⁹⁶ Vangheluwe, D. (1999). “Local communities in their landscape in the rent district of Eersel / Bergeyk (14th-16th centuries)”. F. Theuws & N. Roymans (eds.). *Land and ancestors. Cultural Dynamics in the Urnfield Period and the Middle Ages in the Southern Netherlands*. Amsterdam, University Press: 349-399

Table 3.4 Property structure of the ducal part of Bergeyk, 1450 & 1525, based on the rent (*cijns*) registers

Property in hectares	1450		1525	
	Absolute number of owners	Percentage	Absolute number of owners	Percentage
< 1 ha	113	53.3%	87	43.7%
1 to 3	58	27.4%	62	31.2%
3 to 5	14	6.6%	21	10.6%
5 to 8	17	8.0%	20	10.0%
> 8	10	4.7%	9	4.5%
Total	212	100	199	100

Source: Vangheluwe, D. (1999). "Cijnzen en belastingen in de dingbank van Eersel: de ontwikkeling van een plattelandsgemeenschap tussen 1350 en 1569." *Brabants heem* 51(3): 105

Vangheluwe's findings are based on ducal rent registers, but these do not provide us with a complete image, since land held in rent from other lords, allodial land, or fiefs were left out, and there is no way of knowing if the rent-payers actually lived in the village. However, there is a source available, allowing us to sketch a much more complete, much clearer image: the already-mentioned sixteenth century *penningkohieren*. For this research-aspect, I will use the *penningkohieren* of several villages. First of all Gierle (Fig 3.8 & Table 3.5)¹⁹⁷, a village in the vicinity of Turnhout and part of the ducal domain. Furthermore Alphen (Fig 3.9 & Table 3.6)¹⁹⁸, in current-day Northern Brabant and finally Tongerlo (Fig 3.10 & Table 3.7)¹⁹⁹, a village owned by its powerful abbey and situated in a slightly more fertile area. This will be supplemented by an inventory for the tiny village of Minderhout (Fig 3.11 & Table 3.8), situated in the Land of Hoogstraten, in 1590²⁰⁰. Only those people listed using a *hofstede* (a farm building / house) have been taken into account, since these were the 'true' inhabitants of the village. The total owning only a plot of land or pasture is, however, mentioned in footnote.

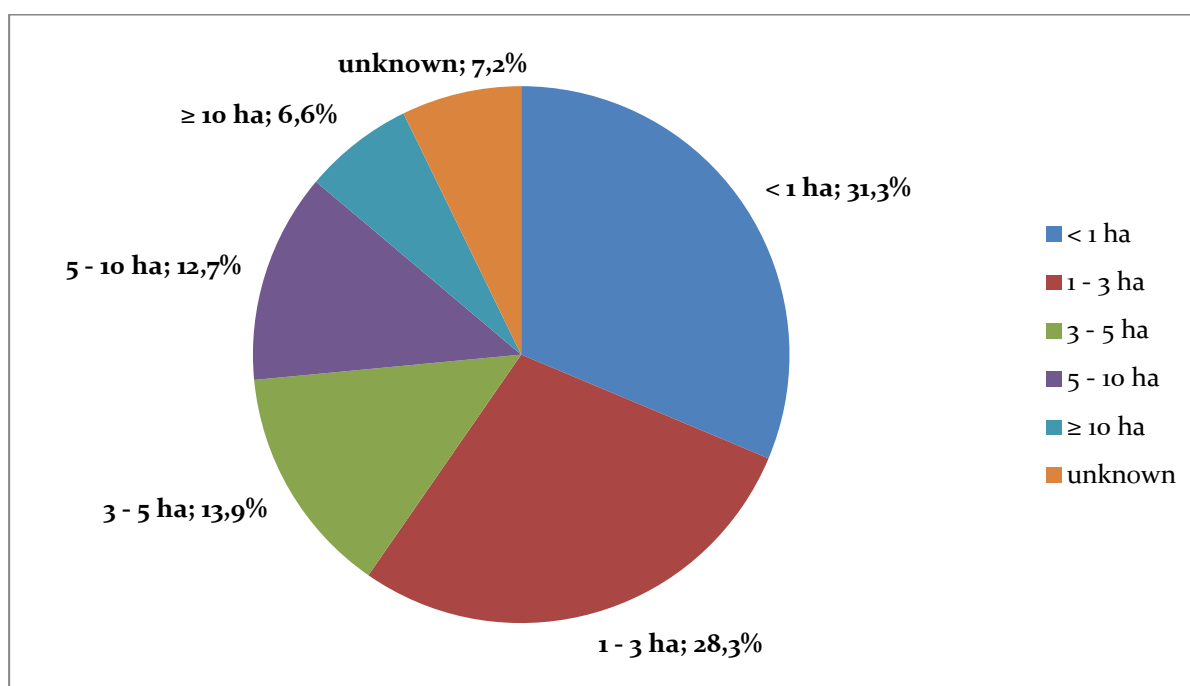
¹⁹⁷ RAA, OGA Gierle, 344. Pieces concerning the 10th and 20th penny tax (*penningkohier*), 1554

¹⁹⁸ AAT, II, 689. 100th penny register (*tooste penningkohier*) for the village Alphen, 1559-1578

¹⁹⁹ AAT, II, 896. 100th penny register (*100 ste penningkohier*), Tongerlo, 1569

²⁰⁰ RAA, OGA Minderhout, 65. Count of lands, meadows, horses, etc., 1590

Fig 3.8 Relative distribution of farm sizes, Gierle (1554); n=166²⁰¹



Source: RAA, OGA Gierle, 344. Pieces concerning the 10th and 20th penny tax (penningkohier), 1554

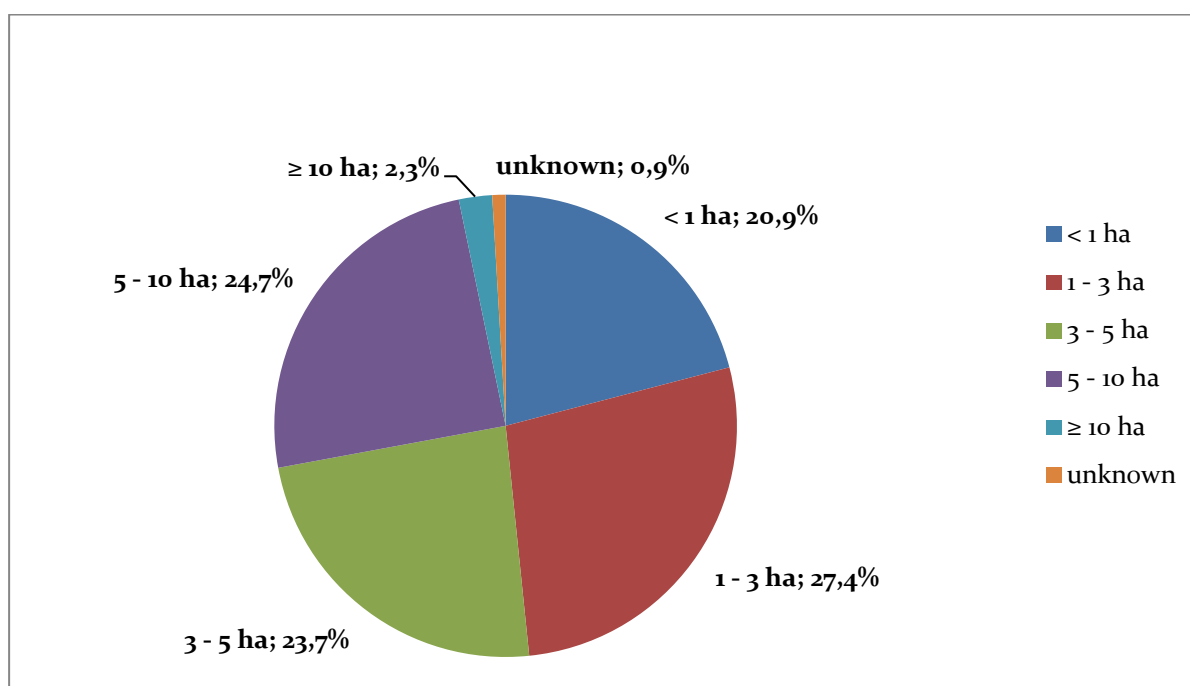
Table 3.5 Relative distribution of farm sizes, Gierle (1554)

	Relative number per property group	% of total village surface per property group	Cumulative %
< 1 ha	31.3%	6.2%	6.2%
1 - 3 ha	28.3%	18.8%	25%
3 - 5 ha	13.9%	18.2%	43.2%
5 - 10 ha	12.7%	27.3%	70.5%
≥ 10 ha	6.6%	26.8%	100%
unknown	7.2%	2.7%	

Source: RAA, OGA Gierle, 344. Pieces concerning the 10th and 20th penny tax (penningkohier), 1554

²⁰¹ 23 people were listed owning no *hofstede*

Fig 3.9 Relative distribution of farm sizes, Alphen (1569); n=215²⁰²



Source: AAT, II, 689. 100th penny register (10oste penningkohier) for the village Alphen, 1559-1578

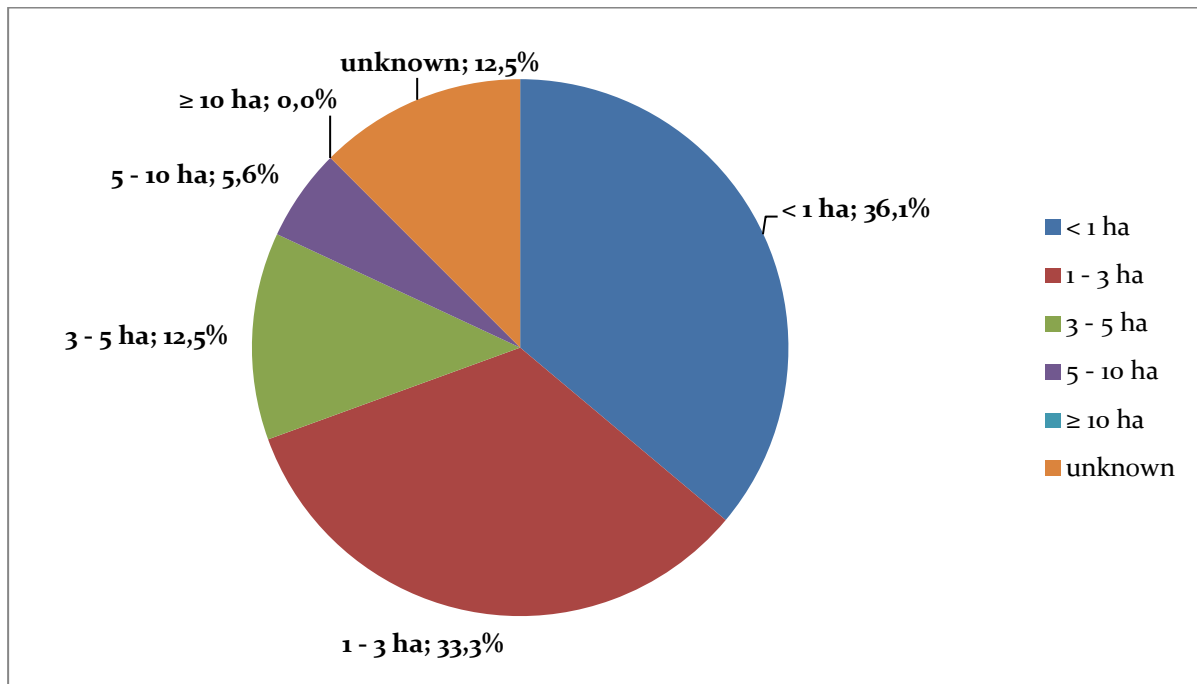
Table 3.6 Relative distribution of farm sizes, Alphen (1569)

	Relative number per property group	% of total village surface per property group	Cumulative %
< 1 ha	20.9%	3.2%	3.2%
1 - 3 ha	27.4%	18.4%	21.6%
3 - 5 ha	23.7%	27.1%	48.7%
5 - 10 ha	24.7%	44%	92.7%
≥ 10 ha	2.3%	7.3%	100%
unknown	0.9%		

Source: AAT, II, 689. 100th penny register (10oste penningkohier) for the village Alphen, 1559-1578

²⁰² 14 people were listed owning no *hofstede*

Fig 3.10 Relative distribution of farm sizes, Tongerlo (1569); n=72²⁰³



Source: AAT, II, 896. 100th penny register (100 ste penningkohier), Tongerlo, 1569

Table 3.7 Relative distribution of farm sizes, Tongerlo (1569)

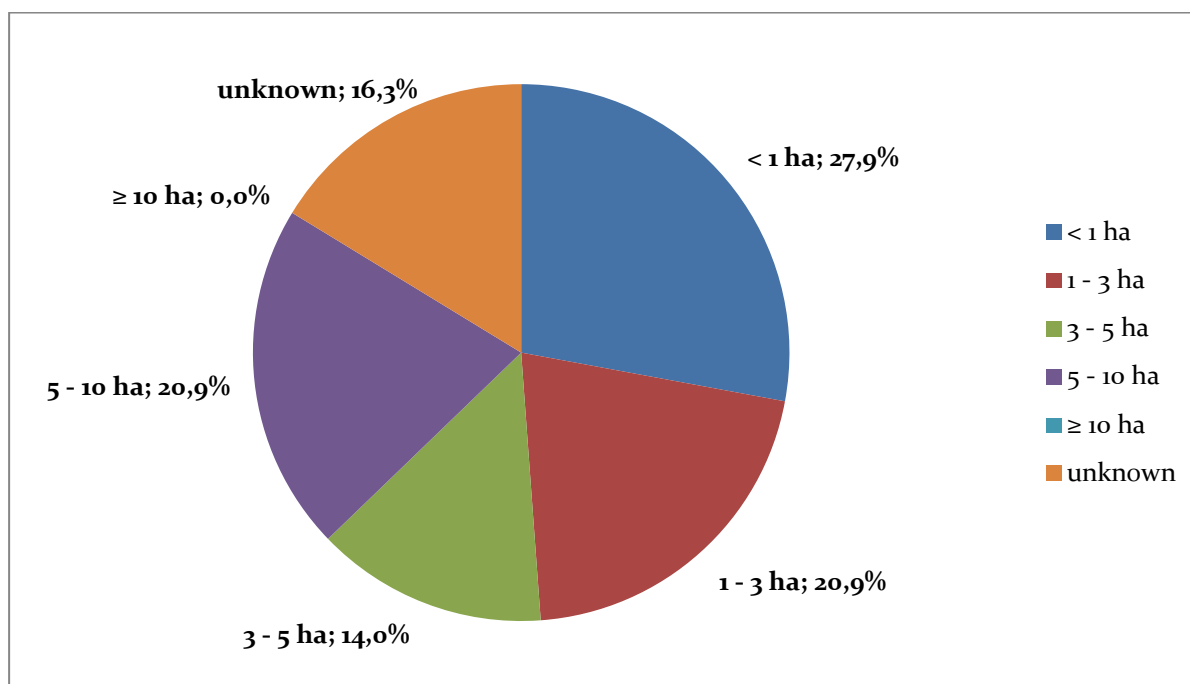
	Relative number per property group	% of total village surface per property group	Cumulative %
< 1 ha	36.1%	2.9%	2.9%
1 - 3 ha	33.3%	6.4%	9.3%
3 - 5 ha	12.5%	6.2%	15.5%
5 - 10 ha	5.6%	3.4%	18.9%
≥ 10 ha	0%	0%	18.9%
Tenant Farmers	/	81.1% ²⁰⁴	100%
unknown	12.5%		

Source: AAT, II, 896. 100th penny register (100 ste penningkohier), Tongerlo, 1569

²⁰³ 20 people were listed as owning no *hofstede*

²⁰⁴ It is important to know that the Tongerlo tenant farmers and their farm sizes were mentioned in the penningkohier, but in a very specific way. They were taxed differently and therefore, their holdings were left out of the analysis

Fig 3.11 Relative distribution of farm sizes, Minderhout (1590); n=43²⁰⁵



Source: RAA, OGA Minderhout, 65. Count of lands, meadows, horses, etc., 1590

Table 3.8 Relative distribution of farm sizes, Minderhout (1590)

	Relative number per property group	% of total village surface per property group	Cumulative %
< 1 ha	27.9%	5.6%	5.6%
1 - 3 ha	20.9%	20.3%	25.9%
3 - 5 ha	14.0%	18.4%	44.3%
5 - 10 ha	20.9%	55.7%	100%
≥ 10 ha	0.0%	0.0%	100%
unknown	16.3%		

Source: RAA, OGA Minderhout, 65. Count of lands, meadows, horses, etc., 1590

All villages were characterised by the presence of a substantial group of villagers owning over 3 hectares of land – often put forward as the lower limit for subsistence farming.²⁰⁶ Villagers using over 5 hectares of land were in an especially prosperous position, relatively speaking. In the village of Gierle, 19.3 percent of all villagers worked over 5 hectares. In Alphen this number amounted to 28 percent and in Minderhout to 20.9 percent. The village of Tongerlo was somewhat of an exception, with only 5.6 percent of villagers belonging to this group. However, Tongerlo was home to as many as 8 tenant farmers, leased out by the village’s abbey. This was an exceptional situation within the Campine context (as will be described in chapter 6), going hand-in-hand with an equally exceptional social stratification. Villagers working over 3 – and especially those working over 5 – hectares, will be labelled ‘**independent**

²⁰⁵ 5 people were listed owning no *hofstede*

²⁰⁶ Lindemans, P. (1952). *Geschiedenis van de landbouw*: 265

peasants'. This group bears a striking resemblance to what Blickle labels *Gemeine Männer*. These, predominantly, male household-heads, who owned their own plots of land, were most probably a stable and powerful factor in these Campine communities. As will be seen in section 3.3.3, the particular composition of their farms ensured them a rather secure living, making them the stable substructure on which they could erect a complex entity of (socio-)economic and (socio-)political strategies.

One is, of course, only a member of an economic elite in proportion to ordinary or less well-off villagers and, indeed, a significant proportion of the Campine households had a much less advantageous position. Especially those inhabitants working less than 1 hectare can be mentioned in this respect. In Gierle, 31.3 percent of all those listed in the *penningkohier* belonged to this category. In Alphen (20.9 percent), Minderhout (27.9 percent) and especially Tongerlo (36.1 percent) the numbers were high as well. This could partly be compensated for by making use of the commons, where they could gather fuel (wood or peat), cut sods and even graze an animal. These **micro-smallholders** were probably also the ones entitled to poor relief (cfr. chapter 8). It is indeed the case that 15 to 25 percent of all Campine households were listed as poor in the hearth counts.²⁰⁷ Another important group within Campine society were the owners of farms between 1 and 3 hectares. They can be labelled as '**cottagers**'. Depending on their exact farm size and the size of their family, this group probably skirted on the edge of the subsistence level. The size of this group fluctuated between 20.9 percent (Minderhout) and 33.3 percent (Tongerlo). The convivium between these independent peasants and the great mass of micro-smallholders and cottagers was in all likelihood very fragile, in two respects. Firstly, due to old age, accident, etc. an independent peasant could easily find himself dwindling down the social ladder. Secondly, to maintain stability in the Campine communities, there had to be ways in which this mass of cottagers was sustained and ways in which they could add to their income. This was also in the interest of the independent peasants, not only because they themselves might one day end up in this group too, but to maintain order and stability in their communities.

We have already seen that economic inequality in the Campine area (as represented by the Gini-indexes) was comparable to that of several villages in Inland Flanders. Were the property structures and property distribution underlying these Gini-indexes also similar? What can we say about the property distribution in other peasant regions? Unsurprisingly the resemblance with Drenthe, a sandy peasant region with commons in the present-day Netherlands is rather striking. In 1650 this region was clearly characterised by a vast multitude of smallholders. Bieleman's findings indicate a group of 60 percent owning less than 2.2 hectares and one of 5 percent with over 8.8 hectares.²⁰⁸ More or less the same holds true for a peasant society without commons. Erik Thoen, for example, provides us with farm sizes for the Inland Flanders village of Lede. In this village smallholding was also very dominant, with 46 percent of the farms being smaller than 1 hectare in 1540 and 38 percent of them between 1 and 5 hectares. 14 percent of the Inland Flanders peasants worked on a farm between 5 and 10 hectares. This was a somewhat smaller sample than in the Campine area, where the middle groups were more present. Another difference is the presence of some exceptionally larger farms in the Flemish communities (2 percent of all farms). These were tenant farms, occupied

²⁰⁷ Based on Cuvelier, J. (1912). *Les dénombrements de foyers*, in which the poor hearts are listed for 1437, 1480 and 1496

²⁰⁸ Own calculations, based on: Bieleman, J. (1987). *Boeren op het Drentse zand*: 244

by the so-called *coqs de village*.²⁰⁹ This phenomenon was not absent in the Campine area either – Tongerlo is an excellent example of it – but tenant farms were not present in every village, nor were they always extremely large (cfr. chapter 6).

3.2.3 Property composition

Independent peasants in the Campine region not only distinguish themselves by owning crucially more land than some of their fellow-villagers, they also owned and / or worked a very balanced portfolio of types of land, making them the ultimate mixed-farmers. The sixteenth-century *penningkohieren* can also shed light on the landed portfolio of the Campine peasants and the value of different types of land. Not all *penningkohieren* allow us to reconstruct this, since they often only assess the value of one's property as a whole. Only for the villages of Gierle (1554) and Wuustwezel (1581)²¹⁰ can detailed information on individual plots of land be found. This will be complemented by findings for the village of Kalmthout, coming from a remarkably detailed rent register (*cijnsboek*) from 1518, thus enabling us to widen our time-frame. They are, of course, not as reliable as the *penningkohieren* since a rent sum does not reflect the exact value of the land perfectly and they are also less comprehensive, but at least it gives us an indication.

In tables 3.9 to 3.11 the value of different types of land are rendered. In general they indicate that arable land and meadows (wet pastures) were by far the most valuable which is, of course, linked to the fact that the Campine area was, and remained, a mixed farming region throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Arable land – for grain production, mainly rye – was a bare necessity, and the same can be said for meadows which were used for hay and therefore for the feeding and grazing of animals. The more of these types of land one owned, the more one had a stable substructure to depend upon, as was the case for our Campine independent peasants.

Table 3.9 Kalmthout, 1518, Amount of rent due per hectare based on rent register (*stuiver*)

	Number of plots	Median value	Average value
Arable land	73	1,04	1,67
Meadow	34	1,16	1,77
House & land	87	1,21	2,20
Pasture	5	1,20	1,39

Source: Analysis of J. Bastiaensen, based on the Tongerlo rent registers,

²⁰⁹ Thoen, E. (1988). *Landbouweconomie en bevolking*: 863

²¹⁰ This *penningkohier* is rather incomplete, since it was written down during the troublesome period of the 1580s.

Table 3.10 Gierle, 1554, Land value per hectare based on penningkohier (stuiver)

	Number of plots	Median value	Average value
Arable land	48	75,99	73,10
Meadow	91	60,79	71,91
House & land	98	78,16	141,92
Pasture	76	37,99	39,58

Source: RAA, OGA Gierle, 344. Pieces concerning the 10th and 20th penny tax (penningkohier), 1554

Table 3.11 Wuustwezel, 1581, Land value per hectare based on penningkohier (stuiver)

	Number of plots	Median value	Average value
Arable land	12	60,79	76,31
Meadow	2	60,79	172,24
House & land	182	32,42	63,75
Pasture	4	60,79	88,65

Source: RAA, OGA Wuustwezel, Section 2, 5th penny tax (5^{de} penningkohier), 1581

Feeding the family: arable land and grain production

Most Campine villagers had some arable land at their disposal, however, the amount could differ greatly. It can therefore be interesting to reconstruct the amount of households owning enough land to produce enough grain (probably predominantly rye) to meet subsistence needs. To assess this, we first need to reconstruct the amount of rye an average family (of 5 people) needed to provide for themselves during one year. According to Erik Thoen this amounted to 1250 to 1375 litres a year.²¹¹ The yearly production of rye per hectare is relatively hard to assess. It is quite a Sisyphean task to estimate the yearly produce of an average Campine field, therefore data provided by other researchers will have to be relied on. Thoen and Soens, for example, have determined the yearly net-produce in Inland Flanders – also characterised by sandy soils – as being 1326 litres of rye per hectare, which implies an average family needed at least 1.04 hectares of arable land. However, since peasants also needed seeds in order to sow for the following year, since part of the arable land lay fallow, and since tithes and all sorts of other taxes needed to be paid, in reality somewhat more land was needed.

In his master's thesis, Van den Broecke made a reconstruction of the combination of all burdens (expressed in litres of rye) for the period 1470-1489.²¹² He made a detailed estimation of arable production and the final proceeds, taking into account a multitude of factors, tithes, seeds for sowing, the miller's wage (*molster*), customary rent and taxation. He came to the conclusion that those with only one hectare of arable land produced consistently too little to feed an average family, taking into account all burdens that had to be paid. Those owning 2 hectares of arable land could easily get into trouble when the taxation level rose or harvests failed – or a combination of both. Those owning over 2.5 hectares were usually relatively safe, and those with land from 3 hectares of arable upwards could be threatened only extreme

²¹¹ Thoen, E. (1988). *Landbouweconomie en bevolking* :105-120

²¹² Van den Broeck, N. (2013). *Graancrisis in de Kempen. Sociale allocatie op het vorstelijk domein te Turnhout (1470-1490)*. Departement Geschiedenis. Antwerpen, Universiteit Antwerp: 37-38

circumstances. For a comfortable living, at least 2 hectares of arable land was therefore needed which implies that, in the village of Gierle 21 percent of all households belonged to this category.²¹³ If we consider 2.5 hectares as the demarcation line, only 19.5 percent met this requirement. For the village of Minderhout, assuming the necessity of 2 hectares, 26.5 percent of all villagers owned enough arable land, whereas if it was 2.5 hectares, 18.4 percent of that fulfilled the requirements.²¹⁴ Even if a certain number of households were smaller than average, this still indicates that a significant part of the Campine village community very probably had to struggle in order to make ends meet. At the other end of the spectrum, we can discern a more limited group of villagers, with a far more comfortable position, belonging to the group I previously labelled 'independent peasants'. This peasant society is thus by no means egalitarian when it comes to the division of arable land, however, this is not the only economic 'gap' in the Campine region.

Pastures of plenty?

The independent peasants were not only characterised by a rather secure production of grain, but when it came to the use of pasture they were also clearly best-off. Meadows (wet pasture) were quintessential for the breeding of animals. Meadows are lands bordering running water and are liable to flooding²¹⁵. Such flooding was essential, since the deposited alluvium fertilized the soil.²¹⁶ In the Campine they were used both for mowing and grazing. Mowing was of extreme importance, since it provided hay to feed the Campine animals. Qualitative grazing ground furthermore was, however, rather rare in the Campine area. The common heathland could, of course, be employed for this goal, although mainly for sheep and not for cows. Meadows were therefore a vital part of the Campine mixed farming system. Their importance can also be deduced from the attention they received in the village byelaws. Particularly those rules concerning the mowing and grazing periods were very strict. Grazing was limited to certain periods of the year. From the month of March, or sometimes May, onwards, animals (most notably cows) were averted, to foster the hay harvest.²¹⁷ After the harvest, animals were again allowed on these meadows where their manure played an essential part in fertilising them. As a provider of both hay and grazing land, meadows were therefore obviously attractive plots of land. Indeed, our sources indicate that the ownership of meadows is closely intertwined with a beneficial economic position. For the villages of Gierle and Alphen, it was possible to identify all meadow-owners and determine to which property group they belonged²¹⁸.

²¹³ Based on: RAA, OGA Gierle, 344. Pieces concerning the 10th and 20th penny tax (*penningkohier*), 1554

²¹⁴ Based on: RAA, OGA Minderhout, 65. Count of lands, meadows, horses, etc., 1590

²¹⁵ Lane, C. (1980). "The Development of Pastures and Meadows during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries." *The Agricultural History Review* 28: 18

²¹⁶ Baker, H. (1937). "Alluvial Meadows: A Comparative Study of Grazed and Mown Meadows." *Journal of Ecology* 25(2): 411

²¹⁷ Examples all come from a database composed by Maïka De Keyzer, containing a collection of Campine byelaws

²¹⁸ Only those meadow-owners who also owned a *hofstede* (or farmhouse) were selected

Table 3.12 Economic profile of meadow-owners, Gierle, 1554

	Absolute number	Relative amount	Relative amount on total population
< 1 ha	8	10.3%	31.3%
1-3 ha	20	25.6%	28.3%
3-5 ha	15	19.2%	13.9%
5-10 ha	19	24.4%	12.7%
≥ 10 ha	11	14.1%	6.6%
unknown	5	6.4%	7.2%

Source: RAA, OGA Gierle, 344. Pieces concerning the 10th and 20th penny tax (penningkohier), 1554

Table 3.13 Economic profile of meadow-owners, Alphen, 1559

	Absolute number	Relative amount	Relative amount on total population
< 1 ha	1	2.0%	20.9%
1-3 ha	10	19.6%	27.4%
3-5 ha	13	25.5 %	23.7%
5-10 ha	21	41.2%	24.7%
≥ 10 ha	4	7.8%	2.3%
unknown	2	3.9%	0.9%

Source: AAT, II, 689. 100th penny register (10oste penningkohier) for the village Alphen, 1559-1578

The same trends can more or less be discerned for both villages, based on tables 3.12 and 3.13. Villagers owning less than 1 hectare were extremely underrepresented, but still present. The same can be said of the Campine cottagers, owning between 1 and 3 hectares, although their level of under-representation was somewhat lower. Peasants with farms from 3 to 5 hectares were slightly over-represented, but only to a certain extent. The true gluttons were villagers owning over 5 hectares. Meadows were therefore clearly an important asset to the Campine economic upper-layer and more detailed figures seem to confirm this. Particularly for the people working over 5 hectares of land, this represented quite a significant hay harvest and thus the possibility to feed several animals (See table 3.14). In a society characterised by a mixed farming system, this meadow-ownership clearly was an asset, providing food for the Campine animals, which in their turn provided manure – vital for the sandy Campine soils – and commercial opportunities.

Table 3.14 Features of meadows, Gierle, 1554

	Average % of meadow on total property	Average hay harvest (in kg per ha)	Number of cattle units that could be fed ²¹⁹
< 1 ha	43.9%	486.1	0.8
1-3 ha	27.3%	788.9	1.3
3-5 ha	29.2%	1671.2	2.7
5-10 ha	25.7%	2585.7	4.1

²¹⁹ One cattle unit consists of 1 cow, 1 horse or 4 sheep

≥ 10 ha	25.5%	4557.8	7.3
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Source: RAA, OGA Gierle, 344. Pieces concerning the 10th and 20th penny tax (penningkohier), 1554

Table 3.15 Features of meadows, Alphen, 1559

	Average % of meadow on total property	Average hay harvest (in kg per ha)	Number of GVE that could be fed
< 1 ha	20.0%	232.1	0.4
1-3 ha	44.7%	1377.1	2.2
3-5 ha	24.00%	1321.2	2.1
5-10 ha	28.83%	2689.5	4.3
≥ 10 ha	27.02%	4178.0	6.7

Source: AAT, II, 689. 100th penny register (100ste penningkohier) for the village Alphen, 1559-1578

3.2.4 'Ploughing a lone furrow': access to other production factors

It is self-evident that land needs to be laboured, and therefore ploughing was, of course, also vital. For Inland Flanders, Erik Thoen has stated that peasants owning a relatively limited amount of land²²⁰, were able to plough their land manually by spading it. Peasants with larger farms, and thus more arable land, often owned a plough as well as one or two horses.²²¹ The Netherlands were notorious for ploughing with horses, in contrast to most other European regions where oxen were predominant.²²² Larger farmers often lent out their horses and ploughs to their less well-off neighbours – mostly in exchange for labour services. This evolution reached its height in the eighteenth century, when the Flemish 'horse farmers' accumulated more and more land. The ordinary Flemish cottagers and smallholders became increasingly dependent on the services (also transport services and the access to credit) these big farmers provided.²²³ The amount of people possessing one or more horses can therefore reveal something about the level of dependency of our Campine peasants. How many of them were able to plough their own land? Can we find traces of dependency relations comparable to those of eighteenth-century Flanders, or was the Campine area characterised by different patterns?

For the fifteenth century, an assessment of the number of horses can be made for the village of Rijkevorsel by using a taxation list on horse possession of 1470.²²⁴ In this village 41.09 percent of all household heads owned at least 1 horse. Of all horse-owners, 27.71 percent owned 1 horse, 71.08 percent owned two, and 1.2 percent three. Nonetheless, as Erik Thoen has also claimed for Inland Flanders, these horses were no shining Black Beauties. 16.87 percent of horse-owners had horses labelled as 'small', 'one-eyed', 'old' or even 'miserable'. These horses were probably mostly used for ploughing and, in all likelihood, also for transport services (cfr. chapter 5, section 5.2). However, at the same time they were a burden to feed and thus probably not in top shape. Nonetheless, these findings do suggest that a rather exceptional proportion of the villagers of Rijkevorsel had access to at least one horse. We can link these

²²⁰ Less than 3 hectares sown with winter grain

²²¹ Thoen, E. (1988). *Landbouweconomie en bevolking*

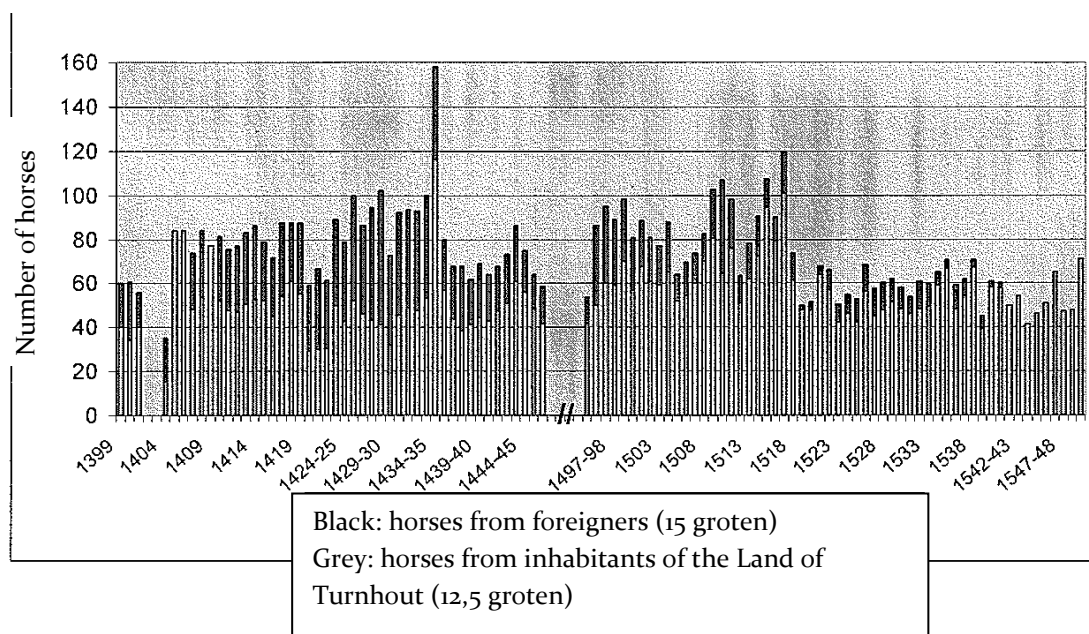
²²² Lindemans, P. (1952). *Geschiedenis van de landbouw in België*: part II: 298-301

²²³ Vermoesen, R. (2008). *Markttoegang en 'commerciële' netwerken*: 440.

²²⁴ RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 3916. List of people owning carriages and horses, 1470

findings to the ducal taxation lists of the same period (1465-1474), to assess the economic status of these horse-owners.²²⁵ 61.54 percent of all horse-owners belonged to the richest 30 percent – or the upper 3 deciles – of a village community. If we assume taxation was mostly based on landed property, this implies that these horse-owners were – quite unsurprisingly – also the ones with the largest farms. The relative omnipresence of horses – at least for the richest part of the Campine communities - is backed-up by the study of Hilde Verboven on the Grotenhout forest in the vicinity of Turnhout. This forest, which mainly served as a ducal hunting ground, was also used for the grazing of horses. Inhabitants of the Land of Turnhout had to pay a small sum for this possibility, whereas ‘outsiders’ (from outside the Land of Turnhout) had to pay slightly more. These sums were entered in the ducal accounts and were already present in the oldest accounts, dating to the beginning of the fifteenth century.

Fig 3.12 Horsegrazing in Grotenhout forest, 1399-1548



Source: Verboven, H. V., K en Hermy, M. (2004). *Bos en hei in het Land van Turnhout (15de-19de eeuw). Een bijdrage tot de historische ecologie*. Leuven, Laboratorium voor Bos, Natuur en Landschap, 128

For the late sixteenth century we have another source at our disposal allowing us to make a reconstruction of the presence of ploughs in the Campine countryside. After war and plunder had ravaged the Low Countries in the 1570s and 80s, Campine villages were asked to report the damage done to their lands and other assets. For the village of Loenhout, a detailed inventory of ploughs was written down, which is analysed in table 3.16. This survey reveals that 69.66 percent of all households had at least half a plough (or 1 horse) at their disposal.²²⁶ Furthermore, 25.47 percent of the households owned an entire plough. These findings are quite similar to those of the beginning of the seventeenth century for the villages of Brecht²²⁷

225 RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 3244-3256. Royal taxation, 1464-1475

226 SAAntwerp, V 5. Ancien regime Archief van de stad Antwerpen, Andere overheden, Lokale overheden en heerlijkheden, België, Hertogdom Brabant, State of the villages in the *markgraafschap*, 1593

227 RAA, OGA Brecht, 2385. Count of hearths and ploughs, 1604

(Table 3.17) and Vorst²²⁸ (Table 3.18). In Brecht, in 1604, 69.65 percent of all households owned at least half a plough, whereas in Vorst this amounted to 64.52 percent. So, it seems that most Campine villagers, most notably those with the 30 percent largest farms were able to provide for their own ploughing, probably also by pairing up horses with their neighbours. Light, sandy soils could probably be ploughed by one single horse, or by pairing two half-hearted horses together. The high frequency of horse-ownership seems to have been quite characteristic of peasant regions with common, sandy wastelands. As Roessingh indicates for the Veluwe and Bieleman for Drenthe, horses were not only important for ploughing, but also for the transport of sods and manure to the arable infield and to transform dry pasture and waste into arable land.²²⁹ The Campine independent peasants were, however, clearly not, unlike the eighteenth-century Inland Flanders tenants, true horse farmers. For the Campine cottagers, with their limited amount of arable land, it was, on the other, hand quite possible to plough their land manually, although it cannot be excluded that they borrowed horses from their better-off fellow-villagers. Nonetheless, a true dependency of the majority of society on a small, extremely wealthy minority of 'horse farmers' as can be seen in early modern Aalst²³⁰, was by no means present in the Campine countryside. Nonetheless, the difference between a group of peasants able to maintain one or two horses, and a group of smaller-sized cottagers who did not own these animals, was quite significant. This – relatively – widespread horse-ownership might serve as an indication of a somewhat individualistic type of agriculture, suggesting that commons did not necessarily go hand-in-hand with an open field agriculture.

Table 3.16 Plough ownership in Loenhout, 1575

	Absolute	Relative
People owning 2 ploughs	1	0,37%
People owning 1 plough	68	25,50%
People owning 0,5 plough	117	43,80%
People with acces to at least 0,5 plough	186	69,70%
Total population	267	

Source: SAAntwerp, V 5. Ancien regime Archief van de stad Antwerpen, Andere overheden, Lokale overheden en heerlijkheden, België, Hertogdom Brabant, State of the villages in the markgraafschap, 1593

Table 3.17 Plough ownership, Brecht, 1604

	Absolute	Relative
People owning 2 ploughs	0	0%
People owning 1 plough	70	34,80%
People owning 0,5 plough	70	34,80%
People with acces to at least 0,5 plough	140	69,60%
Total population	201	

Source: RAA, OGA Brecht, 2385. Count of hearths and ploughs, 1604

²²⁸ RAA, OGA Vorst, 39. Count of hearths and ploughs, 1604

²²⁹ As stated in: Bieleman, J. (1987). *Boeren op het Drentse zand: 291-293* & Roessingh, H.K. (1979). "De veetelling van 1526 in het kwartier van Veluwe". *A.A.G. Bijdragen*. 22: 38-39

²³⁰ Vermoesen, R. (2010). "Paardenboeren in Vlaanderen. Middelaars en commercialisering van de vroegmoderne rurale economie in de regio Aalst 1650-1800." *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis* 7(1): 3-37.

Table 3.18 Plough ownership, Vorst, 1604

	Absolute	Relative
People owning 2 ploughs	0	0%
People owning 1 plough	31	50,00%
People owning 0,5 plough	9	14,50%
People with acces to at least 0,5 plough	40	64,50%
Total population	62	

Source: RAA, OGA Vorst, 39. Count of hearths and ploughs, 1604

3.3 Fiscal inequality: micro-level inequality within Campine village communities

So far, we have approached economic inequality via the distribution of land, the most important production factor in late medieval, early modern (and even present-day) rural societies. This has allowed us to clearly distinguish a top-group (fluctuating around more or less 25 percent of village population), which I have labelled independent peasants. We know, therefore, the substructure of their economic position, namely the amount and types of land they were able to use and control. We also have an idea of actual inequality, however, the question remains how this actual inequality was translated into fiscal inequality. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the ongoing state formation process went hand-in-hand with a more regular, more organised taxation. On the whole, the taxation burden was relatively bearable for villages as a whole, but its impact on the micro level remains somewhat enigmatic. To get an insight in the micro-level impact of taxation and the translation of actual inequality in fiscal inequality, I will, firstly, provide some information about the allotment of taxation and, secondly, focus on two micro-studies, the villages Rijkevorsel and Brecht, to assess fiscal inequality and make some suggestions as to how it is linked (or not, as the case may be) to actual inequality.

3.3.1 The bumpy road towards the allotment of taxes

As has been mentioned before, we do not a great deal about the mechanisms behind the allotment of the bulk taxation sum over individual villages and, furthermore, among individual village members. The scarce source material that is preserved, suggests that the road towards it was often rather bumpy and winding. The way taxation sums were allotted among villages and individual village members, was very much prone to a lengthy negotiation process, which sometimes even made it to court. These tensions could occur on different levels. Discussions arose between the central state and individual villages, between villages, or between villages and individual village members. It is hard to get an all-encompassing view of all these types of conflicts since this would require a very time-intensive *grand tour* through a multitude of archives, however, based on the scattered evidence I could find in the municipal archives, some general remarks can be made.

Three examples can be given, each of them illustrating a different level on which conflicts could arise. The first one brings us back to the village of Arendonk in the year 1580. This was not the best of years for the Campine area because the Dutch Revolt hit the region hard during this time. When the villagers of Arendonk found out they were obliged to contribute to the royal *aide* of 1580, they wrote a heart-wrenching plea to the Emperor, begging him to exempt them from this over-excessive burden. The villagers put forward several reasons to be rewarded this privilege. The letter for example states:

“dat de innewoonders van voerseide dorpe geduerende dese oirloge soo seer zijn verdorven verermet ende uutgeteert bijden krijgsvolcke soo vander eenre als andere ende merckelijck bij zekere twee tochten van bij anderen door deser dorpe gedaen binnen twee jaeren herwaerts dat den meesten vanden zelve innewoonders nu qualijck mogelijck is hun levens onderhouden min eenen stuiver te gheven”.²³¹

They therefore claimed that the village was severely hit by warfare and plundering soldiers, to the extent that most inhabitants were not able to provide for themselves. In addition, to add insult to injury, Arendonk was also struck by a very contagious disease, ‘*de haestige sieckte*’, and by an influx of refugees, which were a burden to the community and – even worse – not liable to taxation.²³² Even though the writers of this letter (in all likelihood the village government, although this is never explicitly stated) might have exaggerated the impact of these tragedies to make a more convincing argument, it seems quite likely that the Revolt had a rather crushing effect on the early modern countryside. Sadly, we do not know if the Estates of Brabant, to whom the letter was addressed, was lenient enough to comply with this request.

Taxation gave further rise to a much intra-village quarrelling, particularly when it came to the division of the total taxation sum among different villages and hamlets. One example of this can be found in the Land of Hoogstraten, at some point during the fifteenth century (unfortunately the precise date has not been preserved due to the fact that the document is rather damaged). The document lists the arguments of the tiny village of Wortel on the one hand, and the inhabitants of the ‘five hamlets’, Bolck, Kersscoet, Achterlee, Houterlee and Leemputten – belonging to the village of Rijkevorsel, on the other. The Wortel inhabitants argued that these five hamlets used to pay part of the Wortel share of the lordly *aide* almost as long as one can remember or, as the sources states it: “*van seer oude tijden, LXX, LXXX jaeren oft soe lange als men dat ter waerheyt bevinden sal*”²³³, something fervently denied by the inhabitants of the five hamlets, who insist on paying part of the Rijkevorsel share only.²³⁴ The outcome of this conflict is not preserved, but the ducal taxation lists of the 1460s and 1470s for Rijkevorsel suggest that Wortel drew the short straw.

A last example illustrates that individual inhabitants, too, at times denounced the taxation allotment. In the municipal archives of the village of Brecht a piece of litigation can be found, dating from 1534, on the conflict between the taxation officials of Loenhout and Lenaert Putcuyp, an inhabitant of Brecht, who also owned a piece of meadow in Loenhout. Lenaert refused to pay the Loenhout taxation on his plot of land, since he claimed it was freehold land and thus not subject to taxation. The Antwerp bench of aldermen, who were to judge in this

²³¹ Translation: “That the inhabitants of the beformentioned villaged were strongly struck and impoverished by the soldiers from both sides – especially during two campaigns two years ago, so most of the villagers are hardly able to secure their survival let alone give a penny”

²³² RAA, OGA Arendonk, 635. Request to the Estates of Brabant to reduce taxation, 1580

²³³ Translation: “From the ‘old days’, 70 or 80 years or as long as one can remember, this has been true”

²³⁴ RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 2361. Taxation Conflict, Wortel vs. 5 *Gehuchten*, 15th century

matter, declared his complaint inadmissible and demanded that he pay his due.²³⁵ The allotment of taxation therefore clearly consisted of a process of negotiation and quarrelling. Unsurprisingly, a distinct desire to pay as little as possible can be perceived. Lords were confronted with villages trying to put a limit to what they had to pay, whereas villages (i.e. tax officials) had to reckon with individuals surreptitiously trying to slip away from obligations of paying. However, the Campine taxation system reached some sort of equilibrium, which remained remarkably stable throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and its participants were able to reach a negotiated compromise – albeit often with the usual hiccups.

3.3.2 An unequal stability? Two case-studies: fifteenth-century Rijkevorsel and sixteenth-century Brecht

In the previous chapter, it was established that the average taxation burden per household was relatively moderate. It can, however, be extremely interesting to see how the bulk taxation sum was divided among these community members – or in other words, to reconstruct fiscal inequality. In the Campine area, each village was supposed to pay its part of the *aide*, and the exact amount they were obliged to contribute was based on hearth counts and, quite probably, also on a lengthy negotiation process (cfr. 3.3.1). Furthermore, each village was responsible for the allotment of its portion of the *aide* among its members. The main taxation unit for these ducal (and later on royal) taxes, was the household. It was the head of the household – usually men, but on occasions women were mentioned as well – that was listed in the village tax registers. Villages – i.e. probably the village government and tax officials – were able to allot taxes to each household as they saw fit. As has been mentioned already, it seems quite likely that it was the use of land – and to some extent the possession of animals – that were the most important criteria. Furthermore, in theory, the village poor were excluded from paying taxes. These made up a rather large group in the fifteenth and sixteenth century Campine area. The hearth counts occasionally list the number of poor hearths and these were relatively numerous. In 1437 16.1 percent of all hearths were listed as poor, whereas this rose to 27.5 percent in 1480 and amounted to 24.1 percent in 1496.²³⁶ Furthermore, several other groups were exempt from taxation too: the nobility and the clergy were privileged and therefore were not expected to pay taxes.

Between 1464 and 1475²³⁷ the individual contribution of all taxpayers to ducal *aides* by the inhabitants of the village of Rijkevorsel was listed from 1464 to 1475²³⁸ albeit intermittently. For the village of Brecht, the same type of source has survived for the entire period of 1523-1576.²³⁹ For both villages, tax collectors never really specify how the taxation sum was allotted among the individual households. It seems quite likely, however, that the tax collectors made an assessment of every villager's wealth (for example based on land use and animal ownership), although it also seems plausible that part of the allotment was not made on such 'rational' grounds, as I will try to illustrate below. First, let us take a look at the fiscal division in fifteenth-century Rijkevorsel and sixteenth-century Brecht. In tables 3.18 and 3.19 the year of

²³⁵ RAA, OGA Brecht, 952. Proces of L. Putcuypvs vs. the Loenhout tax officials, 1534

²³⁶ Own calculations, based on: Cuvelier, J. (1912). *Les dénombrements de foyers*

²³⁷ RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 3244-3256. Royal taxation, 1464-1475

²³⁸ RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 3244-3256. Royal taxation, 1464-1475

²³⁹ RAA, OGA Brecht, 2431-2482. Accounts of the ducal (later on royal) *aides*, 1523-1576

the taxation and the number of taxpayers is shown. The fiscal division itself is represented using deciles. This means that the total population was divided into 10 equal parts, with every decile comprising 10 percent of the population. The lowest decile (I) is the poorest, whereas the highest decile (X) represents the richest 10 percent. For every decile the total relative contribution in the total taxation sum was calculated. Furthermore, tables 3.18 and 3.19 list the Gini-indexes for the villages of Rijkevorsel and Brecht, based on these tax lists. To refine these findings, I have decided to follow the suggestion of Bruno Blondé and Jord Hanus to also calculate the Q₃/Q₁ ratio. This broadly represents the extent to which a taxpayer of the third quartile paid more than one of the first quartile. This Q₃/Q₁ ratio serves as an indicator for the position of the middling groups.²⁴⁰

Table 3.19 Social / Fiscal inequality in Rijkevorsel, based on taxation lists (1464-1475)

Year	1464	1465	1469	1471	1472	1475
Number of taxpayers	302	222	216	295	280	159
Decile I	0.7	0.7	0.5	0.7	0.8	0.5
Decile II	1.1	0.9	0.6	0.85	1.2	0.8
Decile III	1.4	1.6	1.0	1.55	1.6	1.3
Decile IV	2.2	1.8	1.8	2.2	2.2	1.9
Decile V	3.3	2.7	2.5	3.3	3.35	3.2
Decile VI	5.4	4.5	4.2	4.9	5.05	3.9
Decile VII	7.2	6.5	6.4	7.7	7.8	5.5
Decile VIII	11.8	11.3	13.0	13.05	12.7	8.6
Decile IX	20.9	20.2	16.9	21.15	19.7	12.8
Decile X	46	49.8	53.1	44.6	45.6	61.5
Gini index	0.60	0.61	0.63	0.61	0.60	0.59
Q ₃ /Q ₁	8	7	12	9.25	8	10

Source: RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 3244-3256. Royal taxation, 1464-1475

Table 3.20 Social / Fiscal inequality in the village Brecht, based on taxation lists (1523-1576)

Year	1523	1533	1543	1555	1563	1576
Number of taxpayers	272	289	302	283	294	282
Decile I	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.5	0.3	0.9
Decile II	0.9	0.7	0.8	0.7	0.9	1.8
Decile III	1.4	1.4	1.5	2.0	1.5	2.9
Decile IV	2.1	2.2	2.5	2.6	2.1	4.2

²⁴⁰ Blondé, B. (2004). "Bossche bouwvakkers en belastingen. Nadenken over economische groei, levensstandaard en sociale ongelijkheid in de zestiende eeuw." B. Blondé & F. Vermeylen (eds.) *Doodgewoon: mensen en hun dagelijks leven in de geschiedenis: liber amicorum Alfons K.L. Thijs*. Antwerpen, UFSIA, Centrum voor Bedrijfs geschiedenis: 52-54

Decile V	3.45	3.3	3.6	3.5	3.0	5.9
Decile VI	5.55	4.9	5.3	4.8	4.9	7.9
Decile VII	7.5	7.2	7.4	7.7	7.2	9.7
Decile VIII	12.7	11.2	12.3	11.8	11.3	12.7
Decile IX	20.2	20.5	19.8	18.3	18.1	19.7
Decile X	45.9	48.2	46.5	48.1	50.7	34.3
Gini index	0.62	0.62	0.61	0.60	0.62	0.55
Q3/Q1	9.2	6.7	8.0	6.4	7.5	5

Source: RAA, OGA Brecht, 2431-2482. *Accounts of the ducal (later on royal) aides, 1523-1576*

Several patterns as well as similarities emerge when looking at these tables. Both villages have consistently surprisingly high Gini-indexes, fluctuating at around 0.6 and this remains so throughout the whole research period. This is rather high, when compared to other findings concerning taxation, for the late medieval and early modern Low Countries' countryside. It is, of course, exceptionally difficult to compare pre-modern Gini-indexes, since they are usually calculated using different types of sources, based on different types of taxation, which may explain some of the divergences in the ratios. Van Zanden, for example, notes for eighteenth-century Overijssel Ginis between 0.32 and 0.39, which is clearly remarkably lower.²⁴¹ In the Coastal Area of Flanders, Ginis fluctuated between 0.42 and 0.52, during the fifteenth century – and again, the difference is outspoken here!²⁴² It is also quite remarkable how much the highest decile contributed to the taxation. The numbers are extremely impressive, and are comparable to other, more commercialised regions of the Low Countries. In Gelre, for example, the richest 20 percent of the population paid on average over 60 percent of the total taxation sum.²⁴³ In Rijkevorsel and Brecht, this number was about the same. The high Ginis are furthermore not a literal reproduction of actual inequality as found when looking at property distribution. The Ginis based on land use were in fact lower - mostly fluctuating around 0.50 to 0.55 - than those based on fiscal findings, mostly exceeding 0.6. It is, furthermore, quite interesting to take a look at the Q3/Q1 ratios. In fifteenth century Rijkevorsel they were somewhat higher than in sixteenth century Brecht, but overall we can firmly state they were quite high. Comparable material for the countryside is mostly lacking, however, if we look at sixteenth century-'s-Hertogenbosch for example, the Q3/Q1 ratio was, at its highest, 4.3. For the fifteenth century Flemish coastal area, this ratio, at its maximum, amounted to 5.9. It was only in the severely polarised coastal society of the seventeenth century that we can find Q3/Q1 ratios comparable to those of the Campine area.

These tax registers do, however, also contain some striking discrepancies. These are most noticeable when we focus on the Rijkevorsel tax registers, since they consists of records within concise time period. It is, for example, striking how the total number of taxpayers varies considerably in the different tax registers, ranging from 302 in 1464 to 159 in 1475. This is probably not due to incomplete source material or the sudden death of half the village population, but to a more pragmatic – and less dramatic – reason. In the nine tax registers preserved between 1464 and 1475, 504 individuals could be discerned. Of these 504 individuals

²⁴¹ Van Zanden, J. L. (1995). "Tracing the beginning of the Kuznets curve: 648

²⁴² Dombrecht, K. (forthcoming). *Plattelandsgemeenschappen*

²⁴³ Calculations of Kristof Dombrecht, based on: van Schaik, R. (1987). *Belasting, bevolking en bezit: 224*

only 69 were present in all taxation lists (or 13.7 percent). 37 villagers (or 7.3 percent) were intermittently present in the first year (1464), the last year (1475), and often some years in between. This can imply two things. First of all, this might be an indication of a process described by Jane Whittle for late medieval and early modern Norfolk. She distinguishes a substratum of extremely mobile villagers, who moved around endlessly when opportunities arose in other locations. The village's upper stratum, on the other hand, were far more stabile. They stayed put, since they were relatively well-off, and had no direct reason to leave their place of birth. In Whittles's view, villages therefore had two 'speeds'.²⁴⁴ This model could also be applicable to the Campine area, since the upper quartile (quartile 4) was overrepresented in the group of taxpayers present in all registers, at 34.8 percent. It is also consistent with some of the findings of Jan De Meester, who has analysed migration into the city of Antwerp – which was at its height in the sixteenth century – and found out that several of the new wool and linen weavers trickling into this metropolis were Campiners.²⁴⁵

It therefore seems quite likely that part of the 'missing' taxpayers simply died, or that they migrated – something that might be especially true of poorer villagers, although there might be more to it than that. Campine taxation has some striking and fascinating aspects. Several pieces puzzled together hint at a very nuanced story – not one of gaping inequality, although no egalitarian Utopia either. The first piece of evidence, pointing towards the specificities of Campine taxation is this: taxation contribution in the Campine area was extremely inclusive – at least in some years. Based on the population numbers of the hearth taxes, it would seem that nearly every Rijkevonsel inhabitant contributed to the taxes. In the counts of 1464 and 1472, 202 hearths were listed which probably corresponded with some 1010 inhabitants. Taking into account the fact that in most years between 250 and 300 taxpayers were listed, it seems quite probable that most households were part of the taxpaying community. This inclusiveness is rather intriguing, since it was clearly not present in other rural regions. It seems, for example, very unlikely that the Gelre situation, where 41 to 59 percent of community members did not contribute²⁴⁶, was a realistic scenario for the Campine countryside. This inclusiveness was also highly symbolic. The taxpayers in the lowest decile, for example, were hardly relevant. Their contribution was so small, that it was almost negligible. For these 'poorer' villagers, contributing to village taxes was probably a means of making their membership of the village community explicit – something that was essential in securing their access rights to the vitally important commons. Might it be that these lower decile taxpayers were spared the burden of taxation in some years?

At its highest end Campine taxation is therefore equally fascinating. In Brecht, the number of people contributing more than 5 times the average taxation sum was still rather limited, never exceeding 10 percent of the total population, mostly fluctuating between 5 and 7 percent. However, since the upper 10 percent often paid over half of all taxes, it seems important to have at least an impression of who these people were.²⁴⁷ This is no evident to

²⁴⁴ Whittle, J. (2007). Population mobility in rural Norfolk among landholders and others, c.1440-c.1600. C. Dyer (ed.) *The self-contained village? The social history of rural communities, 1250-1900*. Hatfield, University of Hertfordshire Press: 28-45.

²⁴⁵ De Meester, J. (2011). *Gastvrij Antwerpen? Arbeidsmigratie naar het zestiende-eeuwse Antwerpen*. History Department. Antwerpen, Universiteit Antwerpen: 389.

²⁴⁶ Van Schaik, R. (1987). *Belasting, bevolking en bezit*: 224

²⁴⁷ Segers, Y. (2012). *Ongelijkheid op het platteland in de zestiende eeuw: Onderzoek naar sociale polarisatie in Brecht tussen 1523 en 1593 aan de hand van belastinggegevens*. Antwerpen: unpublished paper

reconstruct for the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Campine area, but some of these big-shot contributors can be identified. For the village of Brecht, one family made a considerable contribution to the village taxes: the Van der Noot family, a relatively important sixteenth-century family. Jan Van der Noot, who lived in the sixteenth century, was a rather famous poet who wrote the first renaissance collection of poems in the Low Countries, called *Het Bosken*. He was a fervent Calvinist, who, interestingly enough, returned to Catholicism at the end of his life. The Van der Noot family had some possessions in Brecht, however, apparently spent most of their time in Brussels where several family members resided in the bench of aldermen.²⁴⁸ Members of the Van der Noot family paid considerable taxes, ranging from 1.04 to 5.75 percent of the total sum. The Van Amstel family made considerable contributions too. Reynier Van Amstel, paid 1.12 percent of all taxes in 1523 and 3.67 percent in 1560. He was furthermore active as bailiff and steward. It is also quite intriguing that Reyniers heirs paid substantially less.²⁴⁹ For the village of Rijkevorsel, the number of people contributing more than five times the average allotted sum, between 1464 and 1475, was somewhat lower, ranging from 3 to 5 percent. When looking at the male taxpayers, it is noteworthy to point out that 41.2 percent of them were also active as village aldermen. It seems quite likely, therefore, that the people paying the lion's share of the village contribution, were also the ones responsible for the allotment of taxation. These 'upper-strata' contributors were also a very stable group, with more or less the same people returning every year.

Since the Gini's based on fiscality were higher than those based on land use, it would appear that the 'richer' villagers contributed more to the taxation than their use of land would necessitate. This is in striking contrast to, for example, Coastal Flanders, where taxation was notably regressive; richer inhabitants were proportionally taxed less than their 'poorer' fellow-villagers.²⁵⁰ I can, of course, only present a hypothesis when it comes to explaining this discrepancy. Since we do not know the exact basis for taxation allotment, it could be that besides land use, other factors were also taken into account. Many other taxable units, however, such as animal possession, are of course closely related with the amount of land used, so this might not be the only explanation. The allotment of taxation might indeed be one of the ways in which the convivium between independent peasants and the great mass of cottagers was established. It may have helped secure an equilibrium and order and stability in their communities and this taxation might have been used as some sort of redistribution mechanism, albeit a rough and incomplete one. It may also have been a symbolic matter to a certain extent. As suggested before, for villagers belonging to the lower-tier it might have been essential to make a pro forma contribution in order to establish their position as community members and profit of the accompanying right to use the commons. For upper strata villagers, it might have been status-enhancing to pay a substantial part of village taxation. By paying more, they might have also wanted to accentuate their position as leading community members, some sort of 'no overrepresentation without taxation'. The upper-tier of village society was also the main beneficiary of the Campine 'system', as will be illustrated in-depth in the following chapters. So, perhaps, these main beneficiaries strongly identified themselves with what was essentially 'their' village community and were not hesitant in paying a substantial part of 'their' community's taxes. As mentioned before, the taxation burden was

²⁴⁸ Lejour, E. (1954). *Inventaire des archives de la famille Van der Noot*. Bruxelles, Archives générales du royaume: 6-8

²⁴⁹ Segers, Y. (2012). *Ongelijkheid op het platteland*

²⁵⁰ Dombrecht, K. (forthcoming). *Plattelandsgemeenschappen*: 117

relatively low, so even villagers paying the bulk of it were probably not excessively weighed down by it (cfr. supra). This factor might also have enhanced the previously described process. If one (or perhaps both) of the above-mentioned theories hold true, this suggests that the Campine upper-layers (the upper 20 to 30 percent) who paid over 60 percent of the total taxation sum were in a way an equalising factor to a certain extent. In a way this taxation system was indeed rather 'democratic', since the strongest shoulders clearly bore the heaviest burden, thereby nuancing the rather crude figures suggested by the Gini indexes and yet another warning that this is a measure needing careful interpretation.

Another noteworthy aspect of late medieval and early modern taxation and specifically its division among village members was that it hardly changed at all over time. The Gini-indexes for fifteenth-century Rijkevorsel are not different from those for sixteenth-century Brecht. Furthermore, the Brecht Gini-indexes remain stable throughout the sixteenth century, fluctuating around 0.65.²⁵¹ The same stability and 'resilience' has also been noted by Alfani for the Italian city of Ivrea. In the two and a half centuries he studied, hardly any changes could be perceived and tendencies towards new distributions were mostly short-term phenomena.²⁵² The Q₃/Q₁ ratio was somewhat higher in the fifteenth century than at the end of the sixteenth century, but this was a slow evolution. The impressive decline in the 1570s might also be related to a number of other factors such as the upheaval stemming from the Dutch Revolt. The upper deciles continuously contribute massively and the lower groups were, throughout the whole period, included even though they only paid extremely small sums. A sixteenth-century growth of inequality therefore evidently cannot be perceived in the Campine area. In addition – as will be demonstrated in the remainder of this thesis – this is not the only aspect in which the Campine area demonstrates a striking stability and often quite some resilience.

3.4 Conclusion

Several essential conclusions impose themselves after closely looking into inequality on the Campine countryside, through two different angles: via actual and fiscal inequality. First of all, the Campine area strikes us as an impressively stable society. Structurally, nothing really changes when it comes to (in)equality. Almost all parameters, Gini-indexes, as well as Q₃/Q₁ ratios, as well as property relations indicate an almost staggering stability. That does not mean that nothing changes at all – in periods of demographic and economic pressure, land fragmentation becomes a more important feature of society, perhaps pushing more peasants under the subsistence level – but, this cannot be labelled a structural tendency. Furthermore, I think this chapter has proved the need for a combination of parameters to assess economic inequality on the countryside. Only by combining different measures, a nuanced estimate of inequality can be made.

When specifically zooming in on the core-subject of this thesis, the characteristics and strategies of the Campine village elite, several things can be noted. When focussing on property relations it was indicated that Campine villages clearly consisted of different social

²⁵¹ Segers, Y. (2012). *Ongelijkheid op het platteland*

²⁵² Alfani, G. (2010). "Wealth Inequalities and Population Dynamics": 545

strata, with a clearly distinguishable upper-layer of independent peasants – some 25 percent of village society. These independent peasants combined their somewhat over-average farm with a range of other assets, thus creating a rather diverse portfolio of power options, which clearly distinguished them from the large mass of cottagers and micro-smallholders. This actual inequality was furthermore translated into fiscal inequality – but it was a free translation, to say the least. The upper-strata paid a considerable amount of village taxes, more than their landed position would necessitate. I suggested that part of the explanation lies in securing a convivium with the lower strata, with taxation functioning as an – albeit limited – redistribution mechanism. Farm sizes were however not the only ground for distinction of these independent peasants. Other ways of distinction might have been pre-eminent as well, and this chapter also indicated that an important aspect of this was the securing of stable relations with their fellow-villagers. So, even more important than the size of their farms and their landed portfolio, were, what I will label, the three C's: control over the commons, commercial activities, and control over the community.

4

CONTROLLING THE CAMPINE COMMONS.

(Eline Van Onacker & Maïka De Keyzer)

Therefore that one covetous and insatiable cormorant and very plague of his native country may compass about and enclose many thousand acres of ground together within one pale or hedge, the husbandmen be thrust out of their own, or else either by coveyne and fraud, or by violent oppression they be put besides it, or by wrongs and injuries they bes o wearied, that they be compelled to sell all: by one means therefore or by other, either by hook or crook they must needs depart away, poor, silly, wretched souls, men, women, husbands, wives, fatherless children, widows, woful mothers, with their young babes, and their whole Household small in substance and much in number, as husbandry requireth many hands. Away they trudge, I say, out of their known and accustomed houses, finding no place to rest in.

(Source: Thomas More, 1516, Utopia, Book one – On Enclosure)

If you were to take a walk through the present-day Campine area, hardly anything remains of the medieval landscape. Nowadays, the Campine area is besmirched with industrial estates and endless stretches of ribbon development. However, in some places, relicts of the late medieval and early modern landscape can be encountered, for example in the heathlands of the village of Kalmthout or the wetlands of *De Liereman*, near Turnhout. The late medieval and early modern Campine area was typified by the presence of impressive amounts of heathland and moors, which surrounded the villages and hamlets. These heathlands were common wastes, making the Campine area quite unique in the context of the (Southern) Low Countries. In most agro systems, common lands were mostly given up during the period of the Great Reclamations. The Low Countries' core regions, Coastal Flanders, Inland Flanders and Holland, were characterised by the almost complete absence of commons.²⁵³ In some regions, however, common land remained crucial up until the end of the Ancien Regime. In the present-day Netherlands, Drenthe and the Veluwe are prime examples.

Situated closeby to Antwerp – a sixteenth century metropolis – and thus in the heartland of one of Europe's most urbanised, densely populated and especially market-oriented regions,

²⁵³ With some notable exceptions of course: De Moor, M. (2003). *"Tot proffijt van de ghemeensaemheijt". Gebruik, gebruikers en beheer van gemene gronden in Zandig Vlaanderen, 18de en 19de eeuw.* History Department. Ghent, Universiteit Gent

the Campine area was one of the last peasant societies dominated by commons within the Southern Low Countries. Since uncultivated and marginal lands covered up to 70 or even 80 percent of village surfaces, these commons have generally been accepted as encompassing the defining characteristics of the region. The common pool regime is generally considered to have had quite a deep-seated effect on societies within these regions. The most famous and widespread thesis on the functioning of the commons, has been formulated by Garrett Hardin²⁵⁴ who points to an inevitable ‘tragedy of the commons’. He believed commons were vulnerable to over-exploitation, which ultimately would lead to their disappearance. Noble Prize laureate Elinor Ostrom has argued otherwise, and convincingly so. She meticulously defined the framework for studying ‘common pool institutions’. Basically, she argued, these institutions were the keys to success and provided the tools necessary to prevent a tragedy of the commons. For her, these institutions encompassed sets of working rules, which in turn were used to determine who was eligible to make decisions in a particular area. These rules touched on different themes: actions, rules, procedures, the provision of information and payoffs.²⁵⁵ In the wake of Ostrom, research on commons has seen a new *hausse* in the Low Countries which, up until now, has mainly been embodied by Tine De Moor and her research team. She has suggested that common pool regimes, and especially institutions, were an efficient and rational choice, to protect one’s self against imperfect and underdeveloped markets. By sharing risks and benefitting from advantages of scale, commons were actually very much in tune with the *Zeitgeist* and were advantageous for large parts of society.²⁵⁶

Still, who benefitted from these commons exactly, and how, remains open to discussion. Within historiography a fierce debate has been carried out on precisely this theme. One line of thought firmly emphasises the beneficial effects on the members of an institution, and has furthermore identified open-field agriculture as a catalyst for solidarity.²⁵⁷ Sheilagh Ogilvie’s views represent a fiercely critical and opposing position. As she puts it in one of her articles: “strong communes persisted not because they efficiently maximized the economic pie, but because they distributed large shares of a limited pie to village elites (well-off peasants, male household heads), with fiscal, military and regulatory side-benefits to rulers and overlords”.²⁵⁸ Was the continuous existence of the Campine commons first and foremost an indication of the fact that they were equally beneficial to the society as whole, or did one group of stakeholders clearly occupy a more advantageous position? Or, as Nadine Vivier has put it: “*Qui profitait des communaux: les riches ou les pauvres? C’est un theme recurrent, glose interminable*”.²⁵⁹

By answering the following questions, an attempt will be undertaken to shed some light on this matter: who had access to the commons? Who actually used them and to what end?

²⁵⁴ Hardin, G. (1968). "The tragedy of the Commons." *Science* 162: 1243-1248.

²⁵⁵ Ostrom, E. (1997). *Governing the Commons. The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 51.

²⁵⁶ De Moor, M. (2006). The Silent Revolution. The Emergence of Commons, Guilds and Other Forms of Corporate Collective Action in Western Europe from a New Perspective. *The Return of the Guilds*. Utrecht.

²⁵⁷ Some examples of this line of thought: Turner, M., J. Becket, et al. (2003). "Agricultural Sustainability and Open-Field Farming in England, c. 1650-1830." *International Journal of Agricultural Sustainability* 1(2): 124-140; Richardson, G. (2005). "The Prudent Village: Risk Pooling Institutions in Medieval English Agriculture." *The Journal of Economic History* 65(2): 386-413 & Pimsler, M. (1977). "Solidarity in the Medieval Village? The Evidence of Personal Pledging at Elton, Huntingdonshire." *The Journal of British Studies* 17(1): 1-11.

²⁵⁸ Ogilvie, S. (2007). "Whatever is, is right'? Economic institutions in pre-industrial Europe." *Economic History Review* 60(4): 663

²⁵⁹ Vivier, N. (1998), *Propriété Collective Et Identité Communale. Les Biens Communaux En France, 1750-1914*. Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne.

Furthermore, Erling Berge has suggested focussing on the people behind the rules, since an institution requires guardians charged with the authority to monitor and enforce the rule system.²⁶⁰ These guardians, being either official members of the institutions or the community members themselves, therefore had to make sure an institutional framework was created. So, who was in control of the Campine commons, who managed and monitored its precious assets? By delineating the group of users and the ones in charge of controlling the commons, an attempt at delineating the true beneficiaries of these commons will be undertaken. Did all members of society benefit from the continuous presence of common waste lands? Can we discern social groups with significantly more to gain than others, and did they try to control common land in order to preserve their interests?

The Campine commons remain, up until now, a true *terra incognita*. Apart from some agricultural studies, dating from the mid-twentieth century and scarce indirect references in some general historical overviews, the commons of the Campine area represent a vast wilderness ready to be explored. Since early modern Campine society did not leave us with abundant source material, the above-mentioned questions are not easily answered. While some English manorial villages often left extensive manorial court records, land books, administrative accounts and a variety of economic sources, the Campine area and its commons will have to be reconstructed from incomplete evidence and indirect sources. No membership lists, original charters, village meeting rolls or official's accounts have survived, and moreover, the remaining sources often stem from different villages, thus hampering any attempt to get a full picture of the community as a whole. Therefore the byelaws, both a curse as well as a blessing for the historical research concerning commons, remain vital in getting a grip on the functioning of the commons and its beneficiaries. However, these byelaws are, of course, mere normative sources. These are by no means completely representative of day-to-day reality since they only indicate a formal, firmly institutionalised level. They are therefore supplemented by a wide range of administrative, economic, social and judicial sources, which are able to shed more light on the real day-to-day government, and which suggest the importance of more informal practices.

As a result, this chapter will provide a preliminary overview of the Campine commons and the peasant communities using them. As such it will be demonstrated that Campine communities quite stubbornly stuck to their own course, adapting what are generally accepted to be the main and essential design principles to their own model and, moreover, still managing to keep it largely intact up until the late eighteenth century. Remaining an exceptionally open common pool regime, the commons suited different stakeholders within the early modern communities on fundamentally different levels, however, ultimately they favoured - predominantly - the upper tier of society, the 'independent' peasants. Finally, this complex interplay of interests and stakeholders, was meticulously held together by a flexible and adaptable system of negotiation through both formal and informal contacts. The stakeholders constantly interacted and sometimes clashed, in order to reach a 'common denominator'.

²⁶⁰ Berge, E. (2002). "Reflections on Property Rights and Commons in the Economies of Western Europe," *The common property resource digest* 62(4).

4.1 A rough guide to the Campine commons

4.1.1 Different types of commons: waste/pasture/arable

First and foremost, the concept ‘commons’ has been interpreted and used in a variety of ways. Commons is short for common lands, which in turn is a subcategory of common pool resources. Common pool resources are defined by Elinor Ostrom as ‘natural or man-made resource systems that are sufficiently large as to make it costly to exclude potential beneficiaries from obtaining benefits from its use’.²⁶¹ This definition however includes all resources, such as water, fish, air, and even sunshine. One of the most studied common pool resources however, is land. Even though private property has become dominant in Europe, common land and common usage rights to land were omnipresent up until the eighteenth century when enlightened, and later on liberal governments, progressively abolished most commons.²⁶²

In addition, common land came in many forms. The most important and dominant types were common arable, common pasture and common waste. In the Campine area **common waste** was the dominant type. This refers to land used neither for the cultivation of crops, nor for the production of hay, but principally for the grazing of animals or the gathering of fuel, sods, buildings materials etc. As land books, tax registers and rent registers indicate (table 4.1), between 60 to a staggering 87 percent of the total surface of Campine villages remained “waste” even during the sixteenth century.

Table 4.1 Common vs. private land in a selection of villages, sixteenth century

Village	Total surface (in ha)	Total surface private land (in ha)	Surface common waste land (in ha)	% common
Kalmthout	11586,23	4292,58	7293,65	58,28
Tongerlo	2044,62	498,34	1546,28	75,63
Lichtaert	2518,20	325	2193,2	87
s Gravenwezel	1498,78	312,00	1186,78	79,18
Gierle	1775,00	400,00	1375,00	77,46
Wommelgem	1273,69	474,5	799,19	63

Source: SAAntwerp, V 5. *Ancien regime Archief van de stad Antwerpen, Andere overheden, Lokale overheden en heerlijkheden, België, Hertogdom Brabant, State of the villages in the markgraafschap, 1593*; RAA, OGA Gierle, 344. *Pieces concerning the 10th and 20th penny tax (penningkohier), 1554*; AAT, II, 896. *100th penny register (100 ste penningkohier), Tongerlo, 1569*

Next, **common pasture** consisted of grassland which was used for common grazing. The hay meadows, which were almost completely privatised by the sixteenth century, remained open for communal grazing after the first hay harvest.²⁶³ Finally, **common arable** can be

²⁶¹ Ostrom, E. (1997) *Governing the Commons*.

²⁶² Dejongh, G. (1999). "De Ontginningspolitiek Van De Overheid in De Zuidelijke Nederlanden, 1750-1830. Een Maat Voor Niets?" *Tijdschrift van het Gemeentekrediet*.

²⁶³ "Er is gesloten en door de gemeente overgedragen bij consent van de meier en schepenen dat men het broek zal omheinen en bevrijden zoals de andere vrede beemden en dat men in hetzelfde broek zal mogen voor de oogst hooien en

distinguished. Common arable refers to land, primarily used as arable in individual or private ownership, even though collective sowing, harvesting and ploughing could be allowed. For England and France abundant literature is available which elaborates on the communal practices of arable lands. The local byelaws often explicitly list the data for harvesting, opening up the enclosures, the start of the communal grazing season, etc.²⁶⁴ The same image is depicted for the Campine area. In one of the classics of agricultural history, written by Piet Lindemans in 1952, it is claimed that the Campine arable fields were collectively sowed, harvested and ploughed and that animals were allowed to enter the fields after harvest.²⁶⁵ However, not a single reference can be found in any byelaw concerning either collective sowing, harvesting, ploughing, or grazing. In addition, a large amount of byelaws are dedicated to rules and fines concerning trespassing of animals on private lands, clearly indicating they were enclosed. Finally, the extraordinary detailed land books of the abbey of Tongerlo, listing their farms in Kalmthout, Tongerlo and the area's surrounding Hapert and Beerse, suggest that most of the arable plots were individually enclosed by hedges (Table 4.2).²⁶⁶

Table 4.2 Ratio enclosed versus open land, per type of farmland of the abbey of Tongerlo's tenant farms in 1510

Type of land	Enclosure grade
Total number of arable fields	81
Number of enclosed arable fields	63
Percentage of enclosed arable fields	78%
Total number of hay meadows	98
Number of enclosed hay meadows	11
Percentage of enclosed hay meadows	11%
Total number of heath fields	52
Number of enclosed heath fields	29

dat niemand zijn beesten daar in zal stouwen zolang er 3 lieden hooi in het broek hebben. Als de lieden hun hooi daaruit hebben zal het wederom gemeen zijn. 17 januari 1544". Translation: "It has been decided and by the village proclaimed with the consent of the bailiff and aldermen that the hay meadow will be fenced and liberated like all other "vrede beemden". Before the harvest everyone can collect his hay and nobody will graze his animals as long as more than three individuals have to collect their hay. When everyone has done his harvest the hay meadow will be common. 17th of January 1544." , quotation from: Van Olmen, E.H.A. (1910); "De Keuren Van Vorselaar," *Taxandria* 7.

²⁶⁴ Antoine, A. (1999), *Des Animeaux Et Des Hommes. Economie Et Sociétés Rurales En France (Xie-Xixe Siècles)*. Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes; Ault, W.O. (1972). *Open-Field Farming in Medieval England* Londen, Allen and Unwin; Moriceau, J.M. (2005). *Histoire Et Géographie De L'élevage Français. Du Moyen Âge À La Ravolution*. Fayard; Winchester, A. (2008). "Statute and Local Custom: Village Byelaws and the Governance of Common Land in Medieval and Early-Modern England," B. Van Bavel & E. Thoen (eds.) *Rural Societies and Environments at Risk. Ecology, Property Rights and Social Organisation in Fragile Areas (Middle Ages - Twentieth Century)*. Turnhout, Brepols.

²⁶⁵ Lindemans, P. (1952). *Geschiedenis Van De Landbouw in België*, 2 vols. Antwerpen, De Sikkel; Meynen, P. (2012). *Onderzoek Naar Het Gebruik Van De Gemene Gronden in De Antwerpse Kempen: Terlo Als Testcase*. Universiteit Gent; Moeskop, G. (1985) *Het Gebruik Van Gemene Gronden in De Antwerpse Kempen Tijdens Het Ancien Régime* licentiaatsthesis, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven.

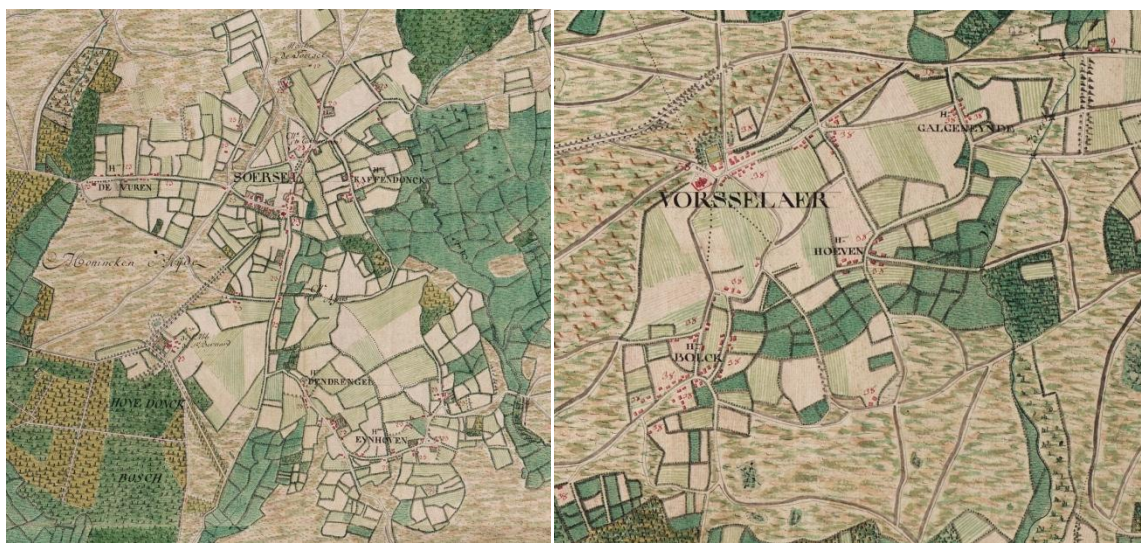
²⁶⁶ AAT, Section II, 292.

Percentage of enclosed heath fields	56%
Total number of pastures	67
Number of enclosed pastures	27
Percentage of enclosed pastures	40%

Source: AAT, II, 292 *Fines Culturam*, 1510

This extraordinary enclosure ratio seems to be confirmed by the first small-scale maps which were produced during the eighteenth century. Several villages were primarily made up of enclosed arable plots and pastures, only complemented with modest open field relicts.²⁶⁷ Normally, open fields were only enclosed by one big surrounding fence, which was opened after harvest. Nonetheless, as the first Ferraris map shows, a bocage-type of landscape had developed at least by the eighteenth century. This is in stark contrast to the typical common meadows that still persisted around the brook valleys, which were surrounded by only one linear hedge. In order to delimit each individual plot, small ditches were used rather than hedges.

Map 4.1 Detail of the Ferraris map of Zoersel, showing enclosed arable fields vs. Detail of the Ferraris map of Vorselaar, showing (relicts of) open fields



Source: http://www.kbr.be/collections/cart_plan/ferraris/ferraris_nl.html.

4.1.2 The Campine commons and their functions

The commons served a wide variety of purposes for medieval and early modern rural communities, the most important ones being the collecting of raw materials and the grazing of animals. When it came to **collecting raw materials**, wood, the original coverage of the Campine landscape, had become scarce by the high Middle Ages, because of more intensive

²⁶⁷ The maps by Ferraris have recently been scanned in high resolution and can be accessed at: http://www.kbr.be/collections/cart_plan/ferraris/ferraris_nl.html.

grazing, cutting of timber for building and fuel, and reclamation of land.²⁶⁸ The cutting of wood was therefore nearly always strictly prohibited. Peat, on the other hand, became increasingly valuable as a source of fuel within the Duchy of Brabant. However, except for the region around Kalmthout and Roosendaal, no vast or thick peat layers were present in the Campine area. Commercial exploitation, therefore, remained limited, the abbey of Tongerlo's grand scale reclamation around Kalmthout and Nieuwmoer – which was specifically founded for the reclamation of peat – providing an exception.²⁶⁹ The numerous and scattered moors and peat layers on the other hand, remained a common asset for the village communities. Since peat was such an important and easily exhaustible resource, village governing bodies were extremely strict concerning the collecting and cutting of peat, and introduced innumerable rules and fines to maintain a sustainable environment and retain sufficient resources. The right to collect or cut sods, which could be mixed with manure or used as building material was also controlled quite strictly. As stated before, the Campine arable land required huge amounts of fertiliser in order to become productive. Since Campine cattle was too scarce to fertilise the infields, their manure was mixed with sods or heather and possibly even sand after which it was spread onto arable fields. The process of cutting sods, however, posed a serious threat to the Campine ecosystem. Since most of the area existed of dry sand, sand drifts were always a potential threat. Therefore, general restrictions as to the amount of harvest-days and the number of harvesters allowed, were combined with strict delimitations as to where – and especially where not – to cut.²⁷⁰

The most important benefit provided by the commons, and especially the common waste and pasture, was the provision of **grazing**. Considering the predominance of common waste lands and pastures in continental Europe, this holds true for most European countries. Therefore, Nadine Vivier stated that the right of pasture was the most important common right.²⁷¹ The same perception can be detected in the discourse of the late medieval stakeholders too. Jan III, the Duke of Brabant, for example, stipulated in a charter granted to the community of Vechel, on the fifth of August 1310, that “*il donne à cens aux habitants de Vechel pour la pâture de leur bétail [] les terres vagues*”.²⁷² As will be argued later on, the Campine commons were indispensable to sustain any kind of cattle or sheep breeding, for peasants as well as tenant farmers. The most extraordinary feature of the Campine commons, however, was the absence of restrictions relating to the amount of animals one was able to put on the commons – also known as ‘stinting’. While the overwhelming majority of European common pool institutions attempted to reduce the pressure on the commons through limiting access and restricting the amount of animals, Campine communities were apparently never tempted to turn to such strict measures. The common waste was predominantly used for the grazing of sheep. For horses and cattle, heathland grazing was probably not an option, since the quality

²⁶⁸ Verboven, H. V., K en Hermy, M. (2004). *Bos en hei in het Land van Turnhout*.

²⁶⁹ Leenders, K.A.H.W. (1989). *Verdwenen Venen: Een Onderzoek Naar De Ligging En Exploitatie Van Thans Verdwenen Venen in Het Gebied Tussen Antwerpen, Turnhout, Geertruidenberg En Willemstad 1250-1750*. Brussel, Gemeentekrediet.

²⁷⁰ For example: “*Niemand mag in het goor van overbroek heide of allerlei strooisel maaien of vlaggen halen beneden de tekens die daar gesteld zijn of worden op de boete van 30 stuivers*” Translation: “Nobody can mow or collect heather or grass on “het Goor” of Overbroek, between the signs on the penalty of 30 pennies”, in: Helsen, I. (1949), “Het Dorpskeurboek Van Retie”. *Bijdragen tot de geschiedenis* 1(1).

²⁷¹ Vivier, N. (1998). *Propriété Collective Et Identité Communale*.

²⁷² Translation: “Jan III] donates in exchange for a rent, the waste lands to the inhabitants of Vechel for grazing of their cattle”, in: Verkooren, A. (1961). *Inventaire Des Chartes Et Cartulaires Des Duchés De Brabant Et De Limbourg Et Des Pays D'outre-Meuse*. vol. I Brussel, Archives générales du royaume 227.

of fodder was not sufficient for them. They mainly benefitted from the communal grazing on pastures and meadows – common for a limited period of time – which provided fodder of a far higher quality.

4.2 “All commoners are equal, but some commoners are more equal than others”. Participators and beneficiaries of the Campine commons

The purpose and use of the commons is therefore quite easy to grasp. Since the ecological gains mostly depended on the natural environment, they barely changed throughout time unless ecological disasters struck or overexploitation or planned adjustments fundamentally altered the outlook of the commons. Defining the community of users is, however, a bigger challenge. The use of the commons was in many cases and in many communities, restricted to certain community members and inclusion usually depended on property, inheritance or wealth. As J.M. Neeson has shown for the East Midlands in England, cottagers and landless labourers were mostly excluded from use of the commons and only full members of the community, owning a complete plough or farmstead, were accepted.²⁷³ In *Het Gooi*, located in the Northern Low Countries, and the *Geest* area in Schleswig Holstein (in present-day Germany) a household was required to be a descendent of one of the original inhabitants – or *Hufner* as they were called in Schleswig Holstein – who colonised the region and founded the common pool regime.²⁷⁴ Newcomers, especially cottagers, were formally excluded. Finally, certain communities required members to purchase their share in the community of users.²⁷⁵ In short, most European rural communities restricted access to only a part – mostly the richest part – of its inhabitants. Clearly, however, access rights tell only part of the story. Even though all formal participants could use the commons, they probably did not benefit from them in quite the same way. Despite obvious pitfalls, reconstructing the beneficiaries of the common pool regime is, however, one of the most important challenges regarding research into commons. What about the Campine area, therefore? Who were the users and beneficiaries of the Campine commons?

4.2.1 Normative sources: framing reality

Traditionally byelaws provide a good starting point to learn about the community of users of each particular seignior or village. The *aardbrief*, or charter of Turnhout which dates back to 1331, for example, states:

²⁷³ Neeson, J.M. (1993), *Commoners: Common Right, Enclosure and Social Change in England, 1700-1820*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

²⁷⁴ Kos, A. (2010). *Van Meenten Tot Marken. Een Onderzoek Naar De Oorsprong En Ontwikkeling Van De Gooise Marken En De Gebruiksrechten Op De Gemene Gronden Van De Gooise Markegenoten (1280-1568)*. Hilversum: Verloren, 2010; Poulsen, B. (1999), "Landesausbau Und Umwelt in Schleswig 1450-1550j". M. Jakubowski-Tiessen & K.J. Lorenzen-Schmidt (eds.). *Dünger Und Dynamit. Beiträge Zur Umweltgeschichte Schleswig Holsteins Und Dänemarks*. Neumünster, Wachholtz Verlag Neumünster; Rheinheimer, M. (1999). "Umweltzerstörung Und Dörfliche Rechtssetzung Im Herzogtum Schleswig (1500-1800)". M. Jakubowski-Tiessen & K.J. Lorenzen-Schmidt (eds.). *Dünger Und Dynamit. Beiträge Zur Umweltgeschichte Schleswig-Holsteins Und Dänemarks*. Neumünster, Wachholtz Verlag Neumünster.

²⁷⁵ De Moor, T. (2003) "*Tot Proffijt Van De Ghemeensaemheijt*".

“Joannes dei gratia Lotharingiae, Brabantiae et Limburgiae dux notum facimus universis quod nos omnes communitates et wastinas [] universis et singulis hominibus nostris villarum nostrarum de Turnhout et de Arendonck ad opus eorum et omnium omnium”.²⁷⁶

This certainly seems to suggest that every male member or household-head was granted the right to use the commons or *wastinas* of Turnhout. Other byelaws do not refer to the original donation of the privilege to the community or certain community members, but only state that the byelaws are created to maintain the good policy for **all** the ‘*ingezetenen*’, or community members.²⁷⁷ The exact definition of an *ingezetene* is, however, a tricky question. Upon first encountering it, the word seems to group together everyone living within village boundaries. Nonetheless, it is often assumed that it actually refers to the ‘real members’, namely those who contributed to the local taxes and communal obligations. After all, according to the *hearth taxes*, a significant share of the total households could be labelled as poor houses, theoretically exempt of all taxation.²⁷⁸ According to Limberger this percentage rose to as much as 25 percent during the later Middle Ages.²⁷⁹ The Campine hearth taxes confirm Limberger’s statement since, in most villages, 20 to 25 percent of all households were labelled ‘poor’.²⁸⁰ Other rules often refer to households as beneficiaries, or as those who were obliged to participate in the common tasks. However, it seems highly unlikely that the village poor were exempt from the use of the commons since that would imply that the village poor relief would be more heavily burdened. Furthermore, as I suggested in chapter 3 (section 3.3.2), an impressive majority of household heads did indeed contribute to village taxes. It would seem that village byelaws can only give us a partial view on the true users of the commons which means we have to search for additional information in other sources.

4.2.2 The Zandhoven *Heyboek*: a glimpse on the true group of users

For most of the Campine villages, normative sources give us no decisive answers on the delineation of the group of users. Unfortunately, no membership lists have survived, not even for the eighteenth century. The only source, shedding light on the commoners themselves, is the *heyboek* of Zandhoven.²⁸¹ This administrative source was created in 1559 and kept up to date until 1582. It listed all earnings and expenses made by the common pool institution of the village of Zandhoven. The revenues allow us to reconstruct those who registered as a user. The most important revenue consisted of an extremely low contribution users had to pay on a yearly basis in order to gain access to the commons, together with a fixed sum for each day of collecting heather or sods and a fixed sum per cattle unit.²⁸² Despite the fact that the

²⁷⁶ Jansen, J.E. (1905). "Twee Aardbrieven Van Turnhout." *Taxandria*.

²⁷⁷ For example: "Vergaderd zijn en hebben eendrachtelijk gekozen en genoemd uit onze stad uit elke heerdgang en gehucht twee van de meest notabele personen om van de gemeynte en ons wegen te maken en ordineren de keuren, statuten en regels zoals het hun lieden nuttig, profijtelijk en oorbaar dunkt voor de gemeente." Translation: "We have held a meeting and chose unanimously from our city and per hamlet two of the most noble individuals to create and ordinate the byelaws, statutes and rules for the community, as they consider of profit and for the good of the village." In: Michielsens, J. (1907). "Keuren Van Brecht". *Oudheid en Kunst*.

²⁷⁸ Cuvelier, J. (1912). *Les dénombrements de foyers en Brabant, 14e-16e siècle*. Brussel, s.n

²⁷⁹ Limberger, M. (2008). *Sixteenth-Century Antwerp and Its Rural Surroundings. Social and Economic Changes in the Hinterland of a Commercial Metropolis (Ca. 1450-1570)*. Turnhout, Brepols.

²⁸⁰ Based on: Cuvelier, J. (1912). *Les dénombrements de foyers*.

²⁸¹ RAA, OGA Zandhoven, 148. *Heyboek of the village of Zandhoven, 1559-1582*

²⁸² The Zandhoven *heyboek* used its own system of cattle units, but sadly enough, it is impossible to reconstruct the number of animals in one unit. In all likelihood, the main animals included are cattle and especially sheep.

Zandhoven byelaws remain completely silent on the subject of an entrance fee, it was apparently a requirement to contribute to the common pool institution to enjoy the fruits of the commons. In addition, a fixed sum is rather socially biased. For the richest part of society this sum would have been easier to bear and could have enhanced one's competitive position. Nevertheless, during this short period on average 79.5 households are listed as users. Since Zandhoven counted approximately 81 households during the same period, this means almost all families could and did use the commons (Table 4.3). After all, on average a family household had to pay 8 *stuiver* for one year, which is less than the average daily wage for this period (fluctuating around 11.5 *stuiver*), either grazing or collecting peat. One cattle unit cost on average 0,6 *stuiver* and one day of cutting peat and mowing hay 1,75 *stuiver*.²⁸³ In 1496 20 households were considered poor and were thus not liable to taxation, however, apparently even poor households used the commons, probably helped by the low entrance fee.²⁸⁴

Table 4.3 Number of households and inhabitants of Zandhoven

Zandhoven	1496	1526
Households	80	81
Inhabitants	400	405

Source: Cuvelier, J. (1912). *Les dénombrements de foyers en Brabant, 14e-16e siècle* Brussel, s.n.

Most importantly, this source does not only provide an insight into authorised individuals or households, but also indicates who actually used the commons. As Tine De Moor has shown, there is a fundamental difference between those authorised to use the commons, the actual users, and those involved in managing the commons. These three modes of participation did, however, not necessarily overlap. De Moor indicated for the particular common she researched, in the vicinity of Bruges, that a growing proportion of rural inhabitants were employed in non-agricultural professions in the eighteenth century and that therefore their right to use the commons became increasingly abstract. In Flanders this resulted in a significant rise in the average age of the individuals registering as a commoner.²⁸⁵ Late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Flanders is, however, barely comparable to the late medieval and early modern Campine area. Here the overwhelming majority of village inhabitants still held strong property rights over their land. Next, practically all households, except for the nearly landless and poorest cottagers, owned at least one cow requiring pasture (see also chapter 5). Finally, wage labour was more limited in the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Campine area than in eighteenth century Inland Flanders. This cocktail of factors, together with a very inclusive access regime, resulted in an extraordinary grade of activity. As 99 percent of the village community was registered between 1559 and 1582, it is safe to state that the entire community of Zandhoven actively used the commons in one way or another.

A more detailed analysis of the revenues confirms the image depicted by the byelaws: the collecting of heather or sods and peat, were the most important and valued assets after grazing. Not only were they very strictly regulated, these practices were meticulously monitored by

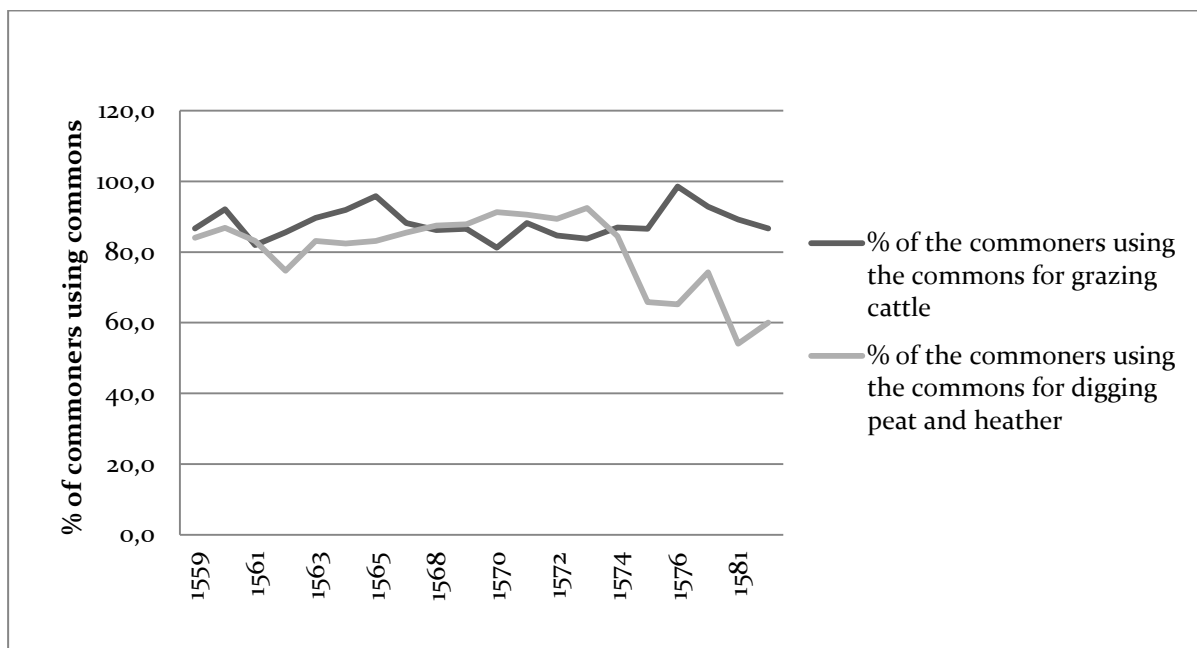
²⁸³ RAA, OGA Zandhoven, 148. Heyboek of the village of Zandhoven, 1559-1582

²⁸⁴ 1496 is the latest enquiry listing both the total amount of houses, as well as the amount of poor households. Cuvelier, J. (1912). *Les Dénombrements de foyers*.

²⁸⁵ De Moor, T. (2010), "Participating Is More Important Than Winning: The Impact of Socioeconomic Change on Commoners' Participation in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Flanders." *Continuity and Change* 25(3).

common pool institutions. This extraordinary source, in addition, offers an insight into individual household strategies of the commoners. Since each household accounted for its total days of harvesting heather, sods and peat, together with the total amount of cattle units they grazed on the commons, it is possible to calculate how these activities related to each other, as is shown in Fig 4.1. First of all, more than 80 percent of the community of Zandhoven used the commons for both grazing and harvesting heather and peat. From the beginning of the Dutch Revolt, surprisingly the number of households collecting sods, heather and peat dropped significantly, while the grazing figures remained relatively stable.

Fig 4.1 Functionality of the commons based on percentage of commoners using heathlands for grazing and the cutting of peat, Zandhoven, sixteenth century



Source: RAA, OGA Zandhoven, 148. *Heyboek of the village of Zandhoven, 1559-1582*

When focussing on the household level, it becomes clear that there is no significant relationship between the amount of days a household collected raw materials, and the amount of cattle units they placed on the commons. While some combined investments in both grazing and collecting heather and sods, others focussed on one of them or adopted a middle course. In short, every individual household determined, both individually and on a yearly basis, what benefits they wanted to enjoy, rather than investing as much as possible in both or specialising in one activity. This links up with the mixed farming strategy of the Campine peasants, who relied on very diverse agricultural practices, rather than relying on one particular endeavour.

4.2.3 Equality and beyond: the beneficiaries of the Campine commons

We now have at least some idea of the extent of the group of users of the Campine commons and have established that virtually all community members were included. Even so, this by no means implies that all users benefitted equally from the common pool institution. As has

already been mentioned, in historiography many divergent opinions on the most important beneficiaries of commons can be found. The necessity of the commons is often attributed to the “rural poor”. The exact interpretation of this particular concept is, in turn, also challenging, however, it can refer to either landless labourers as well as cottagers owning at least a piece of cattle. For the landless labourers the commons are supposed to have provided them with inexpensive strips of land which could be claimed, either illegally or officially, in addition to some additional food and fuel supplies.²⁸⁶ Most attention is, however, paid to the cottagers. It has been claimed that the ownership of one piece of cattle constituted the essential difference between being poor and needy, and being able to provide at least a minimum income.²⁸⁷ Following on from this line of thought, the disappearance of the commons would be most detrimental for these cottagers, since they supposedly relied heavily on the commons to tend to their livestock. From this point of view, the richest part of the community would also be affected although they would be able to invest enough to retain their independence and, therefore, social status. This hypothesis, however, only applies to those communities granting access rights to small cottagers. Whether a common could function as some sort of social security system or not, depended entirely on the inclusiveness of the commons. As Francisco Beltran has shown very effectively, living standards were not higher in regions with commons than in those without, unless the usage was enjoyed in a very egalitarian manner, which was quite rare.²⁸⁸ More often than not, the rural elites were the true beneficiaries of the common pool regime.²⁸⁹ Since grazing was the most important privilege, it is often stated that the upper tier of society, owning herds of cattle often had most to gain.²⁹⁰

The Zandhoven *heyboek* proves a point already made by the village byelaws: virtually all community members made use of the commons. Contrary to what was stated in these normative sources, they had to pay a small sum to enjoy the fruits of the commons, but this sum was low enough not to be a burden on the poorest community members. Still, the fact that participation to the common pool institution cost money (and the same amount of money had to be paid by all participants – regardless of their social status) already indicates that the Campine common pool institution did not necessarily represent a democratic paradise for peasants. In addition, since grazing was indispensable for those owning significant flocks of sheep, herds of cattle, and horses, the middle ranks and richest tiers of the rural communities probably relied most heavily on the commons. After all, the cost of obtaining, enclosing, and sustaining sufficient pasture for large herds of livestock was often far too high to be profitable.²⁹¹ Nadine Vivier for example states:

“Depuis des siècles dans la vicomté de Soule, les gros laboureurs, maîtres de “bonnes maisons”, sont les gros éleveurs, propriétaires des bêtes à cornes ou à laine: primaires bénéficiaires des affièvements de biens communaux, ils défendent jalousement l’usage des vacantes contre toute

²⁸⁶ Rheinheimer, M. (1999). "Umweltzerstörung."

²⁸⁷ Shaw-Taylor, L. (2001). "Labourers, Cows, Common Rights and Parliamentary Enclosure: The Evidence of Contemporary Comment c. 1760-1810." *Past and Present* 171: 95-126.

²⁸⁸ Beltran, F. (2012) "Commons and the Standard of Living Debate in Spain, 1860-1930." *Design and Dynamics of Institutions for Collective Action*. Utrecht.

²⁸⁹ Lana Berasain, J.M. (2008) "From Equilibrium to Equity. The Survival of the Commons in the Ebro Basin: Navarra from the 15th to the 20th Centuries." *International journal of the commons* 2(2).

²⁹⁰ Vivier, N. (1998). *Propriété Collective Et Identité Communale*.

²⁹¹ Clark, G. (1998). "Common Sense: Common Property Rights, Efficiency and Institutional Change." *Journal of economic history* 58 (1).

*tentative de cultures, refusent les clôtures et les défrichements temporaires – les labaquis indésirables des agriculteurs pauvres”.*²⁹²

As such, cattle-owners might have been the main stakeholders of the commons.

Table 4.4 Animal grazing on the commons of the village of Zandhoven, 1559-1575

Year	Number of households	Average amount of 'heads' within household	Number of people with more than the average of heads per household	% of people with more than the average of heads per household
1559	75	4,2	27	36,0%
1560	76	4,7	29	38,2%
1561	83	4,2	31	37,3%
1562	83	4,0	26	31,3%
1563	77	3,7	28	36,4%
1564	74	4,0	25	33,8%
1565	71	4,0	22	31,0%
1566	76	3,2	22	28,9%
1568	80	3,6	27	33,8%
1569	82	3,6	31	37,8%
1570	80	3,3	28	35,0%
1571	85	3,5	27	31,8%
1572	85	3,5	28	32,9%
1573	80	3,5	26	32,5%
1574	84	3,3	29	34,5%
1575	82	2,9	30	36,6%

Source: RAA, OGA Zandhoven, 148. *Heyboek of the village of Zandhoven, 1559-1582*

This is furthermore confirmed by the findings of the Zandhoven *heyboek*, as presented in table 4.4. This clearly allows us to distinguish a group of villagers – of some 30 to 35 percent of all participants – grazing more than the average amount of animals on the commons. For these upper-tier peasants the additional grazing ground the common (pasture and mainly the common waste) provided was absolutely essential. For the village of Gierle, the achieved amounts of hay yields have been reconstructed, based on the *penningkohier* of 1554.²⁹³ The maximum amount of hay yielded by a Gierle peasant was 8786,93 kg. On average, Gierle inhabitants were able to grow 1957, 66 kg, with a median value of 928,44. Unfortunately we do not know how many animals the Gierle peasants had to feed with their yields. If we extrapolate the findings for early seventeenth century Rijkevorsel²⁹⁴, animal owners on average owned 4 cows, 1.6 horses and 45.2 sheep, which needed to be fed, which would – in ideal circumstances require 15901,60 kg of hay. Not even one Gierle inhabitant was able to produce this amount of

²⁹² Desplat Ch. (1993).

: *Guerres Paysanne*

- les.

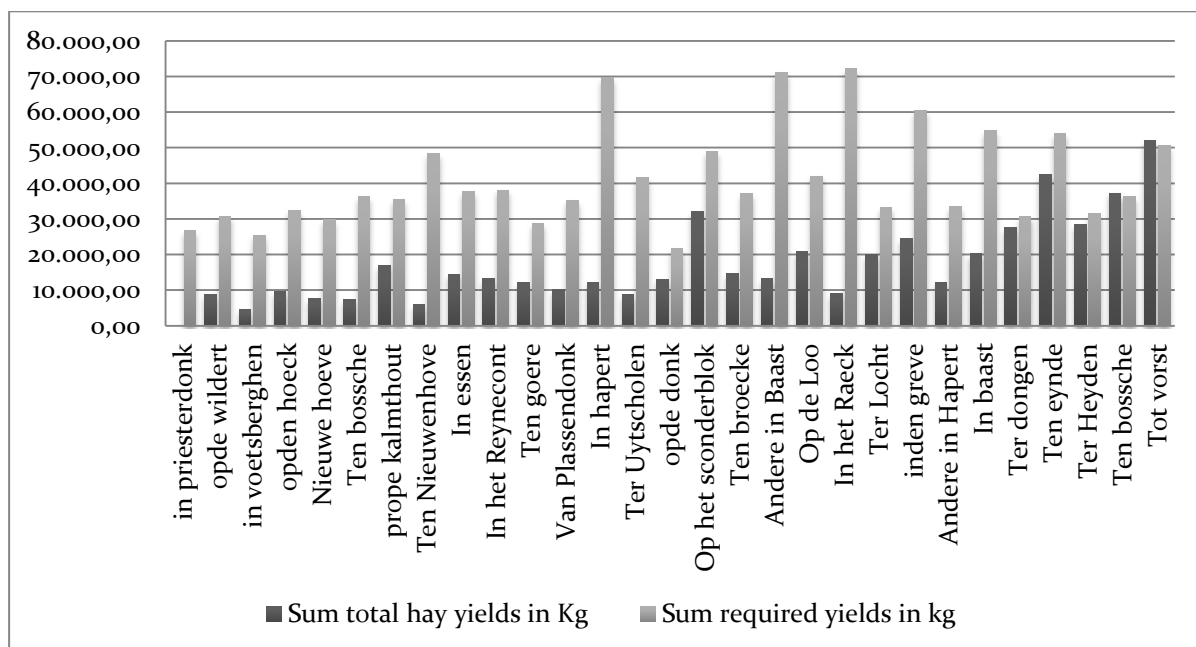
: 170-174.

²⁹³ RAA, OGA Gierle, 344. Pieces concerning the 10th and 20th penny tax (*penningkohier*), 1554

²⁹⁴ RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 3141-3149, Animal Counts, 1608

hay with his own meadows and pastures. In reality animals probably received less fodder than ideally required, but even then it seems that the Campine peasants could not provide enough food. The same holds true for the Campine tenant farmers (the subject of chapter 6). For example, the tenant farmers of the abbey of Tongerlo, the true giants of this region, tilled between 25 and 82 ha of land²⁹⁵ and owned on average 47.5 cattle units.²⁹⁶ As we can see in Fig 4.2, most of them were also unable to provide for their fodder themselves, making them dependent not only on the market, but in all likelihood on the commons as well. If they had wanted to be self-sufficient, the Campine tenant farmers would have to expand their farms by a factor 2.8, but farms of this size (70 to a staggering 230 hectares) would require immense investments in order to enclose and maintain of these lands. Using the commons was clearly an obvious strategy.²⁹⁷

Fig 4.2 Required vs. achieved hay yields on the tenant farms of the abbey of Tongerlo, 1510



Source: AAT, II, 206. *Status bladorum monasterii Tongerloensis, 1510*

This by no means implies that other social groups had nothing to gain from the continuous presence of the Campine commons. Cottagers, for example, probably hardly needed them for grazing, since sheep were the only animals that could be sustained on heathlands. Because most cottagers only owned a single cow, they had more to gain from the common pasture on the hay meadows after the harvest. On the other hand, the collecting of sods and heather to fertilise their sandy arable was indispensable for them to obtain sufficient yields. Cottagers owning insufficient cattle in particular had to mix manure with sods to

²⁹⁵ Based on the Tongerlo land books and Dahlström, A. (2006). *Pastures Livestock Number and Grazing Pressure 1620-1850. Ecological Aspects of Grazing History in South-Central Sweden*. Swedish University of agricultural sciences.

²⁹⁶ In order to calculate the number of cattle units, cattle and horses were considered as one unit each, while four sheep constituted one unit. The total amounts of animals were found in the tenant account books of the Abbey of Tongerlo: AAT, II, 206. *Status bladorum monasterii Tongerloensis, 1510*

²⁹⁷ Clark, G. (1998). "Common Sense."

acquire enough fertiliser. Moreover, the purchase of manure was quite expensive, due to a general shortage of fertilisers in the early modern Low Countries.²⁹⁸ Furthermore, the digging of peat was also of prime importance to them, supplying them with ever-necessary fuel.

Indisputable evidence about the true interests of every stakeholder is thus hard to come by. Nonetheless, by reconstructing the functioning of the common pool institutions and the level of inclusiveness, we can provide an insight in the answer to this question. Independent peasants benefitted from the survival of very extensive common waste lands, with no restrictions on the amount of livestock to be put on the commons. Given their economic strategies, the worst possible evolution of the rules concerning the commons, would be the introduction of stinting.²⁹⁹ On the other hand, a more restrictive access to the commons would, in theory, only be an advantage for their aspirations. If the commons were able to be reserved for those farmers owning at least a couple of sheep or cattle, the commons would be used less intensively, thus preventing the degradation of the heathlands lands and thereby securing their continued existence. However, in reality, the very inclusive access-system of the Campine commons was mostly beneficial for these Campine (independent) peasants as well. As most of them did not own an 'original' farm and probably wished to bestow their children with the benefits of the commons, a reservation of the commons for certain estates or members, could easily take a grim turn. The same goes for a minimum ownership of a couple of hectares of land as a necessary precondition. Older peasants in general often owned only a very limited amount of land, since they usually sold it to fund their retirement. Even independent peasants would have only a very limited amount of land towards the end of their lives, therefore needed the use of the commons. Strict access rights were thus disadvantageous for this group as well, especially since the inclusiveness of the commons probably played an essential part in the cottagers – independent peasants convivium. Even if these cottagers possessed but a single cow, the commons might still be of paramount importance. Furthermore, the commons were needed for the collection of fodder, hay, peat, loam and other supplies. These cottagers and micro-smallholders might not have used the commons to their full potential as the independent peasants did, however, they were nonetheless essential for a secure survival and stability in the community.

4.2.4 To enclose or not to enclose: the crucial Campine question

So, we know now that independent peasants had much to gain from the Campine commons, as did – maybe to a somewhat lesser extent – their less well-off fellow-villagers. Traditionally historiography has also portrayed the 'enemies' of the commons, those striving for enclosure and the termination of the common pool regime. The most notorious adversaries were local landlords and his tenant farmers. The image depicted by Christopher Dyer for the later Middle Ages, and Robert Allen for the Early Modern era, has given to these alleged partners in crime

²⁹⁸ Thoen, E. and Soens T. (2008). "Élevage, Prés Et Paturage Dans Le Comté De Flandre Au Moyen Age Et Au Début Des Temps Modernes: Les Liens Avec L'économie Rurale Régionale." F.Brumont (ed.). *Prés et pâtures en Europe occidentale: 28e journées internationales d'histoire de l'abbaye de Flaran*. Presses universitaires du Mirail.

²⁹⁹ The setting of a maximum number of beasts that could be grazed. Source: De Moor, M., Shaw-Taylor, L. and Warde, P. (eds.). *The Management of Common Land in North West Europe, C. 1500-1850*. Turnhout, Brepols: 261.

the reputation of being the biggest opponents of the common pool regime.³⁰⁰ Since rents were far below the level of private lands, lords tried to transform them into private property. Tenant farmers, on the other hand, are thought to have been keen on more intensive and commercial agricultural practices. Supposedly these were obstructed by more conservative field systems and harvest practices sustained by common pool institutions. However, as has been mentioned before, Campine tenant farmers had much to gain from the common pool regime, since they could graze their flocks of sheep on the common waste and used common pasture to feed their cattle.

The Campine landlords showed a rather inconsistent attitude towards commons and communal rights. In theory, the lords had abdicated their rights to the commons around the middle of the fourteenth century when they granted *vroentebrieven* to local communities.³⁰¹ By “selling” the usage of their *bona vacantia* or *wastinas* to the communities, they refuted their right to sell, cultivate, exploit or use the lands themselves, although ultimately ownership remained in their hands.³⁰² Theory and practice were, however, something completely different, and bending the rules was as common as the land itself. On several occasions Campine landlords attempted to enclose parts of the commons, albeit not always equally successfully. The most striking example of a failed enclosure policy dates back to the middle of the sixteenth century when Mary of Hungary – or quite likely her entourage – decided to engage in a large-scale commercial sheep-breeding enterprise and enclosed part of the commons of Turnhout and Arendonk. However, quite soon a tragedy unwound itself on the Campine commons. The revenues of this enterprise were not large enough to cover the enormous costs made to enclose the commons and to feed and house the huge flocks of sheep and ultimately Mary of Hungary had to accept her ‘defeat’ and donated the pieces of waste land back to the community of Turnhout in 1556. However, not all grand scale attempts to privatise or enclose huge parts of the commons were doomed to fail. One of the most eager landlords in this respect, was the abbey of Tongerlo. Possessing the seigniorie of Kalmthout-Essen, which was rich in peat reserves, it ventured into commercial exploitation from the fourteenth century onwards. Since most of the peat layers in Flanders were already depleted by then, the search for the black gold moved northwards. Increasingly, concessions were sold and the peat layers in the common waste lands were systematically exploited and eventually transformed into cultivable land. In the rent register of 1518 alone, 90 hectares of the commons were privatised in order to exploit the peat.³⁰³ As a result, Nieuwmoer, a peat colony, was founded and was later on transformed into a new hamlet. A grand-scale enclosure in a peat-area was, economically, a much more ‘profitable’ thing to do, since peat was extremely valuable. Furthermore, the abbey used a system of ‘concessions’, so they did not have to make the necessary investments themselves.

³⁰⁰ Allen, R.C. (1992) *Enclosure and the Yeoman: Agricultural Development of the South Midlands, 1450-1850*. Oxford, Clarendon Press; Dyer, C. (2006). "Conflict in the Landscape : The Enclosure Movement in England, 1220-1349," *Landscape history* 28.

³⁰¹ Vroentebrieven are a kind of charters, specifically addressing the granting of commons to local communities. Paepen, N. (2004) "De Aard Van De Zes Dorpen 1332-1822. Casusonderzoek Naar De Kempense Gemene Heide (Deel 1)." *Taxandria, Jaarboek van de Koninklijke geschied- en oudheidkundige kring van de Antwerpse Kempen* LXXVI.

³⁰² Meeusen, G. (1956). "Aan Wie Behoort De Vroente?" *De Spycker* 13(2).; Steurs, W. (1993). *Naissance D'une Région. Aux Origines De La Mairie De Bois-Le-Duc, Recherches Sur Le Brabant Septentrional Aux 12e Et 13e Siècles.*, vol. III, *Memoire De La Classe Des Lettres*. Bruxelles, Académie royale de Belgique.

³⁰³ The effect on the common pool regime, however, must not be overestimated. Since the common wastelands of Kalmthout covered approximately 7293 ha, only around 1.2% of the commons were enclosed. Source: AAT, Section II, 373. Rent register, 1518 and http://www.hisgis.be/nl/start_nl.htm

Grand-scale enclosures by tenant farmers or lords were therefore not an endeavour undertaken regularly and, moreover, attainable only in places with valuable raw materials. However, these large-scale enterprises were not the only type of enclosure which existed: piecemeal enclosures, by peasants for example, were an indispensable part of the Campine agrosystem as well. Around 1436 the rent registers of Tongerlo mention only four plots of hay meadows in private hands.³⁰⁴ In about 1529 the amount of hay meadows had significantly increased to 45 individual parcels.³⁰⁵ At the same time, 45 privatised pieces of heathland were recorded as well.³⁰⁶ Despite the lack of precision of the earliest rent registers, it is possible to make estimations of the average surface area of the enclosed plots. While, during the fifteenth century, they measured around 3.7 ha - quite a significant investment for a typical peasant - the numbers dropped to 1.1 ha during the sixteenth century, as can be seen in table 4.5. This might indicate that between the thirteenth and fifteenth century enclosures were conducted to found new farms and estates, while around the sixteenth century, the basic layout was finished and predominantly *voorhoofden*, little plots added to enlarge existing fields, were privatised. These ideas are, however, mere hypotheses which need further testing. Piecemeal enclosures were therefore frequent, albeit in small clusters, and were probably executed by cottagers and peasants. Looking at the size of these plots, peasant land hunger could provide an explanation.

Table 4.5 Enclosure figures in the seigniories of the abbey of Tongerlo

Rent registers Tongerlo	1430-1434	1435-1453	1566-1621
Percentage of plots referring to common waste land	13%	11%	14%
Average surface area of enclosed land (ha)	3,7	3,4	1,1
Mode surface area of enclosed land (ha)	1,3	0,65	1,3

Source: AAT, Section II, 334, 335, 342. Rent registers, 1430-1621

4.3 Control. A common battlefield

So far we have delineated the group of users of the Campine commons and established that all users benefitted, but that the Campine independent peasants (and partly also the tenant farmers), benefitted to a larger extent. It is, however, equally important to focus on another group, not those who used the commons, but those who controlled it, wrote its rules, and fined those who broke them. In 'commons-studies' it has often been stated that these 'governors' or 'guardians' came from the grassroots level. This dominant view derives from one of the main design principles described by Elinor Ostrom in her ground-breaking work on

³⁰⁴ AAT, II, 335. General Rent registers, 1435-1453

³⁰⁵ AAT, II, 342. Rent registers (Tongerlo & environment), 1566-1621

³⁰⁶ Ibidem.

common pool institutions. Ostrom stressed that in order to have and maintain an efficient and sustainable management, most individuals affected by the operational rules have to have the opportunity to participate in modifying them. She therefore emphasises the importance of collective-choice arrangements³⁰⁷ In a way this links up with the concept of ‘**environmentalism of the poor**’ developed by J. Martinez-Alier which emphasises the fact that local, rural populations are often very preoccupied with the sustainability of their natural environment since their livelihood directly depends on it, making them, more often than not, adhere to precautionary principles rather than pursuing wealth as a basis for decision-making.³⁰⁸ Common pool institutions using this principle are supposed to have been better able to adapt their rules to changing local circumstances. Ostrom, however, remained rather vague as to the exact definition and range of member-participation which has led to some interesting debates.

On the one hand, the concept of ‘**environmentality**’ has been put forward. Arun Agrawal, for example, refers to the top-down introduction of values in his work on the Northern-Indian Himalayas and its village communities. He claims that certain values – imposed from above – were internalised by community members, mainly through the participation in the local councils.³⁰⁹ Several scholars, however, have contested this theory since this alleged internalisation was often a masquerade, one which community members were able to enact beautifully in order to pursue their own specific interests. In turn, Tobias Haller has put forward the idea of ‘**constitutionality**’ as a prerequisite for a sustainable functioning of the commons. This implies a conscious process of institution-building from below, an approach which does not suffer from the drawbacks of top-down imposed processes of democratisation, decentralisation and participation, which are often subject to processes of elite capture.³¹⁰ In short, this meant that instead of being able to participate in a very passive or merely be present during meetings, all interest groups within society had to be part of the decision-making process in order to get a sense of ownership and responsibility. Otherwise the excluded groups, having no sense of ownership, would not be inclined to follow the rules and pursue a sustainable system.³¹¹

Grassroots-level participation in the establishment of rules, and in their enforcement, is therefore firmly emphasised as a prerequisite for smoothly functioning commons. Historical evidence, however, questions the dominance of an on-going grassroots-level participation in pre-modern institutions, suggesting that it was by no means self-evident. Waterboards, for example, are a prime example of this. Whereas past research often emphasised the historical roots of the Dutch *poldermodel* – the Dutch consensus model, based on the need for consultation and cooperation when it came to governing the dikes – this has recently been nuanced by the research of Tim Soens. His conclusions are two-fold. First of all he emphasises the fact that decisions on dike and water management were not made based according to contemporary democratic principles, rather, they largely followed the medieval conceptions of

³⁰⁷ Ostrom, E. (1997). *Governing the Commons*, 93.

³⁰⁸ Martinez-Alier, J. (2002). The environmentalism of the poor. A report for UNRISD for the WSSD. Witswatersrand: 59. For a short introduction, see: Davey, I. (2009). "Environmentalism of the poor and sustainable development: an appraisal." *Journal of Administration & Governance* 4(1): 1-10.

³⁰⁹ Agrawal, A. (2005). *Environmentality: Technologies of Government and the Making of Subjects*. Durham, Duke University Press.

³¹⁰ Haller, T., Acciaioli, G. & Rist, S. (2012). "Constitutionality: Constitutionality: Emic Perceptions of Bottom-up Institution Building Processes." T. De Moor (ed.) *Design and Dynamics of Institutions for Collective Action*. Utrecht.

³¹¹ Ibidem

the importance of the opinion of the *melior* or *sanior pars* of the community. Or as Soens puts it: institutions mainly reflect pre-existing power balances and private interests, thus nuancing theoretical models which emphasise communal management such as Blickle's concept of *Kommunalismus* or Ostrom's Common Pool Resources. Secondly, he emphasises the fact that changes in the political or economic balance of power strongly influenced the inclusion rate of 'ordinary' participants.³¹²

In what follows, therefore, the prime goal is to shed light on the regulation, control and sanction mechanisms of the Campine commons and those who had a grip on these mechanisms. Can we indeed see traces of grassroots-level participation and control or was the Campine area also characterised by decision-making by the *melior pars* of the community – and if so, who constituted this 'better-part' of the community? These questions will be tackled through two approaches. First of all, the formal aspects of regulation, control and correction will be addressed in order to see who was formally responsible for all these aspects of the management of the commons. Secondly, more informal ways of management will also be addressed, in order to complete our picture.

4.3.1 Formal institutions: writing the byelaws

Framing the rules

Despite the fact that byelaws, being purely normative sources, tend to show theory rather than practice of rules and that they highlight only a small proportion of village rules, they are nonetheless the 'formal constitutions' of pre-modern peasant villages. These byelaws constituted the formal agreement between the lord, the village governing body and its inhabitants on how the village was supposed to be ruled and monitored. They dealt with many divergent aspects of village life, however, the management of the commons was one of the primary concerns reflected in the byelaws. They provide the principle source giving us an insight into the regulation of the village commons, nonetheless, as will be demonstrated by the end of this chapter, formal and informal agreements and management systems did not always correspond and could, in fact, sometimes be quite contradictory to each other.

Let us first take a look at the formulation of regulation (specifically concerning the commons) and the groups that were involved in these practices. This will be done by making use of a database containing the byelaws of 17 villages.³¹³ When focussing on the byelaws – and specifically the 'salutation' – the opening words in which all the parties concerned were addressed – grassroots-level participation is at least suggested. When it comes to the formulation of rules, however, the participation of all community members is seldom the norm. The byelaw of Hoogstraten for example, a town under the jurisdiction of the de Lalaing family, stated that "*Het keurboek, statuten en ordonnanties die door de welgeboren heer Antoon van Lalaing van Hoogstraten in 1534 bij goeddunken van de schepenen, gezworenen en gemene ingezetenen van zijn vrijheid van Hoogstraten gesloten zijn geweest*", mentioning the presence

³¹² Soens, T. (2006). "Polders zonder poldermodel? Een onderzoek naar de rol van inspraak en overleg in de waterstaat van de laatmiddeleeuwse Vlaamse kustvlakte (1250-1600)." *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis* 3(4): 34

³¹³ The byelaws of the villages Arendonk, Brecht, Ekeren, Geel, Gierle, Herenthout, Hoogstraten, Kalmthout, Essen, Kasterlee, Oostmalle, Ravels & Eel, Retie, Terloo, Turnhout, Westerlo and Wuustwezel – all analysed by Maïka De Keyzer

of the lord, aldermen, ‘jurors’, and ‘ordinary inhabitants’.³¹⁴ This introduction is quite representative for several village byelaws – almost all of them include a reference to the village communities as being present during the formation process of normative rules that provided the basis of village life. However, the actual power to create rules was largely out of reach for the ordinary peasant as can be seen in fig 4.3. First of all, in most of the cases, the lord was the one creating the byelaws, or at least officially had to approve their content. Even in Gierle, a village that had purchased the right to manage its commons from the Duke of Brabant, the introduction of the byelaw states that “the old byelaw, ordinances and statutes are known for time immemorial within the village as the ordinance handed over by his majesty (the Duke of Brabant)”.³¹⁵ If the lord did not directly interfere with the underlying regulatory framework of his seignories, the responsibility was passed on to his representative, the bailiff or sheriff, and the local aldermen, who were formally in charge of determining the rules. Within the village of Oostmalle, for example, the byelaws were “made, ordained and chartered by the bailiff and aldermen of the jurisdiction of Oostmalle and approved of by the noble and fine lord Fredericus de Renesse, lord of the village of Oostmalle”.³¹⁶ This cooperation between the lord’s representative and the local village governing body was the most common practice to create village byelaws. Only one village byelaw explicitly identifies the ‘ordinary’ inhabitants as prime participators. In Terloo, nothing more than a hamlet, a byelaw was written down addressing solely rules concerning their commons. Here, the introduction quite extraordinarily reads: “*Ordonnantie of aardbrief gemaakt bij de gemene ingezetenen van Loo op het gebruik van hun gemeynte en de aard van loo*”, meaning that the charter was made by all inhabitants of the hamlet.³¹⁷ In all other cases, they were required to cooperate with the bailiff and /or the village aldermen, if they were allowed in at all.

As will be argued in detail in chapter 7, village aldermen overwhelmingly belonged to the socio-economic top-layers of village society, meaning that those responsible for writing up the regulation of villages were clearly socially biased. An intriguing case in this matter is the village of Brecht, where not only the village aldermen were mentioned, but also several other community members were specifically indicated as being part of the establishing of the byelaws. More specifically, “*uit elke heerdgang en gehucht twee van de meest notabele personen*”, or two prominent inhabitants from each hamlet.³¹⁸ This is consistent with Soens’s findings on the predominance of the *melior* or *sanior pars* in institutional decision-making. Bailiffs were, even more so, members of the elite, the regional elite even. The bailiff of Ravels, for example, one of the villages of the abbey of Tongerlo, was called Dominicus Vanden Nieuwenhuysse. Not only had he studied both canonical and civil law, he was born into a very influential family. Godeschalk Vanden Nieuwenhuysse became the prelate of Tongerlo in 1598, one of his direct relatives, Bartel, became a bailiff of the neighbouring village Weelde, and another family

³¹⁴ The byelaw, statutes and ordinances that were drawn up by the renowned lord Antoon van Lalaing of Hoogstraten in 1534 by the consent of the aldermen, sworn members and common inhabitants. Source: De Longé, G. (1878). *Coutumes D'herenthals, De Casterlé, De Moll, Balen Et Deschel, De Gheel, De Hoogstraten, De Befferen Et De Putte, Et Feodales Du Pays De Malines, Recueil Des Anciennes Coutumes De La Belgique*. Brussel, Fr. Gobbaerts.

³¹⁵ De Kok, H. (2009). "De Aard Van Zes Dorpen: Beerse, Vosselaar, Lille, Wechelderzande, Gierle En Vlimmeren. Een Casusonderzoek Van Een Kempense Gemene Heide." *Post Factum. Jaarboek voor geschiedenis en Volkskunde*. 1.

³¹⁶ Keuren gemaakt geordonneerd en gestatueert door de schout en schepenen van de heerlijkheid en jurisdictie van Oostmalle en geaprobeerd door de edele en welgeboren heer Fredericus de Renesse, heer van het dorp Oostmalle. De Molder, Th. (1935). "Keuren Van Oostmalle," *Oudheid en Kunst* 26 (1).

³¹⁷ Ordinance or “aardbrief” made by the common inhabitants of Loo for the usage of their commons of Loo. Source: Van Gorp, J. (1927) "De Aartbrief Van Terloo." *Bijdragen tot de geschiedenis* 18.

³¹⁸ Michielsens, J. (1907). "Keuren Van Brecht."

member, Franciscus, was a secretary in Ravels. This was a rich, educated and powerful family, closely connected to the abbey. They were clearly engaged in managing the affairs of the abbey in the area around Ravels and Weelde, where the abbey held strong seigniorial powers.³¹⁹

So as Fig 4.3 amply proves, when it came to drawing up the byelaws and approving them, ordinary villagers were not always included and, even if they were, they might nonetheless have been over-ruled by village officials. The fact that they were included in these actions probably had to do with the fact that their consent was required for the maintenance of order and stability in the village. The main influence the local villagers had in steering the management of the commons, was the introduction of new rules, as can be also seen in fig 4.3. One rule in the byelaw of Retie clearly bears witness to this, since the byelaw states: "Whenever seven individuals of one hamlet come to the lord in order to create a new rule which is deemed to be profitable for the hamlet, permission will be given to ordinate and create that rule the whole year round by the lord and 4 aldermen. If these men confirm by oath that this rule will be profitable, it will be worthy to comply with this rule as with all the other rules made by the sworn councillors".³²⁰ The byelaw of Vorselaar is living proof of this practice. Almost half of village byelaws refer to rules being introduced by the village community, either independently or with the cooperation of the aldermen and bailiff. In 1550, a rule was introduced by the village community through the general village meeting that whoever "*schadden, turven of maaien op enige van de gemene vroente die het schot en genot in het dorp heeft, zal verbeuren 1 karolus gulden*".³²¹ Nevertheless, both bailiff, as well as aldermen, possessed exactly the same prerogatives. Moreover, as fig 4.3 shows, this privilege was used by the aldermen far more often than by the villagers themselves. If we take into consideration specifically that on almost half of the occasions new rules were introduced by inhabitants, they can be attributed to one particular village: Vorselaar.³²²

'Constitutionality' was, on a formal level, therefore far from present in the pre-modern Campine communities. The lords and village governing body opted instead – as was the case in urban governments, guilds, and other forms of collective organisations – for a participation model.³²³ By being present at village meetings and granting their explicit or implicit consent, it was presumed inhabitants would comply with those rules and eventually internalise them. This is clearly depicted in the byelaws, for references to the obligation to be present during the publication of byelaws, the annual village meeting and the communal duties, are omnipresent.

Control and correction

We can also wonder how control and sanction mechanisms functioned, and who participated when it came to these aspects of the management of the commons. According to Ostrom, the

³¹⁹ Heemkundekring Nicolaus Poppelius. (1980). *Ravels in Lief En Leed*. Heemkundekring Nicolaus Poppelius; Koyen, M. (1958) "Keuren Van Ravels," *Oudheid en Kunst* 41(2).

³²⁰ "Wanneer zeven personen van een heertgang komen naar de heer om enige zaken die profijtelijk zouden zijn voor de heertgang in een keure gezet te worden, zal men het hele jaar door mogen ordineren en zetten bij de heer en vier schepenen. Indien de mannen affirmeren bij eed dat dezelfde keur naar hun vijf zinnen profijtelijk is dan zal de keure waardig zijn om te onderhouden zoals de andere keuren die bij de gezworenen gezamenlijk gemaakt zijn en onverbrekkelijk onderhouden moeten worden." Helsen, I. (1949). "Het Dorpskeurboek Van Retie."

³²¹ Whoever is part of the village by contributing schot and digs or mows on any common in the village, will have to pay 1 karolus gulden. Van Olmen, E.H.A. (1910). "De Keuren Van Vorselaar."

³²² Ibid.

³²³ As for example described in: De Keyzer, M. (2010). "Opportunisme, corporatisme en progressiviteit. Conflicten en vertogen van corporatieve belangengroepen in het stedelijk milieu van het achttiende-eeuwse Mechelen." *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis* 7(4): 3-26.

introduction of strict rules and the strict sanctioning of trespassers, were vital in obtaining a sustainable management.³²⁴ This has been confirmed by Haller, who stated that the involvement of the community to set the rules, fines and implement them, is indispensable. In his case-study of modern day Zambia a tragedy of the commons was, according to him, inevitable once rules and fines had been introduced by the state without any consideration for local communities. Law enforcement was scarce and trespassing frequent due to the fact that rules were never accepted by members of the local community, and law enforcement was resented.³²⁵ According to Haller, appointing members of the community as guardians and law enforcers was less likely to instigate insurrection. Furthermore, Tine De Moor has suggested that the best way to safeguard an efficient common pool regime, was not to sanction but prevent trespassing through the implementation of a system of social control within the community of users.³²⁶ This grassroots-level control was, however, not possible for all infringements on rules concerning the commons, since lordly prerogatives functioned as a hindrance. Serious infractions, which were sanctioned through high fines, were always the prerogative of the lord. For example, any trespassing against lordly privileges, such as the felling of wood or fishing in lordly ponds and streams, fell within the jurisdiction of the lord and the lord alone. In addition, theft and similar offences, such as breaching fences and destroying crops, also had to be brought before the lord. Fences and the privatisation of arable land were of immense importance in pre-modern agrarian societies, resulting in higher fines and the compulsion to plead the case before the lord.³²⁷

Most cases, concerning infringements on common rules were, however, handled by the lord's bailiff and local aldermen's bench. When an infraction on the rules occurred, the bailiff had to summon the trespasser to court, after which the local aldermen's bench had to hear and sentence the case. In Geel, for example, the function of the bailiff was set forth as follows: "The bailiff of the Freedom of Geel and the aldermen are obliged and compelled to bring right and justice to the subjects. The bailiff functions as plaintiff and the aldermen as judges."³²⁸ Afterwards the bailiff was responsible for the stipulation and collection of the fine.³²⁹ Even though the majority of the rules written down in the byelaws mentioned an exact fine, bailiffs mostly determined a composition which held into account the gravity of the offence, the social background of the trespasser, and whether it was a first transgression or not.³³⁰ The Campine trespassers, therefore, were indeed partly judged by their 'peers', i.e. village aldermen, however,

³²⁴ Ostrom, E. (1997) *Governing the Commons*.

³²⁵ Haller, T. (ed.). (2010). *Disputing the Floodplains. Institutional Change and the Politics of Resource Management in African Wetlands*. Leiden, Brill.

³²⁶ De Moor, T. and Tukker, A. (2012). "Penalty and Punishment. Designing Effective Sanctions for Freerider's Behaviour on Early Modern Dutch Commons." *Design and Dynamics of Institutions for Collective Action* Utrecht.

³²⁷ See for example Ravels: "Niemand zal ontvreemden of wegdragen andermans heymself, horden oft tuinen of vekens op pene van gecorrigeerd te worden door de heer". "Nobody will steal or carry away ones hedge, fence, bushes or locks, on the punishment of being corrected by the lord." Koyen, M. (1958). "Keuren Van Ravels."

³²⁸ Original: "De drossaard van de vrijheid van Geel en de schepenen zijn schuldig en behoren de onderzaten recht en justitie te doen. De drossaard is maander in alle zaken en de schepenen rechtens en wijzen".

³²⁹ Berents, D.A. (1972) "Taak Van Schout En Schepenen." *Maandblad Oud Utrecht* 45 (8); Jacobs, B.C.M. (1986). *Justitie En Politie in 'S-Hertogenbosch Voor 1629. De Bestuursorganisatie Van Een Brabantse Stad*. Assen, Van Gorcum; Van Den Branden, W. (1989) "De Schout of Officier Van De Landsheer Te Lille, Wechelderzande En Vlimmeren. Aspecten Van Het Dorpsbestuur in Het Land Van Turnhout in Het Ancien Régime, Vooral in De Zeventiende En Achttiende Eeuw." *Heemkundige kring Norbert de Vrijter Lille*; Van Rompaey, J. (1961). "Het Compositierecht in Vlaanderen Van De Veertiende Tot De Achttiende Eeuw." *Tijdschrift voor rechtsgeschiedenis* 44.

³³⁰ Espin-Sánchez, J.A. (2012) "Let the Punishment Fit the Crime: Self-Governed Communities in Southeastern Spain," *Design and Dynamics of Institutions for Collective Action*. Utrecht.

as mentioned before, these men predominantly belonged to the economic upper-layers of the community. Furthermore, the aldermen, might have reasoned partly according to a form of institutional logic instead of fulfilling peasants' interests.³³¹

Ordinary peasants were, however, not entirely excluded from control and correction mechanisms. Villagers, for example, could officially participate in the control of the village commons, working for the bailiff or aldermen. Imposing rules was one thing, but actually enforcing them was something else entirely. Therefore officials, called *schutters* and *vorsters*, were appointed to perform day-to-day management tasks. In Ravels and Eel, the *vorster* was appointed by the bailiff and aldermen and "*zal zijn boeten van het schutten en aanklagen, innen zo ver deze de grond en bodem aangaan en zal zich niet onderwinden in enige zaken de overheer aangaande*".³³² They were the ones catching trespassers, locking up straying cattle, and collecting particular fines imposed by the bailiff or steward. In addition, some villagers were renowned for their expertise when it came to cattle diseases and containing pestilence. Louise Hill Curth has indicated that for early-modern England, animal health care was a very layered phenomenon which easily accommodated the activity of lay-healers such as shepherds, swineherds, herds-men or grooms.³³³ In the Campine area 'good men' from within the villages themselves were therefore appointed to make frequent visits to the village stables and be on the lookout for sick animals. When precautionary measures had to be taken, their advice was final. In the byelaws of Ravels and Eel for example it is stated:

"Om dit perikel te vermijden zal men nemen en kiezen door de meier, schepenen en gezworenen in elke heerdgang of gehucht of schapenrij twee goede mannen met verstand daaraf om de schapen te visiteren en de meier zal de eed afnemen van deze goede mannen".

The lordly representative, aldermen and 'jurors' were obliged to pick two able men of each hamlet, therefore, to 'visit' the sheep. Local participation in the control of common management or the use of local expertise was therefore clearly present albeit under close supervision of the village aldermen and lordly representative.

On some rare occasions, however, the byelaws suggest a much larger grip of the village community on control and correction. In Terloo, the one village that drew up its own byelaws, the *vorster* was appointed by the community of users themselves:

"Is geordonneerd dat bij gemene stemmen van de ingezetenen het gehucht van loo dat er altijd 2 aardmeesters gekozen zullen worden om 2 jaar te dienen zoals kerkmeesters. Als hun termijn beëindigd is zullen zij de keuze hebben om uit de gemeente van loo twee andere uit te kiezen naar hun verstand en goeddunken".³³⁴ Finally, the entire village community was summoned to watch

³³¹ As is described in: De Keyzer, M., Jongepier, I. & Soens, T. (forthcoming). "Consuming Maps and Producing Space. Explaining Regional Variations in the Reception and Agency of Cartography in the Low Countries During the Medieval and Early Modern Periods," *Continuity and Change* Accepted, Published Spring 2014.

³³² Translation: "Will collect his fines from catching cattle and charging trespassers, as long as they concern the land and soil, and will not intervene in the lord's matters". Koyen, M. (1958). "Keuren Van Ravels."

³³³ Curth, L. H. (2010). *The care of brute beasts. A social and cultural study of veterinary medicine in Early Modern England*. Leiden, Brill: 68-69

³³⁴ "It is ordained by general election of the inhabitants of the hamlet Loo that two common's masters will be elected to serve, like the church masters, for two years. When their term is over, they will have the opportunity to select two other members of the community according to their approval and insight". Van Gorp, "De Aartbrief Van Terloo."

out for any offences and to report them to the local officials or authorities.³³⁵ In return for their collaboration, villagers could receive a part of the fine.³³⁶

Let us finish off this section by pointing out micro-differences relating to the different actors that were identified within the village byelaws regarding framing the rules and ensuring whether they were respected. It has already been suggested above that there were some inter-village differences, and these can easily be perceived when focusing on the responsible officials in different types of villages. In Figure 4.4 we can identify the officials who were most frequently mentioned in the village byelaws in three types of villages: feudal villages (with a local lord), ducal villages, and clerical villages (with an ecclesiastical institution as the lord). Broadly speaking, most of the trends and tendencies that have been described were present in all of these villages, but it is perhaps worthwhile outlining some differences. In 'feudal villages', which were under the jurisdiction of a local lord, the lord himself was quite often referred to. More than the Burgundian or later Habsburg royals, local lords were obviously more inclined to interact with their villagers themselves. In clerical villages (under the jurisdiction of the abbey of Tongerlo), the sheriff or steward was mentioned more regularly than in other type of village. This has a somewhat Robin Hood-like ring to it, however, the strong presence of the sheriff was mostly linked to the fact that the lord (i.e. the abbey) was not often referred to and left most tasks to his representative. In ducal villages, the aldermen were mentioned slightly more often compared to the two other types of villages. This can be explained by the fact that the lord himself was not in a position to interfere directly in village business. The lordly representatives were often responsible for several villages at once, meaning they were also less engaged. So, even if the larger picture was more or less identical for the Campine area as a whole, it pays off to focus on inter-village differences, which shed light on the particular dynamics and customs of individual villages.

Other norms

Lastly, the lord - often in cooperation with his bailiff - had to give the incentive to start the execution of communal tasks and hold visitations or investigations in the village. In Kasterlee, for example, the lord

*“zal doen gebieden de heerenleuck te omheinen tegen de beesten opdat op het einde van maart iedereen zijn goed komende met zijn akkers of erven aan de omheiningen, tuinen en gemeen hekken, opdat er geen schade door geschiet kan worden”.*³³⁷

This refers to the yearly communal visitations of the enclosures, boundaries and streams, which were the highlight of the year, coinciding mostly with a holiday, fair or religious procession. According to David Fletcher, these collective rituals were of greatest importance

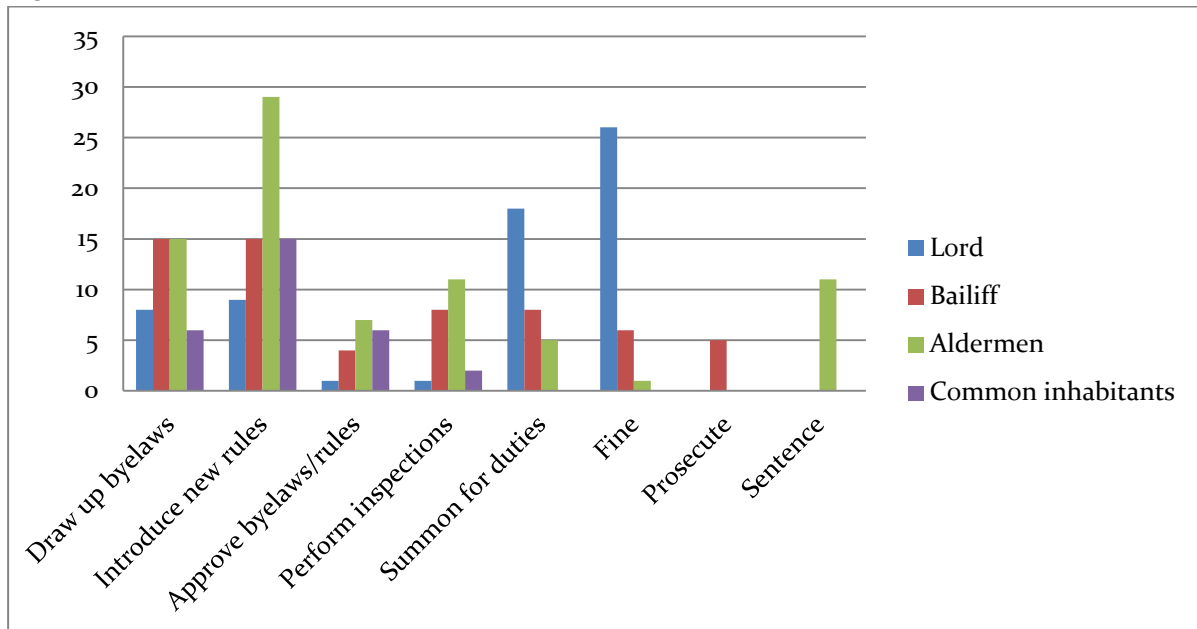
³³⁵ Go around the common wastelands and boundaries every 14 days together and with each other. Gielens, A. (1939). "Keuren Van Ekeren," *Oudheid en Kunst* 30(1).

³³⁶ For example: "Alle keuren en breuken waar geen bijzondere ordonnantie of kostuime van is, hoe en in welke manier die verdeeld en bekeerd moet worden, volgens het principe van 1 derdendeel aan zijne majesteit of de heer van de plaats, 1 derdendeel aan de officier en het resterende deel aan de aanbrenger." Translation: All the fines of the byelaw, where no special ordinance applies, will be divided according to the principle: one third to his majesty or the local lord, one third for the local officer and finally one third to the informer." In: De Longé, G. (1878). "Coutumes De Santhoven, De Turnhout Et De Rumpet" G. De Longé (ed.). *Coutumes Du Pays Et Duché De Brabant: Quartier D'anvers*. Brussel, Gobbaerts; Verbist, F. (2007). *Costuymen Van De Hoofdrechtbank Van Zandhoven, Uitgave 1664 . Keuren En Breuken, Uitgave 1665, Zandhoven, Gemeentebestuur Zandhoven*.

³³⁷ The lord will order the heerenleuck, or to enclose by the end of march all land bordering the fences, hedges or common enclosures, so as to prevent damage done by animals, in: Van Gorp, J. (1927). "Het Keurboek Van Casterlee," *Bijdragen tot de geschiedenis* 18.

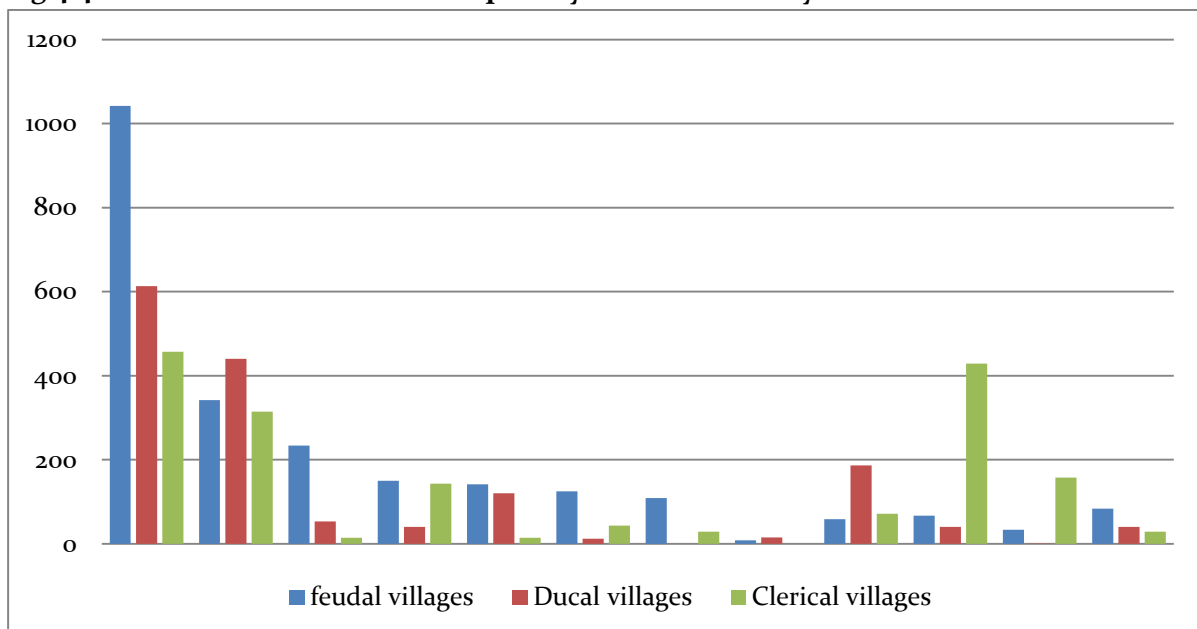
when it came to community formation and restoring the relationships within the village.³³⁸ For the lord and village governing body, this was also a prime occasion to display their power and jurisdiction to the inhabitants, and also the village itself as a whole to neighbouring villages. At that moment their perspective on the boundaries, enclosures, and agricultural practices and duties was publicly performed and had to be witnessed by the entire community.³³⁹

Fig 4.3 Division of tasks in Common Pool Resource Institutions



Source: database Maïka De Keyzer

Fig 4.4 Indices of officials most frequently referred to in byelaws



Source: database Maïka De Keyzer

³³⁸ Fletcher, D. (2003). "The Parish Boundary: A Social Phenomenon in Hanoverian England." *Rural History* 14(2).

³³⁹ De Keyzer, M., Jongepier, I. & Soens, T. (forthcoming) "Consuming Maps."

The practices of day-to-day management: the Zandhoven Heyboek revisited

Byelaws therefore give us a strong image of the normative framework established regarding the management and control of the commons, however, they remain vague on how this was done on a day-to-day basis. Yet again, the Zandhoven *heyboek* can shed light on these matters, since the expenditures made by this institution were meticulously listed between 1560 and 1582. The *heyboek* is concise when it comes to sketching the Campine routines, but nonetheless offers us some vital information on the day-to-day running of a common pool institution, by the Zandhoven heath masters (*heidemeesters*). First of all, the expenditures shed light on its precise range of duties. On a yearly basis, money was spent on a variety of things, of which some were predominant. This ranged from repairs to fences, bridges, etc., to ‘wages’ paid to those counting the animals, to expenditure connected with the payment of the *vroentecijns*. Finally, administrative costs constituted a big part of the budget. Furthermore, some entries mention assemblies of the heath masters (*heidemeesters*). One of these assemblies, in 1568, was organised to discuss the cost price per cattle unit. Two other assemblies, in 1569, specifically dealt with infringements of rules. The first offender was Gielis Gijssels who was caught when cutting sods in a non-designated area. The second was Laureys Van Hove, who apparently illegally levelled a meadow. However, we do not know if, or how, these offenders were punished, since there is no mention of a fine or any other type of punishment (cfr. *infra*).

Furthermore, the *heyboek* allows us to establish the names of those engaged in the management of the ‘common’ and we can therefore make an attempt to reconstruct their social position. Inconveniently, however, there are no other sources preserved for sixteenth-century Zandhoven, so we cannot reconstruct the background of these particular individuals. We can, however, determine if they were among the main animal-owners of the village, since the cattle units per user were recorded in the *heyboek*. Twenty names were mentioned in the expenditure section of the accounts. Five of them (constituting 20 percent) were only involved in repairs and the construction of fences and bridges. All of them grazed less cattle units than the village average, amounting to only 3.7. Two of the people that were listed were *schutters*, responsible for catching trespassing animals. One of them, Adriaen Vervoirts, placed more or less the average amount of cattle units on the village commons, whereas the other, Claes Mertens, grazed slightly less units than the village average. This, very preliminary investigation, confirms the fact that there was indeed some involvement of ‘ordinary’ villagers in the daily government of the commons. The thirteen other people explicitly mentioned were probably *heidemeesters*. Twelve of them (92.03 percent) owned more – usually significantly more – animals than the village average, indicating that formal government was firmly in the hands of the independent peasants. When it comes to the daily practices of the formally institutionalised government of the commons, therefore, the practices as recorded by the *heyboek* are indeed quite similar to what the analysis of the byelaws has suggested.³⁴⁰

A round-up on formal institutions

An attempt has been undertaken above to answer the following questions on the formal management of commons: who had a say in the regulation of the village commons and who controlled the observance of this regulation and sanctioned possible offenders? What exactly was the role of the grassroots-level, including village members of all ranks and positions? Was

³⁴⁰ RAA, OGA Zandhoven, 148. Heyboek of the village of Zandhoven, 1559-1582

there a predominance of the *melior pars* of village society, in correspondence with Tim Soens's findings for the Flemish waterboards? First of all, it would seem that many different people / groups participated in regulation and control: the lord and his representative (the bailiff), but also the village community as a whole, and its representatives, the village aldermen. However, as we have seen, not all of these parties were equally important or powerful when it came to controlling the commons at a formal level.

In most villages – although there are one or two exceptions – the ability to regulate lay in the hands of the *melior pars* of village society, consisting of a strong controlling influence of the lord himself, or his representative, the bailiff. The writing-up of the village byelaws was undertaken mainly by aldermen and bailiffs, even though all *ingesetenen* of the village were often mentioned, although this is more likely due to the need for an audience in order to complete the ritual of writing-up. In some villages every inhabitant was allowed to make suggestions for new, necessary rules, however, even then the village aldermen mostly acted as intermediaries. When it came to controlling or sanctioning, lordly and village representatives (i.e. bailiffs and aldermen) were predominant yet again, even though there was indeed room for broader participation since the cooperation of several villagers was need for the day-to-day control as well as the use of their expertise.

So, the regulation and control of the village commons were indeed dominated by the *melior pars* of the village community, but still, even formally, there was room for participation of 'ordinary' villagers. In some ways the Campine commons were therefore governed by the upper-layers of the grassroots-level of society. The village community as a whole – or all the *ingesetenen* – was involved, even though the village aldermen and the lordly bailiff served to exist as some sort of filter. It is furthermore important to note the fact that – even though we can perceive a predominance of the 'better part' of the village community – the government of the commons formally remained in the hands of the local population. In contrast to, for example, the Coastal area's waterboards, which became increasingly dominated by urban landowners, the Campine commons were, and remained, a community-controlled region throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The fact that 'locals' were the main party responsible for the management of the common waste, could serve as one explanation for their continued existence up until the end of the eighteenth century (cfr. the concept of 'environmentalism of the poor').

4.3.2 Informal practices: breaking the byelaws?

By relying exclusively on normative sources, it would appear that the 'the average villager' had only a rather limited influence on the management of their commons. Nonetheless, Campine peasants' greatest power was their ability to circumvent formal institutions and create, mould, and employ custom to whatever ends suited their needs best. Informal institutions operated in parallel alongside the institutions presided by the village governing body and, more often than not, went against the rules and concepts introduced by the lord, bailiff, and aldermen. One excellent example of this has recently been described in an article by Maïka De Keyzer, Iason Jongepier and Tim Soens. They discuss the refusal of peasants who herded cattle and sheep through the common waste lands, to comply with the formally described limits. As a symbol of the lord's and village's jurisdiction, village boundaries were one of the most important communal affairs. According to Fletcher, visiting the boundaries was a festive as well as

instructive activity presided by the lord and the entire community in order to create a village identity and prevent any trespassers from breaching those limits. By combining religious processions together with visiting the boundaries, its almost 'sacred' character trickled down to villagers.³⁴¹ The same kind of recurrent visiting of the boundaries as a communal activity, gathering both 'ordinary' inhabitants, the village governing body and neighbouring communities, was a well-known practice in pre-modern Campine villages. Nevertheless, these strict and hierarchal boundaries were repeatedly rejected by the day-to-day users of the commons who favoured boundary zones which suited their grazing trails, rather than strict limits. Despite numerous conflicts, renewed visitations, setting of boundary markers, etc., these practices survived for centuries. Until the eighteenth century formal boundaries were often defied through own notions of space.³⁴² This clearly indicates that there was quite some room for manoeuvre in addition to the formal rules and institutions, allowing villagers to pursue their own strategies.

Moreover, not every aspect of village life was as meticulously arranged through village byelaws. Several matters concerning the commons were of no direct interest to the lord and his bailiff. As a result those matters remained implicit in the local byelaws, and therefore subject to informal regulations and custom. Chris Dyer notes that for late-medieval English villages in the Midlands, certain essential topics, such as crop choices, crop rotations or fencing, are nearly always absent from byelaws.³⁴³ Even though unwritten rules could prove disastrous for peasant communities, when they were challenged before court or put under pressure by outsiders or lords, they could actually strengthen villagers. By complying with vague or informal rules, they could easily be adapted, taking into account their own changing needs when it came to the use of the commons, without interference of the lord or third parties.³⁴⁴ How peasant communities dealt with these situations remains rather vague. According to Christopher Dyer, the village meeting, a regular gathering of the members of the community, was crucial for the management of the communal affairs.³⁴⁵ For the Campine area, there is some scarce evidence that peasants had their own village meetings.³⁴⁶ Because many of the design principles were left unwritten and undefined, therefore, meetings of the sort Dyer described, must have been a necessity.

Finally, several formal rules proved to be mere normative regulations that, in practice, were mostly neglected. Sanctioning is one of the best examples of this. While the Campine byelaws explicitly mention rules, corresponding fines, as well as the official responsible for collecting them, no evidence can be found to prove the implementation of the sanctions. Apart from the fine collected by the *vorster* or *schutter* for catching straying cattle, most fines were bound to end up with the bailiff. In Turnhout and Herentals several centuries of bailiff accounts have survived.³⁴⁷ Fines or compositions collected for correctional offences are

³⁴¹ Fletcher, D. (2003). "The Parish Boundary."

³⁴² De Keyzer, M., Jongepier, I. & Soens, T. (forthcoming) "Consuming Maps."

³⁴³ Dyer, C. (2013). "The role of the village meeting in organising open fields in medieval England." *Rural History* 2013. Berne.

³⁴⁴ Falvey, H. (2011). "The Articulation, Transmission and Preservation of Custom in the Forest Community of Duffield (Derbyshire)," R. Hoyle (ed.). *Custom, Improvement and the Landscape in Early Modern Britain*. Farnham, Ashgate.

³⁴⁵ Dyer, C. (2013). "The role of the village meeting."

³⁴⁶ In chapter 7 I present the case of a list of villagers confirming or opposing a village loan. This at least indicates the fact that villagers met up to discuss these topics

³⁴⁷ ARA, *Chambre de comptes*, 12983-12988. *Baillif accounts of the Land of Turnhout*, 1403-1600

abundantly present in these accounts, however, fines or compositions for infractions of byelaw rules on the commons are surprisingly absent. Even though the registers saved space for a list of fines concerning trespassing on the commons, barely any fine was ever recorded. Thomas Cools has furthermore investigated the accounts of the bailiff of Zandhoven and came to the same conclusion: for a period of 100 years (1550-1650) there were hardly any breaches of the common byelaws.³⁴⁸ The ones that were listed concerned the felling of trees, the cutting of wood, and the breaching of fences, all offences grave enough to appear before the lord, or his representative. Guido Van Dijck notices that this changes from the 1670s onwards, when the inspection of roads, rivers, and fences became obligatory and after the government made a point of the writing-up of complete accounts. However, even then, it was predominantly the illegal felling of trees, cutting of wood, and breaching of fences that induced punishment. None of the fifteenth and sixteenth century officials operated, therefore, in the manner prescribed by the byelaws. Consequently, how trespassing was prevented or punished in day-to-day practice remains a mystery. Either officials did collect fines without registering them, or community members themselves used social pressure and forms of punishment according to custom. Whatever the case, neither community or officials had to account for their actions to the lord, and they were therefore able to operate virtually independently.

4.4 Conclusion

Let us first resume the central question of this chapter: who benefitted from the use of the village commons and who controlled the use of this institution? The answer to this question is rather nuanced and complex: to a certain extent all users (i.e. all members of the village community) benefitted from the village commons and all of them, more or less, participated in setting the rules and controlling for compliance. However, some villagers benefitted a bit more than others. The village's economic upper-layer was the main beneficiary of the Campine commons, since they were able to use all aspects of the commons, ranging from the digging of peat and sods to the grazing of sheep. The fact that there are indications that a fixed entrance fee had to be paid was also quite advantageous for these upper-layers, since it was a lesser burden for them than for their poorer fellow-villagers. Furthermore, when it came to setting the rules and controlling them, village aldermen (overwhelmingly stemming from the economic upper-layers) were also predominant. They had most of the formal influence and power, and acted as intermediaries between their fellow-villagers and the lord when it came to the introduction of new rules.

However, the durability of the Campine commons system was firmly indebted to its relative openness for other community members as well. The fact that cottagers and micro-smallholders were allowed to use the commons, and indeed do so continuously, is probably a defining feature in explaining the convivium between the upper layer of independent peasants and a large mass of less-well off villagers and the stability of the Campine system. Even though they might have reaped fewer fruits from the use of the commons than the economic upper-

³⁴⁸ Cools, T. (2013), *De evolutie van de regelgeving op de Kempense gemene gronden. 16^{de}-18^{de} eeuw*, unpublished paper: 33-34

layer, the fact that every medium-wealthy to poor villager could and did make use of the commons, made all Campine villagers – to a certain extent – stakeholders when it came to safeguarding the commons. And although participation in decision-making was dominated by the political elite, informal mechanisms left some room for a more creative way of applying the rules or even changing them. Thanks to these more informal mechanisms, the system was actually rather supple.

This pliability is probably an explanation for the continued existence of the Campine commons throughout the Ancien Régime: although the formal set of rules might seem rather strict and unvarying and the procedures to introduce new rules rather stringent, informal changes and adaptations were much more easily achieved. Stability was thus achieved through pliability and a certain openness to change. Furthermore, the management of the Campine commons continuously remained in the hands of the local population (together with the lordly representative) – albeit it to a certain extent a limited group – without the interference of urban landowners, for example. The fact that the guardians of the commons were also its main stakeholders can serve as a further explanation for its continued existence. The Campine commons therefore functioned in a very precious, sometimes unstable, but ultimately rather sturdy, way. The system was propped up by all participants, although disproportionately so by the village's economic and political elites, and these participants were not only the main beneficiaries, but also the prime guardians of the Campine commons.

5

CAMPINE PEASANTS AND MARKET INTEGRATION. ACTIVITIES ON THE PRE-MODERN COMMODITY AND FACTOR MARKETS.

“Their activities were integrated into the market economy (even if production for markets was not the main goal), but not dependent on markets.”

(One of the characteristics of peasants, as described by Peter L. Larson, 2006)³⁴⁹

For the Low Countries – and especially Brabant – the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were a period of significant economic change. From the fifteenth century onwards, the Brabantine annual fairs in Antwerp and Bergen op Zoom prospered. In the sixteenth century Antwerp rose to become a true commercial metropolis, a vibrant centre of trade and art, buzzing with possibilities. Markets flourished; not only the market for commodities – both regular and luxury – but factor markets – markets for land, labour and capital – and the labour market reached an early peak as well. All in all it was a period of change, innovation and general upheaval. Much has been written about the impact of market development and expansion on social relations and social structures – albeit pre-eminently within the centres of this trade, the cities. Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly have written a highly influential study on the social implications of market development and economic ‘growth’ on sixteenth century Antwerp, pointing to a significant rise in inequality.³⁵⁰ Recently, this grim image has been nuanced by, among others, Bruno Blondé and Jord Hanus, pointing to the relatively prosperous evolution for the middling groups in society in, for example, the city of ‘s Hertogenbosch.³⁵¹

If and how the booming markets impacted the late medieval and early modern countryside in general, and its social structures specifically, is less well-known. Rural historiography has been one-sided, focussing mainly on the *coqs de village* type of village elites,

³⁴⁹ Larson, P. L. (2006). *Conflict and Compromise in the Late Medieval Countryside. Lords and Peasants in Durham, 1349-1400*. New York, Routledge: 9

³⁵⁰ Lis, C. and Soly, H. (1980). *Armoede en kapitalisme in pre-industrieel Europa*. Antwerpen, Standaard

³⁵¹ Blondé, B. (2004). “Bossche bouwvakkers en belastingen. Nadenken over economische groei, levensstandaard en sociale ongelijkheid in de zestiende eeuw”. B. Blondé, B. De Munck and F. Vermeylen (eds.). *Doodgewoon: mensen en hun dagelijks leven in de geschiedenis: liber amicorum Alfons K.L. Thijs* Antwerpen, UFSIA, Centrum voor Bedrijfs geschiedenis: 45-62. & Hanus, J. (2010). *Affluence and Inequality in the Low Countries. The City of 's-Hertogenbosch in the Long Sixteenth Century, 1500-1600*. History Department. Antwerpen, University of Antwerp.

whose market activities were considered one of the primary preconditions for elite membership. These *coqs de village*, who were often large tenant farmers, were engaged in a commercial type of agriculture, specialising in produce for the market and accumulating resources.³⁵² Furthermore, these *coqs de village* provided the main gateway to market services for their peasant fellow-villagers, offering ploughing and transport services, acting as the main creditors, etc. These peasants often repaid the tenant farmers with their labour.³⁵³ In this way, the peasants of Inland Flanders clearly became economically dependent on the village tenant farmers. We have already established that Campine villages had a social structure that was markedly different from the one in eighteenth-century Inland Flanders. The question, then, is: how did markets function in a peasant society, such as the Campine area? Did, for example, independent peasants in the Campine use them for accumulation (of, for example, money or land) or the creation of dependency? Or did markets play a different part in the lives of the village's upper layer in a peasant-dominated region?

Although research does indicate that all countryside inhabitants from large farmers to small cottagers used markets - from the Scandinavian peasants living under the sun division³⁵⁴ to Eastern European peasants confronted with a wave of feudalisation³⁵⁵ - the bonds between peasants and markets have, however, proven to be a distinctly more complicated matter. Firstly, the nature of the relationship between peasants and markets has been a matter of intense discussion. In the neo-Marxist and neo-Malthusian theories of the seventies, peasants and markets belonged to two different worlds. The godfather of peasant studies, the Russian agronomist Alexander Chayanov propounded a distinctly negative view of peasants and markets³⁵⁶, suggesting that peasants were market averse and more inclined to shun risks. This vision was confirmed by renowned historians such as Michael Postan. Postan recognised the fact that peasants did, in fact, use markets, but suggested this was not their natural inclination. Peasants were fundamentally subsistence-oriented and turned to the market mainly because they were forced to.³⁵⁷ On the other hand, historians studying the market development and commercialisation from a neo-Smithian point of view, have focussed strongly on the role of the cities as prime movers. It has been argued that if the countryside became market-integrated, this was due to incentives given by the late medieval cities. Jan De Vries can be cited as an example of this, considering rural production as an endogenous answer to urban demand.³⁵⁸

More recently, however, this dichotomy has been overcome. In peasant studies, market activities are increasingly considered as being part of a mixed portfolio of activities, portraying

³⁵² An example of a study focussing on this particular group and its market strategies: Moriceau, J. M. (1994). *Les fermiers de l'Île-de-France - XVe-XVIIIe siècle*. Paris, Fayard.

³⁵³ As described in: Lambrecht, T. (2003). "Reciprocal exchange, credit and cash: agricultural labour markets and local economies in the Southern Low Countries during the eighteenth century." *Continuity and Change* 18(2): pp. 237-261. & Vermoesen, R. (2010). "Paardenboeren in Vlaanderen. Middelaars en commercialisering van de vroegmoderne rurale economie in de regio Aalst 1650-1800." *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis* 7(1): 3-37

³⁵⁴ For example: Myrdal, J. (2008). "Women and Cows - Ownership and Work in Medieval Sweden." *Ethnologia Scandinavica* 38: 61-80.

³⁵⁵ Guzowski, P. (2005). "A changing economy: models of peasant budgets in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Poland." *Continuity and Change* 20(1): 9-25.

³⁵⁶ Chayanov, A., D. Thorner, et al. (1986). *A. V. Chayanov on the theory of peasant economy*, Madison, Wis., Madison Wisconsin Press.

³⁵⁷ Postan, M. M. (1973). *Essays on medieval agriculture and general problems of the medieval economy*. New York, Cambridge University Press.

³⁵⁸ De Vries, J. (1974). *The Dutch rural economy in the Golden Age, 1500-1700*. New Haven, Yale University Press.

peasants as the ultimate 'anti-specialists'.³⁵⁹ This is confirmed by several historians who firmly stress the importance of subsistence farming, but point both towards the possibilities and necessity of market participation. Paul Warde, for example, takes a very pragmatic stance, stating that peasants were indeed inclined to meet subsistence needs first, but that this did not imply that they shunned market participation.³⁶⁰ Ulrich Pfister takes it a step further, stating that:

*"Peasants in many parts of early modern Western Europe were far from practising a subsistence economy. Rather, they made systematic use of a broad range of markets. On product markets they sold foodstuffs such as grain, dairy products and manufactures and in return bought goods to complement domestic subsistence production with consumption goods. Areas with many land-poor families saw the emergence of labour markets for servants and day-labourers, partly coupled with systems of seasonal and/or life-cycle-specific migration. Where land titles were sufficiently explicit and secure, mortgage credit and land markets emerged."*³⁶¹

Pfister's description seems to fit the Campine area perfectly, speaking of areas combining subsistence production and market activity, with a certain amount of land poverty and strong property rights.

Secondly, even though markets were present in the lives of pretty much every pre-modern countryside inhabitant, there were considerable regional differences in the degree of market activity – even between peasant regions. These regional differences can be explained in two different ways. The most dominant way of explaining differences in market functioning is the neo-institutionalist approach. In the slipstream of Douglas North's groundbreaking studies³⁶², many historians have looked at institutions and institutional constraints to explain whether markets operated and how. Epstein, for example, is an exponent of this theory, comparing, for example, the regions of Tuscany and Sicily because, he claims, "*similar property relations will provide different incentive structures for peasants depending on the wider institutional context in which production takes place*". In his view, peasants made rational decisions based on the institutional context in which they operated.³⁶³ In the Low Countries, Jaco Zuijderduijn wrote a study on medieval capital markets in Holland, an institution which – according to Zuijderduijn – played a major part in the rise of Holland.³⁶⁴ Jessica Dijkman furthermore dedicated a study to the organisation of late-medieval commodity markets in Holland, in the cities as well on the countryside, in a search for the roots of the institutions which proved to be so profitable during the Golden Age.³⁶⁵ If peasants were not prime market-users, this was not due to an inherent conservatism or a deep-felt fear of buying and selling

³⁵⁹ See for example: Van der Ploeg, J. D. (2009). *The new peasantries: struggles for autonomy and sustainability in an era of empire and globalization*. Abingdon, Earthscan.

³⁶⁰ As formulated in: Warde, P. (2006). "Subsistence and sales: the peasant economy of Württemberg in the early seventeenth century." *Economic History Review* LIX(2): 289-319.

³⁶¹ Pfister, U. (2007). "Rural land and credit markets, the permanent income hypothesis and proto-industry: evidence from early modern Zurich." *Continuity and Change* 22(3): 489

³⁶² For example: North, D. C. (1990). *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

³⁶³ Epstein, S. R. (1991). "Cities, Regions and the Late Medieval Crisis: Sicily and Tuscany Compared." *Past and Present* 130: 3-50.

³⁶⁴ Zuijderduijn, C. J. (2009). *Medieval Capital Markets. Markets for Renten, State Formation and Private Investment in Holland (1300-1550)*. Leiden, Brill.

³⁶⁵ Dijkman, J. (2011). *Shaping Medieval Markets. The organisation of commodity markets in Holland, c. 1200-1450*. Leiden, Brill.

things, rather, it was – according to these neo-institutionalists – due to an unfavourable institutional context.

However, this focus on institutions has somewhat led attention away from the socio-economic implications of, and structures behind, market development. Another strand of research focuses specifically on the social structures behind markets and suggests that differences in market interaction were linked to larger differences in between – what Erik Thoen would label – social agrosystems. The impact and role markets played could vary greatly between different social agrosystems, as is meticulously illustrated by Erik Thoen and Tim Soens, who have focussed on the differences between the markets of Coastal and Inland Flanders when it came to the functioning of factor markets. In the Coastal region the polder, villages were characterised by quite some upheaval in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. During this period, the Coastal polders underwent large-scale commercialisation, causing the expropriation (and later on even proletarianisation) of small-scale peasants and the rise of large tenant farms, operating on a large scale and specialised in production for the ever-growing markets. Land and credit markets played an essential part in this polarisation process since they enabled the accumulation of wealth by a minority of farmers, while at the same time accelerating the structural impoverishment of a large part of the Coastal inhabitants. In Inland Flanders, a completely different situation can be perceived. Land and credit markets mainly perpetuated the existing structures. This region was characterised by a symbiosis between some large farmers (true *coqs de village*) and a large majority of small peasants. Due to the land and credit market these small peasants were able to maintain their business model, based on domestic, non-specialised production, whereas large farmers could use the credit market to strengthen their position vis-à-vis their peasant fellow-villagers.³⁶⁶

Departing from the ideas of Thoen and Soens on the impact of social structures on market use, I want to focus on the specifics of market functioning in a peasant region with commons such as the Campine area. In this chapter, I want to argue that the Campine markets existed on a ‘formal institutional’ level, one not very different from their counterparts in more commercial regions. The fact that the Campine area remained a region dominated by peasants and never swung over to a more commercial type of agriculture can therefore not be explained by looking solely at institutions, since Campine institutions were by no means unique or different. The position of economic actors, their interests and strategies, their relations – among themselves and with the outside world – determined the effectiveness of institutions, namely the extent to which peasants made use of markets. The specific social structures of the Campine area functioned as a prism through which this standard set of institutions created a certain effect.

It is my aim to focus on the functioning of commodity and factor markets in the Campine area during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, to argue that the functioning of these markets was strongly determined by, and embedded in, a peasant way of life, and especially by that of the independent peasants. I will try to reconstruct the activity of Campine villagers on these markets. Which markets did the Campine peasants use and how often did they engage in market activities? To what extent did markets have an elite-enabling potential

³⁶⁶ Thoen, E. and T. Soens (2004). Appauvrissement et endettement dans le monde rural: étude comparative du crédit dans les différents systèmes agraires en Flandre au bas Moyen Age et au début de l'Epoque Moderne. *Il mercato della terra: secc. 13-18*. Prato, Istituto Internazionale die Storia Economica "F. Datini": 703-720. & Thoen, E. and T. Soens (2009). Credit in rural Flanders, c.1250-c.1600: its variety and significance. P. R. Schofield and T. Lambrecht (eds.) *Credit and the rural economy in North-western Europe, c.1200-c.1850*. Turnhout, Brepols: 19-38.

and how was this made concrete? To try and formulate an answer to these questions, three case studies have been selected. Firstly, I will focus on the involvement of the Campine villagers in commodity markets by examining one of the most distinguishing economic activities of this region: sheep-breeding and wool production. Secondly, I will attempt to get some insight into the functioning of the Campine labour market – although, due to a lack of sources, this will be only very limited. And finally, I will scrutinize the functioning of two Campine factor markets – namely the land and credit market – and also briefly touch upon the functioning of the Campine rural labour market. This should provide us with a good impression of the way Campine peasants – and mainly the better-off villagers – interacted with the market.

5.1 Campine commoners and commodity markets: sheep-breeding, wool production and market opportunities

5.1.1 Some general remarks on commodity markets and their institutional framework

Before we can turn to our case study on sheep-breeding and wool production, it seems relevant to try and make an assessment of the markets the Campine peasants could and would have used as both sellers and buyers and the types of products they brought to the market. Since source material shedding light on these matters is extremely scarce, I can only give a rather incomplete overview. The Campine area was situated closely to one of the most important commercial centres of its time: Antwerp. It seems, however, quite unlikely that Campine peasants were frequent sellers on the Antwerp markets when it came to the selling of day-to-day products. Most of the Campine market towns or *vrijheden* (Herentals, Hoogstraten, Turnhout, Geel, Mol, Arendonk, Oirschot, Oisterwijk, 's Hertogenbosch³⁶⁷) had a weekly market and peasants from the immediate vicinity were obliged – in first instance – to offer their products on these markets. Most of these market privileges date back to the first half of the fourteenth century.³⁶⁸ So, for instance, if one was an inhabitant of one of the villages of the Land of Hoogstraten (Minderhout, Meer, Meerle, Wortel and Rijkevorsel), your 'designated market' was obviously the weekly market in Hoogstraten. These markets were situated closely to the Campine villages, however, in essence they were urban markets. This domination of 'urban' markets can also be perceived in Flanders and – to a somewhat lesser extent – in Holland. It stands in stark contrast to the English case, where rural markets were omnipresent.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁷ More information can be found in: Craane, M. (2013). *Spatial Patterns. The late-medieval and early-modern economy of the Bailiwick of 's-Hertogenbosch from an interregional, regional and local spatial perspective*. University of Tilburg: 230

³⁶⁸ See, for example: Verellen, J. R. (1955). "Lakennijverheid en lakenhandel van Herentals in de 14e, 15e en 16e eeuw." *Taxandria*. XXVII(3-4): pp. 118-180; Rombauts, W. (1995). "Van transit tot periferie? Hoogstraten, 1550-1885." *Bijdragen tot de geschiedenis* 78(1-4): 129-169 & Van Gorp, J. (1953). "Turnhout in de 14de eeuw." *Taxandria*. XXV: 3-16.

³⁶⁹ The differences between the English and Dutch case are discussed in: Dijkman, J. (2011). *Shaping Medieval Markets*.

Flemish cities, furthermore, had a strong grip on the surrounding countryside, often smothering its economic potential. The powerful Flemish cities, most notably Bruges, Ghent and Ypres, had a complete monopoly on the production of certain types of goods – most notably cloth. *Banmijlen* or banmiles were present which implies that the production of cloth, for example, was forbidden in a certain area around the city, sometimes reaching as far as 30 kilometres. These cities, furthermore, had a monopoly on staple markets and controlled the most important roads and waterways.³⁷⁰ It seems rather self-evident that a small-sized town of regional importance, such as Hoogstraten (and nearly every other Campine town), was not able to control its surroundings in the same comprehensive way as, for example, Bruges, a city of international fame and esteem. Antwerp, however, had a much stronger position and was still relatively close to the Campine heartland. An economic monopoly on raw materials or the production of textiles was even less likely. Competition from small and medium-sized cities proved problematic. Since the production and trade of quality cloth was the privilege of Tienen, Lier, Mechelen, Leuven, Brussels, and 's-Hertogenbosch, as well as Antwerp, not one of them was powerful enough to exclude the others.³⁷¹ Monopolies or staple markets existed, however, because of competing claims and conflicts within the urban network, these could be circumvented. *Banmijlen* (or banmiles) did, however, also exist in the Campine area. Herentals, a town with a significant cloth industry in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was, for example, given a ducal privilege in 1327 which enabled it to establish a *banmile* of 3 miles (or about 17 kilometres) around the city of Herentals.

We do, however, find traces of Campine products being brought to the Antwerp market as well. In all likelihood bulk could be sold as was the case in Flanders. This probably meant that local traders bought up rather large quantities to bring them to the Antwerp market. For the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries no examples could be found, however, for the eighteenth century there are some indications that this was indeed common practice. In eighteenth-century Beerse a certain Gillis Somers often acted as a buyer-up of cattle in order to sell the animals on the urban markets.³⁷² Similar transactions might have been present in previous centuries too. This habit of transactions taking place through middlemen was also present in peasant regions that were dominated by intense proto-industrial activities in the eighteenth century such as around Aalst or Oudenaarde, for example. This could be perceived as an institutional setback, however, this mechanism also shielded the Inland Flanders peasants from direct market participation on the – still rather imperfect – pre-modern markets.³⁷³ The activities of middlemen can furthermore explain why Van der Wee found traces of Campine products in the accounts of several sixteenth century Antwerp institutions, such as linen, charcoal and, most notably, Campine butter.³⁷⁴

³⁷⁰ On the endless territorial conflicts and constant shifting of wool staples between Flemish towns see: van Uytven, R. (2000). *De gewestelijke en locale overheidsinstellingen in Brabant en Mechelen tot 1795*. Brussels.; Nicholas, D. (1992). *Medieval Flanders*. London: 190-1 & Dijkman, J. (2010) *Shaping Medieval Markets: 165-70*.

³⁷¹ Peeters, J. (1993). "De-Industrialisation in the Small and Medium-Sized Towns in Brabant at the End of the Middle Ages. A Case Study: The Cloth Industry of Tienen". H. Van Der Wee (ed.), *The Rise and Decline of Urban Industries: 170.*; Stabel, P. (1995). *De kleine stad in Vlaanderen: bevolkingsdynamiek en economische functies van de kleine en secundaire stedelijke centra in het Gentse kwartier (14de-16de eeuw)* Brussel, Paleis der Academiën: 275

³⁷² RAA, OGA Beerse, 6. Lists of sold cows, sheep and lambs, 1777-1783. Processed by Filip Van Roosbroeck

³⁷³ Ronsijn, W. (2011). *Commerce and the countryside: the role of urban weekly markets in Flemish rural society, 1750-1900*. Gent. & Vermoesen, R. (2010). "Paardenboeren in Vlaanderen": 3-37.

³⁷⁴ van der Wee, H. (1963). *The growth of the Antwerp market and the European economy (fourteenth-sixteenth centuries)*. The Hague, Nijhoff.

The picture that arises from this very general assessment of Campine peasants and their use of markets is a nuanced one. Certainly, there were some forms of what (neo-)institutionalists would label institutional constraints such as the *banmijlen*, for example. However, as we have seen, these same constraints – or even more far-reaching ones – were present in the County of Flanders as well. This did not prevent the development of a rather commercialised rural economy in the Coastal area, or the emergence of a very lively proto-industry in peasant-dominated Inland Flanders. Institutions alone, therefore, clearly cannot fully explain the divergent paths of the way different regions developed. Coastal and Inland Flanders – and, to a lesser extent, also the Campine area – were liable to the same restrictions, however, they developed clearly divergent economic structures. Coastal Flanders underwent large-scale commercialisation which caused the expropriation (and later on even proletarianisation) of small-scale peasants and the rise of large tenant farms, operating on a large-scale, and specialised in production for the ever-growing markets. Inland Flanders was characterised by a symbiosis between some large farmers (true *coqs de village*) and a large majority of small peasants, engaging in proto-industrial activities. The Campine area, on the other hand, remained a peasant region, dominated by mixed-farming and strongly dependent on the commons. However, we have also seen that Campine peasants were indeed active on the markets as both sellers and buyers, although in the cases I have put forward they were somewhat shielded by the presence of intermediaries: local buyers when it came to selling and the village community / church institution when it came to buying. The acts of individual peasants have remained somewhat more shielded from our view. I will, however, attempt to shed light on the interaction of individual peasants and the market by looking at sheep breeding and wool production.

5.1.2 Campine villagers and their flocks: a tale as old as times?

The connection between the Campine heath lands and the flocks of sheep quietly wandering around on them has proved to be very intricate. Societies dominated by heath land were mostly also centres of sheep-breeding. The Norfolk Brecklands³⁷⁵, are probably the best studied heath-land region in Europe and were, for example, an important centre of wool production and characterised by huge flocks (of over 1000 sheep) grazing the commons and the open fields in a foldcourse system.³⁷⁶ In the present-day Netherlands, in the Veluwe and Drenthe (sandy regions also dominated by heath and moors), flocks of sheep were an inherent part of the scenery. There remains, however, much disagreement as to the precise origins of Campine sheep-breeding and wool-production. Astrid De Wachter summarizes both points of view in her work, summing up the arguments of both Frank Theuws and Karel Leenders. Theuws states that Campine sheep-breeding was, first and foremost, a ducal initiative which developed from the thirteenth century onwards. According to him, the Duke of Brabant wanted to provide 'his' urban textile centres with wool, making them less dependent on the supplies coming from England or Flanders. In order to bring this about, he decided to use the Campine area as a breeding ground for sheep by using the omnipresent commons. This went hand-in-

³⁷⁵ As studied by Allison, K. J. (1957) *The Sheep-Corn Husbandry of Norfolk in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries. The agricultural history review*, 5: 12-30

³⁷⁶ This implies that the owner's sheep were moved through certain established fields, via established routes after the harvest, grazing on the stubble and thus manuring the land

hand with a broader economic and political *tabula rasa*. New structures, such as benches of aldermen, emerged, abbeys were founded to supervise production, and markets found their way into the Campine area. All in all Theuws's vision is an extremely top-down one, portraying the Duke of Brabant as a *deus ex machina*, someone finally putting the backward Campine area on the map. Unsurprisingly, his visions provoked severe criticism.

In his extensive study on the early development of the Maas-Demer-Scheldt area Leenders, for example, casts doubts on Theuws's findings. He claims that there is no evidence of Campine sheep-breeding prior to 1350, let alone wool production with Campine wool. According to him, the 'development' of the Campine area was not only instigated by the duke, but also by demographic pressure and internal evolutions. The same vision is more or less confirmed by Spek and Vangheluwe, who situate the beginnings of Campine sheep-breeding in the fourteenth century. Leo Adriaenssen confirms Leenders's vision by pointing out that we can only find evidence of cloth production in the city of Oisterwijk from 1380 onwards. Furthermore, cloth guilds only emerged at the beginning of the fifteenth century which, as Leenders has suggested, seems to indicate that cloth production was a relatively late development.³⁷⁷ Based on the somewhat dated studies of Floris Prims, Adriaan Verhulst proposes an opposing view, that Brabantine wool production was – up until the middle of the thirteenth century – mainly catered for by Campine sheep. This statement is mainly based on sources from the rich charter collection of the abbey of Tongerlo, whose sheep-breeding strategies are, however, not necessarily representative of an average peasant's business. The true origins and importance of Campine sheep-breeding and wool supply in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries remains somewhat enigmatic, therefore. This is mainly because source material is extremely scarce and scattered and thus prone to multiple interpretations. Thankfully, for the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, source material is – although still not abundantly present – sufficient to make some statements regarding sheep-breeding and wool production.

5.1.3 Sheep supply. Campine peasants as sheep-owners

Flock-sizes

Before we can focus on the position and various motivations of the Campine sheep-owners, it is of course necessary to make an assessment of the importance of sheep and the extent of their presence in a precise way. Whereas sheep-owning and flock numbers for the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries appear to be rather hard to assess, it is possible to reconstruct flock sizes for some villages in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Nonetheless, the source material which sheds light on the precise number of sheep grazing village commons is astonishingly rare which means the numbers will only ever be rough impressions. In the '*generale enquête*' of 1593³⁷⁸, drawn up to assess the damage done by the uprisings of the last quarter of the sixteenth century, the Campine inhabitants themselves gave an estimation of their pre-riot sheep-numbers. The villagers of Olen, for example, stated that '*elke ingesetene*' or

³⁷⁷ Adriaenssen, L. (2001). "De plaats van Oisterwijk in het Kempense lakenlandschap." *Textielhistorische bijdragen* 41: 30-32

³⁷⁸ SAAntwerp, V 5. Ancien regime Archief van de stad Antwerpen, Andere overheden, Lokale overheden en heerlijkheden, België, Hertogdom Brabant, State of the villages in the *markgraafschap*, 1593, processed by Maïka De Keyzer

every inhabitant was a sheep-owner. The people from Geel claimed that 221 flocks grazed on village territory. In Loenhout, with over 1500 inhabitants, 3200 sheep were accounted for, and in Wortel - a tiny village of some 300 people - 877 sheep could be encountered.

Nonetheless, this *enquête* is still unlikely to be a perfectly trustworthy source since the Campine inhabitants used it to demonstrate the sheer horror of the Revolt and the huge damage done, thereby hoping to be compensated. Other sources, however, very much confirm the image of a society permeated by sheep. In the village of Alphen in 1514, 2619 lambs were counted for the annual collecting of the tithe. A 1553 collection of lamb tithes for the villages Essen and Nispen mentions the presence of 1597 lambs. In the early seventeenth century the village of Brecht accommodated 1573 sheep³⁷⁹ and in Rijkevorsel 2352 sheep could be encountered.³⁸⁰ The Campine villages were, therefore, populated by sheep to a greater extent than men.

Furthermore, if we are to believe the village byelaws, Campine villagers seem to be extremely preoccupied with the well-being of their sheep. The main concern of Campine sheep-owners seems to have been to prevent disease in their flocks. The village byelaws of 16 villages have been combed through and in 14 of them precautions against the spreading of diseases – in reality probability relating largely to scabies – were summed up. Sheep, defined as scabby or shaggy (*schurftig* or *ruig*), were apparently a severe threat to Campine sheep flocks. Several measures were summed up in the byelaws to prevent this disease from spreading: putting animals under quarantine, a prohibition on the buying and selling of sheep stricken by scabies, etc. This indeed reflects the importance of sheep for Campine villagers. Sheep were evidently vital to the Campine agrosystem because of their manure, which was essential to fertilising the sandy infields. In addition, wool and meat were obviously the other commercial by-products of sheep-breeding, providing the Campine sheep-owners with viable commercial opportunities.

Who were the Campine sheep owners?

Based on our extensive knowledge of, for example, Norfolk sheep-breeding, it would seem quite plausible that the main sheep-owners were predominantly lords or their tenant farmers. For the case of Northern Spain, Xavier Soldevila I Temporal, has demonstrated that – even though peasant families did own some sheep that were kept for subsistence farming – it was mostly noble lords, urban investors and rural elites who possessed immense flocks of sheep. Those animals were in turn gathered into even larger flocks and were herded by professional shepherds, in order to provide the famous merino wool.³⁸¹ For the English case, in the Norfolk Brecklands, both Cistercian and Benedictine abbeys are labelled as the most important wool exporters to the continent. Thanks to direct demesne exploitation, these abbeys owned as many as 3000 sheep per manor.³⁸² ‘Ordinary’ peasants were allowed to include some of their own sheep – the exact number depending on the size of their holdings – in these landowner flocks. However, as time went by this right became increasingly undermined by these large landowners who eventually came to dominate the whole foldcourse system, thus undermining

³⁷⁹ RAA, OGA Brecht, 2540A, Animal count, 1605

³⁸⁰ RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 3141-3149, Animal Counts, 1608

³⁸¹ Soldevila I Temporal, X. (2006). "L'élevage ovin et la transhumance en catalogne nord-occidentale (XIIIe-XIVe siècles)". P.Y. Laffont (ed.). *Transhumance et estivage en Occident. des origines au enjeux actuels*. Valence-Sur-Baïze: 109-118

³⁸² Bond, J. (2004). *Monastic landscapes*, Stroud, Tempus.

the viability of the peasant way of life.³⁸³ In the sandy peasant regions of the Low Countries – and specifically in the Campine area – sheep holding was by no means restricted to large landowners or mighty tenant farmers. Campine tenant farmers, most notably those of the powerful abbey of Tongerlo, did indeed graze sheep on the extensive common heath lands (for more information see chapter 6), however, they were certainly not the only ones doing so.³⁸⁴

What makes this region stand out in particular is the substantial size of peasant sheep-ownership. Their flocks were not as huge as those of the Campine tenant farmers, however, they were by no means negligible. In 1514, 243 households of the village of Alphen owned several lambs.³⁸⁵ In a village of some 1700 inhabitants, with some 340 heads of households, this is indeed a considerable amount (71.47 percent of all households to be exact). Alphen was located in the north of the Campine area, and was, with its extremely sandy soils, excellent for sheep-breeding. The total number of lambs amounted to 2619. In the villages of Essen and Nispen 133 people made a contribution to the lamb tithes in 1553, for a total of 1597 lambs.³⁸⁶ The division of lamb-owning is strikingly similar in both villages in both periods. In late sixteenth century Wortel, 30.5 percent of all households owned, on average, a flock of 48.72 sheep. In early seventeenth century Brecht (1605) 29.10 percent of households owned a flock of sheep, consisting of – on average – 28.6 sheep.³⁸⁷ In Rijkevorsel, in 1608 49.52 percent of all households owned on average 45.23 sheep.³⁸⁸

³⁸³ For an overview Allison, K. J. (1957) *The Sheep-Corn Husbandry* & Postgate, M. R. (1962) *The field systems of breckland. The agricultural history review*. 10: 20-101,

³⁸⁴ See chapter 6 for more information on Campine tenant farmers.

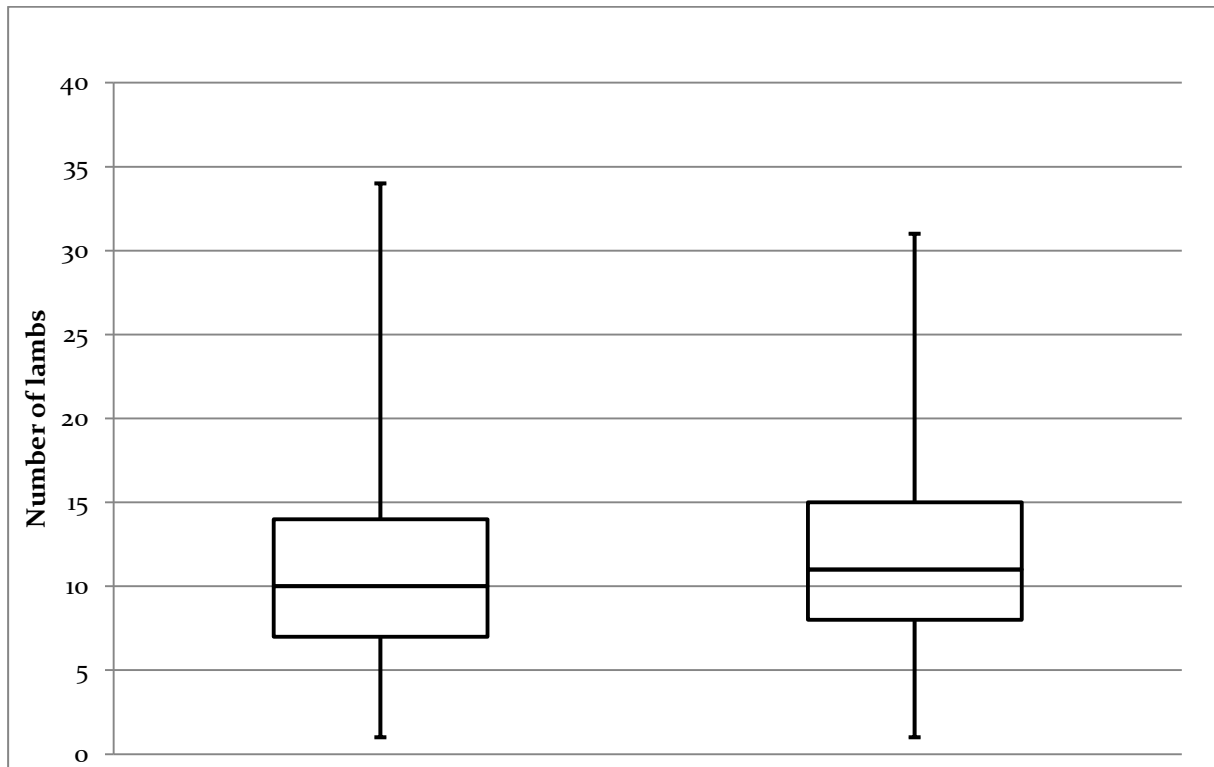
³⁸⁵ AAT, II, 688. Lamb tithes in Alphen and environment, 1514

³⁸⁶ AAT, II, 806. (Lamb) tithes, Nispen en Essen, 16th and 17th century

³⁸⁷ RAA, OGA Brecht, 2540A, Animal count, 1605

³⁸⁸ RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 3141-3149, Animal Counts, 1608

Fig 5.1 Boxplot of lamb possession, based on the lamb tithes of the abbey of Tongerlo for the villages of Alphen (1514) and Essen-Nispen (1553)



Sources: AAT, II, 688. Lamb tithes in Alphen and environment, 1514 & AAT, II, 806. (Lamb) tithes, Nispen en Essen, 16th and 17th century

Although there are differences in the number of sheep-owners and the average sizes of their flocks, we can still attempt to find out who these owners were. The *enquête* of 1593 for the village of Wortel already reveals a hint of one particular characteristic possessed by sheep-owners. Those not owning sheep have one thing in common: they are all cottagers who rent their houses and possess almost no land. Sheep-owning thus seems limited to ‘true peasants’: peasants who ‘owned’ their land (or at least held it in customary rent) and were mostly able to guarantee the survival of their family. We can, of course, then wonder about the socio-economic profile of the peasants who were the true flockmasters. It is extremely difficult to get a clear view on this aspect of sheep-ownership because it requires combining animal counts and tax registers, both of which are very rare for the Campine region. We can only attempt to sketch the socio-economic position of sheep-owners for two villages (namely Brecht and Rijkevorsel) for the early seventeenth century. For both villages we were able to identify a group of people who figured in both an animal count³⁸⁹ and a tax register of the same period.³⁹⁰ The following results are based on this corpus of people. For the village of Brecht, in 1602 32.5 percent of animal owners could be traced in a tax list, whereas in 1605 this amounted to 36 percent. In the village of Rijkevorsel, in 1608, 61.9 percent of all sheep-owners could be traced.

³⁸⁹ RAA, OGA Brecht, 2540A, Animal count, 1605; RAA, OGA Brecht, 2541. Animal count, 1602 & RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 3141-3149, Animal Counts, 1608

³⁹⁰ Based on the following tax registers: RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 3262. Contribution book, 1607 & RAA, OGA Brecht, 2529. *Aide* book, early 17th century

In Brecht, in 1602, 50 percent of all sheep-owners were part of the highest three tax deciles, while in 1605 this amounted to 58.33 percent. In Rijkevorsel, in 1608, as many as 69.69 percent of all sheep-owners belonged to the highest three tax deciles. Not surprisingly the majority of sheep-owners, possessing flocks larger than the median-value, came even more predominantly from the highest deciles. In 1602 Brecht this amounted to 57.14 percent. Three years later, in 1605, this number rose to 81.81 percent. In Rijkevorsel, in 1608, 72.22 percent of owners with flocks larger than the median came from the highest three deciles. In addition, rather strikingly, sheep-owners also tended to possess substantial amounts of cows (higher than or equal to the median value).

Sheep-owners, therefore, preponderantly came from the economic better-off groups of village society, even though they never entirely dominated the terrain. To a large extent, this group of sheep-owners therefore overlapped with the group of independent peasants. These elite-peasants worked holdings larger than 3 (or even 5) hectares, making them – relatively – able to meet their subsistence needs and even produce a surplus. Furthermore – as is also mentioned in chapter 7 – village aldermen were often among the most important sheep owners. Several lines of power therefore intersect: peasants with a holding large enough to sustain their families were also the most important sheep-owners (and cow-owners for that matter), furthermore, they played a major part in village government. These village aldermen had a significant say in the governing and managing of the commons – the most important grazing grounds of the Campine flocks. Power over the commons was therefore extremely significant for Campine sheep-owners.

For these independent peasants the market was a way of adding to their income and to secure their peasant ‘way of life’. Specialisation was never considered, let alone achieved. Campine peasants held onto their mixed farming model in which the villagers with the largest amount of arable land were also the most important sheep and cow owners. The commons were essential to secure the survival of this peasant production mode, enabling the continuous presence of animal breeding and the mixed farming model. The market thus functioned as a means of gaining extra income for independent peasants in the Campine, however, it was never the only strategy. There is, of course, one blind spot in this entire picture: the interaction of cottagers and nearly landless villagers with the market. Source material does not allow any substantial statements on this topic to be made, only possible suggestions can be made. Since most villagers – even those with very tiny plots of land – owned at least one cow, it is possible that they marketed some of this animal’s by-products. In Brecht, in 1602, 99.04 percent of all animal owners owned at least one cow. In 1605 this number still amounted to 98.41 percent. In Rijkevorsel, in 1608, something similar can be detected, with 98.10 percent of all animal owners being in possession of at least one cow. Furthermore, it is possible that these small-scale peasants engaged in proto-industrial (textile?) activities in order to add to their income although substantial evidence of this could not be found.

5.1.4 Making money. The possible profits of sheep-breeding and wool production

Animal prices

A focus on the supply side has proved that sheep were omnipresent in the Campine area and mainly belonged to the ‘independent’ peasants. However, to assess the true value of sheep breeding it is also necessary to look at possible revenues that would come from selling sheep or wool on the market. I have tried to make a reconstruction of the possible profits of the selling of the animals themselves (lamb and sheep) and the selling of wool. Let us start with the possible gains to be made from the sale of the animals themselves. Antwerp market prices are easy to come by. Scholliers has bundled fifteenth and sixteenth century Antwerp animal prices (among those of sheep and lambs) – pre-eminently based on the accounts of the Saint Elisabeth Hospital. However, these prices are probably not entirely representative for the Campine markets, where products were usually somewhat cheaper. To overcome this setback, I have decided to use the prices of sheep sales recorded in the domain accounts of the Land of Turnhout during the period 1550-1555 in order to establish the ratio between the Antwerp and Campine prices. Mary of Hungary, lady of the Land of Turnhout, built up a large sheep-breeding enterprise on the Turnhout commons (cfr. *infra*) during the 1550s. It was a short-lived activity, however, it has however provides us with animal prices, since many of these animals were sold. In order to make an assessment of the number of animals owned by the Campine peasants I have used the above-mentioned lamb tithes of the villages of Essen-Nispen (1553)³⁹¹ and Alphen (1514)³⁹² and calculated the minimum number of sheep, the first quartile, the median, the third quartile, the maximum, and the average. It should be mentioned that the numbers of sheep are derived from the number of lambs and for that reason they may not be entirely correct. Comparison with seventeenth century flock sizes for the villages of Brecht and Rijkevorsel suggest that this reconstruction might be somewhat on the low side, the findings, therefore, should probably be seen as a minimum.

Table 5.1 Lamb prices and possible profits in the sixteenth century (prices based on Scholliers)

	Alphen, 1514			Essen-Nispen (1553)		
	Number of animals	In denieren brabant	In working days of unschooled labourer	Number of animals	In denieren brabant	In working days of unschooled labourer
Price for 1 lamb		57,8	4,0		90	3,75
Minimum number of lambs	1	57,8	4,0	1	90	3,75
Q1 number of lambs	7	404,6	27,9	8	720	30

³⁹¹ AAT, II, 806. (Lamb) tithes, Nispen en Essen, 16th and 17th century

³⁹² AAT, II, 688. Lamb tithes in Alphen and environment, 1514

Median number of lambs (Q₂)	10	578	39,9	11	990	41,25
Q₃ number of lambs	14	809,2	55,8	15	1350	56,25
Maximum number of lambs (Q₄)	34	1965,2	135,5	31	2790	116,25
Average number of lambs	10,8	623	43,0	12	1080,7	1080,7

Sources: Animal numbers come from AAT, II, 688. Lamb tithes in Alphen and environment, 1514 & AAT, II, 806. (Lamb) tithes, Nispen en Essen, 16th and 17th century; Prices are derived from: Scholliers, E. (1959). *Prijzen en lonen te Antwerpen (15e en 16e eeuw)*. *Dokumenten voor de geschiedenis van prijzen en lonen in Vlaanderen en Brabant*. C. Verlinden. Brugge, Tempel. 2: 369-378. Wages from van der Wee, H. (1963). *The growth of the Antwerp market and the European economy (fourteenth-sixteenth centuries)*. The Hague, Nijhoff, processed by Jord Hanus.

Table 5.2 Sheep prices and possible profits in the sixteenth century (prices based on the Turnhout domain accounts)

	Alphen, 1514			Essen-Nispen (1553)		
	Number of animals ³⁹³	In denieren brabant	In working days of unschooled labourer	Number of animals	In denieren brabant	In working days of unschooled labourer
Price for 1 sheep		38,5	5,3		48,1	4,0
Minimum number of sheep	0,9	34,7	4,8	0,9	43,3	3,6
Q₁ number of sheep	6,3	242,7	33,5	7,2	346,3	28,9
Median number of sheep (Q₂)	9	346,7	47,8	9,9	476,2	39,7
Q₃ number of sheep	12,6	485,4	67,0	13,5	649,4	54,1
Maximum number of sheep (Q₄)	30,6	1178,9	162,6	27,9	1342,0	111,8
Average number of sheep	9,8	373,7	51,5	10,8	519,8	43,3

³⁹³ In order to reconstruct the number of sheep, I started from the number of lambs, using a 0,9 ratio, based on the analysis of eighteenth century flock composition of Filip Van Roosbroeck, which is more or less consistent with the findings of Wim Blockmans: Blockmans, W. (1970) "De rendabiliteit van de schapenteelt in Brabant tijdens de 15^{de} eeuw". *Bijdragen tot de geschiedenis*, 53(3-4): 117

Sources: Animal numbers come from AAT, II, 688. Lamb tithes in Alphen and environment, 1514 & AAT, II, 806. (Lamb) tithes, Nispen en Essen, 16th and 17th century; Prices are derived from ARA, *Chambre de comptes*, 5213. Domain account of the Land of Turnhout, 1552-1559, processed by Maïka De Keyzer. Wages from van der Wee, H. (1963). *The growth of the Antwerp market and the European economy (fourteenth-sixteenth centuries)*. The Hague, Nijhoff, processed by Jord Hanus.

In table 5.1 & 5.2 I have reconstructed the prices and profits to be made from the selling of sheep and lambs. I have decided to use the quartiles of the total number of animals as an indicator. Quartiles split up a division into four equal parts. A villager owning sheep equal to Q₁, for example, owns more sheep than 25 percent of the population and less than the other 75 percent. A Campiner owning the median number of animals (equal to Q₂) is richer / poorer in animals than 50 percent of the population. Someone owning sheep equal to Q₃ owns more sheep than 75 percent of the population and less than the 25 percent of the most important sheep-owners, and so forth. I have calculated the money that could be made from the sale of animals in *denieren Brabants*. So, for example, if a villager in Alphen owning the median number of sheep decided to sell all his animals, he would have been able to make – according to current market prices – 346,7 *denieren Brabants*, corresponding to 47,8 daily wages of a rural labourer. In the villages of Essen and Nispen a villager owning the median number of sheep would have been able to earn 476,2 *denieren Brabants*, which equals 39,7 daily wages of a rural labourer.

It is, of course, extremely unlikely that Campine sheep-owners would have decided to sell all their animals at once, so these numbers are clearly only an indication of the possible maximum profit to be made from the selling of animals (for meat). I have also included the price for 1 animal in order to give an indication of the profit to be made from the selling of individual animals. It is impossible to assess the number of lambs and sheep that peasants sold on a yearly basis. However, knowing that the median sheep-owning villager owned around 10 to 11 lambs and 9 to 10 sheep, they might indeed make a tidy sum of money from the sale of these animals; taking into account that the sale of one lamb equalled 3,75 (Essen and Nispen) to 4 (Alphen) and 1 sheep 4 (Essen-Nispen) to 5,3 (Alphen) daily wages of a rural labourer. Furthermore, investment costs for the breeding of sheep were rather low. If their flocks did not regenerate smoothly enough, sheep-owners might occasionally have felt the need to buy one or more animals on the market, however, the animals could graze on the commons, which was extraordinarily cheap (as was argued in chapter 4) and herding them was probably quite frequently carried out by young children. In this way the commons played an essential part in the market strategies of independent peasants. The byelaws firmly state that it was explicitly forbidden to make a direct profit from the selling of common assets, such as peat or sods. However, more indirect profits, such as the sale of sheep (or wool, cfr. *infra*) that grazed on these commons were clearly allowed.

Wool demand: the use of Campine wool in the cloth industry of the Low Countries

The sale of wool was, of course, another strategy that Campine sheep-owners could deploy. I have therefore attempted to reconstruct the possible profit to be made from the sale of wool and make an assessment of the uses of Campine wool in the Low Countries' lively cloth industry. It is a quite a challenge to gain an insight into wool profits and prices in the Campine area, however, luckily there is one source that sheds some light on these matters. Not only were the prices of animals recorded in the domain accounts of the Land of Turnhout, but also

the amount of wool sold and the animal-to-wool ratio can also be reconstructed since we know the number of sheep that were shorn and the amount of wool this yielded. Approximately 0.59 kilograms of wool was shorn per sheep. This is more or less consistent with the findings of M.J. Stephenson for thirteenth century Winchester, where wool yields fluctuated between 0.57 and 0.68 kilograms. Some regions, however, obtained higher yields such as Holderness, for example, where fleeces weighed some 1.45 kg.³⁹⁴ In thirteenth century Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire fleeces weighed some 0.865 kg. The most noticeable fact is, however, that the sixteenth century numbers were significantly higher, with fleeces weighing over 1.59 kg. The enclosure movement and accompanying specialisation that characterised these regions thus resulted in higher yields.³⁹⁵ The lack of true specialisation in the Campine area is probably the main explanatory factor for the – relatively – low fleece weights. Still, the marketing of wool might have generated some much-appreciated extra income. The wool from one sheep generated 16 *denieren Brabants*, which is somewhat more than a daily wage of an agricultural labourer. Sheep-breeders owning the median number of sheep could make 158 denieren (= 13,2 working days) if he sold all his animals' wool on the local and regional markets (Table 5.3).

Table 5.3 Wool prices and possible profits in the sixteenth century – Essen-Nispen (prices and production of wool per sheep based on domain accounts)

	Number of animals	Amount of wool (kg)	Price in denieren brabants	Price in working days of unschooled labourer
1 sheep		0,59	16	1,3
Minimum number of sheep	0,9	0,5	14,4	1,2
Q1 number of sheep	7,2	4,4	114,9	9,6
Median number of sheep (Q2)	9,9	6,0	158,0	13,2
Q3 number of sheep	13,5	8,2	215,5	18,0
Maximum number of sheep (Q4)	27,9	17,0	445,3	37,1
Average number of sheep	10,8	6,6	172,5	14,4

Sources: Animal numbers come from: AAT, II, 806. (Lamb) tithes, Nispen en Essen, 16th and 17th century; Prices are derived from ARA, *Chambre de comptes*, 5213. Domain account of the Land of Turnhout, 1552-1559, processed by Maïka De Keyzer. Wages from van der Wee, H. (1963). *The growth of the Antwerp market and the European economy (fourteenth-sixteenth centuries)*. The Hague, Nijhoff, processed by Jord Hanus.

³⁹⁴ Stephenson, M. J. (1988). "Wool yields in the medieval economy." *Economic History Review* XLI(3): 368-391

³⁹⁵ Bowden, P. J. (1956). "Wool supply and the woollen industry." *The Economic History Review* 9(1): 48-49

If Campine wool really functioned as a viable extra income strategy for peasants, it must also have played its part in the late medieval cloth industry. The extent of the production and use of inland wool is the real missing link of the Low Countries' historiography. It was Adriaan Verhulst who firmly stated that inland wool did indeed play its part in the medieval cloth production. He claims that inland wool used to be very popular in the early stages of cloth production (up until the middle of the thirteenth century) and partly reclaimed this position in the fifteenth century when shortages of English wool emerged and new drapery techniques came into being. He even mentions Campine wool, but mostly focuses on the wool produced by the immense flocks of the abbey of Tongerlo. Nonetheless, he also states that even 'normal' Campine peasants sold their wool on the regional markets.³⁹⁶ As has been mentioned before, a difference of opinion exists as to the precise importance of the Campine area for inland wool production, with Theuws describing the Campine area as a ducal wool-walhalla and Leenders firmly disagreeing with this.³⁹⁷

Several different opinions and strong views have been expressed, however, there is no clear stance as to the importance of inland wool and of the role of the Campine area in that respect. In an article on cloth production in the city of Oisterwijk, Leo Adriaenssen convincingly proves that sources mentioning '*Kempisch laken*' do not refer to the origin of the wool, but to the provenance of the cloth itself. Indeed, the Campine area harboured several cloth-producing centres of local and regional importance. The small town of Herentals, for example, was an important regional cloth-producing centre. From the early fourteenth century onwards mainly English wool was processed although the guild regulations also mention *hierlandsche wol*. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the Herentals cloth industry functioned relatively smoothly and successfully, however, the sixteenth century was a period of decay and severe crisis.³⁹⁸ The cloth producers of Herentals never fully recovered from its downfall. The same rise and fall of cloth production can be perceived in Diest, Geel, Eindhoven and Turnhout.³⁹⁹ Oisterwijk proves an exception to this rule and managed to maintain a rather vibrant cloth production throughout the sixteenth century. Several of the traditional Campine cloth producers, Herentals, for example, but most notably Turnhout, made a successful transfer to linen production. The Turnhout '*tijken*', for example, easily found willing buyers. *Tijk* was mainly used for second-rate quality goods, such as bed sheets, aprons, vests and for furniture and shoe making. The sixteenth century was the hey-day of linen producing in general and *tijk* in particular. This Golden Age lasted up until the end of the seventeenth century, albeit somewhat halted by the exodus of weavers due to the Civil War at the end of the sixteenth century.⁴⁰⁰

We now know, therefore, that the Campine was indeed a centre of cloth production, although as Adriaenssens has already argued: Campine cloth is not necessarily made of Campine wool. His case study on cloth production in Oisterwijk, however, does illustrate the fact that Campine wool was indeed used. One of the most important suppliers of different

³⁹⁶ Verhulst, A. (1970). "De inlandse wol in de textielnijverheid van de Nederlanden van de 12e tot de 17e eeuw: produktie, handel en verwerking." *Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 85(1): 6-18

³⁹⁷ A summary of this discussion can be found in: De Wachter, A. (2002). *De toepassing van wereldsysteem-analyse op geografische streken. Twee casestudies: de Kempen en noordelijk Ghana*. Vakgroep Geografie. Gent, Universiteit Gent: 103-116

³⁹⁸ Verellen, J. R. (1955). "Lakennijverheid en lakenhandel": 118-180.

³⁹⁹ Adriaenssen, L. (2001). "De plaats van Oisterwijk: 40

⁴⁰⁰ De Kok, H. (1990). "De Turnhoutse tijknijverheid": 187-197.

types of wool were the tenant farms of the *Geeffhuis* of 's Hertogenbosch, all located in the Campine region itself. Oisterwijk specialised in the production of medium-quality cloth and mainly employed German and Campine wool in order to weave.⁴⁰¹

Oisterwijk was not the only cloth production centre using Campine wool. In a joint undertaking with Maïka De Keyzer cloth guild regulations have been examined with a fine tooth-comb in order to find out more about the use and function of inland wool in general, and Campine wool in particular. Several of the regulations of the old and respectable Flemish cloth centres mention the use of inland (*'hierlandsche'*) wool. Nevertheless, this term is quite general and by no means proves that the said wool actually came from the Campine region. A quick scan of the cloth guild regulations of some Brabantine cities such as Antwerp, Brussels, Leuven, Lier and 's Hertogenbosch might shed more light on this enigma. In these regulations several entries mention the use of Campine wool.

Table 5.4 References to Campine cloth in guild (bye)laws

's Hertogenbosch ⁴⁰²	Item soe wie brede laken maken wil, dat hi die maken sal van engelscher wolle ende van uytdragender goeder <u>kempenscher</u> wollen, die daertoe goet is,...	Anyone who wants to produce broad cloth, must make it from English wool and of good Campine wool
's Hertogenbosch ⁴⁰³	... ende dese voorschreven laken sal diegheen sweren ten heyligen, dies die laken sijn, dat se gemaect sijn van engelscher wollen of van <u>kempenscher</u> wollen ...	And the above-mentioned cloth will be sworn to be made of English or of Campine wool
Antwerp ⁴⁰⁴ de <u>retiesche en duffelsche</u> lakens ...	Cloth from Retie and Duffel (two villages in or close to the Campine area)
Brussel, Mechelen & Lier ⁴⁰⁵	nyet en syn verwerckende zeeusche wolle, lampwolle, brabantische wolle noch blootwolle, dan alleenlyck de fynste ende best vuytgelesender <u>kempesche</u> wolle	We are not processing Zeelandic wool, lam(b?)wool, Brabantine wool or blootwool, but only the finest and most exquisite Campine wool
Leuven ⁴⁰⁶	... Deze inlandse wol kwam uit de onmiddellijke omgeving waar sommige	This inland wool came from the immediate surroundings, where some drapers such as,

⁴⁰¹ Adriaenssen, L. (2001). "De plaats van Oisterwijk": 27-48.

⁴⁰² Van Den Heuvel, N. (1946). *De Ambachtsgilden Van 'S-Hertogenbosch Voor 1629. Rechtsbronnen Van Het Bedrijfsleven En Het Gildewezen*. Utrecht: 74

⁴⁰³ Van Den Heuvel, N. (1946). *De Ambachtsgilden Van 'S-Hertogenbosch Voor 1629. Rechtsbronnen Van Het Bedrijfsleven En Het Gildewezen*. Utrecht: 240

⁴⁰⁴ Prims, F. (1930). "De Statuten Van De Antwerpsche Lakengilde in Het Begin Der 16de Eeuw". *Koninklijke Vlaamsche academie voor taal- en letterkunde*: 37

⁴⁰⁵ Thijs, A. (1978) *Van "Werkwinkel" Tot "Fabriek". De Textielnijverheid Te Antwerpen Van Het Einde Der Vijftiende Tot Het Begin Der Negentiende Eeuw* Universiteit Gent: 504

⁴⁰⁶ Van Uytven, R. (1961). *Stadsfinanciën en stadseconomie te Leuven*. Brussel, Paleis der Academiën: 345

	drapiers als Ard Vinke kudden bezaten, maar de beste was ongetwijfeld de fijne <u>Kempische</u> wol die voor gewone lakens met fijne Engelse wol mocht vermengd worden in 1513, maar in de XVe eeuw zelfs hiervoor alleen gebruikt werd...	for example, Ard Vinke possessed some flocks, although the best was without doubt the fine Campine wool, which was – for regular cloth – mixed with fine English wool in 1513 and in the fifteenth century was used for this purpose on its own
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Sources: Van Den Heuvel, N. (1946). *De Ambachtsgilden Van 'S-Hertogenbosch Voor 1629. Rechtsbronnen Van Het Bedrijfsleven En Het Gildewezen*. Utrecht: 74; Van Den Heuvel, N. (1946). *De Ambachtsgilden Van 'S-Hertogenbosch Voor 1629. Rechtsbronnen Van Het Bedrijfsleven En Het Gildewezen*. Utrecht: 240; Prims, F. (1930). "De Statuten Van De Antwerpsche Lakengilde in Het Begin Der 16de Eeuw". *Koninklijke Vlaamsche academie voor taal- en letterkunde*: 37; Thijs, A. (1978) *Van "Werkwinkel" Tot "Fabriek". De Textielnijverheid Te Antwerpen Van Het Einde Der Vijftiende Tot Het Begin Der Negentiende Eeuw'* Universiteit Gent: 504 & Van Uytven, R. (1961). *Stadsfinanciën en stadseconomie te Leuven*. Brussel, Paleis der Academiën: 345. Corpus composed by Eline Van Onacker & Maïka De Keyzer

We do know that Campine wool was processed in the late medieval cloth industries of the Low Countries, however, it is of course hard to assess on what scale this occurred. Furthermore, it is not always entirely clear what this wool was used for. Some guild regulations, and some authors, suggest Campine wool could be used for the production of even the finest pieces of cloth. Other regulations lack clarity and it is often suggested that inland wool was mainly used for the production of low quality goods. It is therefore equally possible that Campine wool was employed for the production of lighter and lower quality fabrics. This can, for example, be deduced from Van der Wee's 'magnum opus' on the growth of the Antwerp market. He presents a series of sources which suggest that Campine cloth was mostly sold to poor relief institutions in order to help the poor.⁴⁰⁷ Nonetheless, an important remark needs to be made. When high quality products are being discussed Campine *wool* is mentioned and when low-quality products are being talked about, we are referring to Campine *cloth*. So, whereas Campine wool in itself is suggested to be of high enough quality to function as an alternative to English wool – mainly in periods of shortage – Campine cloth, produced in the region itself, was supposedly a product of lower quality.

Finally, a last piece of evidence suggesting the commercial qualities of wool in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries can be presented. Jan Bieleman has suggested that in the Veluwe, a sandy region in the Netherlands, flock sizes started to decline from the late sixteenth century onwards. He claims that from then on commercial sheep breeding and wool production were no longer a lucrative business.⁴⁰⁸ Due to the growing popularity of linen, wool became less attractive and the breeding of sheep transferred to more peripheral regions, such as Drenthe. There, the evolution of sheep-breeding was, from the seventeenth century onwards, strongly linked to the evolutions of the market demand for low-quality wool.⁴⁰⁹ It is hard to prove declining flock sizes for the Campine region, but the only village for which we can assess flock sizes at two distinct moments in time does seem to confirm this hypothesis.

⁴⁰⁷ van der Wee, H. (1963). *The growth of the Antwerp market*: 273

⁴⁰⁸ Bieleman, J. (2008). *Boeren in Nederland: geschiedenis van de landbouw, 1500-2000*. Amsterdam, Boom., pp. 112-119

⁴⁰⁹ Bieleman, J. (1987). *Boeren op het Drentse zand 1600-1910. Een nieuwe visie op de 'oude' landbouw*. Utrecht, HES Uitgevers: 480-487

In 1553, in the villages of Essen and Nispen, 1597 lambs could be found⁴¹⁰, whereas in the 1620s on average only 652 lambs were counted annually.⁴¹¹ This could suggest that also in the Campine area commercial sheep-breeding went through a phase of decline from the end of the sixteenth century onwards, as it did in the Veluwe, because its commercial possibilities declined – causing a shift of sheep-breeding towards even more peripheral regions. By the eighteenth century sheep had all but disappeared from the Campine area. The evidence is by no means decisive, but may provide a hint as to what was really going on.

5.2 A mighty mystery: the Campine labour market

As was already suggested in the introduction to this chapter, peasants were the ultimate anti-specialists, combining different sources of income in order to make a stable living. In recent years, the income strategies and income portfolio of peasants has received quite some attention. For the Low Countries, this diversity of strategies has, for example, been established for late medieval and early modern Holland. Jan Luiten Van Zanden and Jan Lucassen have pointed to the fact that Dutch peasants combined the tilling of their small farms with seasonal labour, fishing and shipping activities, as well as by being active in international transport.⁴¹² In inland Flanders many peasants were active in the production of industrial crops and proto-industrial activities, mainly in textiles, especially the weaving of linen.⁴¹³ In the Rupel area, to the south of Antwerp, peasants were active in the draperies industries⁴¹⁴ and in brick burning.⁴¹⁵ These phenomena are, of course, not limited to the Low Countries. Ulrich Pfister, for example, has focussed on the income of peasants in the surroundings of Zurich, pointing to the importance of draper activities on the countryside⁴¹⁶, however, examples can be given for almost any Western European peasant region. Wage labour might have been an essential strategy for the Campine peasants, especially the cottagers and micro-smallholders as well. However, it is notably difficult to make bold or firm statements about the structures of the Campine labour market since, fundamentally, we hardly know anything about it. Sources remain almost completely quiet on this issue, leaving us somewhat puzzled on this highly relevant subject. I will, however, address three ways in which Campine inhabitants might have been able to get hold of some additional income based on wage labour: via agricultural labour,

⁴¹⁰ AAT, II, 806. (Lamb) tithes, Nispen en Essen, 16th and 17th century

⁴¹¹ Ibidem.

⁴¹² Van Zanden, J. L. (2001). "A third road to capitalism? Proto-industrialization and the moderate nature of the late medieval crisis in Flanders and Holland, 1350-1550." P. Hoppenbrouwers and J. L. Van Zanden (eds.). *Peasants into farmers? The transformation of rural economy and society in the Low Countries (Middle Ages-19th century) in light of the Brenner debate*. Turnhout, Brepols: 85-101 & Lucassen, J. (1982). "Beschouwingen over seizoengebonden trekarbeid naar het westen van Nederland, ca. 1600-ca.1800." *Tijdschrift voor Sociale Geschiedenis* 8: 327-358.

⁴¹³ Thoen, E. (1988). *Landbouweconomie en bevolking in Vlaanderen gedurende de late middeleeuwen en het begin van de moderne tijden. Testregio: de kasselrijen van Oudenaarde en Aalst*. Gent, Belgisch Centrum voor Landelijke Geschiedenis.

⁴¹⁴ The village of Duffel, for example, later became famous for its duffelcoat

⁴¹⁵ Limberger, M. (2001). "Early forms of proto-industries in the backyard of Antwerp? The Rupel area in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries." B. Blondé, E. Vanhaute and M. Galand (eds.). *Labour and labour markets*. Turnhout, Brepols: 158-173.

⁴¹⁶ Pfister, U. (2007). "Rural land and credit markets, the permanent income hypothesis and proto-industry: evidence from early modern Zurich." *Continuity and Change* 22(3): 489-518.

transport services and proto-industrial activities in the hope of shedding at least some light on one of the Campine area's greatest mysteries: the functioning of the labour market.

The first topic we will address is agricultural labour. The Campine independent peasants had, in all likelihood, only a very limited need for additional, extra family labour since their farms never exceeded 10 hectares. However, in some Campine villages, large tenant farms were present which might have had a greater demand for labours.⁴¹⁷ In a tenant farm, based on a mixed farming model, several labourers were needed. Lies Vervaeet, for example, mentions the need for fixed personnel, such as sowers, ploughers, kitchen personnel, and people to look after the sheep and cattle. Tenant farms, however, mainly required seasonal labour, particularly during the harvest period when grain needed to be harvested and threshed.⁴¹⁸ For the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century villages of Essen and Kalmthout, Dries Kools has shown that the tenant farmers had several fixed labourers in his service. The largest among them employed one maid, two servants, a cowherd and a shepherd. On average tenant farmers had 3 people on their permanent staff, numbers which were unattainable for most peasants. Only the richest two or three peasants of every village were able to maintain the same number of people working for them.⁴¹⁹

Tenant farmers were therefore clearly employers with some fixed manpower, but also with a need for temporary labourers, as Vervaeet has indicated. Sadly we do not have indications as to the number of labourers needed on the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century tenant farms of the abbey of Tongerlo. We do, however, have information regarding the labourers needed on the estate of Mary of Hungary in the Land of Turnhout. In the accounts of the steward of the Land of Turnhout⁴²⁰ we are able to find indications of the number of labourers working for Willem Wils, the man responsible for a sheep-breeding enterprise set up by the governess (Table 5.6). To achieve this she claimed a significant amount of wasteland from the communities of Turnhout and Arendonk.⁴²¹ In 1551, 16 men were paid to mow the meadows for which they each received 8 *denieren* a day. On average they worked 78 days, but some of them worked over 130 days. Moreover, 16 men and women each received 4 *denieren* per day for haymaking and 4 men (or maybe boys) were mentioned as shepherds. The haymakers, on average, worked 77.6 days even though, again, there were people working over 130 days. Finally, 5 men were paid to maintain the ditches.

Table 5.5 Agricultural labour and wages in the Land of Turnhout, 1551

Function	Number of workers	Wage per day (in denieren)	Wage per day of mason's labourer in 1551, in Antwerp (in denieren) ⁴²²	Average number of working days
Mowing	16	8	12	78

⁴¹⁷ A more detailed view on these Campine tenant farmers will be provided in chapter 6

⁴¹⁸ Vervaeet, L. (2013), *De rurale arbeidsorganisatie in laatmiddeleeuws Kust-Vlaanderen: de hoeve Scuringhe in Zuienkerke als casus*. Paper presented at the CSG lunch seminar, 28-01-2013

⁴¹⁹ http://www.ethesis.net/essen/essen_hfst_3_4.htm#Hoofdstuk%204:%20De%20sociaal-economische%20toestand%20van%20de%20abdijpachters%20in%20de%20heerlijkheid%20Essen-Kalmthout, 09-08-2013

⁴²⁰ ARA, Rekenkamer, 5123. Domain account of the Land of Turnhout, 1551

⁴²¹ ARA, Rekenkamer, Administrative files 'cartons', 83/2 nr. 37B

⁴²² Based on: van der Wee, H. (1963). *The growth of the Antwerp market* as processed by Jord Hanus

meadows				
Haymaking	16	4	12	77.6
Shepherd	4	?	12	?
Maintaining ditches	5	6	12	81.6

Source: ARA, *Rekenkamer*, 5123. Domain account of the land of Turnhout, 1551, processed by Maïka De Keyzer

Willem Wils's enterprise, therefore, provided seasonal work for quite a number of people, probably from the surrounding villages of Turnhout, and sometimes for prolonged periods. Wages were significantly lower than those of an Antwerp mason's labourer, something which is not surprising because Campine labourers derived a substantial part of their income through agriculture. Willem Wils's workforce might not be completely representative of an average Campine tenant farm since his enterprise had to be built from scratch and from the extremely sandy wastelands, nonetheless, it gives a hint of the type of labour that was needed in Campine agriculture. Furthermore, it suggests that these rather large enterprises might be of rather significant importance as a labour opportunity for peasants. It is, however, important to keep in mind that tenant farms were only limited to some villages. Several Campine villages were void of this type of enterprise therefore we must be careful not to overstate their importance for the labour market. Moreover, agricultural labour could not have been more than an additional means of obtaining some extra income. It is furthermore impossible to say which social groups were active as agricultural labourers. One imagines the main suppliers of labour would be mostly cottagers or micro-smallholders, however, there is no way of establishing this firmly.

Another labour possibility was closely linked to the area's position in the trade and road network of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The Campine area was situated along some of the most important thoroughfares, connecting Antwerp to Cologne and the Rhineland, which obviously meant that considerable amounts of bulk passed through and by the Campine villages. As Bart Ballaux has suggested in his dissertation on transport and economic development in sixteenth-century Brabant, transport services (mainly using horses) developed in parallel to the rise of the Antwerp market. Ballaux suggests that this was a means of getting some additional income for the Campine peasants. This was, in all likelihood, particularly true for the independent peasants, since they were among the main horse owners (cfr. chapter 3, section 3.2.4). In the fifteenth-century village of Rijkevorsel, for example, 41.1 percent of the villagers owned at least one horse (table 5.7). It is furthermore interesting to note that Jan Bieleman suggests for the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century sandy peasant region of Drenthe that horse-breeding was also a viable peasant strategy to acquire some extra income⁴²³, something which has also been established for the peasants of Western Slovenia.⁴²⁴ It is impossible to find proof that such a thing also took place in the Campine area, although the large number of horses grazing in Grotenhout forest (as discussed in chapters 2 and 3), might be interpreted as an indication of such an activity taking place. In any case, the use of animal-breeding as a viable economic strategy, directed at markets, seems to have been a clear characteristic of several peasant regions

⁴²³ Bieleman, J. (1987). *Boeren op het Drentse zand*: 291-304

⁴²⁴ Panjek, A. (2012). *Land Reclamation in Pre-Industrial Societies: Economics and Sustainability*. World Economic History Congress. Stellenbosch: 4-5

Table 5.6 Horse-owners in the village of Rijkevorsel, 1470

	Absolute	% of all households
Number of household heads⁴²⁵	202	100%
Number of horse owners	83	41.1%
People owning 1 horse	23	11.4%
People owning 2 horses	59	29.2%
People owning 3 horses	1	0.5%

Source: RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 3916. *List of people owning carriages and horses, 1470*

Evidently these animals were used for ploughing, however, the fact that they were so omnipresent might suggest they had at least another asset as well. Horses required a great deal of fodder (in ideal typical circumstances 2500 kg to make it through the winter).⁴²⁶ Even if they were structurally underfed - as was the case in most pre-modern societies - it still was quite a significant burden for a peasant, suggesting that these animals were used for more than just ploughing alone. Ballaux went through the domain accounts of the Land of Turnhout, between 1471 and 1486, to get an insight - albeit a somewhat limited one - into the presence of locals in transport services. Most of them came from Turnhout or its immediate surroundings (Arendonk and Wechelderzande, for example). The majority, 62 percent, were professionals (but even then transport services might have been only part of their portfolio, as Ballaux himself recognises); the others might very well have been peasants on the lookout for some extra cash. Another indication of transport services as a means of obtaining some extra income can be found in church accounts. Several of these accounts were preserved for the villages of Rijkevorsel and Brecht.⁴²⁷ In both villages, the church was subjected to thorough renovations, necessitating the supply of building and decoration materials. In the accounts, several entries mention payment for horses (and their fodder), carriages, floats used for water transport, and of course the wages for the 'waggon men' - presumably locals. According to table 5.1 building materials were therefore brought in from different types of 'markets'.⁴²⁸ Local and regional markets were of importance, mainly for the buying of peat, faggots, slate, etc. The Antwerp market was of vital importance as well, especially for Brecht, a large village with significant cultural aspirations situated relatively closeby to Antwerp alongside an important trade route. The Antwerp market mainly provided the Campine communities with white stones and chalk. The Rijkevorsel church fabric, furthermore, partly bought these same materials in the city of Breda, which was easily accessible for them reached by following the road via Hoogstraten. Brussels was also mentioned in the Rijkevorsel accounts because the church fabric decided to buy a piece of art of Saint Lucia in that city. The Brecht church fabric furthermore paid a Vilvoorde bricklayer to bring his materials to strengthen the church choir.

⁴²⁵ Based on: Cuvelier, J. (1912). *Les dénombrements de foyers en Brabant, 14e-16e siècle*. Brussel, s.n.

⁴²⁶ Moriceau, J.M. (2005). *Histoire et géographie*: 19-23.

⁴²⁷ RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 4143 - 4164. Church accounts, 1493-1525; . RAA, KA Sint-Michielskerk Brecht, 32. Church accounts, 1529-1600; RAA, KA Sint-Michielskerk Brecht, 809-820. Accounts of Saint Lenaerts Chapel, 1512-1599

⁴²⁸ The use of accounts of religious institutions can also be found in: Stabel, P. (1992). *Markt en hinterland: de centrale functies van de kleinere steden in Vlaanderen tijdens de late middeleeuwen en het begin van de moderne tijd. Het stedelijk netwerk in België in historisch perspectief (1350-1850)*. Brussel, Gemeentekrediet: 341-363.

Table 5.7 Villages and cities mentioned in the church accounts for the buying of building material

	Rijkevorsel (1493-1515)		Brecht (Sint Lenaert: 1543-1546 & Sint Michiel: 1529-1531)	
	Absolute	%	Absolute	%
Local and regional markets	9	47.4%	5	33.3%
Antwerp market	4	21.1%	8	53.33%
Other markets	6 ⁴²⁹	31.5%	2 ⁴³⁰	13.3%
Total number of markets mentioned	19	100%	15	100%

Sources: RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 4143 – 4164. Church accounts, 1493-1525; . RAA, KA Sint-Michielskerk Brecht, 32. Church accounts, 1529-1600; RAA, KA Sint-Michielskerk Brecht, 809-820. Accounts of Saint Lenaerts Chapel, 1512-1599

A final channel through which the Campiners might have gathered additional income was, of course, proto-industry. For Inland Flanders, for example, it is almost common knowledge that its peasant-inhabitants were remarkably active as linen-weavers. Their proto-industrial activities made their survival on ever-smaller plots of land possible. Section 5.1 clearly indicated that sheep breeding was an essential activity for the Campine independent peasants. The large amounts of wool present on the Campine countryside might have been through the first stages of processing in the Campine villages. It is furthermore possible that flax was imported to these communities – allowing its inhabitants to make some extra money – as was apparently common practice in the eighteenth century.⁴³¹ The large village of Arendonk even had a *tijkambacht* or tic guild, dating back to the fifteenth century. So, indeed proto-industrial activities would nicely fit the picture, but we simply do not know if they indeed appeared. No fifteenth- or sixteenth-century sources mention its presence and there are no probate inventories prior to 1650 – a most useful source for the reconstruction of proto-industrial activities. So, the Campine labour market as a whole and the possible presence of proto-industry proved to be extremely difficult to grasp – making it the ultimate Campine mystery.

5.3 Proactive peasants. The Campine markets for land and credit

5.3.1 Facing factor markets

Factor markets in general, and markets for land and credit specifically have often been considered as vital for economic development. Smoothly operating land and credit markets – not hindered by institutional constraints – are, even in present-day development economics perceived as vital to economic success. Due to this strong link, historiographical attention was

⁴²⁹ Breda – 4 times, Brussels, Loon

⁴³⁰ Vilvoorde

⁴³¹ See for example: RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 130. Delivery of flax from Hoogstraten to the commune, 1747

primarily focussed on cities and regions in periods of swift economic development and increasing market integration. Especially regions in the urbanised core-region of the Low Countries, namely Holland and Flanders, received their fair share of attention. Land and credit markets appeared quite active in all of the scrutinized cases, but the way in which they were employed, could differ greatly, as was indicated in the work of Thoen & Soens (cfr. supra). This already indicates the fact that land and credit markets could play different parts in different types of societies / agrosystems. As has been mentioned before, I want to suggest that institutional structures were not the prime cause of these differences – since I am convinced of the fact that the Campine institutions were not fundamentally divergent. I want to argue that the social context defines the functioning of factor markets. To prove this point, I will zoom in on the institutional structures to assess similarities and differences with those in other parts of the Low Countries. And I will of course try to reconstruct the role these factor markets played in a peasant society with commons. The source material that will be used for this research line is rather elaborate, and has as an extra advantage that it starts relatively early and is almost continuously preserved. For the village of Gierle land and credit transactions were recorded by the manor courts (1456-1497)⁴³² and by the bench of aldermen (1513-1558)⁴³³. In Rijkevorsel, all transactions could be found in the register of the bench of aldermen, quasi continuously preserved from 1465 up until 1585.⁴³⁴

5.3.2 Institutions and constraints

Even though the Campine area was a late developer when it came to commercialisation and specialisation, its land and credit institutions were not notably different from those in the core regions of the Low Countries. The bench of aldermen was the prime responsible when it came to recording land and credit transactions. Zuijderdijn, who focussed on credit in late medieval and early modern Holland, goes as far as to suggest the bench of aldermen had a ‘virtual monopoly’ on civil and voluntary jurisdiction. Landed property and its division were essential to pre-modern communities, which explains why land and credit transactions were so meticulously recorded.⁴³⁵ In the Campine area, the situation was somewhat more complex. Many benches of aldermen for example had a manor court as their predecessor. These manor courts were only qualified to register transactions linked to landed property – such as the buying and selling of land, but also credit transactions, since these required an immovable good as pawn. Even when most villages witnessed the erection of a bench of aldermen, many of these manor courts remained in function. In Gierle for example, there was a bench of aldermen responsible for ducal property, but there were also 2 manor courts, recording transactions linked to the property of two local lords: the lord of Tielen and the lord of Poederlee. Peasants, owning customary land belonging to one of these local lords had to pass by the appropriate manor court. Most villages furthermore had one or more notaries, but in the notaryship archives, no land or credit transactions could be traced. Benches of aldermen

⁴³² RAA, OGA Gierle, 627. Charters of the manor court (*laathof*) of lord Daneel van Ranst, 1454-1497 & RAA, OGA Gierle, 630. Charters of the manor court (*laathof*) of lord Peeter van Brimeu, 1471-1501

⁴³³ RAA, OGA Gierle, 349 & 350. Registers of the bench of aldermen, 1512-1558

⁴³⁴ RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 145-180. Registers of the bench of aldermen, 1465-1609

⁴³⁵ Zuijderdijn, C. J. (2009). *Medieval Capital Markets*

thus had no ‘virtual monopoly’ on voluntary jurisdiction, but the institutions responsible for this type of jurisdiction were however extremely attainable and reliable.

This of course does not exclude the presence of other types of constraint. Secure property rights for example are often identified as one of the prerequisites for a smoothly functioning land and credit market. In the Campine area land held in customary rent was predominant, and this could be sold and inherited – secure property rights indeed! Customary rent was however sometimes subject to some a tax when sold, the so-called *pontpenningen*. For the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Campine area, I was however not able to find proof of the collecting of this tax. For the village of Gierle for example the ducal domain accounts systematically recorded the word *nyet* (nothing) in the *pontpenningen* category of the account. Institutional constraints – if any – were thus quite likely rather limited. In the manor of Westerlo, owned by the influential de Merode family, *pontpenningen* were indeed collected – probably making it an exception in the Campine area. This seems to have had a rather limited effect on the liveliness of the land market, since the number of transactions were not remarkably lower.

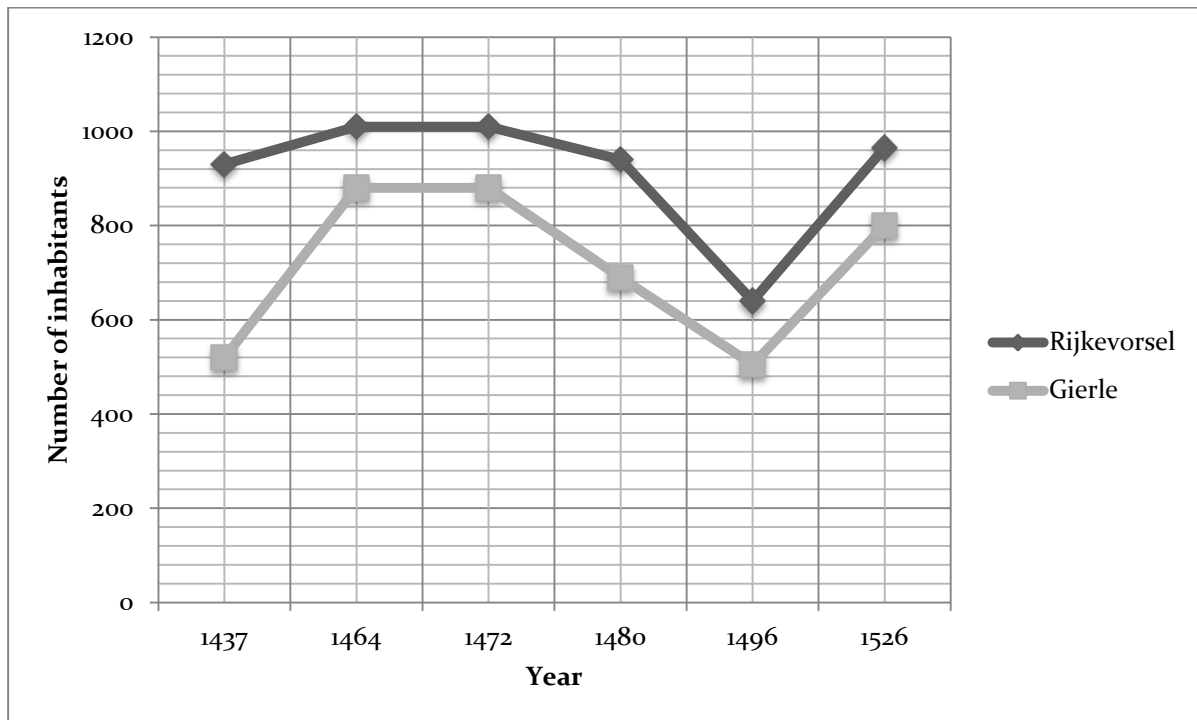
5.3.3 Evolution of the Campine land and credit markets

Land market trends (For graphs: see appendix, fig 1&2)

On the long run, the Campine land market was mainly characterised by a rather stable development (see appendix). This bears a resemblance to the situation in Inland Flanders, which is explained by Erik Thoen, who states that peasants wishing to buy land to establish or expand their business were hardly influenced by economic upswings or downfalls – of course with the exception of severe crises.⁴³⁶ Still the Campine land market was subject to some evolutions and changes. The average surface of land that was sold and bought clearly shrunk during our research period. In Rijkevorsel the average surface diminished from 2.4 ha in between 1465 and 1480 to 1.2 ha between 1538 and 1558. In Gierle, a similar shrinkage can be perceived of 1.6 ha (1471-1497) to 0.8 ha (1538-1558). In all likelihood, this shrinkage is linked to the demographic evolution. Based on the hearth taxes, we can perceive a decrease in population in both villages – and in the Campine area as a whole – in the second half and mainly last quarter of the fifteenth century. Population numbers slowly recovered from the beginning of the sixteenth century onwards. The population decrease of the late fifteenth century probably caused a – temporary? – shrinkage in the surface of plots that were sold.

⁴³⁶ E. Thoen, *Landbouweconomie en bevolking: 888-894*.

Fig 5.2 Population of Gierle & Rijkevorsel, 1437-1526



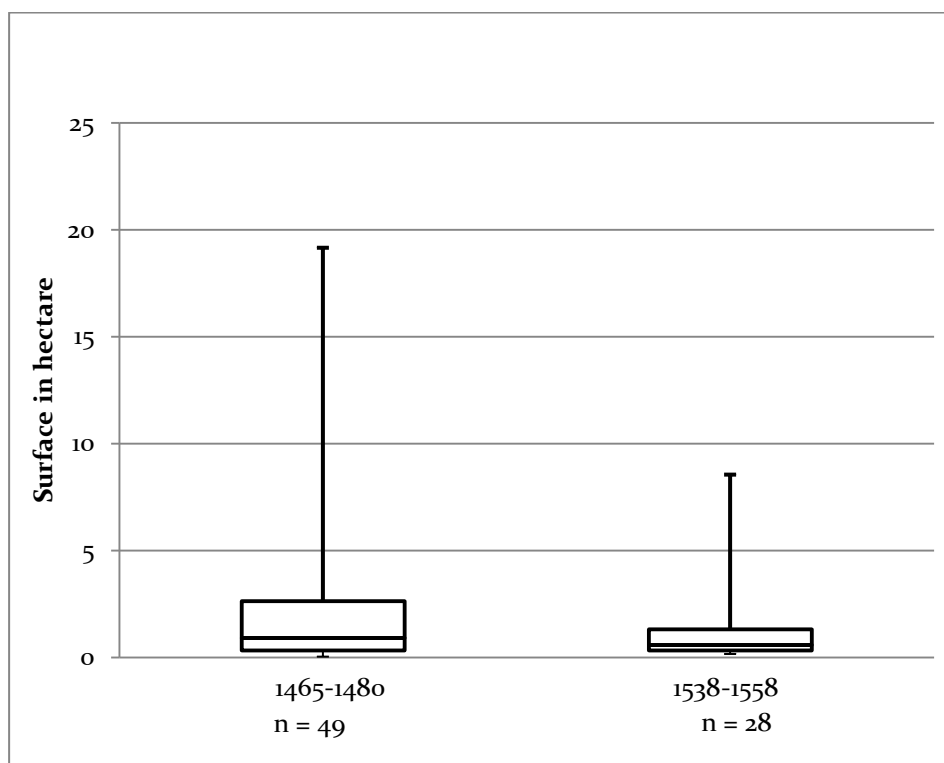
Source: Cuvelier, J. (1912). *Les dénombrements de foyers en Brabant, 14e-16e siècle* Brussel, s.n.

To reconstruct the liveliness of the Campine land market, I used a method suggested by Bas Van Bavel. He calculated the turnover-rate (the percentage of the total acreage traded on a yearly basis) as an indicator. For sixteenth century Gierle, with a total area of 510 hectares of private property, 4.35 transactions a year and an average surface of sold land of 0.8 hectares, which means that 0.7 percent of the total acreage was traded on a yearly basis. It is quite probable that the real number was even somewhat higher, since the transactions recorded by the manor courts could not be included. This number is lower than the 1.5 percent in the Gelre river area in the same period. But Gelre was already a commercial region at that time, specialised in market oriented production and thus rather different from a peasant region such as the Campine area. In 1515-1518, a period during which Gelre was still primarily a peasant region, the turnover rate was remarkably lower, amounting to 0.9 percent.⁴³⁷ Still, the Campine turnover rates were relatively low, compared to those of other regions, for which most numbers fluctuated around 1 to 1.5 percent.⁴³⁸ This might already indicate that the land market in a society dominated by commons, played a different part in society than in regions with a predominance of private property.

⁴³⁷ Van Bavel, B. J. P. (2004). "The Land Market in the North Sea Area in a Comparative Perspective, 13th - 18th centuries." S. Cavachiocci. (ed.). *Il Mercato della Terra*. Prato, Le Monnier: 119-145.

⁴³⁸ B. J. P. Van Bavel, "The land market in the North Sea Area": 135

Fig 5.3 Boxplot surfaces of immovable goods (in hectare), Rijkevorsel



Source: RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 145-180. Registers of the bench of aldermen, 1465-1609

Credit market trends (For graphs: see appendix, Fig 3&4)

The credit market, i.e. the sale of annuities, is characterised by an interesting evolution, which is less clear-cut than that of the land market (see appendix). In general, the trend seems to have been one of increase, but quite liable to fluctuations. The same mounting trend was discerned for Inland Flanders by Erik Thoen and Tim Soens. In the Inland Flanders village of Haaltert, between 1465 and 1480, there were on average 0.15 transactions per 100 inhabitants. In the Campine village of Rijkevorsel, this number was even somewhat higher, with 0.31 transactions per 100 inhabitants. In the sixteenth century (1561-1570) the number of transactions was significantly higher. In Haaltert the average was 0.72 transactions per 100 inhabitants and in Rijkevorsel 1.14 transactions. The Campine credit market was thus by no means less vibrant than the Inland Flanders one, on the contrary.

Table 5.8 Loaned out sums (in litres of rye)

	Gierle (1456-1497)	Rijkevorsel (1465-1485)	Gierle (1538-1558)	Rijkevorsel (1538-1558)
Average	1945,8	1313,7	1496,72	1874,08
Minimum	101,52	181,2	127,2	84,8
Q 1	1015,2	362,4	763,2	1017,6
Median	1522,8	906	1144,8	1696
Q 3	2538	1630,8	1696	2713,6
Maximum	7106,4	3624	6868,8	4748,8

Sources: RAA, OGA Gierle, 627. *Charters of the manor court (laathof) of lord Daneel van Ranst, 1454-1497*; RAA, OGA Gierle, 630. *Charters of the manor court (laathof) of lord Peeter van Brimeu, 1471-1501*; RAA, OGA Gierle, 349 & 350. *Registers of the bench of aldermen, 1512-1558* & RAA, RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 145-180. *Registers of the bench of aldermen, 1465-1609*. Rye prices are based on: Rye prices: van der Wee, H. (1963). *The growth of the Antwerp market and the European economy (fourteenth-sixteenth centuries)*. The Hague, Nijhoff, processed by Jord Hanus.

The Campine credit market was also relatively ‘normal’ in other aspects, since it followed many of the trends that characterised these markets all over the Low Countries. Redeemable annuities became predominant – so life-long payments were abolished, making the credit instrument easier to apply. In Gierle for example, in the second half of the fifteenth century 69.05 percent of loans could be redeemed, whereas in the sixteenth century this even amounted to 78.15 percent! Another trend, characterising credit markets in Western-Europe as well – monetization – could be perceived in the Campine area as well, albeit somewhat later and slower than in other regions. In fifteenth century Gierle most annuities were paid off in kind: only 21.43 percent was paid off in money. In the sixteenth century this already amounted to 71.43 percent. The interest rate – another strong indicator of institutional efficiency – was strikingly similar to that in other regions. In Gierle (1538-1558) the interest rate came to 5.9 percent and in Rijkevorsel (1538-1558) 6.25 percent. This is almost identical to the interest rate in the Inland Flanders village of Haaltert (6.3 percent)⁴³⁹ and to the ‘sixteenth penny’ (6.25 percent), the legally binding interest rate, established in 1573 by a royal edict.⁴⁴⁰

5.3.4 The role of factor markets: the absence of accumulation

Since I want to find out why and how the Campine land and credit markets were employed within the specific context of a peasant society with commons, I chose to look at these institutions from a micro-perspective. Sources do not directly shed light on the motivations and strategies of Campine peasants, so in the wake of for example Thomas Brennan, I will reconstruct which socio-economic groups were active on the land and credit markets.⁴⁴¹ Often, studies suggest these factor markets were dominated by the economic better-off, to accumulate land and money and make their fellow-villagers economically dependent on them. According to this view, land and credit markets thus played a vital part in a process of social polarisation.⁴⁴² Others, most notably Craig Muldrew, suggested factor markets created a web of interdependence, binding together different social strata. For urban societies Muldrew even states that “*the market... introduced a degree of “effective equality” into an otherwise stratified society*”.⁴⁴³ For rural societies similar statements have been made by Trevor Dean (on the fourteenth century Italian countryside) and Chris Briggs (on the fourteenth century English

⁴³⁹ Thoen, E. and Soens, T. (2009). ‘Credit in rural Flanders’: 29.

⁴⁴⁰ Britz, M. J. (1847). *Code de l’ancien droit belge, ou histoire de la jurisprudence et de la législation, suivie de l’exposé du droit civil des provinces Belgique*. Brussel

⁴⁴¹ Brennan, T. (2006) “Peasants and debt in eighteenth-century Champagne”. *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 37: 175-200.

⁴⁴² See for example: Ogilvie, S. (2007). “Whatever is, is right’? Economic institutions in pre-industrial Europe”, *Economic History Review* 60 (2007): 663.

⁴⁴³ Muldrew, C. (1993). “Credit and the courts: debt litigation in a seventeenth-century urban community” *The Economic History Review*. 46: 36

countryside). They suggest that credit relations were mainly horizontally organized and hardly contributed to a polarization process.

To reconstruct the accumulation-potential of the Campine land and credit markets, I have used the registers of the benches of aldermen of the villages Rijkevorsel and Gierle. For Rijkevorsel, the registers of 1465-480 were selected, since these could be linked to ducal tax registers of about the same period (1465-1474).⁴⁴⁴ For the village of Gierle, I scrutinized the registers of 1538-1558 to link them to the *penningkohier* of 1554.⁴⁴⁵ Based on these taxation lists, population could be subdivided into quartiles (Rijkevorsel) or property groups (Gierle). A proportion of the people mentioned in land or credit transactions could then be linked to these findings, shedding light on the socio-economic position of buyers and sellers of land and creditors and debtors. For Rijkevorsel, 33.9 percent of those engaging in land or credit transactions could be identified; in Gierle 21.6 percent. The tables relating to these findings can be found in the appendix (tables 1-4).

These numbers however do seem somewhat limited. Several explanations can be given to frame these findings. First, the sample period used for the registers of the benches of aldermen is somewhat wider than that of the taxation list – most notably this is the case for Gierle, using a *penningkohier* of 1554 and registers of 1538-1558. Quite logically, we miss out on some people. Furthermore, it is quite a challenge to identify Campine inhabitants. Names are often very inconsequently used, making identification a hard nut to crack. And furthermore, many of the people buying and selling land, but mainly acting as a creditor or debtor were women and children. Since taxation lists only enlisted household heads – which were mostly men – women and children are very hard to trace. Finally, some of the people registering transactions probably came from outside the village and could thus not be traced in the village's tax lists. In reality, this group was probably only of limited importance (cfr. *infra*).

If we zoom in on fifteenth-century Rijkevorsel, we can determine which socio-economic groups (reflected in quartiles) were (disproportionally) active on the Campine land market. Let us first zoom in on the sellers of land. Two striking tendencies can be detected. First of all, it is rather striking how sellers came from all layers of society (i.c. all quartiles). Still, there are some discrepancies to be noted: the most active sellers from example come from the lowest quartile. A second overly active group are the people whose position fluctuates between the highest quartiles. In sixteenth century Gierle, the division of sellers among social groups (i.c. property groups) strikes us as rather balanced. Still, peasants owning between 5 and 10 hectares are slightly more active than their fellow-villagers: 11.11 percent of populations belongs to this property group, whereas it includes 33.33 percent of all sellers. No selling without buying of course, so we need to take the other side of the land market into account as well. In Rijkevorsel the buyers of land predominantly came from the highest quartile, whereas in sixteenth century Gierle most buyers came from the 1-3 hectares property group. 36 percent of all buyers came from this property group, whereas only 27.51 percent of the total population belonged to it. To round it up: all layers of society engaged in land market activities. When it came to the selling of land, we can see a (slight) overrepresentation of the higher (middle) classes, whereas buyers were more evenly distributed among social layers. Fifteenth century Rijkevorsel furthermore strikes us as a little bit more elite-dominated, whereas in sixteenth century Gierle the participation of a wider group of people could be perceived. A growing

⁴⁴⁴ RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 3244-3256. Royal taxation, 1464-1475

⁴⁴⁵ RAA, OGA Gierle, 344. Pieces concerning the 10th and 20th penny tax (*penningkohier*), 1554

polarisation in the sixteenth century – as was for example the case in Coastel Flanders or Gelre – thus cannot be perceived in the Campine area.

If we zoom in on the socio-economic position of creditors in fifteenth-century Rijkevorsel, it quickly becomes visible how villagers from quartiles 3 and 4 are the dominant forces. In sixteenth century Gierle, the same trend can be discerned. Especially the people owning between 5 and 10 hectares were clearly overrepresented, with 29.41 percent of all creditors coming from this group and only 11.11 percent of the total population being part of it. In fifteenth century Rijkevorsel debtors also predominantly came from the highest quartiles. In sixteenth century Gierle we can perceive the same predominance of ‘richer’ social groups, since 37.04 percent of all debtors owned between 5 and 10 hectares. Still, the ‘lower classes’ were by no means absent from the credit market. In Gierle, 23.53 percent of all creditors owned less than a hectare and 17.65 percent owned between 1 and 3 hectares. This implies that they were somewhat underrepresented, but they were by no means insignificant.

Still, it is quite possible that a small group of relatively rich, independent peasants used the land and / or credit market to accumulate land or create dependency through credit. To get an insight in this matter, I decided to check how many people were involved in several transactions. I only withheld those people, involved in at least two transactions (one land and one credit transaction). The results are remarkable – to say the least. In Gierle, the proportion of the population engaged in several transactions witnessed a minor increase, from 10 percent in 1471-1497 to 13.4 percent in 1538-1558. In Rijkevorsel the increase was even more striking: from 2.8 percent in 1465-1480 to 15.4 percent in 1538-1558. When we zoom in on this group of people involved in several transactions, we can furthermore note the fact that the average number of transactions they engaged in slightly increased in Rijkevorsel (from 2.9 to 3.6) and remained more or less constant in Gierle (around 3.6). It is however remarkable, that the outliers – peasants involved in a significantly higher amount of transactions – were involved in a lot more transactions in the sixteenth century; although the total number of people in this group remained rather limited. In fifteenth century Rijkevorsel the two most active users of the market could each be traced in 6 transactions, whereas in the sixteenth century this augmented to 10 and 12 times. In the village of Gierle a similar increase can be noted, from 7 and 8 to 12 and 13.

5.3.5 The relative absence of absentee landowners and capital

For another peasant region in the Low Countries – albeit one without commons – we know that the late medieval and early modern land, and especially, credit market were strongly dominated by urbanites. A close scrutiny of the registers of the bench of aldermen of the town of Turnhout, however showed that hardly any transactions could be found including countrymen.⁴⁴⁶ However, given the fact that the Campine area was situated relatively close to one of the most important urban centres of its time, Antwerp, one would immediately be inclined to suspect the same urban dominance as in Inland Flanders. The source shedding light on this topic are the registers of the bench of aldermen of the city of Antwerp. I have not analysed these registers myself, since this would have been far too time-consuming. I decided to make use of some excellent material that was easily accessible. First of all, I used the

⁴⁴⁶ SA Turnhout, 973-1025. Registers of the bench of aldermen, 1444-1600

dissertation of Francine De Nave, who scrutinised the Antwerp registers from 1394 to 1402, and made an assessment of the land and credit ties between Antwerp and the countryside.⁴⁴⁷ Furthermore, I was able to probe a database, meticulously compiled by Tim Bisschops, with the Antwerp transactions between 1491 and 1494. This will be supplemented with some findings of Michael Limberger for sixteenth century Antwerp.⁴⁴⁸ The drawback is of course that these findings were not compiled and analysed in the same way by these different authors, but even so, they shed light on the general patterns.

For the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century, Francine De Nave has analysed where the Antwerp burghers were involved in land transactions. According to her analysis 26.9 percent of all transactions – outside of the city of Antwerp – relate to the Campine area. Her definition of the Campine area is however rather wide, encompassing villages such as Merksem and Stabroek, which cannot really be labelled as Campine, so in reality, the numbers were even lower. 29.3 percent of all transactions outside Antwerp are related to the Polder region, around the river Scheldt. A staggering 43.8 percent of all transactions were linked to what de Nave, somewhat confusingly labels the ‘Flemish sandy area’, clustering villages situated quite closely to Antwerp or to the south of the city. De Nave explains these outspoken differences by referring to soil quality. According to her views, the fertile clay polders and the intensively cultivated ‘Flemish’ soils, were a much more profitable investment strategy. When it comes to the *rentebezit*, or the ownership of annuities of Antwerp citizens outside of Antwerp, the image is slightly different. 20 percent of all transactions were linked to the Polder region, 44.3 percent took place in the Flemish sandy region and 35.7 percent in the Campine area. Again, the ‘Flemish sandy area’ is predominant, but the Campine area is more important in this respect. This might be linked to the fact that many Antwerp *poorters* had a Campine background and perhaps retained links with the home front, resulting in credit relations. Michael Limberger, for example, states that, between 1520 and 1530 60 percent of all new *poorters* came from the Campine area⁴⁴⁹, although the number was perhaps still a bit lower in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Jan De Meester calculated for the entire sixteenth century that approximately 10 percent of all new *poorters* came from the Campine area.

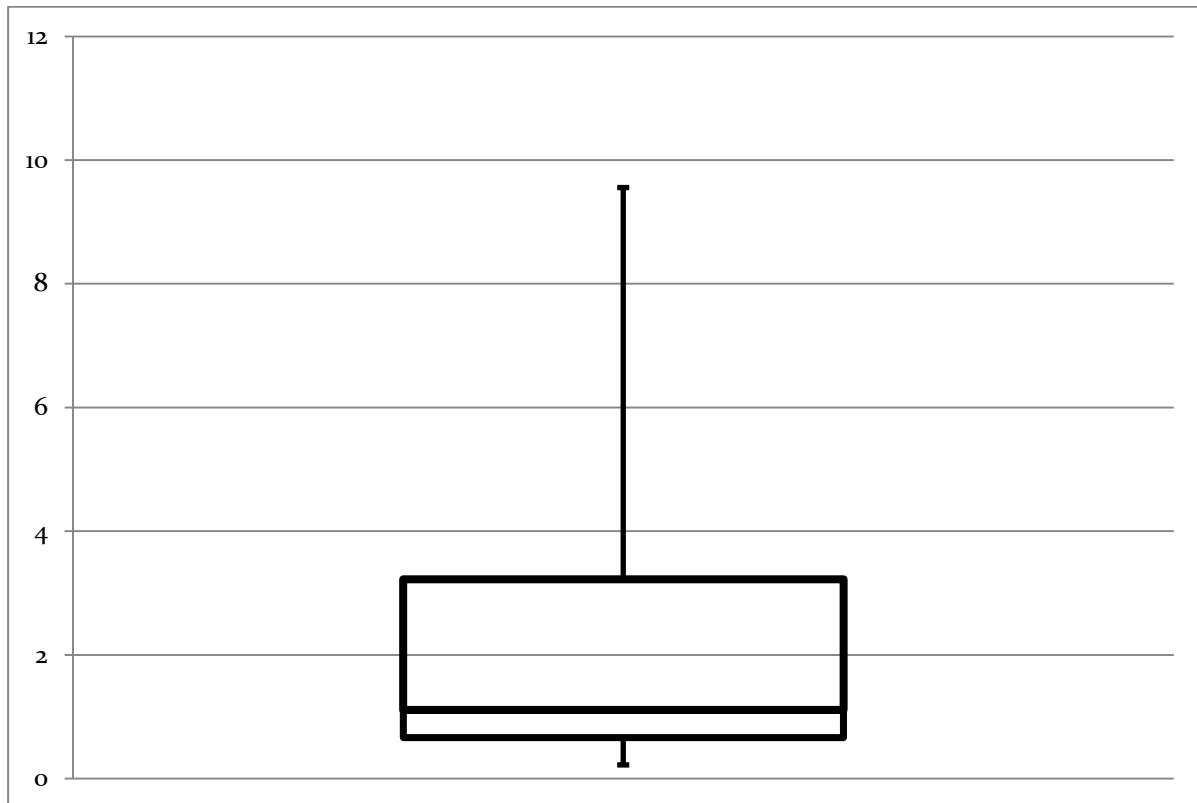
Sadly enough, de Nave’s findings do not allow us to assess the weight of Campine transactions and the amount of transactions per year. Luckily the data of Tim Bisschops, assembled in an Access-database, do allow this exercise for the late fifteenth century. The boxplot of fig 5.4 indicates that these numbers were indeed quite low, with a median of 1.1 per village. The outliers – with transactions exceeding the third quartile are mostly larger towns or villages. The most outstanding example is Brecht, an exceptionally large village, with over 2000 inhabitants, and the Campine area’s centre of Renaissance. In most other villages the number of transactions per year was – at its most – rather limited.

⁴⁴⁷ De Nave, F. (1978). *Antwerpen, stad en land (1394-1402). De innerlijke vervlechting van stedelijk en landelijk milieu in de late middeleeuwen op basis van het privé bezit aan gronden en renten en andere soorten van goed*. Sectie Geschiedenis. Brussel, VUB.

⁴⁴⁸ As can be found in: Limberger, M. (2008). *Sixteenth Century Antwerp and its Rural Surroundings*. Turnhout, Brepols.

⁴⁴⁹ Limberger, M. (1993). “Weltwirtschaft, nationaler und regionaler Markt: die Metropolenstellung Antwerpens im 16. Jahrhundert.” *Bericht über den neunzehnten österreichischen Historikertag in Graz veranstaltet vom Verband österreichischer Geschichtsvereine in der Zeit vom 18. bis 23. Mai 1992*. Wien: 223-229.

Fig 5.4 Boxplot number of transactions (land & credit) per year, per Campine village present, 1491-1495 (average = 2)



Source: database Tim Bisschops

Furthermore, the database allows us to take a look at the type of transactions that was recorded (Table 5.9). *Erfrenten*, or hereditary annuity were the vast majority, followed by the category 'other transactions', an amalgam of transactions, linked to inheritances, pledges, gifts, etc. *Lijfrenten* were of less importance, amounting to 11 percent of all Campine transactions and land sales were even more rare (8 percent). Land sales were thus not all that common, which corresponds with de Nave's findings that the Campine area was not the preferred investment terrain. Limberger stated that Antwerp investors were mainly interested in 'security, consideration, pleasure and profits'. They were notably active when it came to lease out land for a sum in kind, since this was a stable source of income, that could prove especially profitable in times of dearth, when it could be sold for a considerable price. They were mainly interested in arable land situated relatively closely to the city, but throughout the sixteenth-century their area of interest increased dramatically – but only when it came to buying up extremely fertile polder land. The Campine region never became an area of interest.⁴⁵⁰ The sale of annuities was more frequent. It seems likely that a significant amount of these transactions can be linked to the already mentioned migration of Campiners to the vibrant city of Antwerp. These people in all likelihood retained the bonds with their hometowns.

⁴⁵⁰ Limberger, M. (2008). *Sixteenth Century Antwerp: 190-196*

Table 5.9 Overview of transaction types (absolute & relative)

Type of transactions	Absolute number	%
Land sales	36	8%
<i>Erfrenten</i> (hereditary annuity)	190	44%
<i>Lijfrenten</i> (annuity for life)	48	11%
Other transactions	159	37%
TOTAL	433	100%

Source: De Nave, F. (1978). *Antwerpen, stad en land (1394-1402). De innerlijke vervlechting van stedelijk en landelijk milieu in de late middeleeuwen op basis van het privé bezit aan gronden en renten en andere soorten van goed*. Sectie Geschiedenis. Brussel, VUB.

In any case, urban dominance of the Campine land and credit markets was thus completely absent, as is emphasised by Michael Limberger in his work on Antwerp's sixteenth-century rural surroundings as well. At the beginning of the fifteenth century, eighty-three percent of Antwerp property in the countryside was restricted to just a thirteen kilometre radius around the city. As Antwerp grew in stature and wealth in the sixteenth century, urban landownership in the countryside did expand – however, it was mainly restricted to the direct north of the city and the polder regions.⁴⁵¹ So, contrary to Inland Flanders, the Campine land and credit markets were relatively free of urban interference, investment and / or accumulation strategies. These Campine markets thus predominantly played a part in the strategies of the Campine villagers themselves.

5.3.6 The role of factor markets: part of a peasant strategy

Land and credit markets thus did not encourage polarisation and accumulation processes. So the question remains: what part did these factor markets play in a peasant society? I would like to argue that the Campine land and credit markets mainly functioned within the context of distinct peasant strategies. The land market was chiefly used as an extra – albeit vital – allocation mechanism. Villagers who did not dispose of enough land – through inheritance or use of the commons – could make an appeal to the land market to secure the viability of their farms. For peasants on the threshold of retirement, the land market proved extremely useful, since they could use it to push off surplus land. These mechanisms can explain why a relatively large group of buyers came from the lower ranks of society and a relatively large group of sellers came from the higher tier. Being active on the land market was furthermore pre-eminently a 'once in a lifetime' strategy. Of all land market buyers - In the fifteenth century - respectively 78.7 percent in Gierle and 83.5 percent in Rijkevorsel were only active one single time. Even throughout the sixteenth century this number remained remarkably high: 88.4 percent in Gierle and 82.1 percent in Rijkevorsel. At the sellers-side, the same phenomenon can – quite self-evidently – be perceived. In fifteenth century Gierle, 85.7 percent of all sellers was only once active, whereas this number amounted to 79.1 percent in Rijkevorsel. And again, the

⁴⁵¹ Limberger, M. (2001). "Merchant Capitalism and the Countryside: Antwerp and the West of the Duchy of Brabant (XVth-XVIth Centuries)". P. Hoppenbrouwers and J. L. van Zanden (eds.) *Peasants into farmers?: 158-78*. Urban burghers frequently acquiring manors and signorial rights in the immediate hinterlands of Antwerp, exploiting the financial troubles of Phillip II; see Baelde, M. (1963). "Financiële politiek en domaniale evolutie in de Nederlanden onder Karel V en Filips II (1530-1560)", *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis*. 76: 56-67.

sixteenth century is no different, with high percentages – 88.3 percent in Gierle and 81.3 percent in Rijkevorsel. The relevant tables can be found in the appendix.

The ‘once in a lifetime’ nature of the land market is also reflected in the average surface of the pieces of land that were sold and bought. Compared to the average farm sizes, these plots were indeed rather large. In Gierle for example, the median-size of sold plots of land was 0.48 ha, whereas the median farm size was 1.45 ha, or in other words, 33.1 percent of a median farm. For the village of Gierle in the sixteenth century we were able to assess – based on the 1554’ *penningkohier* – that pieces of land that were sold amounted to 46.67 percent (median value) of the farm size of the seller, whereas pieces of land that were bought made up 25 percent (median value) of the farm size of the buyer. These findings are consistent with the hypotheses that the Campine land market functioned as a one-off allocation mechanism. This is notably different from the classic peasant life-cycle pattern, as described by Erik Thoen for Inland Flanders, where peasants and cottagers roamed the land market to enlarge their mini-holdings with tiny plots of extra land.⁴⁵² It is quite likely that the Campine commons tempered the peasants’ need to skim the land market to enlarge their businesses.

When it comes to the credit market, it is enlightening to zoom in on the ‘types’ of people acting as a creditor. In sixteenth century Gierle some groups were remarkably active on this front. Institutions for example, such as the Holy Ghost table (responsible for poor relief) or fraternities were eager creditors, making up 4.35 percent of all creditors. For them, acting as a creditor and receiving the yearly rent was a valid strategy to secure a stable yearly income. Children in custody (14.13 percent) and women (39.13 percent) were also remarkably active. The impressive number of women participating is consistent with the findings of Hoffman, Postel-Vinay and Rosenthal for eighteenth-century Paris. Often, women used this rent-income to preserve their independence and provide for themselves.⁴⁵³ In one of the records, this motivation is explicitly stated; in 1472 Aernout Van Bavel and his sister Katelijjn and her daughter Digne appeared before the bench of aldermen. Aernout promised to ‘pay’ his sister a yearly rent of 3 *viertel* rye – to provide for her livelihood.⁴⁵⁴

In the village of Rijkevorsel this specific behaviour of creditors could not be traced. But, there is a perfectly logical explanation for this. In Rijkevorsel, the above-mentioned groups (institutions, children in custody and women) used *erfgevingen* to secure their income. This is a very specific type of transaction, in which an immovable good was sold to an *erfnemer*, who then promised to pay the *erfgever* a yearly rent.⁴⁵⁵ In the village of Rijkevorsel, this type of transaction was by no means exceptional. On a yearly basis on average 2,6 *erfgevingen* were passed before the bench of aldermen. In 1467 for example, Bertelmeeus Van Bavel, decided to ‘donate’ all his immovable goods to his children, in exchange for a yearly rent of 7 crones and a ‘bed and place in front of the hearth’ with one of his children.⁴⁵⁶ Family members were often the ‘beneficiaries’ of these *erfgevingen*. In 1468 Henric Vanden Aerde appeared before the village aldermen to donate his immovable goods to his nephew, Gheert Vander Meert, in

⁴⁵² Thoen, E. (1988) *Landbouweconomie en bevolking: 888-894*.

⁴⁵³ Hoffman, P.; Postel-Vinay G. & Rosenthal, J. (1999). “Information and economic history: how the credit market in Old Regime Paris forces us to rethink the transition to capitalism”. *The American Historical Review* 104: 69-94.

⁴⁵⁴ RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 145, f. 176

⁴⁵⁵ Helsen, I. (1992) *De werking van de Turnhoutse schepenbank (1427-1457)*. Leuven. Universiteit Leuven: 199

⁴⁵⁶ OGA Rijkevorsel, 145, Register of the bench of aldermen, 1465-1487, f. 44

exchange for 2 zester rye (707,8 litres).⁴⁵⁷ Yet again, women were often acting as *erfgevers*, namely in 34.8 percent of the *erfgevingen* in Rijkevorsel. So, to sum it up, credit transactions (and by extension *erfgevingen*) were essential building blocks of a peasant's economic strategy. At the important moments of life – when parents died and the inheritance needed to be divided, when one's life's partner died, when one retired, ... – Campine peasants could opt to act as a creditor and use rent to ensure a stable income.

The reasons why Campine peasants chose to plunge into debt are extremely difficult to reconstruct, so I will only put forward some preliminary hypotheses. First of all, it is safe to say that credit was not used to buy land. Land and credit markets evolved in completely different ways and we could trace not one individual who in first instance loaned money and was later on a buyer in a land transaction. This matches the findings of Erik Thoen for Inland Flanders, where peasants also did not loan money to invest in business expansions. Thoen suggest that these loans were predominantly used for 'in-depth investments'; investments in the purchase of agricultural implements, livestock, sowing seed, improvements off the farmstead, ...⁴⁵⁸ Since a significant amount of Campine peasants – mainly the so-called independent peasants – owned quite some livestock (cows and sheep) and often also a plough, it seems reasonable to hypothesise that Campine credit played its part its purchase. This is backed up by the findings of Thomas Brennan for the eighteenth-century Champagne. Since most of these loans were long-term loans, it seems quite likely that they were used to invest, whereas short-term loans were often used to alleviate urgent needs.⁴⁵⁹

5.4 Conclusion

Campine peasants were indeed eager market users – market activities were a relevant part of their portfolio, as recent research already abundantly suggested. However, market participation does not seem to have altered Campine social structures, lead to accumulation processes or tight dependency relations. This was clearly not because of shortcomings in the functioning of markets or institutional constraints. On an institutional level, Campine commodity and factor markets were remarkably similar to those in other regions of the Low Countries. When it came to the commodity market, some restrictions – most notably the forced use of certain markets and the existence of banmiles – can named, but these were present as well in the more commercially oriented regions as well – Coastal Flanders for example. For factor markets the same holds true. They were extremely accessible and hardly characterised by severe restrictions. The turnover rate of the land market and the interest rate on the credit market suggests a relatively smooth functioning.

The specific social structures of the Campine area seem to have determined the outcome of market activity within this society. Commodity as well as factor markets seem to have been a relevant factor not when it came to social change, but to uphold societal stability and mainly secure a peasant-dominated life-style. The Campine independent peasants – yet again –

⁴⁵⁷ Omrekening gebaseerd op: P. Vandewalle, P. (1984) *Oude maten, gewichten en muntstelsels in Vlaanderen, Brabant en Limburg*. Gent: 54.

⁴⁵⁸ E. Thoen, *Landbouweconomie en bevolking*, 929-935.

⁴⁵⁹ T. Brennan, "Peasants and debt": 177.

profited the most. They were – due to the vast commons, which they also controlled – able to combine a more subsistence-oriented arable farming with a relatively strongly market-oriented animal breeding. This allowed them to generate extra income, further securing the survival of their family. The demand of urban markets – of the smaller Campine cities, but also a metropolis such as Antwerp – was therefore highly relevant. However, urban capital was not a predatory force, making peasants dependent on urbanites, as Erik Thoen claimed for Inland Flanders. The supply- and demand-side of these markets were fairly local, or at its most, regional. The Campine land and credit market also played an essential part in securing a peasant-way of living, allowing Campine villagers an easy access to credit, to make necessary investments, and an easy disposal of or access to extra land. Independent peasants were relatively somewhat more active, but an access to land and credit were relevant to less well-off villagers as well. For them, the Campine labour market might have been even more important, to add income to the – sometimes meagre – proceedings of their mini-holdings. It was impossible to assess the exact extent of the Campine labour market, but it is quite possible that it contributed to the continued Campine stability, by offering survival options for cottagers and smallholders.

6

COQS DE VILLAGE OR UGLY DUCKLINGS? CAMPINE TENANT FARMERS AND THE VILLAGE COMMUNITY.

“Le personnage du grand fermier en constitue, il est vrai, l’une des figures de proue. Locataire des terres et souvent du corps de ferme, mais propriétaire du capital d’exploitation, c’était un ‘entrepreneur de culture’, soucieux de rentabiliser de lourdes avances en s’engageant à fond dans l’économie marchande pour assurer la rente, les salaires et son propre profit. Aux yeux des historiens, il n’est donc pas étonnant qu’il incarnate la voie ‘classique’ du passage du féodalisme au capitalisme dans l’agriculture”

(Jean- Marc Moriceau, 1994)⁴⁶⁰

On the third day of August 1509, Jan Van Kochoven and his wife Digne Gilsmans appeared before the court of aldermen of the village of Rijkevorsel. They had decided to lease a farm owned by the underage orphans of Jan Wouter Ansems and Barbele Van Kochoven (very likely a family member of Jan). A contract was drawn up by the village aldermen stating the price and general conditions under which Jan and Digne could use the farm. The length of the lease was 6 years, redeemable after 3 years. Every year a lease sum had to be paid – in kind – of 12 *viertel*⁴⁶¹ rye.⁴⁶² Thirty years later, on the first day of May 1539, another similar contract was drawn up, between entirely different parties.⁴⁶³ The landlord was no ordinary peasant, but the extremely powerful Abbey of Tongerlo, leasing out one of their many tenant farms (in this case in the village of Essen) to Jan Vander Couwenberge, who used to be the *vorster*⁴⁶⁴ of Essen, the same village in which he now tilled his newly leased lands. Jan leased the farm for a period of 12 years, redeemable after 6 years. He had to pay a yearly lease sum of 66 *rijnsgulden* and 12 *loopen* rye.⁴⁶⁵ These – quite randomly chosen – examples clearly indicate the fact that leasehold in the Campine area – as in the rest of Western Europe – was a very versatile and multi-layered

⁴⁶⁰ Moriceau, J.-M. (2005). *Histoire Et Géographie De L'élevage Français. Du Moyen Âge À La Révolution*: 15

⁴⁶¹ 1 *viertel* = 79.627 litres

⁴⁶² RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 148. Register of the bench of aldermen, 1496-1513

⁴⁶³ AAT, II, 283. *Registrum Conventionum*, 1525

⁴⁶⁴ The *vorster* was the officer monitoring violations of village byelaws, mainly those concerning the commons

⁴⁶⁵ 1 *loopen* = 19.9 litres

phenomenon, engaging actors of very different backgrounds, ranging from powerful landlords to orphaned peasant children.

Leasehold could take on many different shapes. The recently published CORN volume on leasehold ‘The development of leasehold in northwestern Europe, c. 1200-1600’, is a clear illustration of this. The contributions in this volume make it abundantly clear that leasehold was as diverse as it was frequent. Miriam Müller, for example, clearly points to the differences between inter-peasant leasing⁴⁶⁶, which was predominant in England before the Black Death, and demesne leasing⁴⁶⁷ which became increasingly frequent afterwards.⁴⁶⁸ Both types of leasehold were prevalent in the Low Countries, with significant differences existing between regions. Furthermore, lease terms, conditions, turnover rates, etc. could vary enormously from region to region. Bas Van Bavel, for instance, states: “All kinds of temporary grants or leases existed in the medieval period, varying from very short-term leases (for instance for only one year) on the one hand, to leases very long-term leases (for several lifetimes) on the other. Also, some of these leases were very insecure or revocable at the will of the landowner, whereas other leases offered the tenant very strong rights to the land”.⁴⁶⁹ Tim Soens and Erik Thoen furthermore point to the striking differences in the prevalence and nature of leasehold in Coastal Flanders – where leasehold was predominant and part of a very commercialised economic structure – and Inland Flanders – where leasehold was part of a peasant way-of-life.⁴⁷⁰

However, what Van Bavel labels as ‘short-term leasehold’ was clearly not omnipresent in the entire Low Countries. This was a very specific type of leasehold, defined by Van Bavel as “an economic lease for a limited short period, without the tenant having any permanent rights to the land’. The contract was drawn-up voluntarily between two parties, with terms varying between 3 and 12 years. The lease sum was variable, to be paid in species or in kind, but adaptable to market conditions.⁴⁷¹ Furthermore, this type of leasehold has attracted a great deal of historiographical interest in recent years, predominantly because of Robert Brenner’s pioneering thesis⁴⁷², pointing out the core importance of leasehold in the transition from feudalism to capitalism. It was especially dominant in regions which had undergone a transition towards agrarian capitalism, such as the Gelders River area⁴⁷³ or the Flanders Coastal area⁴⁷⁴ where up to 80 or 90 percent of land was held in lease. In other core regions, such as Holland, or Inland Flanders, leasehold played a role of importance, but was by no means as

⁴⁶⁶ Peasants leasing out their own customary land to other peasants

⁴⁶⁷ The leasing out of entire farm complexes, mostly by large institutions to tenant farmers

⁴⁶⁸ Müller, M. (2008). “Peasants, lords and developments in leasing in later medieval England.” B. J. P. Van Bavel and P. R. Schofield (eds.). *The development of leasehold in northwestern Europe, c. 1200-1600*. Turnhout, Brepols: 155-178.

⁴⁶⁹ Van Bavel, B. J. P. (2008). “The emergence and growth of short-term leasing in the Netherlands and other parts of Northwestern Europe (eleventh-seventeenth centuries). A chronology and a tentative investigation into its causes.” B. J. P. Van Bavel and P. R. Schofield (eds.). *The development of leasehold in northwestern Europe, c. 1200-1600*. Turnhout, Brepols: 179

⁴⁷⁰ Soens, T. and E. Thoen (2008). “The origins of leasehold in the former county of Flanders.” B. J. P. Van Bavel and P. R. Schofield. (eds.). *The development of leasehold in northwestern Europe, c. 1200-1600*. Turnhout, Brepols: 31-56.

⁴⁷¹ Van Bavel, B. J. P. (2008). “The emergence and growth of short-term leasing”: 180

⁴⁷² See for example: Aston, T. H. and C. H. E. Philpin (1985). *The Brenner Debate. Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

⁴⁷³ Studied by Bas Van Bavel in: Van Bavel, B. J. P. (1999). *Transitie en continuïteit: de bezitsverhoudingen en de plattelandseconomie in het westelijke gedeelte van het Gelderse rivierengebied, ca. 1300- ca. 1570*. Hilversum, Verloren.

⁴⁷⁴ Studied by Tim Soens in: Soens, T. (2009). *De spade in de dijk? Waterbeheer en rurale samenleving in de Vlaamse kustvlakte (1280-1580)*. Gent, Academia Press.

predominant as in the aforementioned regions, since only about 40 to 50 percent of land was leased out.⁴⁷⁵

In the more peripheral regions, the extent of leased-out land remained rather modest. In Drenthe, for example, a sandy region with commons not unlike the Campine area, only 39 percent of land was leased out. In the Campine area leasehold was even more limited. Customary tenure was, and remained, the dominant way by which peasants acquired their lands. Still, the short-term leasing of plots of land – mainly in the form of inter-peasant leasing – did occur in the Campine area. In the village of Gierle in 1554, 18.36 percent off all parcels were leased out.⁴⁷⁶ Even in the tiny village of Minderhout, in 1569, this number amounted to as much as 25 percent.⁴⁷⁷ However, these numbers are significantly lower than for any other (studied) region of the Low Countries. Inter-peasant leasehold was thus not predominant, however, still played a part in this peasant society. Demesne leasehold was even more rare. This is not very surprising since the sandy Campine area, determined by its common waste and dominated by smallholding peasant landowners, can by no means be compared with the Low Countries' coastal fringes, and was characterised by fertile polder clay and a large-scale, commercial type of agriculture. Large tenant farms were therefore not a prime characteristic of Campine society, but in a restricted number of villages they did represent an important factor. Particularly powerful ecclesiastical institutions, such as the abbeys of Tongerlo and Averbode, or the Antwerp Saint-Elisabeth Hospital, leased out a couple of clusters of farms which were limited to some villages, most notably in and around Tongerlo, Kalmthout, Essen and Wuustwezel.

The tenant farmers occupying these types of farms have also received their fair share of historiographical attention. In the past tenant farmers have often been portrayed as the haulers of commercialisation and specialised agriculture. Recently, however, this image has been adjusted and somewhat nuanced, even for regions involved in rather commercialised agriculture. Van Bavel, for example, points to the Gelders river area to demonstrate that, whereas leased-out land was on average extremely mobile, this was clearly not the case when it came to large tenant farms, often owned by important (ecclesiastical) institutions.⁴⁷⁸ These farms were frequently occupied by the same families for several generations. This has also been shown by Lies Vervaet, who emphasised the rather large continuity of tenant families in the farms the Bruges Saint-John's hospital owned in Coastal Flanders. She furthermore stresses the fact that these tenant farmers were not uniquely engaged in a market-driven production, but also served the demand for foodstuffs of the large Saint John's hospital, which often resulted in a quite personal relationship between landlord and leaseholder.⁴⁷⁹ This leaves us wondering about the position of tenant farmers in a region such as the Campine area. In previous chapters we already mentioned the importance of the common waste in the Campine agro-system. As we have seen, these commons primarily served the interests of the landowning 'middle-class' of peasants. We furthermore saw that recent research has strongly nuanced the traditional link

⁴⁷⁵ Van Bavel, B. J. P. (2008). "The emergence and growth of short-term leasing": 190-191

⁴⁷⁶ RAA, OGA Gierle, 344. Pieces concerning the 10th and 20th penny tax (*penningkohier*), 1554

⁴⁷⁷ SA Hoogstraten, KA Minderhout, H9. List of owners for the 100th penny tax (*penningkohier*), 1569 & H10. List of tenants for the 100th penny tax (*penningkohier*), 1569

⁴⁷⁸ Van Bavel, B. J. P. (2001). "Land, lease and agriculture: the transition of the rural economy in the Dutch river area from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century." *Past and Present* 172: 3-43.

⁴⁷⁹ Vervaet, L. (2012). "Het Brugse Sint-Janshospitaal en zijn grote hoevepachters in de 15e en 16e eeuw: wederkerigheid en continuïteit in de functie van voedselzekerheid." *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 9(3): 2-26.

between tenant farmers and enclosure. In the past lords and their tenant farmers were portrayed as the main adversaries of the English commons and the main pamphleteers of the enclosure movement⁴⁸⁰, but these views have been strongly adjusted, as we saw in chapter 4 (section 4.2.3). Furthermore, in a recent contribution Maïka De Keyzer has pointed to the importance of commons for the survival of the Campine tenant farmers; the continued existence of the Campine commons was, in her view the result of equilibrium between social groups, who – to varying extents – benefitted from its use.⁴⁸¹

Peasant societies dominated by commons were therefore by no means irreconcilable with the presence of tenant farmers. The tenant farmers occupying these holdings were, however, the odd-ones out in Campine society. In a society dominated by customary tenure and smallholding, these leaseholding farmers with their large holdings were quite exceptional, showing – at first sight – remarkable resemblances with the eighteenth-century Inland Flanders *coqs de village*. In the following chapter, the Campine tenant farmers will be placed at the forefront of our research. Several questions and issues will be addressed to shed light on the characteristics and strategies of this fascinating subgroup of Campine society. In this chapter I will firstly sketch a general image of the extent and characteristics of leasehold in the Campine area by focussing on the different types of leasehold. The central theme of this chapter will, however, be the position (and integration) of these tenant farmers in a peasant society. This topic will be addressed via two fundamental sets of questions. First of all: were tenant farms and their farmers islands of ‘individualistic’ agriculture amidst a world that strongly depended on commons? To what extent were tenant farmers – when it came to economic, agricultural strategies – different from their peasant neighbours? Were they significantly burdened by the pressure of leasing – which would make them distinct from Campine peasants - or was this only cumbersome to a limited extent? What was the role of the landlord (i.e. the abbey of Tongerlo) in deciding on these strategies? Were the prerequisites under which they leased their farms different from those we encounter in inter-peasant leasehold, thus setting them apart, or not? And secondly, I will focus on the position of the Campine farmers in this peasant society. When we look, for example, at early modern Inland Flanders, recently studied by Thijs Lambrecht⁴⁸² and Reinoud Vermoesen⁴⁸³, large tenant farmers appear to be true *coqs de village*, wielding their elaborate political and economic powers and keeping a firm grip on the functioning of the village community. They did this by acting as middlemen in the land, credit, labour and commodity-markets which existed in between the mass of cottagers and peasants on the one hand, and the urban market and landowners on the other.⁴⁸⁴ Can we see traces of a similar dominance in Campine villages? Did our Campine tenant farmers, for example, show a considerable interest in political offices and

⁴⁸⁰ For examples, see: Allen, R. C. (1992). *Enclosure and the yeoman. The agricultural development of the South-Midlands 1450-1850*. Oxford, Clarendon Press Oxford.

⁴⁸¹ De Keyzer, M. (2014), “The common denominator: regulation of the community of users of common waste lands within the Campine area during the 16th century.” F. Aparisi Romero and V. Royo (eds.). *Beyond Lords and Peasants. Rural Elites and Economic Differentiation in Pre-Modern Europe*. Valencia, VUP.

⁴⁸² Lambrecht, T. (2002). *Een grote hoeve in een klein dorp: relaties van arbeid en pacht op het Vlaamse platteland tijdens de 18e eeuw*. Gent, Academia Press.

⁴⁸³ Vermoesen, R. (2010). "Paardenboeren in Vlaanderen. Middelaars en commercialisering van de vroegmoderne rurale economie in de regio Aalst 1650-1800." *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis* 7(1): 3-37.

⁴⁸⁴ See for example: Lambrecht, T. (2002). *Een grote hoeve in een klein dorp* & Vermoesen, R. (2010). "Paardenboeren in Vlaanderen: 3-37.

were they active on the Campine credit markets? Furthermore, what was the nature of their relationship with their peasant counterparts?

These issues will be addressed primarily by making use of the extensive and rich source material of the powerful abbey of Tongerlo. This abbey was the main owner of tenant farms in the Antwerp Campine area, so their accounts, stock taking of movable and immovable goods, lease contracts, etc. will be put to use in order to broadly reconstruct the economic position of tenant farmers. This will be combined with findings for the Wuustwezel tenant farms of the Antwerp Saint-Elisabeth hospital and the ducal farm in the Land of Turnhout, mostly based on their accounts, in order to make some observations on their place and role within village society and their relationship with ‘ordinary’ peasants. These sources will allow me to shed light on this somewhat enigmatic group in Campine society, suggesting that they were not ‘true’ *coqs de village*, as their eighteenth-century Inland Flanders counterparts. In the following chapter it will become clear that their agricultural / economic strategies were not all that different from those of ‘ordinary’ peasants, and that, in a way, they were even somewhat less enviable, since they often had to reckon with a very hands-on landlord. Furthermore, when it came to their position in village life, it would seem that they therefore lacked the necessary economic and political tools to create true dependency.

6.1 The extent of leasehold in a peasant society

6.1.1 Inter-peasant leasehold: numbers and sizes

As has been mentioned before, leasehold might not have been predominant in the Campine area, but it nonetheless played its part in this society. Campine villages were clearly dominated by land held in customary rent, but even ordinary peasants leased out entire farm complexes, albeit of modest sizes. These findings were brought together in table 6.1. For the villages of Alphen, Gierle, Minderhout, and Tongerlo, I have used the sixteenth century *penningkohieren* to assess the number of entire farms⁴⁸⁵ that were leased out in these communities, split up in two sub-groups: farms leased out by peasants themselves and farms leased out by a large landowning institution (i.e. the Abbey of Tongerlo). For the village of Rijkevorsel, only the lease contracts, registered by the bench of aldermen, were at my disposal, which implies that the findings for this village are less reliable, since they may not be complete. Where possible the average size (in hectares) has also been listed.

Table 6.1 Number of tenant farms per village, sixteenth century

Village	Number of tenant farms (institution)	Number of leased farmsteads (peasants)	Total number of leased farmsteads	Number of households ⁴⁸⁶	% of leased out farms compared to households
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⁴⁸⁵ I only included complete farm complexes – usually denominated as (*hof*)*stede* and not individually leased-out parcels. For the findings on the leasing out of parcels, see: chapter 3 (3.2.1)

⁴⁸⁶ Based on: Cuvelier, J. (1912). *Les dénombrements de foyers en Brabant, 14e-16e siècle*, Brussel, s.n.

Alphen ⁴⁸⁷	4 (23,55 ha ⁴⁸⁸)	1 (unknown)	5	382	1.3%
Gierle ⁴⁸⁹	0	7 (2.3 ha)	7	161	4.3%
Minderhout ⁴⁹⁰	0	17 (unknown)	17	68	25%
Rijkevorsel ⁴⁹¹	0 ⁴⁹²	17 ⁴⁹³	17	195	8.7%
Tongerlo ⁴⁹⁴	8 (38.6 ha) ⁴⁹⁵	35 (2.6 ha)	43	218	19.7%

Sources: AAT, II, 689. 100th penny register (*10oste penningkohier*) for the village Alphen, 1559-1578; RAA, OGA Gierle, 344. Pieces concerning the 10th and 20th penny tax (*penningkohier*), 1554; SA Hoogstraten, KA Minderhout, H9. List of owners for the 100th penny tax (*penningkohier*), 1569 & H10. List of tenants for the 100th penny tax (*penningkohier*), 1569 & Heerman, C. (2006). "Het abdijdomein van de abdij van Tongerlo in de 15de - 16de eeuw (met speciale aandacht voor de pachthoeves van de abdij)." *Taxandria* LXXVIII: 142

A number of things are striking from this survey. First of all, whereas large institutions leasing out relatively huge farms are by no means present in all villages, the leasing out of complete farms by peasants themselves occurred in every village. Leasing a farm as a means of acquiring land was apparently of secondary importance in every village – since numbers never exceeded 25 percent – but the differences between villages are what really stand out here. In the village of Alphen, for example, only 1.3 percent of all farms were leased out, whereas in Minderhout, this amounted to 25 percent – quite an impressive difference even though these villages were only 18 kilometres apart. However, it is far easier to note the differences than to identify their causes. Differences in the social distribution of land and in power relations might have played a part on the local level as well as the regional level.

In all of these villages a small, but nevertheless significant, group of peasants did not own their land, instead leasing it. This made them somewhat different from the majority of the Campine commoners, since customary rent was still predominant. For the village of Gierle, the size of all seven tenant farms can be reconstructed. One of them was smaller than 1 hectare, 5 measured between 1 and 3 hectares and one was larger than 3 hectares. For the villages of Tongerlo and Minderhout, I have been able to determine to which quartiles these peasant-tenants belonged. In Tongerlo, only the lowest quartile (1) was clearly underrepresented, with only 5.7 percent. The quartiles 2 (28.6 percent), 3 (31.4 percent) and 4 (34.3 percent) were almost evenly important. In the village of Minderhout 13 of the 17 tenants could be identified. Quartiles 1 and 2 each numbered 5.9 percent. 11.8 percent belonged to quartile 3 and the majority (52.9 percent) belonged to the highest quartile. The image presented is rather mixed and differs from village to village, but it seems safe to say that leased-out holdings, carried out through inter-peasant leases, were not very different from the owner-occupied holdings. Their holdings were not any larger than the ones tilled by their landowning counterparts. To explain

⁴⁸⁷ AAT, II, 689. 100th penny register (*10oste penningkohier*) for the village Alphen, 1559-1578

⁴⁸⁸ Based on: Heerman, C. (2006). "Het abdijdomein van de abdij van Tongerlo in de 15de - 16de eeuw (met speciale aandacht voor de pachthoeves van de abdij)." *Taxandria. Jaarboek van de koninklijke geschied - en oudheidkundige kring van de Antwerpse Kempen* LXXVIII: 142

⁴⁸⁹ RAA, OGA Gierle, 344. Pieces concerning the 10th and 20th penny tax (*penningkohier*), 1554

⁴⁹⁰ SA Hoogstraten, KA Minderhout, H9. List of owners for the 100th penny tax (*penningkohier*), 1569 & H10. List of tenants for the 100th penny tax (*penningkohier*), 1569

⁴⁹¹ RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 148. Register of the bench of aldermen, 1496-1513

⁴⁹² Number not based on *penningkohier*, but on lease contracts, so not necessarily entirely correct

⁴⁹³ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁹⁴ AAT, II, 896. 100th penny register (*100 ste penningkohier*), Tongerlo, 1569

⁴⁹⁵ Based on: Heerman, C. (2006). "Het abdijdomein van de abdij van Tongerlo": 142

the existence and – in some villages – relative importance of inter-peasant leases, we should probably turn to the peasant-life cycle, and one might think of older peasants retiring from agriculture and leasing out their farm (perhaps often to relatives, as in the example in the introduction of this chapter), providing both old-age security to older peasants and the possibility of starting up a farm for young ones. Also, perhaps richer peasants might at some point decide to live off rents, leasing out their farm and collecting the lease, and perhaps some annuities, in order to make a living.

6.1.2 Large landowners: numbers and sizes

Some Campine villages were, however, characterised by more ‘ideal typical’ tenant farms; exceptionally large holdings (at least in a Campine context) leased out, not by ordinary peasants but by, for example, important ecclesiastical institutions. The primary landlord of tenant farms in the Campine area was the powerful Abbey of Tongerlo. This Prémontré abbey, founded in 1130/33, was some sort of spin-off from the Antwerp Saint-Michael Abbey. In the same wave of ecclesiastical foundations the Abbey of Averbode was erected in 1134, in a region somewhat to the south of the Campine area.⁴⁹⁶ During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the Tongerlo monks were able to gather quite a significant amount of real estate, thanks to several bestowals of land and tithes, mainly by local lords. The exceptionally rich charter collection of the abbey bears witness to the manifold complexes of land the abbey received. Contrary to what older works have often suggested, the abbeys were not the great forces reclaiming land in the Campine area. Willy Steurs, for example, clearly points to the fact that abbeys were usually bestowed with already existing property complexes. The Campine tenant farms were therefore mainly ‘*construites sur d’anciennes exploitations laïques*’.⁴⁹⁷ Thanks to the support and protection of the Dukes of Brabant – always on the lookout for allies in their power struggle with, for example the Duke of Breda and other local lords - the abbey managed to become one of the most powerful Campine institutions. The Brabantine dukes were not involved in the foundation of the Premonstré abbey, but when it was up and running they were eager to act as ‘monastery guardians’. This alliance between the Tongerlo monks and the Brabantine dukes was mutually advantageous. It enabled the dukes to strengthen their position in the Campine area, and the Tongerlo monks thrived under the protection of their soon-to-be landlord.⁴⁹⁸

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Abbey of Tongerlo was a well-established player in Campine society. In the villages of Tongerlo, Essen and Kalmthout not only were they the most important landowner (*seigneurie foncière*), they also possessed (part of) the

⁴⁹⁶ There are also some studies – albeit rather superficial ones – on the Averbode tenant farms: Houtmeyers, S. (1999). *Landbouwwitbatingen van de abdij van Averbode in haar onmiddellijke omgeving (16e-17e eeuw)*. History Department. Leuven, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven: 285 & Hanjoul, M. (2005). *De uithoven van de abdij van Averbode en het economische belang hiervan voor de ontwikkeling van de Kempen*. History Department. Leuven, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven

⁴⁹⁷ Steurs, W. (1996). "Abbayes et défrichements en Campine. Notes sur les exploitations cisterciennes et norbertines dans le Brabant septentrional aux 12e et 13e siècles." *Tijdschrift van de Belgische vereniging voor Aardrijkskundige Studies* 65(2): 189

⁴⁹⁸ For more information on the foundation and early history of the Abbey of Tongerlo (and other Premonstratensian abbeys) there is the – slightly dated, but still fairly relevant - Lamy, H. (1914). *L’abbaye de Tongerlo depuis sa fondation jusqu’en 1263*. Leuven. For more recent summaries: Heerman, C. (2006). "Het abdijsdomein van de abdij van Tongerlo": 121 - 224. & De Wachter, A. (2002). *De toepassing van wereldsysteem-analyse op geografische streken. Twee casestudies: de Kempen en noordelijk Ghana*. Vakgroep Geografie. Gent, Universiteit Gent..

jurisdiction in these villages (*seigneurie banale*). The peasants living in these villages therefore had to pay their customary rents (on *cijnsland*) to the abbey and furthermore lived under the jurisdiction of the said institution. The village of Tongerlo, for example, was not only situated close to the abbey's main housing complex, the abbey also cast its shadows over the village in a less literal way. The villages of Tongerlo, Essen and Kalmthout were not only an integral part of the abbey's estate, the majority of the abbey's tenant farms were also based in these communities. In an article based on his master's thesis in Taxandria, Cedric Heerman has reconstructed the number and location of the abbey's fifteenth- and sixteenth-century tenant farms. Such an undertaking is quite a task, since the archival sources of the Abbey of Tongerlo are notoriously complicated. In the Campine area as a whole (Regions: Tongerlo, Beers, Hapert, Alphen, Tilburg, Broechem, Kalmthout and Ravels) 82 tenant farms were able to be identified. The largest concentrations could be found in Tongerlo, Essen and Kalmthout. Tongerlo (a village of 218 households) was home to 8 tenant farms. In Essen and Kalmthout (inhabited by a total of 424 households) 14 tenant farms could be found. In most other villages, the number of tenant farms fluctuated between 1 and 4. Other ecclesiastical institutions were also present in the region, for example the Antwerp-based Saint-Elisabeth hospital, which owned 2 tenant farms in the village of Wuustwezel.⁴⁹⁹ However, none of these institutions had the institutional and economic scope of the abbey of Tongerlo.

The tenant farms of the abbey of Tongerlo were especially large when compared to ordinary peasant-holdings, which on average hardly ever exceeded 3 hectares. By combining data from sixteenth century lease contracts and the so-called *fines culturam* (sixteenth-century relatively detailed descriptions of farms), it is possible to make a reconstruction - albeit a sometimes rather haphazard one - of farm sizes in the villages Tongerlo, Essen and Kalmthout, as can be found in table 6.2.⁵⁰⁰

Table 6.2 Surface areas of tenant farms in the Campine area (in the villages of Tongerlo and Kalmthout) in the sixteenth century

Village	Farm name	Surface (in ha)
Kalmthout	In Priesterdonk	8,60
Kalmthout	Opde Wildert	16,36
Kalmthout	In Voetsberghen	17,21
Kalmthout	Opden Hoeck	20,53
Kalmthout	Prope Kalmthout	22,60
Tongerlo	Ten Nieuwenhove (Nieuwen huis)	23,08
Essen	In Essen	23,30
Tongerlo	Ten Goere	27,84
Kalmthout	Opte Donk	32,02
Tongerlo	Opt Concinxblock	35,05
Tongerlo	Ten Broecke	35,21
Tongerlo	Op de Loo	36,52
Tongerlo	Ter Locht	40,25
Kalmthout	Inde Greve	41,77

⁴⁹⁹ Vorlat, F. (2008). *De prochie van Woestwezel*. Wuustwezel, Gemeentebestuur van Wuustwezel.

⁵⁰⁰ Based on: AAT, II, 283. *Registrum conventionum*, 1525 & AAT, II, 292 & 293. *Fines culturam*, 1510-1653

Tongerlo	Ten (gem)eynde	56,99
Tongerlo	Ter Heyden	57,64
Tongerlo	Ten Bossche	77,62

Source: AAT, Section II, 292-293, *Fines culturam, 1510-1600*, processed by Maïka De Keyzer

It is immediately apparent that these tenant farms were much larger than the holdings of 'ordinary' peasants. Even the big-shot peasants rarely owned over 10 hectares, whereas these typical tenant farms measured on average 37 hectares (median: 33.5 hectares). If we compare this with findings for Coastal Flanders⁵⁰¹ (table 3.3) – a region increasingly dominated by large tenant farms in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries – the Campine tenant farms strike us, in the first instance, as relatively modest. The average farm, owned by the Bruges Saint John's hospital, in the Coastal area was indeed 71.7 hectares (median: 50 hectares), however, the difference between the mean and median already suggests that the Coastal area was characterised by outliers: some exceptionally large farms. Schuringe, for example, one of the tenant farms of the Bruges Saint John's hospital measured a staggering 262 hectares. This almost gargantuan size was exceptional, even for the Coastal area. Keeping this in mind, the Campine tenant farms were, in reality, still somewhat smaller than their coastal counterparts, however, the differences were not as outspoken as suggested by the average size. It is quite hard to obtain tenant farm surfaces for other peasant regions in the Low Countries. Thijs Lambrecht mentions the size of Ter Hoyen, the largest tenant farm of the small Flemish village of Markegem in the eighteenth century. It comprised 50 hectares, whereas other tenant farms in the vicinity were not much larger than 20 hectares.⁵⁰² Based on these findings, one would be tempted to conclude that – when it came to size – the Campine tenant farms were comparable to those of Inland Flanders.

Table 6.3 Surface areas of tenant farms of the Saint John's and Potterie hospitals in Coastal Flanders in the sixteenth century

Village	Farm name	Surface (ha)
Straten	Goed te Straten	20,24
Moerkerke	Goed te Moerkerke	24,20
Adegem	Hof van Altena	31,62
Wenduine	Hof te Wenduine	39,62
Sint Michiels	Hof ten Briele	49,30
Bredene	Goed te Bredene	50,60
Sint Andries	Westschuere	53,08
Zuikerkerke	Trente	58,00
Vlissegem	Ter Scamelweken	128,04
Zuikerkerke	Schuringe	262,30

Source: Based on the findings of Lies Vervaeke & Kristof Dombrecht

⁵⁰¹ Based on the findings of Lies Vervaeke & Kristof Dombrecht

⁵⁰² Lambrecht, T. (2002). *Een grote hoeve in een klein dorp*

6.2 The economic side of the coin: the Campine tenant farmers and their agricultural strategies – commercially and/or landlord driven?

6.2.1 General sketch of the economic strategies of Campine tenant farmers

In historiography, tenant farms and their occupants are often linked to large-scale commercial (and thus market-oriented) activities.⁵⁰³ Recently, however, these statements have been nuanced by Lies Vervaeet, for example, who has emphasised a strong focus on the provision of food for the Bruges Saint John's Hospital and its patients by the tenant farms in Coastal Flanders. In all likelihood the same held true for the Campine tenant farms. These farms were used to supply the abbey with basic raw materials and foodstuffs being as they were the main exploitation centres.⁵⁰⁴ For that reason, the tenant farms, quite like their peasant neighbours, were made up of the same types of farmland but with a larger proportion of pasture. Since they owned more animals, this made it necessary to add more pasture and meadows to generate enough fodder.

Table 6.4 Ratio of arable land and pasture on the tenant farms of the abbey of Tongerlo (in the villages of Kalmthout & Tongerlo), 1510.

Village	Farm	Total surface area	arable land		pasture		other land types ⁵⁰⁵	
			In ha	%	In ha	%	In ha	%
Kalmthout	Opde Wildert	16,36	3,87	23,66%	9,48	57,94%	3,01	18,40%
Kalmthout	In Voetsberghen	17,21	6,55	38,06%	2,8	16,27%	7,86	45,67
Kalmthout	Opden Hoeck	20,53	9,89	48,17%	8,18	39,84%	2,46	11,99%
Tongerlo	Ten Nieuwenhove	23,80	13,10	55,04%	9,66	40,59%	1,04	4,37%
Tongerlo	Ten Goere	27,84	7,86	28,23%	11,79	42,35%	8,19	29,42%
Kalmthout	Opde Donk	32,02	3,01	9,40%	14,88	46,47%	14,13	44,13%
Tongerlo	Ten Broecke	35,21	14,57	41,38%	13,43	38,14%	7,21	20,48%
Tongerlo	Op de Loo	36,52	13,1	35,87%	18,99	52,00%	4,43	12,13%
Kalmthout	Inden Greve	41,77	7,76	18,58%	24,78	59,32%	9,23	22,10%
Tongerlo	Ten Eynde	56,99	22,27	39,08%	32,10	56,33%	6,23	4,59%
Tongerlo	Ter Heyden	57,64	14,08	24,43%	36,68	63,63%	6,88	11,94%
Tongerlo	Ten Bossche	77,62	17,69	22,79%	45,19	58,22%	14,74	18,99%

Source: AAT, II, 292-293, *Fines culturam, 1510-1600*, processed by Maïka De Keyzer

Based on table 6.4, we can say that the Campine tenant farmers possessed a mixed land portfolio with a well-balanced ratio between arable land and pastures. The only clear trend that pops up is the following: the bigger the tenant farm, the more pasture it contained,

⁵⁰³ See for example: Allen, R. C. (1992). *Enclosure and the yeoman*

⁵⁰⁴ Vervaeet, L. (2012). "Het Brugse Sint-Janshospitaal"

⁵⁰⁵ Mainly comprising heathland, but sometimes also some woodland

however, a significant amount of arable land was - in almost all cases - still clearly present. Rye, oats, and even buckwheat were combined and the same goes for animal husbandry. On almost every farm, considerable amounts of cattle, horses, and huge flocks of sheep were present.⁵⁰⁶ Tenant farms therefore developed the same agricultural strategies as ordinary independent peasants, namely combining the production of different types of grains with the breeding of different types of animals, although on a much larger scale.

The Campine area, therefore, was a pre-eminently mixed farming region, not only because of its peasant inhabitants, but also when it came to its tenant farmers. The contours of this mixed farming system by tenants were drawn out by lease contracts. The abbey of Tongerlo set up a list of conditions to which the tenant farmers had to comply, setting boundaries for the development of the Campine tenant farmers' agricultural strategies. In the following paragraphs I will attempt to reconstruct these agricultural strategies, based on 11 sixteenth century lease contracts of the abbey of Tongerlo, for the villages of Essen and Kalmthout, dating from 1525 to the 1560s. To nuance the reconstruction and include some additional material, I have furthermore analysed 18 lease contracts registered before the bench of aldermen of the village of Rijkevorsel between 1500 and 1512. These findings are completed with the *status bladorum (et bestiarum)* of the abbey of Tongerlo⁵⁰⁷, already used by Herman Van der Wee in his famous 'The growth of the Antwerp market'.⁵⁰⁸ These were recently analysed in a thesis by Cedric Heerman⁵⁰⁹, for certain sample years (1402, 1415, 1439, 1462, 1490, 1507 and 1554). Due to the fact that the analysis of these findings is extremely time consuming, I will base my analysis largely on the work of Van der Wee and Heerman. I will focus mainly on the agricultural strategies of the Campine tenant farmers and the extent to which these were shaped by the abbey's expectations. How commercial were these strategies and how did they differ from those of the Campine independent peasants?

6.2.2 Cattle: the particularities of the Campine leasehold system

Shareholding: the Campine way (het Kempisch Stalrecht)

One of the most striking characteristics of Campine leasehold is the dominance of a system of shareholding. In the narrow sense of the term, shareholding refers to a system of leasehold in which the lease sum consists out of a certain percentage of the total produce. This was not entirely the case in the Campine area. The Campine lease-system (the *Kempisch stalrecht*) implied that farm buildings and arable land were leased out under 'ordinary' conditions, whereas livestock partially belonged to the tenant and partially to the abbey itself; usually both 'owned' half. This meant that the abbey provided all the animals, however, the farmers paid for half of them.⁵¹⁰ When a new tenant occupied the farm, the abbey provided him with all the necessary animals and the tenant had to pay the value of half of them. The returns were

⁵⁰⁶ For example, the farm Ter Uytsholen in Tongerlo, measuring 30.46 ha in total, combined arable land of 10.16 ha with 17.04 ha of pasture and meadows, while owning 16 pieces of cattle, 68 sheep and 7 horses. Source: AAT, Section II, 206 *Status bladorum monasterii Tongerloensis*, 1510 and AAT, Section II, 292-293. *Fines Culturam*, 1510-1653

⁵⁰⁷ AAT, II, 198-212. *Status bladorum (et bestiarum)*, 1393-1554

⁵⁰⁸ van der Wee, H. (1963). *The growth of the Antwerp market and the European economy (fourteenth-sixteenth centuries)*. The Hague, Nijhoff.

⁵⁰⁹ Summarised in: Heerman, C. (2006). "Het abdijdomein van de abdij van Tongerlo": 121 - 224. & Heerman, C. (2007). "Het abdijdomein van de abdij van Tongerlo in de 15de - 16de eeuw (met speciale aandacht voor de pachthoeves van de abdij) vervolg." *Taxandria*. LXXVIX: 131-156.

⁵¹⁰ Heerman, C. (2006). "Het abdijdomein van de abdij van Tongerlo": 149

likewise divided among abbey and tenant. When it came to sheep, the lambs, wool and hides were divided between tenant and landlord, whereas for cattle, only the calves were split up, dairy produce apparently belonged to the tenant farmer alone. Usually the abbey mentioned the number of cows and sheep the tenant had to hold, and sometimes even the number of calves and lambs they were required to breed.⁵¹¹ Maximus Gobben, who leased a farm in Essen, had to rear 8 cows, 2 oxen, and 4 calves. Henric Stuyt, leasing Opten Donck in Essen, was obliged to breed cows (at least 7), oxen, calves, and sheep. The Rijkevorsel inter-peasant leaseholders were confronted with similar liabilities. In 1501, for example, Adriaen Bonaert leased out a farm to Henrick Matheus and Meynen Larien, his wife. The contract specifically mentioned the fact that the farm was leased out in *helftwinning* – under a shareholding system, but this apparently only referred to animals – more specifically cows and sheep.⁵¹² Henrick Matheus and his wife Meynen Larien leased a farm under a shareholding regime from Adriaen Bonaert and were expected to keep cows (and deliver at least 2 calves to Adriaen every year) as well as at least 60 sheep. Also in Rijkevorsel Aernout De Proost and his wife Anthonie Brugmans leased a farm from a widow - Katelijne Jacobs - and were obliged to breed 2 horses, 4 cows and at least 70 sheep. According to Lindemans, these numbers were often explicitly mentioned in order to put some pressure on the tenant farmers to meet their ratios.⁵¹³

Shareholding has not always received good press, particularly in some older scholarly works. Van Bavel mentions critiques from Jan De Vries, S.R. Epstein and Catharina Lis & Hugo Soly. These authors mainly saw sharecropping-systems as a hindrance to commercialisation. Others, however, are more nuanced such as Cheung and North, for example, who point to the potential of sharecropping.⁵¹⁴ In addition Jan Bieleman, for instance, suggests that sharecropping in Drenthe functioned as some sort of joint-venture which was mutually beneficial to both parties.⁵¹⁵ Shareholding has often been portrayed as a suitable and useful alternative to ‘ordinary’ leasehold in regions that were, for example, not extremely fertile or during periods of turmoil in the countryside. In the Gelders river area, for example, sharecropping was present only when war raged through the region, especially in the period 1515-1535; during normal circumstances farms were leased out under the usual conditions.

The fact that shareholding – or at least the shared ownership of cattle – was dominant within Campine leasehold, was probably due to the challenging ecological circumstances. Farms in this region were probably unable to make the necessary investments in livestock alone, therefore, if the abbey wanted to find tenants in order to till its farms, it – in all likelihood – had to lend a helping hand, by co-investing in the purchase of livestock. Maïka De Keyzer has calculated that the average Tongerlo tenant farmer’s meadows and pasture were only able to produce 43 percent of the fodder his animals required.⁵¹⁶ She convincingly claims that tenant farmers were therefore strongly dependent on the Campine commons in order to

⁵¹¹ Lindemans, P. (1952). *Geschiedenis van de landbouw in België*. Antwerpen, De Sikkel, vol 1.: 262-265

⁵¹² All examples come from: AAT, II, 283. Pachtvoorwaarden (*registrum conventionum*), 1525 & RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 148. Schepenregisters, 1496-1513

⁵¹³ Lindemans, P. (1952). *Geschiedenis van de landbouw*

⁵¹⁴ Van Bavel, B. J. P. (1999). *Transitie en continuïteit: 533-578*

⁵¹⁵ Bieleman, J. (1987). *Boeren op het Drentse zand 1600-1910. Een nieuwe visie op de 'oude' landbouw*. Utrecht, HES Uitgevers.

⁵¹⁶ She used the findings of Anna Dahlstrom [Dahlström, A. (2006). *Pastures Livestock Number and Grazing Pressure 1620 1850. Ecological Aspects of Grazing History in South-Central Sweden*. Swedish University of agricultural sciences] to assess the hay yields of Campine meadows and the findings of Jean-Marc Moriceau to reconstruct the amount of fodder needed per cattle unit [Moriceau, J.-M. (2005). *Histoire Et Géographie De L'élevage Français. Du Moyen Âge À La Révolution*]

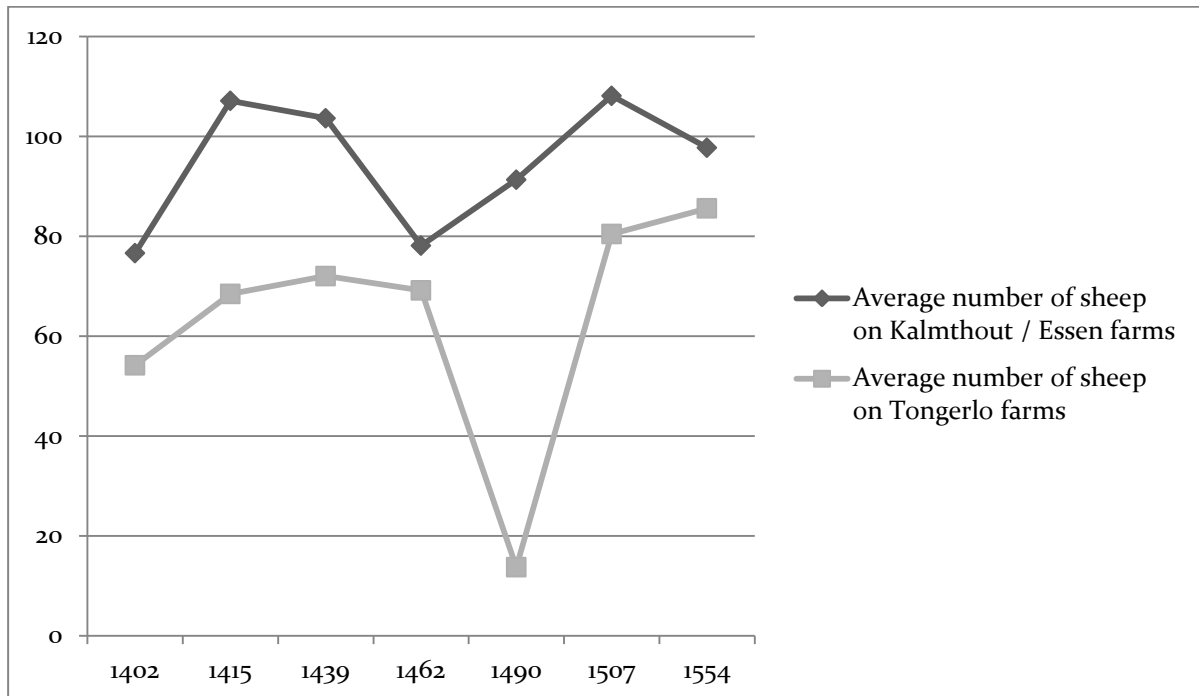
maintain the substantial size of their cattle herds and flocks of sheep, something that has also been suggested in chapter 4.⁵¹⁷ Animal breeding was quite challenging in the Campine area and therefore cows and sheep were often the ‘shared’ property of lord and tenant. Horses did not belong to this shareholding arrangement; farmers were obliged to provide these themselves. Pigs, too, were excluded and farmers were only allowed to breed a limited number of pigs, enough to feed the family (or as the lease contracts state this: “... *ende zal nochtens nyet meer verckenen mogen houden dan voert besieyen voer zijn huysgesinne...*”), since these animals were seen to be rather mischievous. This *Kempisch stalrecht* was inherent to all lease contracts drawn up by the abbey of Tongerlo, although shareholding could indeed be found in the arrangements made between peasants themselves as well.

Animal-breeding: serving the lord and serving the market

The number of animals these Tongerlo tenant farmers held under the system of *Kempisch stalrecht* was quite impressive. Based on the findings of Cedric Heerman, I have calculated the average amount of sheep and cattle on farms within two geographical clusters: one around Kalmthout and Essen, and one in the village of Tongerlo itself (Fig 6.1 & 6.2). When we take a closer look at the numbers, one clear tendency emerges: the Tongerlo farms evidently went through a crisis in 1490. This might have something to do with the revolt against Maximilian of Austria and the subsequent civil war. Little is known of the consequences of this tumultuous period on the Brabantine and Campine countryside, however, perhaps the village of Tongerlo was a direct victim of the havoc, or the possibility that it might have suffered from the upheaval in the markets, something that would have impacted the supply-side, is equally feasible. The breeding of sheep in Kalmthout and Essen went through a phase of relative decline in the second half of the fifteenth century, but apart from this cattle and sheep breeding proved to be relatively stable throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

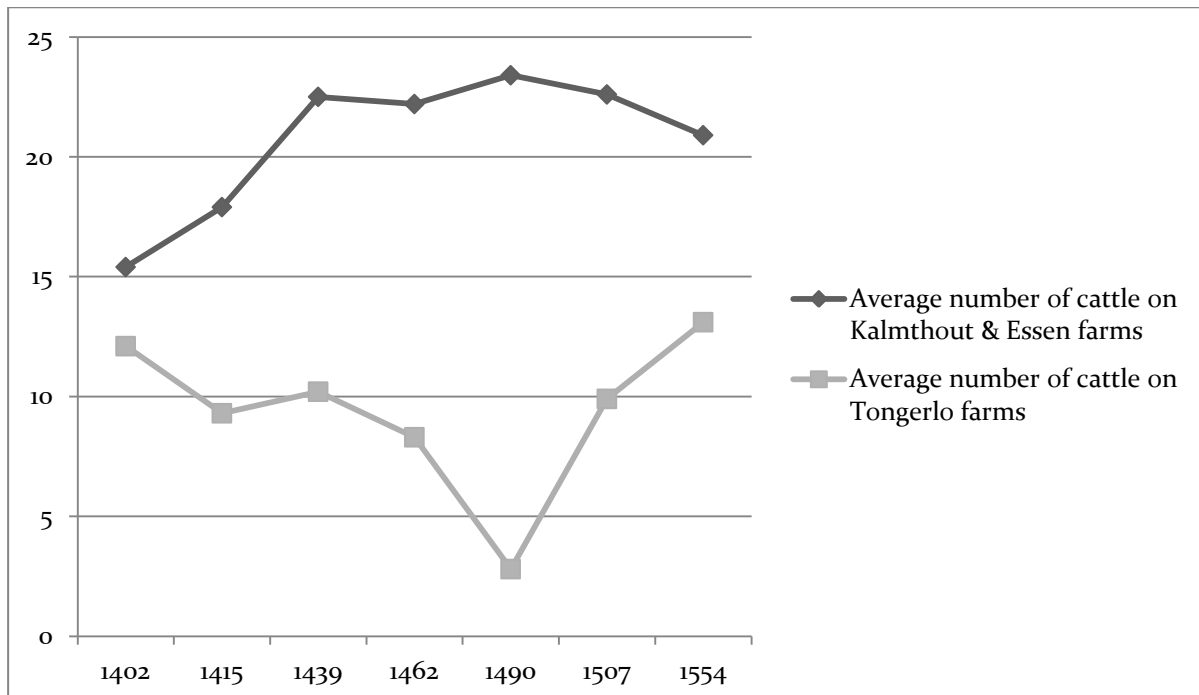
⁵¹⁷ De Keyzer, M. (2014), *The common denominator*

Fig 6.1 Average number of sheep on tenant farms of the abbey of Tongerlo (for the villages Essen-Kalmthout and Tongerlo), 1402-1554



Source: Heerman, C. (2006). "Het abdijdomein van de abdij van Tongerlo in de 15de - 16de eeuw (met speciale aandacht voor de pachthoeves van de abdij)." *Taxandria*. LXXVIII: 169-170

Fig 6.2 Average number of cattle on tenant farms of the abbey of Tongerlo (for the villages Essen-Kalmthout and Tongerlo), 1402-1554



Source: Heerman, C. (2006). "Het abdijdomein van de abdij van Tongerlo in de 15de - 16de eeuw (met speciale aandacht voor de pachthoeves van de abdij)." *Taxandria* LXXVIII: 169-170

We can take a step further and start to wonder about what happened with these animals. The archival material of the abbey of Tongerlo formulates at least a partial answer to this question.⁵¹⁸ We know from the ‘lease books’ of the abbey that every year, during the month of May, animals and produce were *uitgedaan* meaning that they were divided between the tenant farmer and the abbey. May was the most optimal month by far to do this since the sheeps’ fleeces would have reached their maximum girth and all calves and lambs would have been born. When it came to wool, the division was always meticulously undertaken. The wool had to be split up in the presence of the *meier* (the abbey’s representative) and even the leftovers were accurately divided. The animals themselves – or at least the ones that were selected by the tenant farmer – were also divided up. The abbey was clearly able to do what they pleased with these animals, however, it would seem that they often sold (at least some of) them. Heerman mentions that examples exist of tenant farmers initially selling the abbey’s share and simply providing them with the money this generated.⁵¹⁹ The tenant himself was furthermore obliged to sell his portion of the cattle and sheep. Most lease contracts specifically stated that tenant farmers were not allowed to keep their own animals as, for example, the following contract concerning the farm ‘ten Donk’ in Essen mentions. Tenant farmer Henrick Stuyt had to live by the following rule: “[...] *not allowed to keep any animals, except for the ‘common’ animals, and if he breaches the rule, the profits of said animals will go to the lord, who will also be allowed to punish the transgressor*”.⁵²⁰

It is by no means easy to gain a clear picture of the prices that were paid for the tenant farmers’ sheep and cattle. The abbey’s *pachtboeken* only occasionally mention prices, most notably when the tenant still owed payment in arrears. Based on these scarce findings, Cedric Heerman has reconstructed the prices of sheep and cattle. However, these findings need to be approached with care. For some of the years, the number of attested cases was so low that the findings are not very reliable, as can be perceived in table 6.5. When we focus on the prices of sheep, the Tongerlo farms roughly follow the trend of the Antwerp market (Fig 6.3 & 6.4).⁵²¹ Throughout the largest part of the fifteenth century there were no significant upheavals, however, during the 1490s Antwerp prices did also have a tendency to decline. In 1490 a sheep cost 42 denieren, whereas in the previous 5 years prices ranged from between 54 and 66 denieren. Throughout the sixteenth century the Antwerp prices showed a continuous rise, as can also be perceived in the prices of the Tongerlo farms. Cattle prices show a similar tendency – although our interpretation is somewhat hampered by a lack of findings for the sample year of 1490 (Fig 6.5 & 6.6). The Tongerlo cattle prices can be seen to roughly follow a similar trend to the sheep prices. Prices for cows – beef cows, as Heerman claims⁵²² – of the Tongerlo farms were also prone to the same evolutions as the Antwerp prices, relatively stable from 1415 onwards, then declining, followed by a sixteenth century rise which was then halted by the turmoil of the Dutch Revolt.

⁵¹⁸ AAT, II, 206. *Status bladorum*, 1509-1513

⁵¹⁹ Heerman, C. (2006). "Het abdijdomein van de abdij van Tongerlo: 168-169

⁵²⁰ Original text: ‘...ende anders egheen beesten houden dan die gemeyn beesten opte peene van te vervoeren alsulcke beesten ten profijte van mijn heer ende noch te staen ter correctien aribtrael van mijn heer de prelate van Tongerlo’.

⁵²¹ Based on the findings of E. Scholliers, mainly for the Antwerp Saint Elisabeth hospital: Scholliers, E. (1965). *Prijzen en lonen te Antwerpen (15e en 16e eeuw)*. C. Verlinden (ed.). *Dokumenten voor de geschiedenis van prijzen en lonen in Vlaanderen en Brabant*. Brugge, Tempel. 2: 286-308

⁵²² Heerman, C. (2006). "Het abdijdomein van de abdij van Tongerlo: 179

Table 6.5 Number of animals for which prices were recorded in the Tongerlo account books, for sample years (fifteenth and sixteenth century)

	Sheep	Cows
1402	7	2
1415	14	4
1439	10	6
1462	3	2
1490	8	/
1507	18	3
1554	2	1

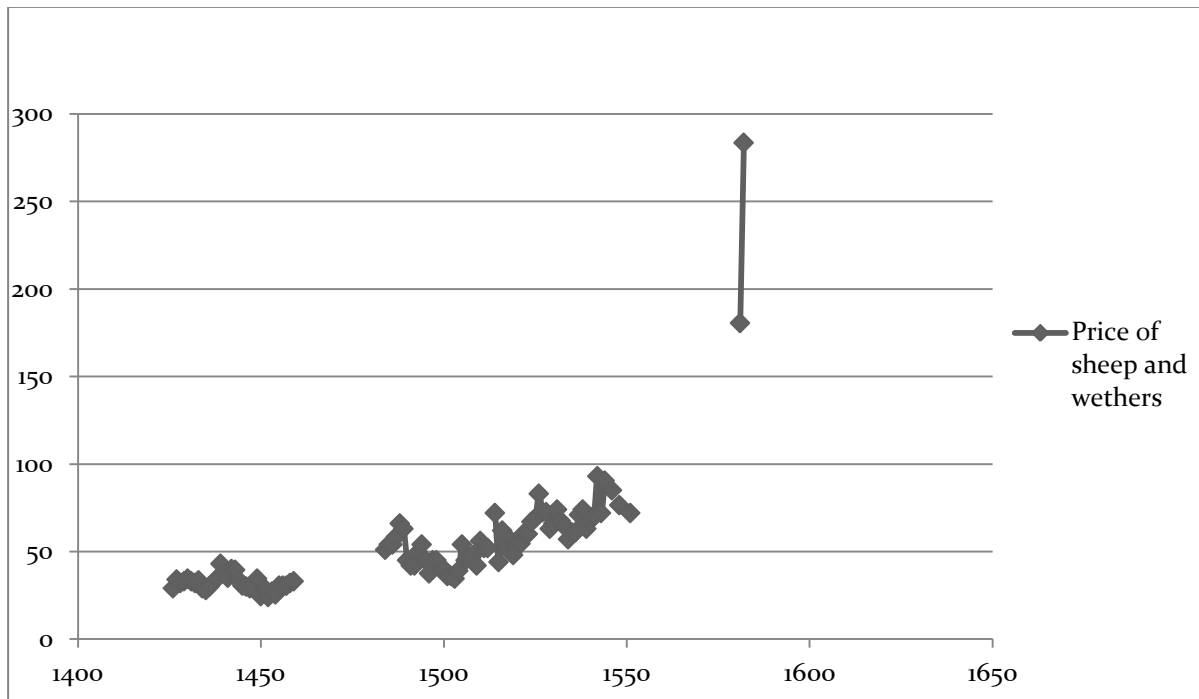
Source: Heerman, C. (2006). "Het abdijdomein van de abdij van Tongerlo in de 15de - 16de eeuw (met speciale aandacht voor de pachthoeves van de abdij)." *Taxandria LXXVIII*: 178

Fig 6.3 Sheep prices on Tongerlo tenant farms (1402-1554)



Source: Heerman, C. (2006). "Het abdijdomein van de abdij van Tongerlo in de 15de - 16de eeuw (met speciale aandacht voor de pachthoeves van de abdij)." *Taxandria LXXVIII*: 178

Fig 6.4 Sheep prices on the Antwerp market, based on the accounts of the Saint Elisabeth hospital (1426-1599)



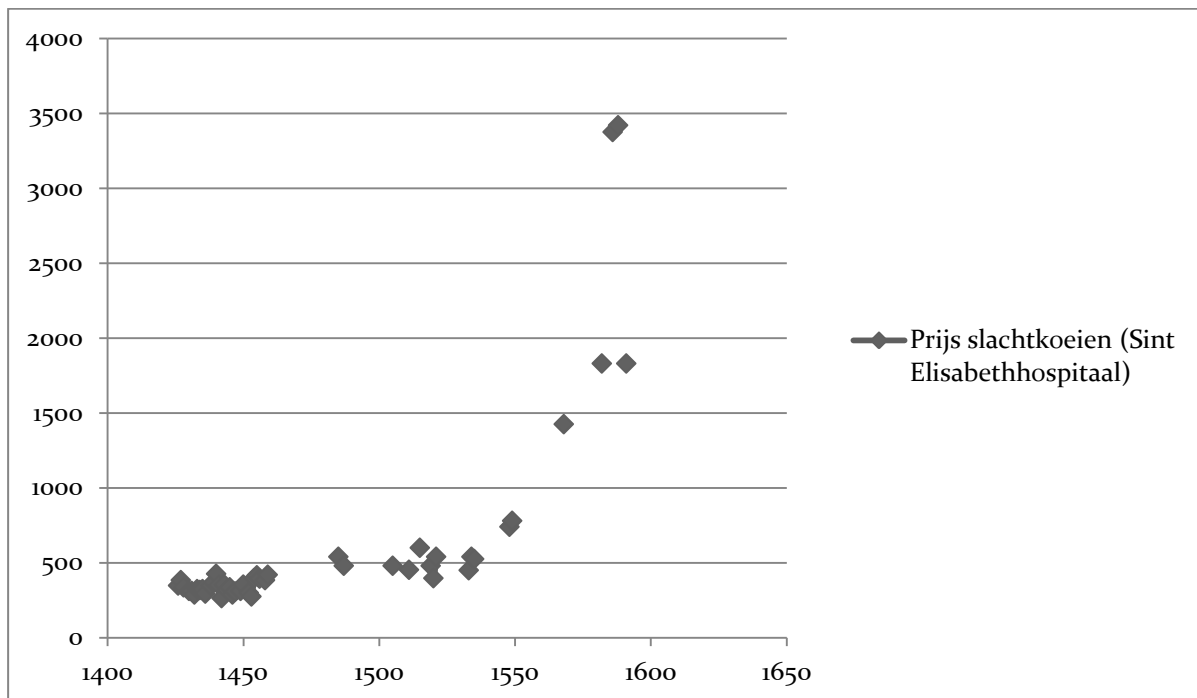
Source: Scholliers, E. (1965). *Prijzen en lonen te Antwerpen (15e en 16e eeuw)*. *Dokumenten voor de geschiedenis van prijzen en lonen in Vlaanderen en Brabant*. C. Verlinden. Brugge, Tempel. 2: 286-308

Fig 6.5 Cattle prices on Tongerlo tenant farms (1402-1554)



Source: Heerman, C. (2006). "Het abdijdomein van de abdij van Tongerlo in de 15de - 16de eeuw (met speciale aandacht voor de pachthoeves van de abdij)." *Taxandria LXXVIII*: 178

Fig 6.6 Prices of beef cows on the Antwerp market, based on the accounts of the Saint Elisabeth hospital (1426-1599)



Source: Scholliers, E. (1965). *Prijzen en lonen te Antwerpen (15e en 16e eeuw)*. *Dokumenten voor de geschiedenis van prijzen en lonen in Vlaanderen en Brabant*. C. Verlinden. Brugge, Tempel. 2: 286-308

This leads us to believe that the Tongerlo tenant farms were firmly embedded in a regional economy. Judging by the prices, Campine cattle and sheep breeding were clearly integrated into the market. Campine tenant farmers partly bred cattle and sheep for the benefit of the abbey, who often decided to market (or rather let the tenant market) their part of the share. On the other hand, the tenants' 'own animals' were clearly bred for the market as well and it seems probable that even a significant part of their wool produce was destined to be sold on the market. The fact that animal breeding was pre-dominantly market-oriented is furthermore clearly something instigated by the abbey: tenant farmers were contractually obliged to sell. The commercial activities of the large tenant farmers were thus largely a landlord-driven phenomenon. However, specialisation was never achieved. Throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Campine tenant farmers continued to combine the breeding of different types of animals with the growing of different varieties of grain.

6.2.3 Grain. The lease sum and its impact

The lands tilled by the Campine tenant farmers, were usually leased out under a normal system. In the fifteenth century, a small minority of farms were also leased out under a sharecropping system, however, this was clearly only of limited importance and they almost all but disappeared in the sixteenth century.⁵²³ The overwhelming majority of Tongerlo tenant farmers had to pay an 'ordinary' lease sum for the lands they used. It is interesting to note that the abbey made a distinction between pasture on the one hand, and arable land on the other. For

⁵²³ Heerman, C. (2006). "Het abdijdomein van de abdi van Tongerlo: 181-185

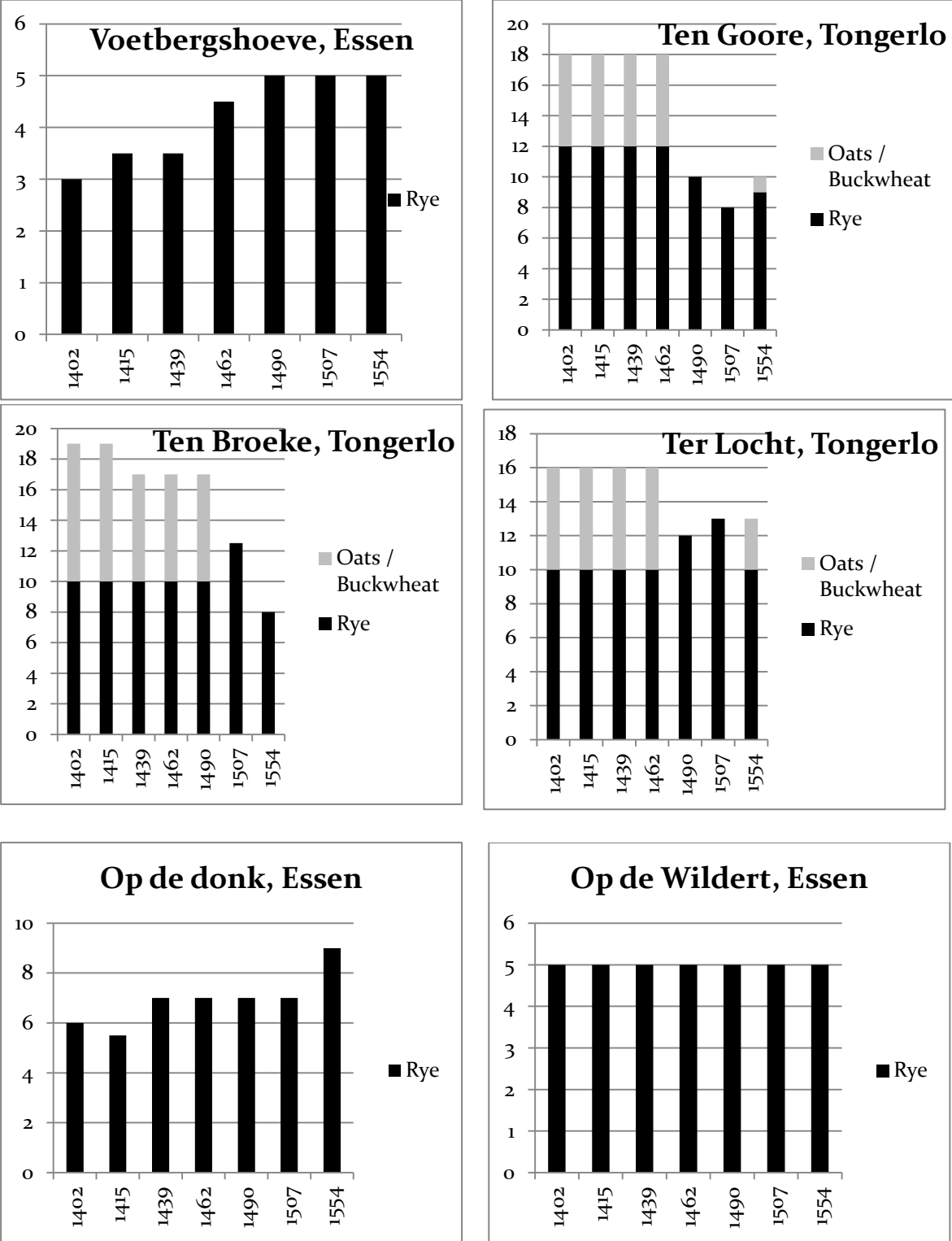
the use of pasture, dry (*eusels*) as well as wet (*beemd*) *voorlijf* or *praelevium* had to be paid, every year on Saint Martin's day. This *praelevium* usually had to be paid partly as species, partly in kind and these payments in kind came in all shapes and sizes. Linen sheets were usually part of the payment, however, a variety of other things popped up too: jute sacks, rape seed, pigs, and even services to the abbey were all mentioned. In sub-regions with exceptionally large commons (as for example around Essen and Kalmthout), the *praelevium* was obviously significantly lower than within sub-regions where commons were smaller (as, for example, around the village of Tongerlo itself). The tenant farmers of Essen and Kalmthout were able to breed as much cattle and sheep as their Tongerlo counterparts, however, with less pasture (hence less *praelevium* needed to be paid) since they were able to use the commons as an alternative.⁵²⁴

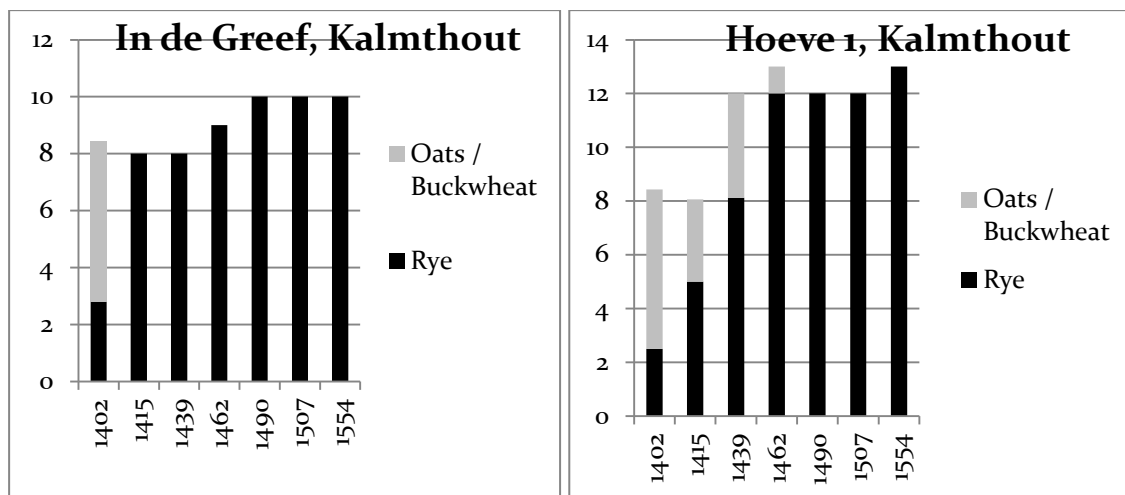
When it came to arable land an 'ordinary' lease sum had to be paid, something that was delineated in the Tongerlo lease contracts. According to Heerman, the abbey preferred leases to be paid in kind as they were, first and foremost, interested in securing a steady delivery of grain for their own consumption. The abbey accounts therefore allow us to reconstruct the normative lease prices, mostly in rye (but sometimes buckwheat and oats were also part of the lease). Based on Heerman's analysis, I have done this for several tenant farms in the Tongerlo and Essen / Kalmthout sub-regions, as can be seen in Fig 6.7.⁵²⁵ There is, of course, a disclaimer: we need to keep in mind that these lease prices are actually only applicable to arable land. As has been mentioned before, cattle were part of a shareholding system and the lease of all types of pasture was taken care of via the *praelevium*. The most striking feature of the evolution of Campine lease prices (all expressed in *mudde* rye, oats, or buckwheat), is their remarkable stability. Campine lease prices reveal a notable constancy. The most extreme example of this is the farm *Ten Wildert* in Essen, where the lease price remained identical throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. On most other farms the occasional rise or decline of the lease sum occurred, however, the general trend was one of stable lease prices. This might indicate that the abbey's main concern was the stable provision of foodstuffs – and perhaps a stable relation with their tenants – rather than the introduction of a competitive lease market. The constancy of lease prices does seem to indicate that the number of people competing for the role of tenant farmer must have been rather limited.

⁵²⁴ Heerman, C. (2006). "Het abdijdomein van de abdij van Tongerlo: 206-217

⁵²⁵ I have only included tenant farms which were continuously present from 1402 to 1554 – Cedric Heerman's sample periods

Fig 6.7 Lease prices (in *mudde* rye) of Tongerlo tenant farms for the villages of Essen-Kalmthout and Tongerlo (1402-1554)





Source: Heerman, C. (2006). "Het abdijdomein van de abdij van Tongerlo in de 15de - 16de eeuw (met speciale aandacht voor de pachthoeves van de abdij)." *Taxandria LXXVIII*: 150-156

These stable lease prices (in kind) furthermore imply a stable level of lease pressure. In table 6.6 lease pressure per hectare (in litres of rye) has been reconstructed based on the *penningkohier* of 1569. It is important to note that these lease prices only comprise arable land and pasture. Animals are not included, since they were part of a shareholding arrangement. On average the lease price amounted to 130.68 litres of rye per hectare (median: 110.12 litres per hectare). It is quite hard to interpret these numbers. For instance, it is remarkable how lease pressure per hectare varies significantly from farm to farm. This might have something to do with soil quality or even differences in livestock numbers. Comparing the Campine area's lease pressure with other regions is remarkably difficult. In the sixteenth century Coastal polders' lease pressure never rose above 200 litres of wheat (the most important type of grain in that region) per hectare, however, wheat was of course much more valuable than rye. Also, since leasehold was so widespread in the Coastal area, these numbers include all types of leasehold and not just the leasing out of exceptionally large tenant farms.⁵²⁶ In the sixteenth century the *Bassin de Paris* lease pressure fluctuated between 86 and 240 litres per hectare.⁵²⁷ When only looking at the litres of grain (be it rye or wheat), it would seem that the Campine tenant farmers were not any worse off or more pressured. However, the notoriously infertile Campine soils might have made the burden heavier for the Campine tenant farmers than for their counterparts in much more fertile regions.

⁵²⁶ Soens, T. (2009). *De spade in de dijk?:* 135-144

⁵²⁷ Moriceau, J. M. (1994). *Les fermiers de l'Île-de-France - XVe-XVIIIe siècle.* Paris, Fayard: 103

Table 6.6 Lease pressure on the abbey's tenant farms of the village of Tongerlo (1569)

Farm	Lease sum in rijns gulden ⁵²⁸	Lease sum in litres of rye ⁵²⁹	Surface area of tenant farm (ha)	Lease pressure per ha (in litres of rye)
Nieuwen Huis	73,8	6464,16	23.08	280.08
Hoeve op 't Coenincxblock	75,8	6639,341	35.05	189.42
Hoeve te Gemeynde	70,8	6201,39	?	
Hoeve Ten Bosch	58,3	5106,512	77.62	65.79
Hoeve Ten Goer	35	3065,659	27.84	110.12
Hoeve Ter Locht	43,3	3792,658	40.25	49.28
Hoeve Ter Heyden	49,05	4296,302	57.64	74.54
Hoeve Ten Broeck	58,5	5124,03	35.21	145.53

Source: Calculations based on: AAT, II, 896. 100th penny register (100 ste penningkohier), Tongerlo, 1569

An important aside must be made, however: money was by no means absent from the Tongerlo lease stipulations. If the tenant was unable to deliver the exact lease sum in rye, the lease was *verdingt*. *Verdingen* means that the lease sum was converted to species, usually based on current market prices, although sometime, the *verdingde* prices were lower than those on the market in order to encourage payment.⁵³⁰ However, even the process of *verdingen* could not prevent arrears in payment to arise. Cedric Heerman reconstructed the arrears in payment for a group of test-case tenant farms.⁵³¹ He concluded that all farms had arrears in payment, mostly ranging between 0.5 and 2.5 times the yearly lease sum with a tendency to drop during the sixteenth century. Theoretically, the abbey had the right to expel tenant farmers with arrears of payment from their farm, however, in practice this never happened. The abbey of Tongerlo therefore demonstrated considerable forbearance when it came in tolerating payment in arrears. For the tenant farms of the Saint Elisabeth hospital in Wuustwezel, Frans Vorlat states that the lease sum was paid very punctually up until the 1580s. During the war, however, the tenant farmer, Peeter Van Eeckelen, was unable to pay the lease sum. The hospital was exceptionally sympathetic.⁵³² This is also consistent with the findings of other historians. Van Bavel has already pointed out how landlords were often rather lenient when it came to collecting the lease sum, especially during periods of severe economical crisis, war, or turmoil.⁵³³ This was recently confirmed by Lies Vervaeke, who emphasised the strong - even personal ties - between the Bruges Saint John's hospital and its tenants, which resulted in the hospital being particularly obliging when it came to leases in arrears. These personal ties went hand-in-hand with a relatively low tenant-mobility, especially on the larger farms.

⁵²⁸ Calculations based on: AAT, II, 896. 100th penny register (100 ste penningkohier), Tongerlo, 1569

⁵²⁹ Calculations based on: Vandewalle, P. (1984). *Oude maten, gewichten en muntstelsels in Vlaanderen, Brabant en Limburg*. Gent, Belgisch Centrum voor Landelijke Geschiedenis. & Van Cauwenberghe, E. (1982). *Het vorstelijk domein en de overheidsfinanciën in de Nederlanden (15de en 16de eeuw)*. Een kwantitatieve analyse van Vlaamse en Brabantse domeinrekeningen. Brussel, Pro Civitate.

⁵³⁰ Heerman, C. (2006). "Het abdijdomein van de abdij van Tongerlo: 202-206

⁵³¹ See Heerman, C. (2006). "Het abdijdomein van de abdij van Tongerlo: 204 for the exact selected farms

⁵³² Vorlat, F. (2008). *De prochie van Woestwezel*: 27-35

⁵³³ Van Bavel, B. J. P. (1993). *Goederenverwerving en goederenbeheer van de abdij Mariënweerd (1129-1592)*. Hilversum, Verloren: 372-385

Tenants tended to occupy the same farms for several years and were often succeeded by their widows or sons. Landlords and leaseholders probably trusted each other, which explains the hospital's relatively compassionate attitude.⁵³⁴ The landlord's main concern was to ensure the continuous exploitation of the land – to avoid degeneration and heath growth – and, in order to make this possible, arrears of payment were tolerated.⁵³⁵ Continuity was therefore deemed important, making the tenant farmers a relatively stable group in society, not unlike the 'independent peasants' themselves. This continuity is also expressed by the rather long lease terms and most Tongerlo contracts were drawn up for 12 years. This was apparently quite common, since the sixteenth-century contracts between the abbey of Averbode and her tenants were also drawn up for 12 years. This is yet another indication of the fact that the lease market was not hugely competitive, since the abbey was not able to adapt the lease prices to market values for quite a long period of time.⁵³⁶

6.2.4 Lease conditions: shared responsibilities

There is, of course, more to leasehold than the strict economic reality of the lease sum. A whole range of topics and concerns were addressed in the Tongerlo lease contracts. Indeed, several 'hot topics' came to the fore. All of these contracts focus, more or less, on the following subjects: maintenance and repair, farming practices, personal services, and dealing with the commons. Interestingly enough, several lease contracts of inter-peasant leasehold were preserved for the village of Rijkevorsel, allowing us to make an assessment of the differences and similarities between landlord-tenant leasehold and the 'ordinary' inter-peasant variety. Most of the above-mentioned subjects can also be found in the lease contracts which Bas Van Bavel has analysed for the Gelders River Area. In addition, if we look at Paul Lindemans's work on the history of agriculture in the Southern Low Countries (present-day Belgium), it would seem that conditions were, to a certain extent, quite similar in most regions.⁵³⁷ This suggests that lessors and lessees all over the Low Countries had, more or less, the same concerns and interests. The only exception is, of course, the specifications concerning the commons, which had disappeared in most regions in the period before the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. On the other hand, the Gelre lease contracts, for example, contained several specifications on dike management, something that was obviously absent from the Campine contract since dikes were really something which defined the sandy Campine region. In what follows, I focus very concisely on these different aspects of the Campine lease contracts. Two types of sources will be examined. First of all, the lease contracts of the abbey of Tongerlo for the tenant farms in Essen and Kalmthout (1525-1546) will be used.⁵³⁸ Secondly, in order to make statements on inter-peasant leasehold, the lease contracts recorded in the registers of the bench of aldermen of Rijkevorsel will be employed.⁵³⁹

First of all, let us take a look at the specifications concerning **the maintenance and repair of the farm and its premises**. The lease contracts of the abbey of Tongerlo are very clear and consistent. The tenant farmers were obliged to administer the farm and its buildings

⁵³⁴ Vervaeke, L. (2012). "Het Brugse Sint-Janshospitaal"

⁵³⁵ Vorlat, F. (2008). *De prochie van Woestwesele*: 27-35

⁵³⁶ Hanjoul, M. (2005). *De uithoven van de abdij van Averbode*: 32

⁵³⁷ Lindemans, P. (1952). *Geschiedenis van de landbouw*.

⁵³⁸ AAT, II, 283. *Registrum conventionum, 1525-...*

⁵³⁹ RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 148. Register of the bench of aldermen, 1496-1513

with care. When repairs were deemed necessary, the abbey was responsible for the payment of the workers and their equipment. The tenant '*sal hen de montcost gheven*', therefore he was responsible for feeding these workers and more importantly, providing them with beer. Furthermore, tenants had to keep the fences and ditches - which were considered to be 'immovable goods' - in good condition. Every lease contract also contained a specific stipulation for hail damage. In the contracts it is usually phrased as: '*Item in gevalle van grooten hagelslach sal mijn heer afslach doen na tseggen van goeden mannen.*' The lord therefore promised to cover this loss on one condition: the tenants needed to inform the abbey of the precise extent of the damage within three days. This is very similar to what Van Bavel found for the Gelders river area and Lindemans for the Southern Low Countries in general, where tenants were generally only responsible for everyday maintenance. The landlord, on the other hand, had to foot the bill and take responsibility for the structural costs.⁵⁴⁰ The inter-peasant lease contracts preserved for the village of Rijkevorsel for the first half of the sixteenth century contain conditions quite similar to those in the Tongerlo contracts. Tenants had to take care of the buildings and lands and a condition stipulated in all lease contracts was that they also had to cover the roof with straw. Peter Dibbouts, for example - who leased a farm from Jan Jacobs - had to renew the roof cover every year with *twelve mandelen goets eusbaers rechts ruggens stroes*, or straw of good quality. If more structural repairs were deemed necessary, the landlord was responsible for the provision of the worker's wages and necessary equipment. Similarly to the Tongerlo contracts, the tenant was obliged to provide the *montcost* - or food provisions - for the labourers. In addition the tenant had to maintain fences and ditches.

Lease contracts subsequently contained stipulations concerning **agricultural practices**. Conditions concerning animals have been addressed above, when the particular shareholding system of the Campine area was discussed: the *Kempisch stalrecht*. Furthermore, we can find several conditions regarding the crops that had to be grown and also some minor stipulations concerning crop rotation. The Tongerlo lease contracts mostly contained rules on the conditions in which the tenant had to leave the farm when his lease term ended. When he left the tenant had to leave one third of the land fallow to allow the next tenant to sow a summer crop. The other two thirds had to be sown with rye which was a winter grain.⁵⁴¹ A similar prescription can be found all the lease contracts drawn up in Rijkevorsel. Some Rijkevorsel contracts furthermore listed specific crops that needed to be grown, mostly oats or buckwheat. The Tongerlo contracts do not contain these types of preconditions, however. In addition, both types of contract had in common an absolute ban on the selling of manure or heath. Lindemans explains that these were considered to be property of the landlord, so the tenant had to leave as much *vette* on the farms as he had found when he started the lease. Since no precise quantities were recorded in the contracts, a ban on the sale of these goods was included in order to make sure the landlord got back as much *vette* as the tenant found on his farm.⁵⁴²

Another subject pops up when reading through these sixteenth century lease contracts, especially those written down in Rijkevorsel. These contracts often specified how and when the tenants could make use of the village **commons** and, more specifically, its resources. Most

⁵⁴⁰ Van Bavel, B. J. P. (1999). *Transitie en continuïteit*: 539-540

⁵⁴¹ Lindemans, P. (1952). *Geschiedenis van de landbouw*

⁵⁴² Lindemans, P. (1952). *Geschiedenis van de landbouw*.

Rijkevorsel contracts mention quite explicitly when the tenant was allowed to dig peat or mow heath and how much of it. Gheert Peter Gheerts and his wife Helene, who leased a farm from Cornelis Coppens, were allowed to dig peat one day a year in the *Daesebroeck*, and one day in the *Vredeheyde*. In addition, they were permitted to mow heathland one day a year in the *Cochovense heyblok*. Other entries in these lease contracts contain specifications on the whereabouts of animals, stipulating where they could and could not go. Sheep, especially, were often banned from certain valuable (common) meadows. Furthermore, tenants – along with their customary rent-paying counterparts – had a duty to fight sandbanks that often threatened the late medieval and early modern Campine villages, by planting trees (most notably birches) on the sandy commons.⁵⁴³ One suspects these rules were identical to those of the village byelaws. Sadly enough the Rijkevorsel byelaws have been lost, nonetheless, the contract rules bear a striking resemblance to those we can find in other Campine village byelaws.⁵⁴⁴ These leaseholding peasants, therefore, had exactly the same rights and obligations concerning the commons as those peasants who held their land in customary rent.

Last but not least, the Campine contracts contain several specifications concerning **personal services** of the tenant for his landlord. The Tongerlo tenant farmers, for example, were obliged to carry out transport services for the abbey. The contracts stipulate: *Item zal alle jare moeten leveren op zijnen cost int huys van mijn heer van Tongerlo inde stadt van Antwerpen twee goede voeder torfs [...]*, indicating that the tenant farmer had to deliver peat to the abbot's residence in the city of Antwerp. Similar acts of carrying out service can be found in the Rijkevorsel contracts. Anthonis Goese, the tenant of Jacop Pouw, was supposed to travel to Antwerp three times a year in the service of the aforementioned Jacop. The precise content of his task is, however, not stated.

6.2.5 Peasants vs. farmers: a difference in strategies?

When focussing on farming strategies it would seem that peasants and farmers were not so very different after all. Tenant farmers, quite obviously, tilled much larger farms than their peasant counterparts, however, both groups never opted for specialisation and were engaged in a mixed farming model, combining the breeding of different types of animals (most notably sheep and cattle) with the growing of grain (especially rye, but also various other types, such as oats or buckwheat). Peasants, as well as tenant farmers, made use of the commons to make animal breeding and grain production possible. It would seem, therefore, that the Campine commons were important for all Campine inhabitants. Both groups produced for the market but never opted for a profound specialisation. The market was the only destination for produce. The Campine peasants mainly strived for a stable family income, whereas the Campine tenant farmers basically tried to provide the abbey with the demanded amount of animals and grain. This does, of course, not imply that both groups shunned the market. As indicated in chapter 5, peasants indeed made use of markets for goods, land, and credit, but mainly to sustain their peasant lifestyle. Tenant farmers were obviously also market participators, but only within the boundaries the abbey had set out for them. Furthermore, the Campine lease market for tenant farms appears to have been everything but competitive. Lease prices showed a remarkable stability and there are several indications that the same tenant farmers remained active on

⁵⁴³ *Item de late sal sant weerent boomen setten opte vroente*

⁵⁴⁴ Database Maïka De Keyzer

'their farms' for quite long periods. The abbey and its farmers had a stable, almost paternalistic, relationship which involved the abbey very much steering its tenants' actions and possibilities. When it came to agricultural and economic strategies, tenant farmers were perhaps less independent than their peasant counterparts. The Campine tenant farmers therefore seem to have been integrated into the Campine system.

6.3 The social side of the picture: an archetypical elite?

When browsing through literature on the late medieval - and especially early modern - countryside, tenant farmers often appear at the forefront of historiographical interest. As I have mentioned earlier, the link between leasehold, large tenant farmers and commercialisation, specialisation and even economic growth has drawn the attention of many historians to this specific social group. The image that arises from this focus is one of tenant farmers as *coqs de village*, really big shots, using their elaborate economic power base to get access to political functions (mostly under the patronage of the landlord) and dominate village life as well as their fellow-villagers. *Les fermiers de l'Île-de-France*, as described by Moriceau, are a prime example of this phenomenon. These farmers working the fertile lands in the *Bassin de Paris* were not only economically very fortunate, they also wielded rather elaborate political powers.

On the early modern countryside of Inland Flanders, a somewhat similar type of elite tenant farmer can be discerned. Thijs Lambrecht, for example, wrote about Gillis Coucke, the prime *coq de village* of Markegem, tilling *Hof Ter Hoyen*, the largest tenant farm in this Flemish village. Gillis meticulously kept track of his incomes and expenditures; his accounts open a small window through which we can gain a glimpse of the everyday short- and long-term decisions and strategies of an eighteenth-century tenant farmer. Gillis mainly derived his power from the middling function he held within village society, acting as a mediator between his peasant co-villagers and the market. The same mechanism is described by Reinoud Vermoesen, when focusing on the 'horse farmers' in the rural surroundings of the small Flemish city of Aalst. These farmers, for example, lent out their horses to their fellow-villagers – for ploughing clearly – and were the main creditors in their villages. The smaller peasants were therefore clearly very dependent on these *paardenboeren* in order to maintain their own small farms and make a living on them.⁵⁴⁵

Nonetheless, the Campine area in the fifteenth and sixteenth century was, of course, very different from the strongly commercialised basin of Paris, which was probably more like the coastal parts of the Low Countries. Furthermore, even the sandy villages of Inland Flanders were different from those in the Campine area, especially because commons were an integral part of Campine society, something which was virtually absent from Inland Flanders village communities and probably because dependency relations were significantly less outspoken. Moreover, the situation in the eighteenth century – the only period that has been thoroughly researched was, of course, very different from that in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The

⁵⁴⁵ Vermoesen, R. (2010). "Paardenboeren in Vlaanderen": 3-37. & Vermoesen, R. and A. De Bie (2008). "Boeren en hun relaties op het Vlaamse platteland (1750-1800)." *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 121(2):430-445.

exact position and function of tenant farmers in a society of smallholders, dominated by commons, however, thus remains enigmatic. To what extent did the Campine tenant farmers dominate Campine village life economically and politically? Were they, for example, eager creditors? Did they fulfil certain political functions. And can we find indications of the degree to which they were integrated into village life? The focus here will be on the tenant farmers of the Abbey of Tongerlo and those of the Antwerp Saint-Elisabeth hospital in the village of Wuustwezel. The peasant-tenants of Rijkevorsel are not taken into account because they cannot be considered as classical examples of *coqs de village* for they were not different from their fellow-villagers at all – the only striking difference was probably the fact that they did not own their land. By combining these case-studies, an impression of the position of tenant farmers in the Campine village communities will be sketched.

6.3.1 An impressive continuity: the village of Tongerlo

The village of Tongerlo, situated to the south-east of the small town of Herentals, was somewhat different from other Campine villages. Since it was located at the far south of the Campine region, its soil was somewhat more fertile due to the fact that it contained loam. Furthermore, this village was dominated – literally and figuratively – by the powerful abbey of Tongerlo, whose buildings were located 1 kilometre to the west of the village centre. The village was not only overshadowed by the abbey itself; the institution's 8 tenant farms were quite overriding as well. According to some very early studies⁵⁴⁶ these tenant farms were originally part of the abbey's *reserve*, and were held in direct exploitation. From the early fourteenth century onwards, the abbey gradually gave up on this direct exploitation, opting mostly for customary rent as an alternative. Unfortunately, we do not really know when the abbey decided to lease out its tenant farms, but the fact is that in the fifteenth and sixteenth century this already became current.

For the year 1569, a *penningkohier* lists all 8 tenant farms and their occupiers (Table 7). Several of these tenant farmers were already present in the 1553 population count⁵⁴⁷, namely Cornelis Peeters, Stoffel Luycx, Sebastiaen Van de Goer and Jacob Geertssen. This could imply two things. First of all, this might suggest that tenant farmers were indeed present in village life for a prolonged period of time. As I suggested earlier, the abbey clearly opted for a politics which ensured stability when it came to leasing out farms, implying that tenant farmers were probably present in village society on a continual basis. Secondly, our case study might also be in line with what Chris Dyer suggests in his article on Robert Parman, a fifteenth century Suffolk farmer.⁵⁴⁸ When the abbey of Bury St Edmunds was on the lookout for a tenant for one of their farms, they chose Robert because he had already acted as bailiff in their behalf and they therefore already knew him and probably trusted him. The abbey of Tongerlo seems to have used the same strategy when it came to selecting tenant farmers. One of their farms was, for example, leased out to Jan Vander Couwenberghe who previously acted as *vorster* in the village of Essen (cfr. *supra*). This tendency to pick locals as tenant farmers was indeed quite current as, for example, Jane Whittle states. Many fifteenth century tenants were indeed 'local

⁵⁴⁶ Lamy, H. (1914). *L'abbaye de Tongerlo* & Erens, A. (1922). "Het uitbatingstelsel der abdij van Tongerlo " *Oudheid en Kunst XIII*: 25-42

⁵⁴⁷ AAT, II, 169. Hearth money, 1553

⁵⁴⁸ Dyer, C. (2007). "A Suffolk farmer in the fifteenth century." *Agricultural History Review* 55(1): 1-22.

peasant tenants', coming from the higher ranks of peasant society, and well known by the landlord.⁵⁴⁹

Table 6.7 Farmers of the abbey's tenant farms in the village of Tongerlo, 1569

Tenant farm	Tenant Farmer
Nieuwen Huis	Jacob Geertssen
Hoeve op 't Coenincxblock	Weduwe Mark Reymans
Hoeve te Gemeynde	Cornelis Peeters
Hoeve Ten Bosch	Peeter Van Paschel
Hoeve Ten Goer	??? Dockels
Hoeve Ter Locht	Stoffel Luycx
Hoeve Ter Heyden	Sebastian Van de Goer
Hoeve Ten Broeck	Gielis Sannen

Source: AAT, II, 896. 100th penny register (100 ste penningkohier), Tongerlo, 1569

6.3.2 An Inland Flanders model – or not quite? The Wuustwezel tenant farmers

It is, furthermore, worthwhile focussing on the creation of economic dependency as described for the Inland Flanders tenant farmers, namely by transport services, ploughing and credit and labour relations – usually acting as middlemen between their peasant fellow-villagers and the market. However, the Campine context was different and might not have allowed this kind of dependent relationship. When it came to ploughing, for example, it would seem that a significant majority of the Campine population had access to a plough, as was already hinted at in chapter 3. In the village of Loenhout, in 1575 (Table 6.7) almost 70 percent of all households possessed at least half a plough (which in reality meant: one horse). The villagers who did not own a plough, in all likelihood tilled rather small plots of land and were therefore, theoretically, able to plough them manually, whereas somewhat better-off peasants could pair their half-plough with one belonging to a neighbour and make do. Tenant farmers and their ploughing equipment was therefore not needed for this quintessential agricultural activity. Contrary to, for example, peasants in eighteenth century Inland Flanders, the Campine peasants were in firm control of this type of means of production.⁵⁵⁰

Table 6.8 Plough ownership in the village of Loenhout, 1575

	Absolute	Relative
People owning 2 ploughs	1	0,37%
People owning 1 plough	68	25,50%
People owning 0,5 plough	117	43,80%
People with acces to at least 0,5 plough	186	69,70%
Total population	267	

Source: SAAntwerp, V 5. Ancien regime Archief van de stad Antwerpen, Andere overheden, Lokale overheden en heerlijkheden, België, Hertogdom Brabant, State of the villages in the markgraafschap, 1593

⁵⁴⁹ Whittle, J. (2008). "Leasehold tenure in England, c. 1300-c.1600: its form and incidence." B. J. P. Van Bavel and P. R. Schofield (eds.). *The development of leasehold in northwestern Europe, c.1200-1600.* Turnhout, Brepols: 139-154.

⁵⁵⁰ Vermoesen, R. (2010). "Paardenboeren in Vlaanderen": 9-10

Credit is also often linked to the creation of dependency as well, and it might, therefore, pay off to try and get an impression of the behaviour of tenant farmers with regards to this particular factor market. This, of course, requires the combination of several types of information. First of all, we need to have a more or less continuous list of the names of tenant farmers for a particular period of time. Secondly, we need to have a largely complete overview of all credit transactions for the same time period. This combination of prerequisites has been met for only one village, namely Wuustwezel. This village, situated some 30 kilometres to the north-east of Antwerp, was one of the locations where the Antwerp Saint-Elisabeth Hospital owned quite some land and leased out one tenant farm (from 1447 onwards it was two). These tenant farms had to provide the hospital with foodstuffs for the hospital's nurses / nuns and their patients.

The accounts of the hospital provide us with the names of the tenants⁵⁵¹, whereas the registers of the bench of aldermen give us the necessary information regarding credit transactions.⁵⁵² Ploughing through the registers of the bench of aldermen is very intensive, time-consuming work, I therefore decided to work with a particular sample period, namely 1570-1575.⁵⁵³ The tenant of the *Grote Gasthuishoeve* during that period was Peeter Van Eeckelen, who leased the farm from 1528 to 1578 and was succeeded by Cornelis Van Eeckelen, most likely a son or a nephew. Peeter (and apparently the rest of his family) therefore represented a stable factor in Wuustwezel village life, however, was he also frequently mentioned in the registers of the bench of aldermen? The answer to this question is a plain and simple: no. In none of the 228 transactions (concerning land and credit as well as quarrels concerning debts and inheritances) is his name mentioned. Credit markets were not used by better-off villagers to accumulate land or create dependency via credit, which corresponds with the theory I developed in chapter 5.⁵⁵⁴ Furthermore, it seems quite unlikely that the Campine tenant farmers, depending as they did on the abbey for the buying of their animals, had a money supply large enough to act as creditors.

This does not, of course, necessarily imply that Peeter Van Eeckelen or his predecessors and successors, were outsiders in the village community of Wuustwezel. The continuous presence of the same tenant family for several generations already suggests that this family was a stable factor in village life. In 1485 Jan Van Eeckelen occupied the *Grote Gasthuishoeve* and was succeeded by Peeter Van Eeckelen, then followed by Cornelis Van Eeckelen.⁵⁵⁵ The precise family ties are not made explicit, but it is beyond doubt that they were indeed family. Furthermore, several of Peeter Van Eeckelen's family members, seemed rather keen on establishing themselves firmly in the village of Wuustwezel. His daughter Jenneken owned several plots of land together with her husband Jan Van Ostayen. Two other Van Eeckelens, Cornelis F. Willem and Pauwels Cornelis, were also listed in the 1599 rent register.⁵⁵⁶ Perhaps the Van Eeckelens were already present in Wuustwezel before they took on the tenant farm? This remarkable stability was, as was mentioned before, typical for large tenant farms, as was the almost hereditary nature of successive tenants. Another indication of integration in village

⁵⁵¹ As can be found in: Vorlat, F. (2008). *De prochie van Woestwesel*. Wuustwezel.

⁵⁵² RAA, OGA Wuustwezel, 11. Registres of the bench of aldermen, 1569-1593

⁵⁵³ This period has been chosen because it can be linked to a 1581 penningkohier

⁵⁵⁴ Van Onacker, E. (2013). "Bedrijvige boeren? Peasants en de land- en kredietmarkt in de vijftiende- en zestiende-eeuwse Kempen." *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis*(1): 40-70.

⁵⁵⁵ Vorlat, F. (2008). *De prochie van Woestwesel*: 78

⁵⁵⁶ RAA, OGA Wuustwezel, 366. Rent register, 1599

life is the fact that Jan Van Eeckelen, who leased a Wuustwezel tenant farm, acted as village aldermen in the 1520s.⁵⁵⁷ In his thesis on the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century tenant farms in the villages of Essen and Kalmthout, Dries Kools states that several tenants served as village aldermen, however, he unfortunately does not provide us with hard quantitative evidence of this.⁵⁵⁸

When it comes to the eighteenth century tenant farmers of Inland Flanders, as described by Lambrecht and Vermoesen, we can perceive that they were furthermore important within the village community because they often acted as 'intermediaries' between their peasant co-villagers and the (urban) market.⁵⁵⁹ We have some indications that these 'broker-like' figures were present in the eighteenth century Campine area as well. In the village of Beerse, for example, a certain Gillis Somers pops up as someone who bought up the cattle from many of the inhabitants. He then sold the animals, mainly on the urban markets.⁵⁶⁰ However, little is known about the economic structures and functioning of the eighteenth century Campine area, so it would be rather speculative to project these findings onto the fifteenth and sixteenth century. However, it may well be possible that the fifteenth and sixteenth century tenant farmers, who clearly were engaged in the early-modern market, did indeed act as intermediaries for their peasant counterparts. Unfortunately, however, sources do not allow us to make any bold claims on this subject.

A last possible factor creating dependency was the labour market. The Wuustwezel labour market and relations between peasants and tenant farmers is something that is impossible to reconstruct, due to a lack of sources.⁵⁶¹ However, as we already established in chapter 5, section 5.2, tenant farms indeed played their part as employers, as the accounts of the ducal farm of the Land of Turnhout indicate. If we shortly resume these findings (table 6.7), it shows that there were indeed different opportunities for work, especially as seasonal labourers which ranged from mowing to maintaining ditches. The wages were substantial enough to make an essential addition to the daily income of, for example, a cottager-family. However, we must keep in mind that this need for additional labour was limited in most villages. Apart from Essen, Kalmthout and Tongerlo, most Campine villages were not characterised by an abundant amount of tenant farms, so these labour opportunities were perhaps not omnipresent. Thijs Lambrecht furthermore points out for eighteenth-century Inland Flanders that labour was often used to refund the tenant farmer for the lending out of his plough or the provision of credit⁵⁶², but it is doubtful whether this was the case in the Campine area, since dependency via ploughing and credit were not present.

⁵⁵⁷ RAA, OGA Wuustwezel, 4. Registers of the bench of aldermen, 1518-1526

⁵⁵⁸ http://www.ethesis.net/essen/essen_hfst_3_4.htm#Hoofdstuk%204:%20De%20sociaal-economische%20toestand%20van%20de%20abdijpachters%20in%20de%20heerlijkheid%20Essen-Kalmthout, 09-08-2013

⁵⁵⁹ See for example: Vermoesen, R. (2010). "Paardenboeren in Vlaanderen": 3-37.

⁵⁶⁰ RAA, OGA Beerse, 6. Lists of sold cows, sheep and lambs, 1777-1783. Processed by Filip Van Roosbroeck

⁵⁶¹ The accounts of the Saint- Elisabeth hospital have indeed preserved but were impossible to consult for this study due to archival reorganisations.

⁵⁶² Lambrecht, T. (2003). "Reciprocal exchange, credit and cash: agricultural labour markets and local economies in the Southern Low Countries during the eighteenth century." *Continuity and Change* 18(2): 237-261

Table 6.9 Agricultural labour and wages in the Land of Turnhout, 1551

Function	Number of workers	Wage per day (in denieren)	Wage per day of mason's labourer in 1551, in Antwerp (in denieren) ⁵⁶³	Average number of working days
Mowing meadows	16	8	12	78
Haymaking	16	4	12	77.6
Shepherd	4	?	12	?
Maintaining ditches	5	6	12	81.6

Source: ARA, Rekenkamer, 5123. Domain account of the Land of Turnhout, 1551, processed by Maïka De Keyzer

Finally, it is important to note that the inclusion of Campine tenant farmers within Campine village society was not necessarily process without its problems. There are some indications that these tenant farmers were, from time to time, considered to be outcasts, or 'ugly ducklings'. There is some proof - recently provided by Maïka De Keyzer - that some village communities tried to exclude tenant farmers from using the commons. From the end of the fifteenth century onwards, communities were confronted with a growing pressure on natural resources, which led to attempts to exclude particular groups. In Stiphout, for example, situated close to Eindhoven, the community tried to prevent tenant farmers from using the commons by going to court. They did, however, lose that particular case due to the fact that the tenant farmers contributed to village taxes and leased lands that were located within the village boundaries which was deemed sufficient by the court. This does not necessarily mean that tenant farmers were always the natural enemies of the Campine communities, it merely indicates that the pre-modern Campine villages were, in a way, arenas in which different social groups continuously negotiated and re-shaped social, economic, and political structures.⁵⁶⁴

6.4 Conclusion

First of all we have ascertained that leasehold did indeed play its part in a society dominated by customary rent. It was by no means the most dominant way of acquiring land, but it seems that, from the sixteenth century onwards, it became more present. Future research, focusing on leasehold in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Campine area, could prove to be enlightening and teach us more about the evolution of leasehold in a peasant society. Tenants, furthermore, proved to be a very diverse group in society. In the Campine area 'ordinary' villagers could be encountered, leasing out a complete business which was about the same size as their rent-paying counterparts. On the other hand, 'real' tenant farmers, tilling impressive farms leased out by powerful institutions, were also present. When it came to agricultural strategies, this latter group was not extremely different from their smallholding 'colleagues'.

⁵⁶³ Based on: van der Wee, H. (1963). *The growth of the Antwerp market*, as processed by Jord Hanus

⁵⁶⁴ De Keyzer, M. (2013), 'Who falls by the wayside? Inclusion and exclusion processes in common pool resource institutions. Case-study: Campine area, 15th and 16th century', lecture, Rural History Conference, Bern

Mixed farming was the predominant means of producing. Arable farming went hand-in-hand with animal breeding, for peasants as well as farmers. These farmers did not produce primarily for the market, rather it was their landlord that was provided, first and foremost, with the necessary foodstuffs and raw materials. Furthermore, these tenants cannot be labelled true *coqs de village* like their eighteenth-century Inland Flanders counterparts. There are some indications that they were certainly integrated in village life. They were continuously present, often succeeded by family members, and some of them filled in (political) offices in their village, with their children settling in the village too. There were, of course, the occasional tensions between tenant farmers and village communities, however, this never led to a true exclusion. All in all the tenant farmers therefore seemed quite integrated in the peasant-structures that characterised the Campine area, nonetheless, they were unable to dominate them or create total dependency as was this case in Inland Flanders.

7

PETTY POLITICS? VILLAGE GOVERNMENT AND OFFICE-HOLDING IN THE CAMPINE AREA.

“The villagers of Nerola (or at least the men eligible to participate in the consiglio) were probably more political than the citizens of the average American city today, where the lines at the polls get shorter each election year”

(Caroline Castiglione on the everyday politics in seventeenth-century Italy, 2001)⁵⁶⁵

So far, I have been able to delineate a clear top-group within Campine society – the so-called independent peasants – that was quite clearly economically the best off. The substructure of their economic power was their landed property, securing food provision for the family and allowing to produce a surplus, however, in addition the use of the commons and market-integration was most beneficial to this group and they probably overall lived under favourable economic circumstances. We can therefore label this elite-group as ‘economically independent’, controlling their own means of production and their own resources, but they were not able to control their fellow-villagers economically, especially not in the way the eighteenth-century Inland Flanders *coqs de village* were able to create economic dependency. However, perhaps the true ‘power’ of this group did not necessarily stem from their economic position. Political control over the village, its inhabitants and its resources might well have been a key-factor. We can, therefore, wonder about the extent of the political grip of this group on their community. Did these independent peasants therefore control village politics and - in a way - also their fellow-villagers? And through which channels was this control carried out?

This type of research is, surprisingly enough, still rather rare. In the past, peasants were very often portrayed as conservative, politically incapable and void of ideology. This, of course, links up with the general negative portrayal of peasants, as described in section 1.2. Many renowned historians have never managed to see the peasant’s political potential. Eric Hobsbawm, for example, stated that ‘peasants appear to belong in economic or social history, but rarely in political history ..., since rulers rarely have to bother for more than a moment about what happens in the villages’.⁵⁶⁶ Emmanuel LeRoy Ladurie even went a step further by labelling

⁵⁶⁵ Castiglione, C. (2001). "Political Culture in Seventeenth-Century Italian Villages." *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* XXXI(4): 528

⁵⁶⁶ Hobsbawm, E. (1973). "Peasants and Politics." *Journal of Peasant Studies* 1: 16-17

peasants '*objects rather than subjects of history*'. However, in the wake of E.P. Thompson - the famous historian of the working classes⁵⁶⁷ - anthropologist James Scott⁵⁶⁸ and Peter Blickle's focus on peasant revolts⁵⁶⁹ even the 'suppressed' were seen as actors, capable of understanding changes, anticipating and reacting to them.⁵⁷⁰ Furthermore, during the last couple of years, several scholars have argued for the existence of a political culture in villages in the countryside. Wayne Te Brake has suggested defining politics as '*an ongoing bargaining process between those who claim governmental authority and those over whom that authority is said to extend*'.⁵⁷¹ Furthermore, Caroline Castiglione quite rightly states that the late medieval and early modern village community was, at its core, also a political community.⁵⁷² She describes the political consciousness and strategies of the inhabitants of a seventeenth century Italian village and stresses their functionality. Chris Dyer has regretted the fact that so little attention had been paid to the internal political life of the village and has argued that villages did have quite a sophisticated political culture, even in the fifteenth century.⁵⁷³ Politics was, he claims, not limited to the high and mighty, the nobility and gentry, but was an inextricable part of everyday village life. Despite this scholarly interest, the political functioning of rural communities in the Low Countries has, up until now, received very little or no direct attention. Bas Van Bavel has devoted an ambitious survey in an attempt to explain the diverging socio-economic developments in the various regions of the Low Countries, pointing to the differing socio-institutional structures that emerged ensuing the great reclamations (based on property relations and the institutional framework) as an explanatory force.⁵⁷⁴ A whole cascade of differences between social agrosystems is summed up meticulously in this study, but political differences between these regional units are never mentioned. The political life of the village thus deserves a share of the attention, since it defined the lives of all its inhabitants and provided ample opportunities for elite profiling.

Quite recently Steve Hindle formulated an interesting thesis on the evolution of village government - or more specifically the parish vestry. He identified the English state formation process as the prime mover of change within the composition of village government. The rise in state influence went hand-in-hand with an increasing process of oligarchisation. The same tendency was perceived for the late medieval Flemish and Brabantine cities. Medievalists from Ghent University in particular have paid an elaborate amount of attention to the functioning of the urban political community. Wim Blockmans, for example, has studied the characteristics and mutation rates of the urban magistracy in the late medieval Flemish cities of Bruges and Ghent. He pointed out that these cities were governed by a combination of a small group of rich influential citizens, with long careers and important functions, but also a

⁵⁶⁷ In his groundbreaking work: Thompson, E. P. (1977). *The making of the English working class*. Harmondsworth, Pelican books.

⁵⁶⁸ See for example: Scott, J. C. (1976). *The moral economy of the peasant. Rebellion and subsistence in Southeast Asia*. New Haven & London, Yale University Press.

⁵⁶⁹ Blickle, P. (ed.) (1997). *Resistance, Representation and Community*. Oxford, Clarendon Press.

⁵⁷⁰ Dyer, C., *English peasant agriculture in an age of crisis*, lecture, Brighton, Rural History Conference, 15 september 2010

⁵⁷¹ Te Brake, W. (1998). *Shaping history: ordinary people in European politics, 1500-1700*. Berkeley, University of California Press: 6

⁵⁷² Castiglione, C. (2001). "Political Culture: 523-552.

⁵⁷³ Dyer, C. (2004). "The Political Life of the Fifteenth-Century English Village." L. Clark and C. Carpenter (eds.). *Political Culture in Late Medieval Britain*. The Boydell Press. 4: 136-157.

⁵⁷⁴ Van Bavel, B. J. P. (2010). *Manors and markets: economy and society in the Low Countries, 500-1600*. Oxford Oxford University Press.

much more elaborate group of people of slightly humbler backgrounds, who filled the lesser functions for a limited amount of time.⁵⁷⁵ This exercise was repeated later on by Koen Wouters for sixteenth-century Antwerp, a city that was even more dominated by an oligarchy⁵⁷⁶. However, of equal interest, is the fact that in the late medieval cities there was always at least a hint of a broader participation. Marc Boone, for example, has pointed to the tensions between a dominant socio-economic oligarchy pulling the most important strings and the ever-present need for dialogue and representation of the *bono communi*⁵⁷⁷. The idea of a broad representation was indeed crucial for medieval city life.⁵⁷⁸ However, the opinions of the *melior* or *sanior pars* of society, were given precedence.⁵⁷⁹ This same tendency has already been established when it came to the government of the village commons (see chapter 4).

Several questions on the political life in Campine villages can therefore be raised. When it came to taxation, the state formation process seems not to have impacted the Campine area all that much⁵⁸⁰, however, does this also hold true for village politics? To what extent was the Campine political government an oligarchy? Was Campine political life characterised by the same stability we can detect in its economic structures, or can we perceive certain evolutions? Was there room for broader political participation of all community members and was such participation merely symbolic or did it have an actual, real-life component as well? The political heart as well as the most relevant institution of the late medieval and early modern countryside was, of course, the village community. Village communities have already received a significant amount attention in historiography. One of the founding fathers of this focus is of course Peter Blickle.⁵⁸¹ According to Blickle, German communes came into being in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and reached their peak in the sixteenth century.⁵⁸² He defines the village community as a *societas civilis cum imperio*, a community of households, with competences on a judicial and administrative level.⁵⁸³ Blickle argues that no matter how big the internal differences in the villages were, unity always reigned when it was necessary.⁵⁸⁴ An opposing view is presented by Sheilagh Ogilvie, who has delivered a cutting critique on the inherent unity of village communities. As she has put it in one of her articles:

⁵⁷⁵ Blockmans, W. (1977). "Mutaties van het politiek personeel in de steden Gent en Brugge tijdens een periode van regimewisselingen: het laatste kwart van de 15e eeuw." H. De Schepper (ed.) *Bronnen voor de geschiedenis van de instellingen in België*. Brussel, Algemeen Rijksarchief Brussel: 92-103.

⁵⁷⁶ Wouters, K. (2004). "Een open oligarchie? De machtsstructuur in de Antwerpse magistratuur tijdens de periode 1520-1555." *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 82(4): 905-934.

⁵⁷⁷ An interesting study had been devoted to this subject: Lecuppre-Desjardin, E. and A.-L. Van Bruaene (2010). *De Bono Communi. The Discourse and Practice of the Common Good in the European City (13th-16th c.)*. Turnhout, Brepols.

⁵⁷⁸ Boone, M. (1990). *Gent en de Bourgondische hertogen ca. 1384 - ca. 1453. Een sociaal-politieke studie van een staatsvormingsproces*. Brussel, Paleis der Academiën.

⁵⁷⁹ For the countryside described in: Soens, T. (2006). "Polders zonder poldermodel? Een onderzoek naar de rol van inspraak en overleg in de waterstaat van de laatmiddeleeuwse Vlaamse kustvlakte (1250-1600)." *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis* 3(4): 34

⁵⁸⁰ For more information: see chapter 3

⁵⁸¹ His most relevant work – at least for this topic – is of course: Blickle, P. (2000). *Kommunalismus: Skizzen einer gesellschaftlichen Organisationsform*. München, Oldenbourg.

⁵⁸² For an excellent overview of the genesis of the village community in medieval Brabant: Hoppenbrouwers, P. C. M. (2000 / 2001). "De middeleeuwse oorsprong van de dorpsgemeenschap in het noorden van het hertogdom Brabant." *Noordbrabants Historisch Jaarboek* 17-18: 45-90

⁵⁸³ Huiskamp, R. (2000/2001). "Het gemene Best? Het oproer in het Besterbroek bezien in het licht van de Communalismus-these" *Noordbrabants Historisch Jaarboek* 17-18: 165

⁵⁸⁴ Prak, M. (2000 / 2001). "Kommunalismus en de steden in de Noordelijke Nederlanden ten tijde van de Republiek." *Noordbrabants Historisch Jaarboek* 17-18: 11-15

"Strong communes persisted not because they efficiently maximized the economic pie, but because they distributed large shares of a limited pie to village elites (well-off peasants, male household heads), with fiscal, military and regulatory side-benefits to rulers and overlords".⁵⁸⁵

A third, more nuanced vision on the characteristics of village communities has been posited by Chris Dyer and Miriam Müller. They accept the fact that differences exist within the hierarchical village community, however, they still consider peasants as 'one class' who were urged to guard peace in their community because of the necessity of communal living and farming, but also because they had a common antagonist: the lord.⁵⁸⁶ These very divergent views on the characteristics of rural communities link up with a broader degree of variation. Different social agro-systemic characteristics in different regions in all likelihood led to significant differences in community cohesion.

In what follows, therefore, I will thus focus on village politics and village government within Campine communities throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Politics, of course, has many different aspects. First of all, there is the level of the 'formalised' institutions, of political offices and office-holding. In the context of village politics the most important institution was the bench of aldermen, but there were other offices as well; every village needed for example several tax officials. In this chapter I want to argue that office-holding was clearly dominated by the Campine independent peasants, giving them – at least formally – a strong grip on Campine village politics. But politics is more than mere formalities. It is a complex and ongoing process of interactions and negotiations. Late medieval and early modern communities were genuinely concerned about the representation of the *bono communi* and this was no different in the Campine area. In fact, it was perhaps even more the case. The participation of all layers of society was strongly accentuated within contemporary sources – albeit often only in a ritualised or symbolic way and it even had practical implications. I will argue that this was also the case in the Campine area, where informal mechanisms were essential in maintaining the social balance, something which was of prime importance for the independent peasants. Campine communities (and their leaders) clearly left some room for participation and dissent as a mechanism in order to let off some steam.

7.1 'Intensively governed'. An overview of the political context at the formal level

7.1.1 A considerable amount of manoeuvring space

The Campine area is strikingly intriguing as a case-study when it comes to the political functioning of its villages. In Flanders a regional intermediary level, called the *châtellenies*,

⁵⁸⁵ Ogilvie, S. (2007). "Whatever is, is right"? Economic institutions in pre-industrial Europe." *Economic History Review* 60(4): 663

⁵⁸⁶ Dyer, C. (1994). "The English Medieval Village Community and Its Decline." *The Journal of British Studies* 33(4): 407-429 & Müller, M. (2007). "A Divided Class? Peasants and Peasant Communities in Later Medieval England." C. Dyer, P. Coss and C. Wickham (eds.) *Rodney Hilton's Middle Ages. An Exploration of Historical Themes*. Oxford, Oxford University Press: 115-131.

existed, which had judicial and fiscal competences.⁵⁸⁷ In the Campine area this regional level was completely absent which meant that villages and their governors themselves were the direct interlocutors with lords and their representatives. There were, of course, some overarching institutions, but these were not extremely important. When benches of aldermen became more and more institutionalised from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries onwards (cfr. *infra*), certain institutions – often already existing ones, stemming from older fief and customary rent structures – were indicated as *hoofdbanken* or chief banks. These *hoofdbanken* functioned as court of appeal and as the supplier of information for local benches. For the Campine area, the *hoofdbank van Zandhoven*, was the most important.⁵⁸⁸

Surprisingly, other supra-local institutions are lacking. When it came to the allotment of taxation over the different parishes of the Duchy of Brabant, or even specifically the *Markgraafschap Antwerpen*, we find no real traces of supra-local consultation. We know that in the Duchy of Brabant – as well as in the County of Flanders – the Estates were the institutions responsible for the approval of the *aides*, but the countryside was not represented within this body. Quite detailed image of how the allotment of taxation among cities and rural parishes exists for the County of Flanders since the distribution code, the *Transport van Vlaanderen*, has already been researched.⁵⁸⁹ For Brabant, much less is known to us. It seems that hearth counts certainly played their part in the allotment procedure, however, the precise details remain unclear. Research on this topic is very much needed, but of course exceeds the ambitions of this dissertation.

However, for the Bailiwick of 's Hertogenbosch, situated to the north of our research region, we do know that there were supra-local deliberative bodies. The Bailiwick Council, joining the city of 's Hertogenbosch with its surrounding countryside, discussed matters concerning the entire region, mostly linked with financial matters, such as war and defence, water management, division of taxes and common procedures. Marlous Craane gives a handful of examples of discussions between the city of 's Hertogenbosch on the one hand, and villages on the other, mainly concerning the division of taxation. It is quite possible that the Campine villages, which all belonged to the *Markgraafschap Antwerpen*, were part of a similar regional consultative body, however, no archival traces of this could be found. Let me add to this, that the city of 's Hertogenbosch – if we are to believe Craane – had a much larger grip on its rural surroundings than Antwerp or the smaller Campine towns did on theirs. She states, for example, that the villages in the bailiwick's countryside were obliged to register their transactions for the urban bench of aldermen of 's Hertogenbosch⁵⁹⁰ – something that was not the case at all in the Campine area (cfr. chapter 5, on the Campine land and credit market).

In any case, Campine villages had quite a large playing field, especially when compared to, for example, Coastal Flanders and the Franc de Bruges as a whole. In oastal Flanders, for example, villages had no 'real' village government. Politically, villages were administrated by

⁵⁸⁷ Blockmans, W., J. Mertens, et al. (1987). *Les Communautés Rurales d'Ancien Régime en Flandre: Caractéristiques et Essai d'Interpretation Comparative. Les Communautés Rurales. Rural Communities*. Paris, Dessain et Tolra. 5: 234-

235

⁵⁸⁸ Sabbe, E. (1954). "De hoofdbank van Zandhoven." *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis en Folklore* 17(1-2): 3-52.

⁵⁸⁹ Buntinx, W. (1965). *Het transport van Vlaanderen (1305-1517): bijdrage tot de geschiedenis van de financiële instellingen van het Graafschap Vlaanderen* Gent, Universiteit Gent & Maddens, N. (1979). "De invoering van de "nieuwe middelen" in het graafschap Vlaanderen tijdens de regering van Keizer Karel V." *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 57(2): 342-363

⁵⁹⁰ Craane, M. (2013). *Spatial Patterns. The late-medieval and early-modern economy of the Bailiwick of 's-Hertogenbosch from an interregional, regional and local spatial perspective*, University of Tilburg: 52

the regional aldermen's court of the *Franc de Bruges* which was mostly staffed with members of the region's noble and influential families who were living in the city of Bruges.⁵⁹¹ On a local level another institution could be found, the water board, responsible for water and dike management in this region that was particularly vulnerable to flooding. However, as time passed, these water boards increasingly came into the hands of absentee landowners, leaving less and less space for the involvement of villagers themselves.⁵⁹² Compared to this, the power of Campine villages can only be labelled elaborate.

For example, the Campine villages had a very strong grip on their economic resources, most notably the common waste. The communities (i.e. their governors) were responsible for managing the use of these commons and used meticulously written-up byelaws to achieve this goal – albeit it usually in consultation with the lord, or more often his representative (cfr. chapter 4, section 4.3.1). It is quite likely that with the institutionalisation process of the fifteenth century these responsibilities shifted to the officialised benches of aldermen – the *de facto* village government. They were not only mainly responsible for the management of the commons and the writing-up of byelaws, but also for voluntary (and sometimes even criminal) jurisdiction. As the growing state had an ever-increasing need for money, taxation became a constant in the lives of late medieval and early modern rural inhabitants, especially from the fifteenth century onwards.⁵⁹³ Village communities therefore had tax officials responsible for the division of taxation among community members and the collecting of these taxes. Due to the lack of a regional level and a multitude of responsibilities – most notably when it came to the commons and taxation – these villages and their governors therefore had quite a lot of manoeuvring space when it came to steering their own lives.

Village communities thus had a broad range of responsibilities or, as Jerome Blum puts it: '*Whatever the framework of limitations within which it functioned, the village community was, to a degree depending upon local circumstances, simultaneously an economic community, a fiscal community, a mutual-assistance community, a religious community, the defender of peace and order within its boundaries, and the guardian of the public and private morals of its residents*'.⁵⁹⁴

Furthermore, as Chris Dyer states for the fifteenth century English countryside, villages were '*intensively governed: officials were chosen, meetings were held, policies decided, minorities were persuaded or coerced, courses of action were pursued, money collected and spent*'.⁵⁹⁵ Not only did these villages have ample competences, they also had a striking amount of officials, entrusted with a variety of tasks both large and small. Some of these offices were clearly imposed by the lord or government in order to function on their behalf, while others grew from within the community itself, although Dyer states that, in practice, this did not really matter since villagers mostly managed to use even the governmentally imposed institutions to

⁵⁹¹ Dombrecht, K., E. Van Onacker, et al. (2013). "The regional differences of officeholding by rural elites. A comparative study for late medieval Flanders and Brabant (14th-16th century)". D. Freist and F. Schmeckel. (eds.). *Hinter dem Horizont. Projektion und Distinktion ländlicher Oberschichten im europäischen Vergleich*, 17. Bis 19. Jahrhundert. Münster, Aschendorff Verlag: 213-224.

⁵⁹² Soens, T. (2009). *De spade in de dijk? Waterbeheer en rurale samenleving in de Vlaamse kustvlakte (1280-1580)*. Gent, Academia Press.

⁵⁹³ For more information on taxation, its characteristics and the (socio-economical) impact it had on the Campine villages, I refer to chapters 2 and 3

⁵⁹⁴ Blum, J. (1971). "The Internal Structure and Polity of the European Village Community from the Fifteenth to the Nineteenth Century." *The Journal of Modern History* 43(4): 542

⁵⁹⁵ Dyer, C. (2004). *The Political Life*: 136-157.

their advantage.⁵⁹⁶ This is quite a bold statement, since it makes claims for the whole of fifteenth-century England, which was probably also characterised by meaningful regional differences. It seems, for example, quite possible that in more commercial (even capitalist) regions, villages had a very different political life – as was the case in Coastal Flanders.⁵⁹⁷ However, I wish to suggest that his statements do hold true for a peasant-dominated region such as the Campine area, where villages (and their governors) had quite a substantial amount of manoeuvring space and a broad portfolio of responsibilities. Intensively governed indeed!

7.1.2 A case-study: the village of Gierle (Land of Turnhout)

For the village of Gierle a total of 35 offices can be distinguished (Fig 7.1). For a total number of households of 161⁵⁹⁸ this is certainly quite impressive. The importance of aldermen and tax officials, from the sixteenth century onwards assisted by two burgomasters, has already been mentioned, but a cascade of other offices could be found as well. When it came to controlling the management of the commons there were, for example, ‘*schutters*’ (entitled to ‘catch’ trespassing animals) and ‘*vorsters*’ (who were responsible for the day-to-day control of the commons). Furthermore, most Campine villages had one or more manor courts of lords holding part of the village in *seigneurie foncière*. These were entitled to arrange transactions bound to land held in customary rent. Every village had its aldermen (seven of them) and tax officials (usually two, but sometimes more). On the level of the parish, nearly all villages had a Holy Ghost Table, responsible for poor relief and a church fabric, each with their own officials, four in total.⁵⁹⁹ And finally, every village was of course home to a *schout*, a bailiff representing the lord’s interests. Still, some villages – Gierle for example, a village owned by the landlord – did not have their own *schout*, but shared one with several other villages, thus keeping them a bit shielded from too much lordly interference. In other villages, most notably those ‘owned’ by the mighty abbey of Tongerlo, the lordly representative was much more present.

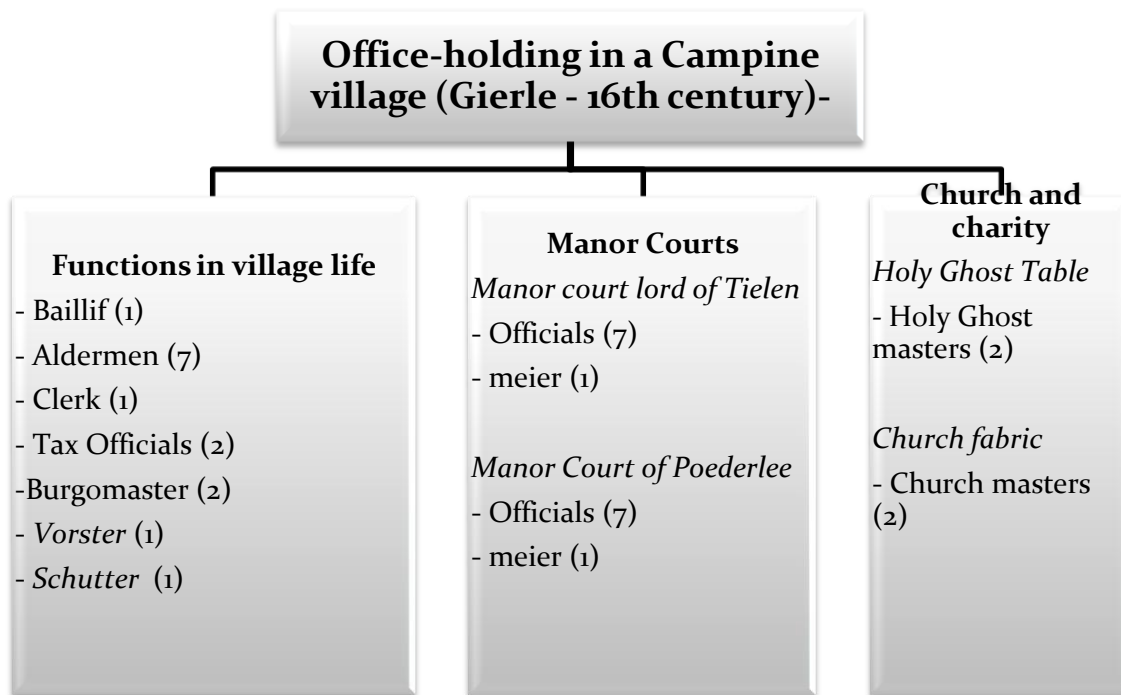
⁵⁹⁶ Dyer, C. (2004). *The Political Life: 136-157*.

⁵⁹⁷ Dombrecht, K., E. Van Onacker, et al. (2013). “The regional differences”

⁵⁹⁸ Hearth count for 1526, See: Cuvelier, J. (1912). *Les dénombremens de foyers en Brabant, 14e-16e siècle*_Brussel, s.n.

⁵⁹⁹ See chapter 8

Fig 7.1 Office-holding in a Campine village, Gierle (sixteenth century)



7.2 Real power? Office-holding in Campine villages

7.2.1 Combining sources

As already mentioned, I will start with reconstructing the 'formal', institutionalised level of village politics, by focussing on office-holding and those filling these offices in order to assess if we can, in fact, call the Campine villages oligarchies and, if so, how this evolved. If we want to assess the economic position of village officials and focus on the mutation rates of these offices, a combination of two types of sources come to the fore. Firstly, we need the names of the officials operating in Campine villages. For the villages of Brecht⁶⁰⁰ (1522-1600), Rijkevorsel⁶⁰¹ (1465-1600) and Gierle⁶⁰² (1514-1558) a relatively continuous series of registers of the benches of aldermen have been preserved, thus providing us with the names of the aldermen, which were recorded at the beginning or end of each transaction. For Brecht and Rijkevorsel, several tax registers are available, therefore providing us with the names of tax officials. These findings have had to be coupled to findings shedding light on the economic position of villagers. For the village of Brecht, the names of aldermen and tax officials can be linked to the tax registers which have been continuously preserved from 1523 to 1576⁶⁰³. In Rijkevorsel the tax registers of 1464 up until 1475 were able to be employed.⁶⁰⁴ Based on these taxation lists, the population

⁶⁰⁰ RAA, OGA Brecht, 179-183. Registers of the bench of aldermen, 1522-1600

⁶⁰¹ RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 145-180. Registers of the bench of aldermen, 1465-1609

⁶⁰² RAA, OGA Gierle, 349 & 350. Registers of the bench of aldermen, 1512-1558

⁶⁰³ RAA, OGA Brecht, 2431-2482. Accounts of the ducal (later on royal) *aides*, 1523-1576

⁶⁰⁴ RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 3244-3256. Royal taxation, 1464-1475

was divided into deciles, which means it was split up in 10 equal parts. A person belonging to decile 1 is poorer than 90 percent of the community, whereas someone belonging to the highest decile - decile 10 - is richer than 90 percent. This will allow us to assess which decile the Campine officials belonged to. For the village of Gierle the names of aldermen can be linked to the 1554 *penningkohier*, which allows us to reconstruct the property category the officials belonged to.⁶⁰⁵ For other types of offices (*vorsters*, members of the manor courts, ...) names have – regrettably – not been continuously preserved, or not linkable to tax registers, thus leaving us in the dark about the socio-economic position of these officials. Hence, they were left out of this sample.

7.2.2 A broad and stable oligarchy: village aldermen

The benches of aldermen were the *de facto* village government of the Ancien Regime. The establishment of these benches of aldermen and its precise origins is a rather complex and enigmatic phenomenon. Raymond Byl has tried to grasp its genesis in his '*Les juridictions scabinales dans le Duché de Brabant*' and traces the roots of this institution back to the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries, presenting it as a lordly initiative.⁶⁰⁶ Other authors, such as Peter Hoppenbrouwers⁶⁰⁷ and Martien Van Asseldonk⁶⁰⁸ have emphasised the fact that most benches of aldermen had their predecessors either in manor courts or in neighbour-associations, and were thus not solely instigated from above. From the fifteenth century onwards, the region furthermore witnessed a significant rise in the number of benches of aldermen. This evolution started in the fourteenth century, but had its offshoots in the fifteenth century, when Philip the Good replaced the local manor courts and neighbour-associations with official benches of aldermen.⁶⁰⁹ The Campine area was not the only region in which Philip tried to institutionalise and officialise more informal village councils that had probably existed as long as the village community itself.⁶¹⁰ In the Duchy of Brabant, between 1431 and 1445, 16 benches of aldermen or manor courts were established or reformed by a seemingly tireless Duke. It is probably no coincidence that the timing closely coincides with the Duke's ambitious attempts to get a tighter grip on the Ghent city magistracy, culminating in the Ghent uprising of 1449-1453 after which Ghent's resistance was broken.⁶¹¹ The Burgundian state formation process therefore not only impacted the proud and powerful Flemish cities, it clearly penetrated the Campine countryside too. This furthermore coincides

⁶⁰⁵ RAA, OGA Gierle, 344. Pieces concerning the 10th and 20th penny tax (*penningkohier*), 1554

⁶⁰⁶ Byl, R. (1965). *Les Juridictions Scabinales dans le Duché de Brabant (des origines à la fin du XVe siècle)*. Bruxelles, Presses Universitaires de Bruxelles.

⁶⁰⁷ Hoppenbrouwers, P. C. M. (2000 / 2001). "De middeleeuwse oorsprong van de dorpsgemeenschap": 45-90.

⁶⁰⁸ Van Asseldonk, M. (2002). "De ontwikkeling van bestuur en dorpsgrenzen in de meierij van 's-Hertogenbosch (ca. 1200-1832)." *Taxandria*. LXXIV: 225-226

⁶⁰⁹ Van Asseldonk, M. (2002). "De ontwikkeling van bestuur en dorpsgrenzen in de meierij van 's-Hertogenbosch (ca. 1200-1832)." *Taxandria* LXXIV: 225-226 and Leenders, K. A. H. W. (1996). *Van Turnhoutervoorde tot Strienemonde : ontginnings- en nederzettingsgeschiedenis van het noordwesten van het Maas-Schelde-Demergebied 400-1350 een poging tot synthese*. Zutphen, Walburg Pers.

⁶¹⁰ For detailed information on the 'early days' of the village community in the Low Countries, I refer to two excellent articles by Peter Hoppenbrouwers: Hoppenbrouwers, P. (1996). 'Op zoek naar de kerels'. De dorpsgemeente in de dagen van graaf Floris V. *Wi Florens... De Hollandse graaf Floris V in de samenleving van de dertiende eeuw*. D. E. H. De Boer, E. H. P. Cordfunke and H. Sarfatij. Utrecht, Matrijs: 224-242 & Hoppenbrouwers, P. C. M. (2000 / 2001). "De middeleeuwse oorsprong van de dorpsgemeenschap": 45-90

⁶¹¹ For a detailed account of events: Haemers, J. (2004). *De Gentse Opstand* Heule, UGA

with the information provided by Byl. He recorded a list of foundation dates⁶¹² in his thesis and – although some inaccuracies can be detected – most Campine benches were indeed first mentioned in the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries.⁶¹³

Although most of these benches of aldermen came into being in the same period and roughly had the same competences, they all had their own specific practices, especially when it came to the nomination of aldermen. An example of these diverging practices can be found in the assignment procedures. In the villages of the Land of Hoogstraten (Rijkevorsel among others), it was the *drossaard*, the lordly representative (of the lords of Cuyc and later on the counts of Lalaing) who chose and appointed the village aldermen, allowing only one ‘fresh’ aldermen to join the aldermen’s ranks every year. In Gierle and the other villages of the ducal land of Turnhout (owned by the Burgundian or Habsburg landlord), the procedure was strikingly different. In those villages, the active aldermen put together a list which included fourteen names (including their own) of possible candidates. The lord – or his representative – made the final call and decided on the precise composition of the bench, however, the aldermen themselves played the largest part since they compiled a list of nominees.⁶¹⁴ Remarkable differences such as these were also noted by Jan Pitman for villages in Norfolk. She has indicated that variation was much more common than uniformity even between villages which were part of the same region and characterised by the same socio-economic structure. She does not come up with a clear-cut explanation for this, however, referring only to differing established ideas on who should participate and who should not.⁶¹⁵ A factor of importance is perhaps that Gierle was a ducal village, whereas the Land of Hoogstraten belonged to a local lord. It has already been suggested in chapter 4 that aldermen had greater room for manoeuvre within ducal villages where the lord – and even his representative – were much more absent than in villages with local or clerical lords where the lord himself, or his bailiff, was much more involved.

This brings us to the central questions of this section: who were these village aldermen who had such a powerful grip on the village and its resources? What was their socio-economic position; did they predominantly come from the upper layers of society? Can we perceive differences in the background of aldermen in different villages – based on diverging appointment procedures, for example? And does this division change throughout the ‘long sixteenth century’, which in the Campine area was marked by relatively stable social relations / social structure. Is the composition of the Campine aldermen-corps equally constant or can we discern certain fluctuations? And to what extent, and at what was the mutation rate of these local functions?

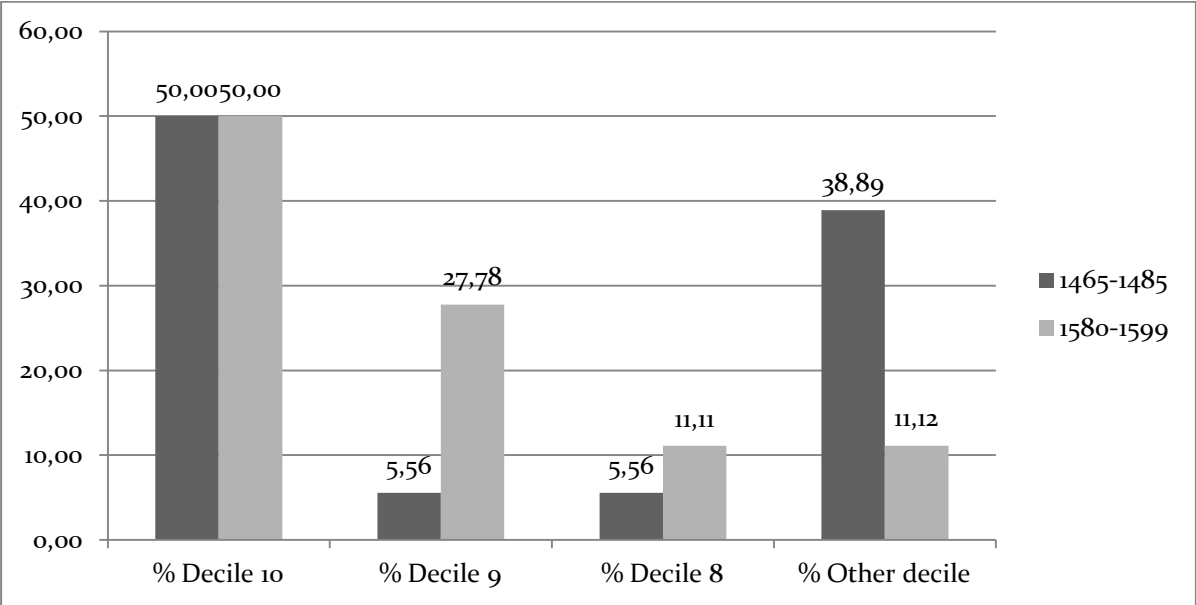
⁶¹² To be more correct: dates when the bench was first mentioned

⁶¹³ Byl, R. (1965). *Les Juridictions Scabinales* : 247-308

⁶¹⁴ Rombauts, W. (1992). "Ambten en bestuursorganisatie in de Vrijheid Hoogstraten en in het Graafschap en het Hertogdom Hoogstraten op het einde van de 17de en in de 18de eeuw, vergeleken met de Vrijheid Turnhout en het dorp Lille." *Provinciale Commissie voor Geschiedenis en Volkskunde. Jaarboek 1989-1990*: 94-100

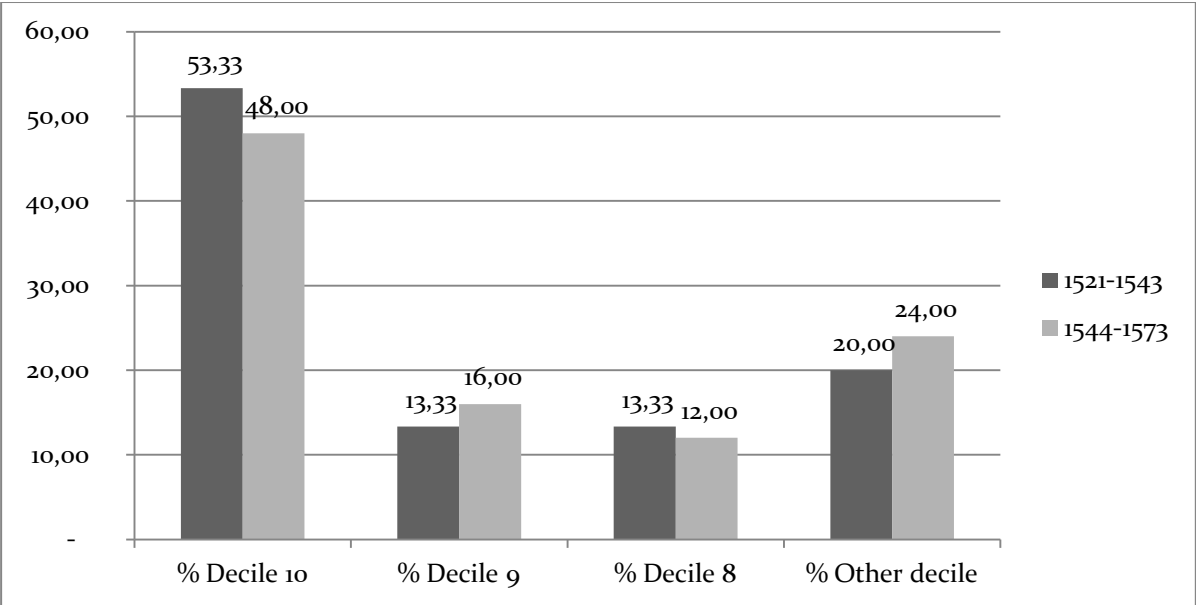
⁶¹⁵ Pitman, J. (2004). "Tradition and exclusion: parochial officeholding in Early Modern England, a case-study from North Norfolk, 1580-1640." *Rural History* 15(1): 27-45.

Fig 7.2 Socio-economic profile of the village aldermen in Rijkevorsel, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, n=36



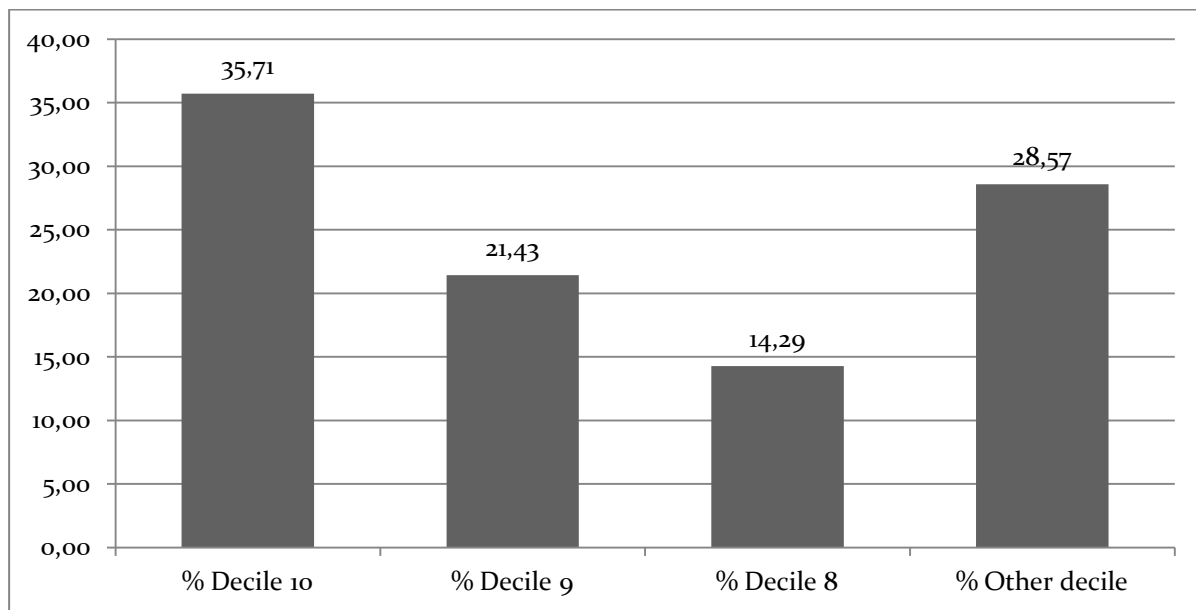
Sources: RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 145-150. Registers of the bench of aldermen, 1465-1525 + 177-180. Registers of the bench of aldermen, 1580-1609; RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 3244-3256. Royal taxation, 1464-1475 & RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 3257. Contribution book, 1591-1592

Fig 7.3 Socio-economic profile of the village aldermen in Brecht, sixteenth century, n=40



Source: RAA, OGA Brecht, 179-182. Registers of the bench of aldermen, 1521-1573 & RAA, OGA Brecht, 2431-2482. Accounts of the ducal (later on royal) aides, 1523-1576

Fig 7.4 Socio-economic profile of the village aldermen in Gierle, sixteenth century, n=14



Source: RAA, OGA Gierle, 349 & 350. Registers of the bench of aldermen, 1512-1558 & RAA, OGA Gierle, 344. Pieces concerning the 10th and 20th penny tax (penningkohier), 1554

The reconstruction of the socio-economic position of village aldermen has – as previously mentioned – been attempted for three Campine villages: Brecht, Rijkevorsel and Gierle. The names of aldermen have been linked to tax registers in order to assess their socio-economic position.⁶¹⁶ The general trend – as can be perceived in Fig 7.2 to 7.4 – is abundantly clear: in all three villages the absolute majority of identified aldermen came from one of the highest three deciles (= the richest 30 percent of the village community). In Rijkevorsel, at the end of the fifteenth century 61 percent of village aldermen came from this group, while at the end of the sixteenth century – a period of severe crisis – this already amounted to 89 percent. In the village of Brecht, the same trend can be discerned: throughout the sixteenth century over 75 percent of the aldermen came from the richest 30 percent of village society. In Gierle, in the first half of the sixteenth century, figures were also very similar: 71.5 percent of all aldermen belonged to one of the three highest deciles. To be even more specific, the highest decile (10) was the most predominant one; an oligarchy within an oligarchy, so to speak. In Rijkevorsel and Brecht almost half the aldermen stemmed from decile 10, whereas in Gierle this amounted to 35,7 percent. In Gierle the sample was much smaller – only 10 aldermen could be traced – so these findings are in all likelihood somewhat less trustworthy.

In the sixteenth century, we can clearly see the emergence and establishment of the dominance of better-off villagers, but this trend was already clearly present in the fifteenth century, if we look at the Rijkevorsel numbers. Daniel Vangheluwe, who studied the villages Eersel en Bergeyk (in current-day North-Brabant), came to somewhat different conclusions for the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. He also spotted a clear dominance of peasants with larger than average farms, but noticed the presence of – in absolute terms – a large group

⁶¹⁶ It is important to note that villagers that were mentioned in more than 1 taxation list and belonging to different deciles in these lists, were recorded with their highest decile.

of small peasants and thus depicts the aldermen's court as 'reasonably democratic'.⁶¹⁷ Since his findings are based on the ducal rent registers, which are not always very reliable when it comes to property surfaces, his findings are somewhat biased. Nonetheless, the fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century benches of aldermen might have been somewhat more diverse socio-economically speaking than a century later. Vangheluwe's tables furthermore clearly indicate that aldermen with larger farms were among the most active members of the court, which nuances the democratic level of this institution somewhat (Table 7.1).

Table 7.1 Frequency distribution of the aldermen per property class, from a 1450 rent register. The last column gives the relative attendance per class at the aldermen's court of Eersel from 1350-1450

Class in hectares	Number of aldermen	Relative proportion of aldermen	Relative participation in aldermen's court in %
0-1	22	26.8%	1.3%
1-3	27	32.9%	7.0%
3-5	15	18.3	16.0%
5-8	9	10.9	20.6%
>8	9	11.0%	12.0%
TOTAL	82	100%	100%

Source: Vangheluwe, D. (1999). *Local communities in their landscape in the rent district of Eersel / Bergeyk (14th-16th centuries)*. F. Theuws and N. Roymans (eds.). *Land and ancestors. Cultural Dynamics in the Urnfield Period and the Middle Ages in the Southern Netherlands*. Amsterdam, University Press: 393

What were the characteristics of this socio-economic elite then? This group of people can be labelled as 'independent peasants', possessing minimally over 3, but usually over 5 hectares of land, some cows, a flock of sheep and a horse or, to sum it up, enough to secure a living. It is interesting to note that the village aldermen were also among the most important animal owners in the village, with some of them owing significant amounts of sheep and / or cows (Table 7.2). Based on a series of early seventeenth century tax records, and assuming 20 percent of all villagers were too poor to contribute to the taxes, I have calculated that Rijkevorsel counted approximately 120 households in the first decade of the seventeenth century. 103 households possessed at least one cow (86.1 percent), whereas 54 households possessed a flock of sheep (43.4 percent). At first sight the group of aldermen animal owners does not seem to be very different from their office-less counterparts. The number of animals they bred was, however, somewhat larger than average. The median number of sheep owned by a flock-owner in Rijkevorsel was 40,5; all aldermen possessed somewhat larger flocks. The median number of cows in possession of cow-owners was 4; yet again most village aldermen had a larger herd. In total only 29.17 percent of all villagers possessed over 4 cows, whereas 50 percent of this sample of aldermen owned more than the median number of cows. Since the bench of aldermen was responsible for the government of the vast common waste lands, which

⁶¹⁷ Vangheluwe, D. (1999). "Local communities in their landscape in the rent district of Eersel / Bergeyk (14th-16th centuries)." F. Theuws and N. Roymans (eds.). *Land and ancestors. Cultural Dynamics in the Urnfield Period and the Middle Ages in the Southern Netherlands*. Amsterdam, University Press: 392-394

was of great importance for the grazing of sheep and the cutting of sods (essential as fodder), it does not seem far-fetched to suggest that these animal-owners had an interest in at least formally having a stake in controlling the commons and thus in occupying a seat in the bench of aldermen.

Table 7.2 The socio-economic position of aldermen, Rijkevorsel, 1605-1611

Name alderman	Highest Decile	Number of sheep	Number of cows
Adriaen Van Kieboom	10	50	6
Aert Canthouts	10	55	5
Cornelis De Decker	9		3
Cornelis De Proest	9		4
Cornelis Steelen	10	100	10
Huybrecht Grielens	9	51	6
Jan Schoenmaeckers	10		
Peter Casus	8		

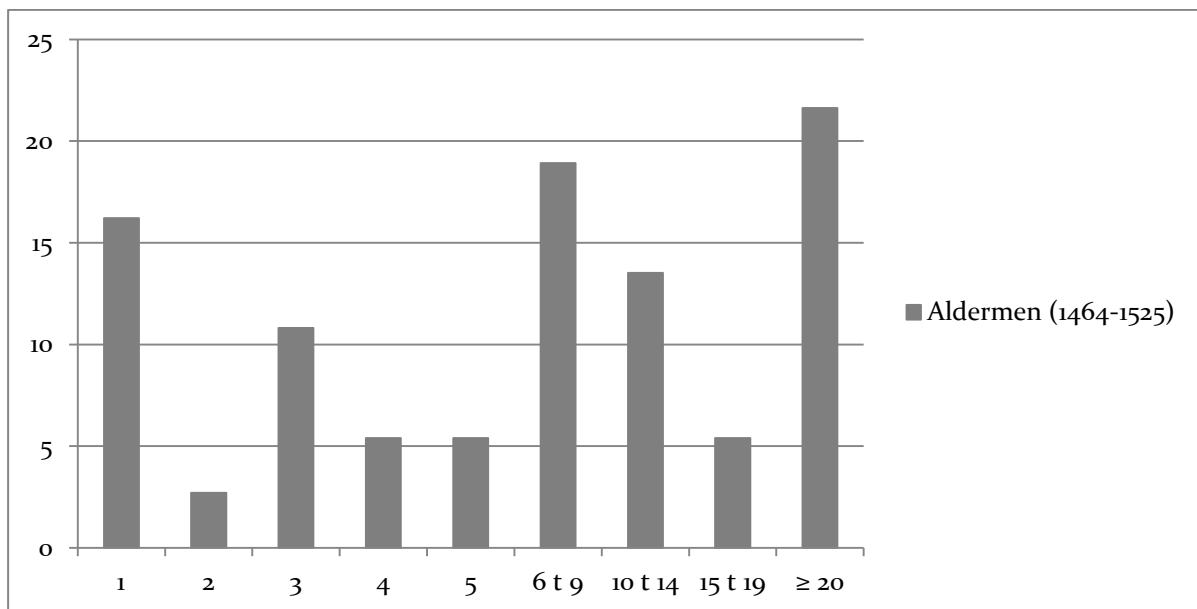
Source: RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 177-180. Registers of the bench of aldermen, 1580-1609 & RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 3262. Contribution book, 17de eeuw

Furthermore, it might be interesting to look at the mutation rates of these offices, since this can enlighten us on their level of democracy or oligarchy (Fig 7.5 & 7.6). We have already established that some of the most important Campine offices were dominated by the highest three fiscal deciles, but can we see a tendency towards some individuals monopolising certain functions? To assess this, we will have to take a look at mutation rates. When we take a look at the Campine benches of aldermen we can observe that, on the one hand, there were a significant amount of people with a rather short career (between 15 and 25 percent were only active for one year) but, on the other hand, another group of aldermen had extremely long careers (over 20 years!). In Brecht (1521-1576) the average number of offices (which corresponds to the number of years one was active as an alderman) held by aldermen was on average 6.7, while in Rijkevorsel (1464-1525), this amounted to 10.8. For Brecht, no significant increase or decrease can be spotted, the average number between 1521 and 1543 was 6.3, whereas it was 6.1 between 1544 and 1576. It is quite remarkable how these findings correspond with what we know of the political personnel of late medieval and early modern towns. Wim Blockmans, for example, describes the situation in fifteenth century Ghent and notices how a significant group of aldermen has very short careers (often limited to one year) whereas another large group had careers that lasted much longer. Especially those aldermen who later on filled 'top functions' (first aldermen or burgomaster) had careers that lasted several years or even a lifetime.⁶¹⁸ Koen Wouters discerns the same tendency for long, stable careers of a certain part of the aldermen for sixteenth century Antwerp. He furthermore points to the fact that Antwerp had a rather weak democratic tradition and was dominated by a limited number of lineages. Nonetheless, there remained some room for *homines novi* to build a career, although they only seldom

⁶¹⁸ Blockmans, W. (1987). "Het wisselingsproces van de Gentse schepenen tijdens de 15de eeuw." *Handelingen van de Maatschappij voor Geschiedenis en Oudheidkunde* 41: 75-96.

managed to climb very high on the career ladder.⁶¹⁹ The fact that a well-defined group clearly dominated an office is thus not limited to the cities of the Low Countries, but can also be ascertained for the Campine villages, although the dominant groups were as different as can be. The dominant Campine group was also relatively broad, with 30 percent of the community – albeit the richest 30 percent – formally participating in village life. This continued dominance of a relatively broad oligarchy of independent peasants – with a slightly increasing tendency in the sixteenth century – is very striking. It is, furthermore, interesting to note that there was a small top-layer within this broad oligarchy that was able to put their mark clearly on village life. Surprisingly and disappointingly, similar research for other regions is completely absent, leaving us without any comparative material. A great deal of further research on this theme is clearly needed.

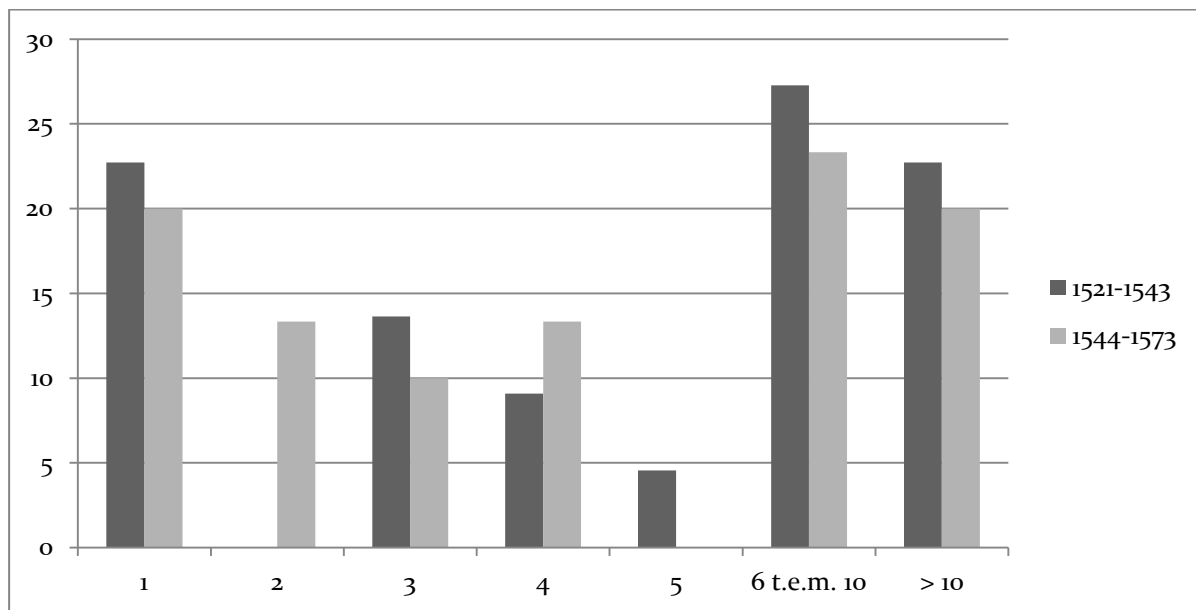
Fig 7.5 Number of offices / person per village alderman, Rijkevorsel (1464-1525)



RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 145-180. 145-150. Registers of the bench of aldermen, 1465-1525

⁶¹⁹ Wouters, K. (2004). "Een open oligarchie?": 905-934.

Fig 7.6 Number of offices / person for village aldermen, Brecht (1521-1573)



Source: RAA, OGA Brecht, 179-182. Registers of the bench of aldermen, 1521-1573

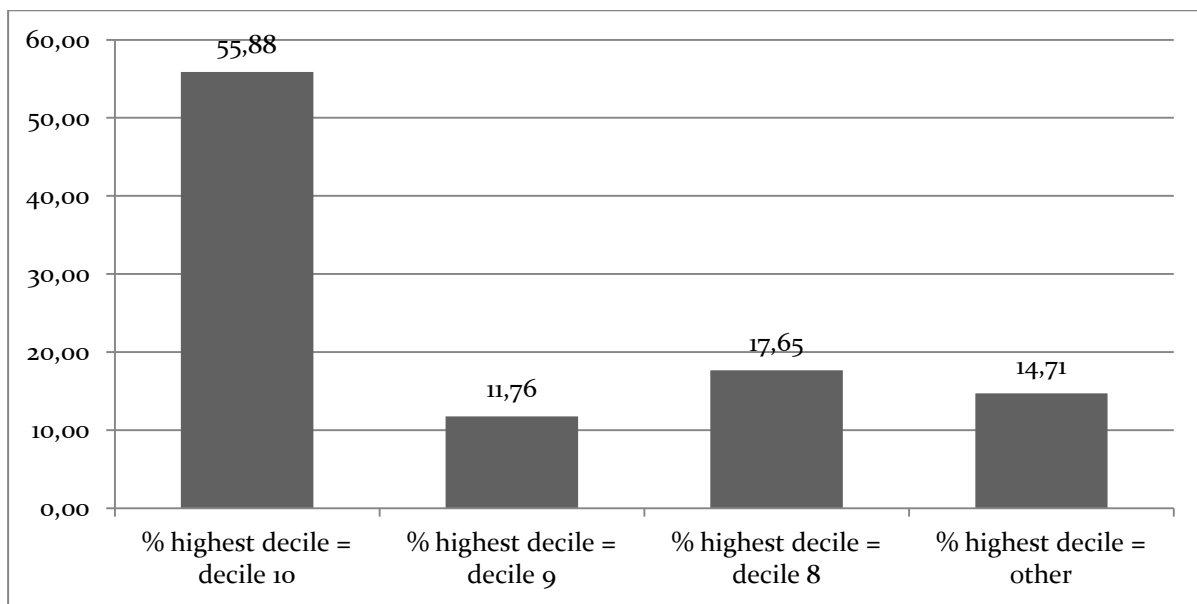
7.2.3 A broad and stable oligarchy: tax officials

As has been mentioned previously in chapter 3, one of the defining characteristics and one of the most sweeping evolutions of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, is the ever-growing impact of the state-formation process. The Burgundian dukes, and their ever-growing state-apparatus, were in need of huge amounts of money and regular taxation provided the means of obtaining exactly this. After all, money that makes the world go round, as the rulers of the Low Countries were well aware of. It was their goal and ambition to get a firm grip on the income that arose from taxation, and on the way this was put to use. We have already established that the impact of state taxation was – in general and on average – not really very significant. Still, the raising and collection of taxation was to be executed and was largely the result of a negotiation, in which different stakeholders, such as village communities, played their part. Each village was made responsible for a certain portion of the total sum to be raised which then needed to be divided further among the community-members. Because the state skimmed some of the village resources, the allotment, collection and delivery of this taxation sum was of prime importance and the village's tax officials – in charge of these important tasks – therefore played an essential part in village life.

Every village, therefore, had a number of tax officials, but yet again, every village had its own peculiarities. The village of Brecht, for example, had four tax officials, whereas the village of Rijkevorsel apparently needed six of them. Their range of duties was more or less the same in both villages. They collected the allotted sum per villager, and made all the necessary arrangements and expenditures in order to deliver it to the central authorities. Usually they kept an account of their activities, however, these varied greatly from village to village and from year to year. Furthermore, we do not know anything about the assignment procedure, whether they were appointed by the village government, the baillif or by their predecessors. We can, however, (as was done for the village aldermen) reconstruct their socio-economic

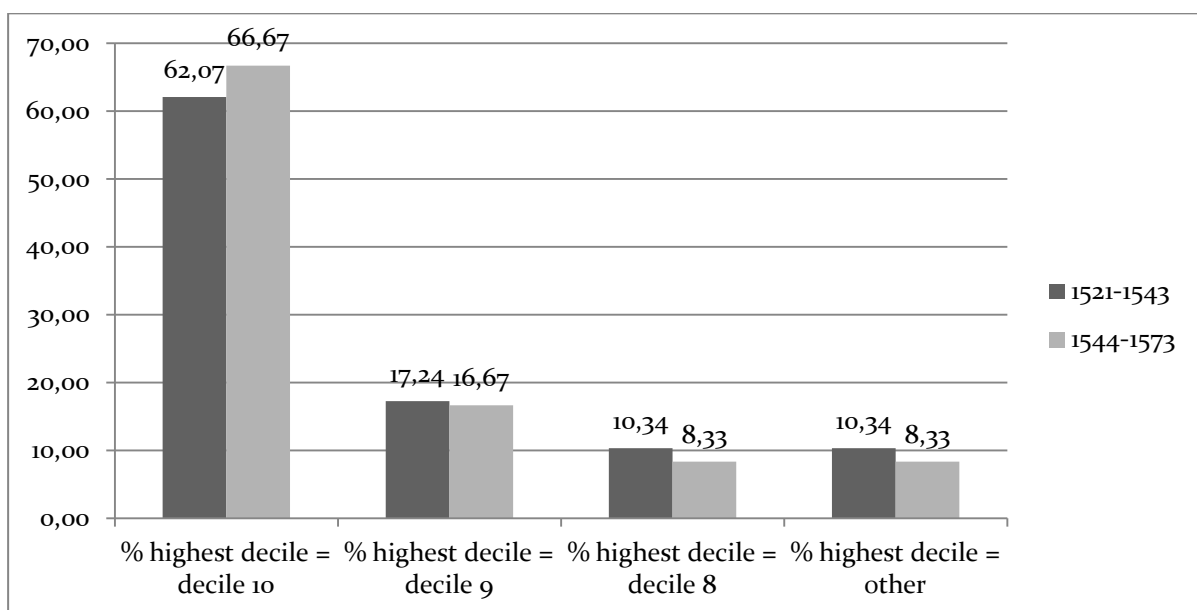
position and the mutation rate of the office in order to assess the degree of democracy / oligarchy of the office. When we focus on the tax officials, a similar trend can be identified as seen for the village aldermen (Fig 7.7 & 7.8). In Rijkevorsel, between 1464 and 1475, 85.29 percent of the identified tax officials came from one of the highest three deciles, while in sixteenth century Brecht this even amounted to – on average – 90 percent. For this type of office the dominance of the fiscal upper-layer was thus even more striking than for the village governors. For tax officials, the mutation rate was also a lot higher than for village aldermen (Fig 7.9), with an average number of offices in Brecht of 1.8 (1521-1543) or 1.9 (1544-1576).

Fig 7.7 Socio-economic profile of tax officials, Rijkevorsel (1464-1475), n=34



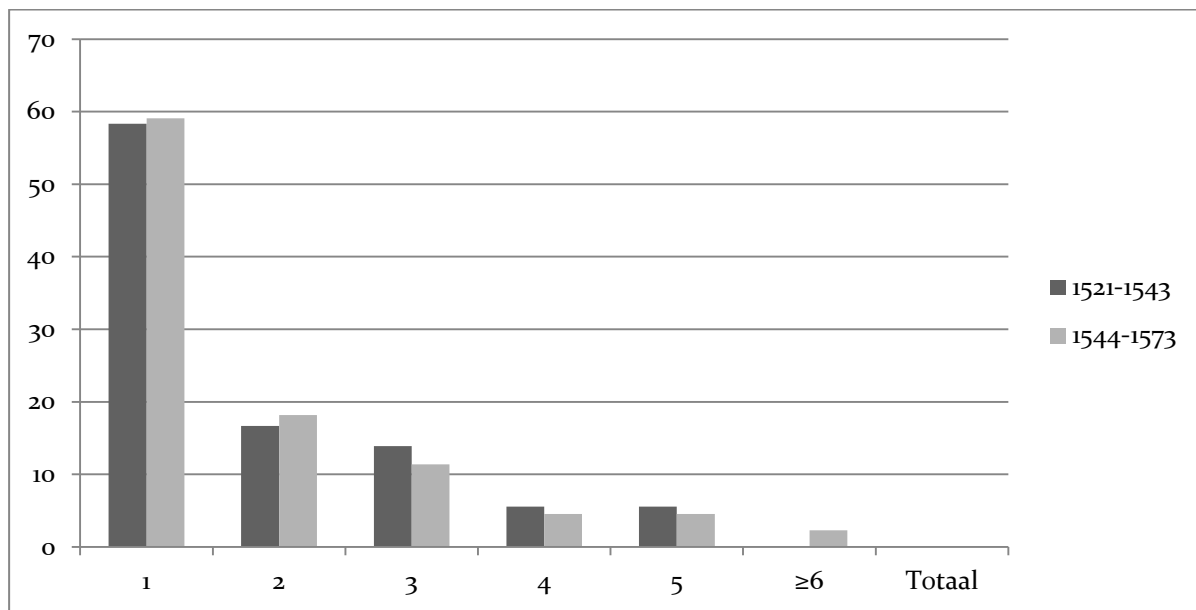
Source: RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 3244-3256. Royal taxation, 1464-1475

Fig 7.8 Socio-economic profile of tax officials, Brecht, sixteenth century, n=65



Source: RAA, OGA Brecht, 2431-2482. Accounts of the ducal (later on royal) aides, 1523-1576

Fig 7.9 Number of offices per person for tax officials, Brecht, sixteenth century

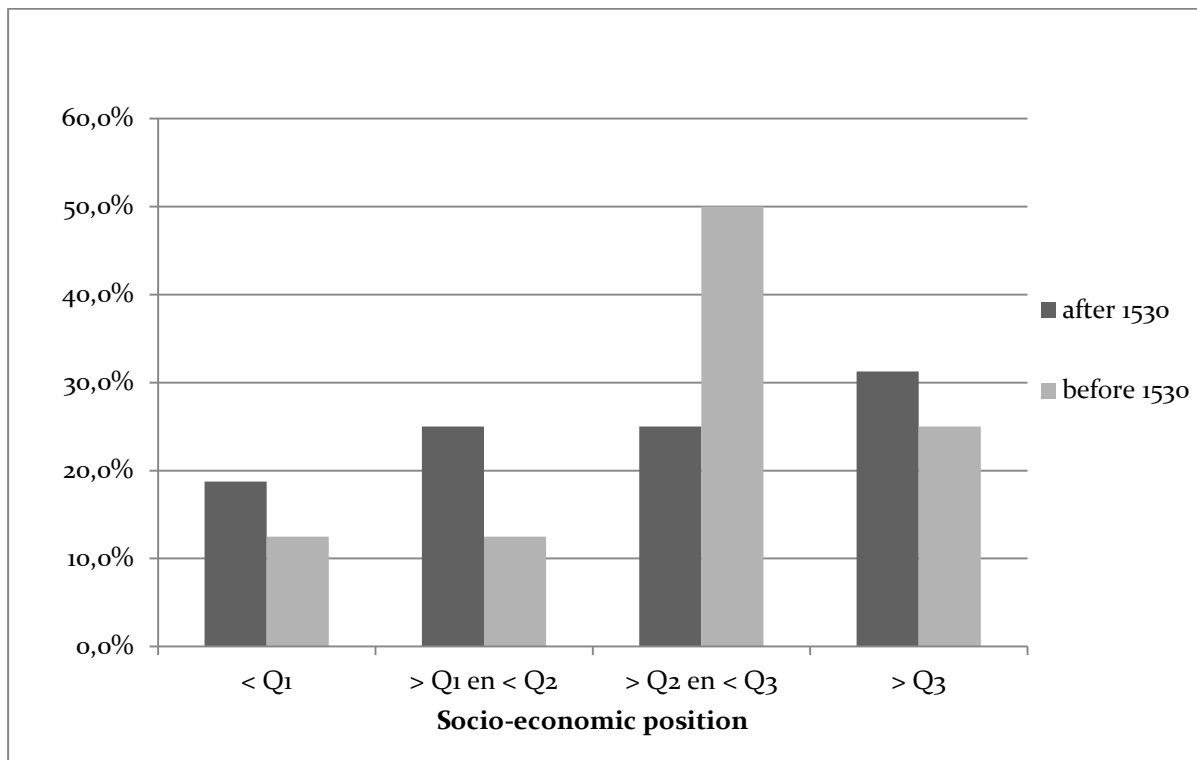


Source: RAA, OGA Brecht, 2431-2482. *Accounts of the ducal (later on royal) aides, 1523-1576*

This dominance of the fiscal upper-layers is by no means present in every region. Kristof Dombrecht has reconstructed the socio-economic position of tax officials in Coastal Flanders. Coastal Flanders is an intriguing case-study, since the Coastal villages – as has been mentioned previously – did not have their own village government, leaving less room for those wanting to strengthen their position via control over the political functioning of the village or aspiring to the status linked to this type of function. However, tax officials were present in these villages as well, to collect the *pointingen* and *zettingen*. The group of Coastal tax officials (Fig 7.10) was socio-economically much more diverse – with a significant amount of officials belonging to the lower quartiles, even augmenting after 1530 – than in the Campine area, suggesting a more democratic composition. This might strike us as rather odd, since the sixteenth century Coastal area was – compared to the Campine area – a much more polarised society, with a widening gap between ever-richer (tenant) farmers and ever-poorer peasants who became almost landless. However, the office of church-master, responsible for the day-to-day management of church affairs, became increasingly dominated by the richest villagers who aimed to distinguish themselves culturally from their poorer counterparts and lacked the means to do this politically.⁶²⁰ The office of tax-official was deemed to be less interesting by the Coastal village elites since it yielded only limited power. In the Campine area, where village communities and their governors had ample competences and a lot of room for manoeuvre, these functions were much more sought after.

⁶²⁰ Dombrecht, K., E. Van Onacker, et al. (2013). “The regional differences”: 213-224.

Fig 7.10 Socio-economic position of tax-collectors of 2 seigniories in the parishes of Dudzele and Ramskapelle, 1499-1536 (n=16) and 1537-1580 (n=16).



Source: based on the findings of Kristof Dombrecht, as can be found in: Dombrecht, K., E. Van Onacker, et al. (2013). *The regional differences of officeholding by rural elites. A comparative study for late medieval Flanders and Brabant (14th-16th century)*. Hinter dem Horizont. Projektion und Distinktion ländlicher Oberschichten im europäischen Vergleich, 17. Bis 19. Jahrhundert. D. Freist and F. Schmeckel. Münster, Aschendorff Verlag: 213-224.

7.2.4 Accumulation and career plans?

Most village officials thus predominantly stemmed from the village's upper-layers, but what if we focus on their careers? Can we distinguish officials combining several types of offices and what were the specifics of these roles? Furthermore, two groups in particular trigger our interest. Firstly, officials with an exceptionally long career – since they probably had a severe influence on village life. What did their career path look like and what were their characteristics? Secondly, officials from 'lower' socio-economic groups strike us as being particularly interesting, since their position was actually rather exceptional.

The accumulation of offices was clearly a striking feature of Campine village society. In the village of Rijkevorsel, 46.7 percent of the aldermen were at some point active as tax officials, whereas 38.9 percent of tax officials served as aldermen. In Brecht, the same trend can be discerned, with 35.6 percent of the aldermen also functioning as tax officials and 24.6 percent of tax officials being active as alderman. Aldermen with exceptionally long careers, exceeding a period of 10 years, all came from the upper three deciles and even predominantly from the highest one. In Brecht, for the period 1521-1576, 23.4 percent of the aldermen were active for more than ten years and all those whom I could identify belonged to one of the highest three deciles. The findings for sixteenth century Gierle were quite similar, with 24 percent of

aldermen being in office for more than 10 years, and all those identified belonging to one of the highest two deciles. Therefore, one could say that the 'richest' villagers quite likely had a disproportionately large impact on village government and village affairs, something which corresponds with the statements of Vangheluwe (cfr. table 7.1).

But not all aldermen came from the village's economic *fine fleur*. Some of the village aldermen came from the lower fiscal groups and were therefore the 'odd-ones out'. It could be interesting to zoom in on these cases, in order to come up with an explanation for their exceptional position. In Rijkevorsel, between 1464 and 1485, three aldermen from lower deciles can be traced in other sources. What is interesting is that all three of them had family members who were also active in one or several village offices (for example as alderman, churchmaster of Holy Ghostmaster). This seems to confirm Sherri Olson's findings for the English countryside, since she stresses the importance of membership of an established family as one of the prerequisites for developing an official career.⁶²¹ In the village of Gierle, one of the lower-quartile aldermen, Jan Leys, started his career in 1552 and inherited several plots of land in 1555, a year after the fiscal cross-section of 1554. In a military taxation register of 1574, he was already part of the highest decile. Another aldermen belonging to a lower quartile, Sijmon Proest, was, most likely, at the end of his active career, since he and his wife made a will in his last year in office. It seems quite likely, therefore, that he was nearing the end of his life⁶²² and had already yielded some of his goods to the next generation, which might explain his lower fiscal position. To sum it up, therefore, the 'lower-deciles' aldermen that I could identify, were either part of one of the 'established families' of the Campine villages or at the beginning or at the end of their active career.

7.3 The common good. Community involvement in Campine politics: discourse vs. practice.

In the above section, village officials were placed at the forefront of our research and we established that they had a lot of manoeuvring space to wield their elaborate powers. They predominantly belonged to the fiscal better-off groups and had – via these formalised functions – a strong grip on village resources. Since a rather small, better-off group governed the village *de facto*, this does seem to suggest that the Campine area was not really a hub of democracy. Nonetheless, the Campine upper layer, which consisted of roughly the richest 30 percent of the village community was confronted with a rather large mass of cottagers, micro-smallholders and poor people. Quantity, therefore, might also have consisted of quality. Research on political communities in cities has indeed suggested that the *bono communi* was very much emphasised in official discourse, meaning that 'ordinary' inhabitants were – at least symbolically – involved in government matters. It seems valuable, therefore, as a first step to find out if the Campine area was characterised by a comparable tendency to create a discourse

⁶²¹ Olson, S. (1991). "Jurors of the Village Court: Local Leadership Before and After the Plague in Ellington, Huntingdonshire." *The Journal of British Studies* 30(3): 237-256

⁶²² Thoen, E. (1988). *Landbouweconomie en bevolking in Vlaanderen gedurende de late middeleeuwen en het begin van de moderne tijden. Testregio: de kasselrijen van Oudenaarde en Aalst*. Gent, Belgisch Centrum voor Landelijke Geschiedenis.

emphasising the common good and a certain extent of general participation. I will, therefore, reconstruct the ways in which the village community represented itself in its byelaws and communications with the outside world. The question then remains whether this alleged discourse had a link with the day-to-day reality of village politics. On a formal, institutionalised level, politics were mostly dominated by the economic upper-layer, but did this does not mean that they were little more than autocrats, only symbolically involving the great mass of less well-off villagers. Can we therefore find practices of broader community involvement in decision-making processes?

7.3.1 The consent of the community? Discourse on participation and decision-making

One of the sources that can be used are the village byelaws, written down to regulate village life and, more specifically, steer the functioning of the commons. We have already focussed upon this source and its possibilities to reconstruct the discourse on and symbolic of participation in chapter 4, but the results of this will briefly be repeated, since they are also extremely relevant here. Almost all byelaws start with a preamble, stating the parties present at its composition. This does, of course, not necessarily imply a direct engagement with true power or participation, however, it does reflect certain practices. An often-mentioned group were the village aldermen which is unsurprising considering they were responsible for controlling the compliance of the village byelaws. It is also rather striking that the lord himself - and / or one of his direct representatives (*schout, meier, drossaard*) - were very often involved in setting up these byelaws. Village affairs were thus clearly not restricted to villagers themselves, but the lord also kept a close watch on regulations, personally or through his direct representative. Other officials and *gezworenen* (jurors) were also regularly mentioned, although the type of officials present often varied from village to village.

The community as a whole (mostly referred to as the *gemeyn ingesetenen*) was mainly present as an audience, when it came to the writing-up and reading of the byelaws. The same tendency to include all village members as an audience in ritualised activities can be seen in an article by Maïka De Keyzer, Iason Jongepier and Tim Soens on the use of maps in pre-modern societies, where they depict boundary visitations in the Campine area. Whenever frictions as to the exact location of boundaries or boundary markers occurred, the entire community had to step off the boundaries, as a ritualised way to demarcate village jurisdiction.⁶²³ When it came to the composition of the regulatory framework of village society, the centre of power clearly lay with the lord, his representative and the village government. The community as a whole was, in most cases, not directly engaged in the establishment of the rules but were, in almost all cases, present as an audience when the byelaws were read aloud.

Another source shedding light on the discourse of in- or exclusion is correspondence. The Campine villages and their governors weren't meek sheep who were mere subjects to the whims of their seniors. They often actively communicated with other villages or their lord to address certain problems or make certain claims. Several sixteenth-century letters have been preserved for the village of Loenhout, addressed to the lords of Arenberg who had jurisdiction over the village. These letters mostly contained requests from the Loenhout inhabitants to

⁶²³ De Keyzer, M., Jongepier, I. & Soens, T. (forthcoming). "Consuming Maps and Producing Space. Explaining Regional Variations in the Reception and Agency of Cartography in the Low Countries During the Medieval and Early Modern Periods," *Continuity and Change* Accepted, Published Spring 2014.

their lady, however, the group of people mentioned as petitioners differed, depending on the subject of the request. It is interesting to note that questions relating to church matters were made on behalf of the whole community. Two letters were addressed to the Lady of Arenberg begging her to prevent the appointment of a new parish priest and retain the current one, Jacob Reuwen. These requests were done by ‘*scoutet, scepenen, kerckmeesters, heylichgeestmeesters ende alle andere inghesetenen int voerseide dorpe van Loenhout*’, in other words, by the bailiff, aldermen, tax officials and all other inhabitants.⁶²⁴ For other requests, however, it was clearly not deemed necessary to mention all the inhabitants of the village. In a letter written to suggest that one *vorster* was more than enough for a small village as Loenhout and that it was therefore not necessary to replace the deceased second *vorster*, the subscribers were limited to the ‘*scoutet ende scepenen* (bailiff and aldermen). In another letter asking for the replacement of what was deemed an incompetent school teacher, the request was made by ‘*de paster, schoutet, rentmeester ende scepenen*’ (the parish priest, bailiff, steward and aldermen).⁶²⁵ It seems quite likely that these letters were actually written by the village aldermen, since their names can be found at the bottom. They probably decided which groups to refer to depending on the circumstances and on the nature of the request. There seems, therefore, to have been – as Marc Boone and others have suggested for late medieval and early modern cities – a genuine concern or tendency to keep up the idea that the *bono communi* or the entire community was in a way involved in the decision-making processes. The (almost) ritualised presence of all community members when byelaws were read aloud, or at the visitation of boundaries, are witness to this desire. However, it remains to be seen whether this discourse was actualised in reality. Can we find traces of mechanisms allowing for ‘ordinary’ villagers to have their say, or was the dominance of the *melior pars* of society and their grip on office-holding so comprehensive that there was no room left for this?

7.3.2 Dealing with dissent.

The reconstruction of participation of ‘ordinary villagers’ is an extraordinarily complicated task. Offices and office-holding are quite easy to get a grip on, since names were recorded quite regularly, but we are left very much in the dark about the true day-to-day functioning of everyday politics. The stakeholders and mechanisms behind decision-making are not revealed by the Campine source material. Antoine Follain, who wrote about pre-modern village communities in France, has indicated that a lack of source material can also be revealing in its own way. According to him all ‘happy’ communities were alike in that they hardly left any source material shedding light on village realities in order to protect themselves from too much lordly or stately interference⁶²⁶. This might indeed explain why there is hardly any trace of village meetings or village accounts. This lack of archival evidence does, however, by no means imply that medieval villages were unified, rustic dwellings.⁶²⁷ Dissent and discussion were most probably an organic part of community life. As, for example, Jelle Haemers⁶²⁸ and Peter Hoppenbrouwers have demonstrated: village (or town) governments were not

⁶²⁴ Arenbergarchief Edingen, box 21/9 Loenhout

⁶²⁵ Arenbergarchief Edingen, box 21/9 Loenhout

⁶²⁶ Follain, A. (2008). *Le village sous l'Ancien Régime*. Paris, Fayard: 245-279

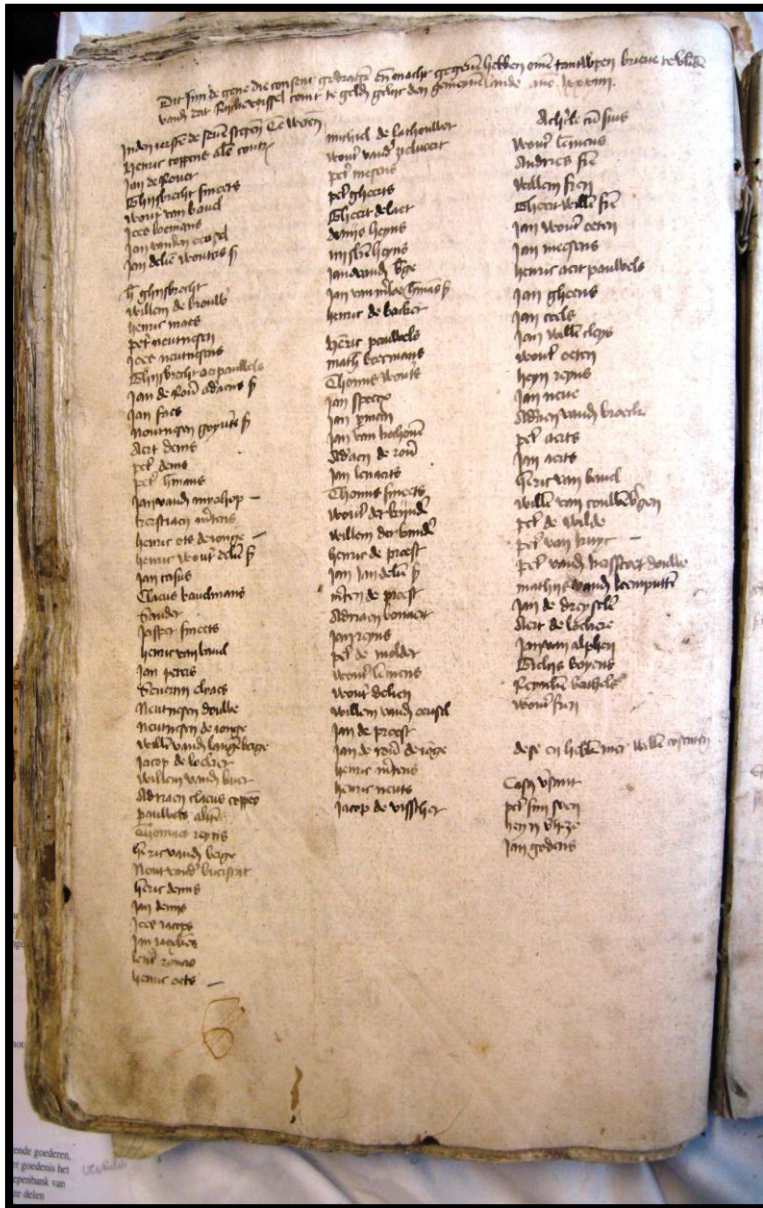
⁶²⁷ Müller, M. (2007). A Divided Class?: 115-131.

⁶²⁸ Haemers, J. (2009). "Factionalism and State Power in the Flemish Revolt (1482-1492)." *Journal of Social History* 42(4): 1009-1039.

necessarily representative of the wants and wishes of other community members. It is not always easy to trace these differing opinions in the sources, but it is possible to give one outstanding example. In the registers of the bench of aldermen of the village of Rijkevorsel, in 1484, we can find an entry concerning a sum of money the village will have to be lent by the city of Antwerp, in which all the names of villagers who are in agreement with this decision are summarised. The significance of this cannot be underestimated; apparently it was deemed necessary by the village government to explicitly ask and write down the consent of the community as a whole! Two remarks need to be made. First of all, it is quite striking that only men appear in this list. Women did function as household heads in the Campine – most probably when they were widowed. In the taxation list of 1465 23.4 percent of all taxpayers (and thus household heads) were women. In 1475 their number still amounted to 20.3 percent. So, it seems female household heads were expected to pay their share when it came to taxation, however, when it came to voicing their opinion on village affairs, the rules were somewhat more misogynistic. Secondly, the names of four people '*die nyet en wilden consenten*' (who did not want to consent) were also mentioned, namely those of Casus Versant, his son Peter Versant, Heyn Verheze and Jan Godens. Since every villager had to vouch for these loans, it was not very far-fetched that their agreement was sought at village meetings.⁶²⁹ Apparently the dominance of the *melior pars* of society did not lead to consensus of opinion among them. Villagers were thus not necessarily obliged or forced to conform to the dominant opinion. On the contrary, their differing viewpoints were even formally recorded. This indicates that Campine villages had mechanisms at their disposal to allow villagers to have their say, even if they were not formally appointed to do this.

⁶²⁹ van Zalinge-Spooren, L. (2000/2001). "De rol van geërfden en naburen in het dorpsbestuur in de achttiende eeuw in enkele dorpen bij 's Hertogenbosch." *Noordbrabants Historisch Jaarboek* 17-18: 202

Fig 7.11 Traces of dissent. Names of dissenters concerning a village loan, Rijkevorsel, 1484



Source: RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 145. Register of the bench of aldermen, 1465-1487, f. 471

Other clear-cut cases of dissent have not been encountered in the sources, however, literature suggests they were probably quite plentiful. For the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – for which much more source material was preserved on these matters – several examples can be given for the Northern-Brabant part of the Campine area. One particular example, presented by Lia van Zalinge-Spooren, is very striking. She describes a conflict in the eighteenth-century village of Helvoirt on the exact location of the new town hall, causing a rupture in village unity, dividing the community into two groups. The village’s aldermen, the churchmaster, two tax officials and two *gezworenen* preferred one location, whereas the village’s two ‘poor relief masters’ and the other two tax officials had their hopes set on another spot and they were backed-up by a significant part of the ‘ordinary’ community members.

After a whole series of discussions and judicial actions a compromise was forged, but it is interesting to see that the village records clearly made note of the tensions and disagreements nonetheless.⁶³⁰ Village politics thus clearly consisted of a rather impressive amount of quarrelling and negotiating. Decision-making was not a smooth, one-way process, but rather a bumpy road towards less-than-perfect solutions.

A quick look at the dominant research interest of many rural historians could suggest that peasants were eager to start significant uprisings, in other words, the so-called peasant revolts. For England, we have the notorious revolt of 1381, reconstructed by Rodney Hilton in one of his eloquent works.⁶³¹ The 1525 peasant revolt in Germany also received considerable attention.⁶³² For the Low Countries a great deal less is written on the subject, but this by no means implies that revolts were absent.⁶³³ Friesland, Drenthe, and also Coastal Flanders witnessed their fair share of upheaval, but in the Campine area peasants never revolted. The reasons and causes for peasant revolts are extremely complex, I therefore do not wish to put forward an encompassing explanation for the relative rest that characterised the Campine region, however, it seems that the fact that Campine independence was never thoroughly threatened, probably holds part of the answer. Village communities maintained the use rights and management of their commons up until the nineteenth century and villages (and especially their governors and the economic better-off) had a relatively strong grip on their own lives. When frictions arose, a whole arsenal of conflict regulation mechanisms could be used, ranging from relatively peaceful judicial negotiations, to – in exceptional cases – the use of violence. All in all, the Campine conflict regulation mechanisms seem to have worked rather well and a certain ‘social balance’ was more or less maintained.

7.4 Conclusion

As Chris Dyer and Caroline Castiglione rightly suggested for their own research-regions, village communities were hubs of political activity. Village communities were not only economic units, they were political communities as well. Several characteristics of political village life in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries catch the eye, when rummaging through the sources. First of all, Campine villages appear to have been ‘intensively governed’. The village government wielded elaborate powers, being responsible for a wide array of tasks: ranging from the government of the commons, the day-to-day government of the village, to the wielding of judicial powers. Moreover, due to the lack of an elaborate regional level and the relatively limited feudal structures, these villages and their (political) elite had quite a lot of manoeuvring space. A second aspect that characterised these political communities during the

⁶³⁰ van Zalinge-Spooren, L. (2000/2001). "De rol van geërfden en naburen in het dorpsbestuur in de achttiende eeuw in enkele dorpen bij 's Hertogenbosch." *Noordbrabants Historisch Jaarboek* 17-18: 196-233

⁶³¹ Hilton, R. H. (1973). *Bond men made free: medieval peasant movements and the English rising of 1381*. New York, Viking Press.

⁶³² See for example: Blickle, P. and C. Catt (1979). "Peasant revolts in the German empire in the late Middle Ages." *Social History* 4(2): 223-239. & Sreenivasan, G. P. (2001). "The social origins of the Peasant's War of 1525 in Upper Swabia." *Past and Present* 171: 30-65

⁶³³ Van Bavel, B. J. P. (2011). Rural revolts and structural change in the Low Countries, thirteenth - early fourteenth centuries. R. Goddard, J. Langdon & M. Müller (eds.). *Survival and discord in medieval society. Essays in honour of Christopher Dyer*. Turnhout, Brepols: 249-268.

late medieval and early modern period was the increasing institutionalisation, formalisation and regulation of office-holding and village responsibilities. However, as Dyer has also suggested, it does not seem to have mattered whether these offices stemmed from the village itself or were imposed by the central government.

These offices were continuously dominated by the Campine independent peasants. When looking at the village aldermen, it seems that this dominance became somewhat more marked throughout our research period. In the second half of the sixteenth century, the dominance of the upper 30 percent is quite striking, particularly the strong presence of the highest decile. Only limited space was left for lesser-off villagers when it came to filling institutionalised offices. Nonetheless, the fact that 30 percent of the village population had relatively easy access to political functions does indeed suggest that political participation in the Campine region was quite widespread. While village government might have been rather oligarchical, it can relatively easily be labelled a 'broad oligarchy', mostly made up of members of well-established families. In other words, independent peasants with enough land and animals to secure the survival of their family, active on the late medieval and early modern markets, and belonging to families already part of village life for several generations.

In discourse and in practice there was some room for political involvement of non-officials too, however. The village byelaws and correspondence clearly emphasised the importance of the common good, symbolically involving all inhabitants in rituals that were an essential part of village life and politics. This involvement often exceeded the level of mere discourse. Sources shedding light on the true scope of day-to-day politics are extremely rare, but the material that does exist, hints at this, suggesting that there was quite some room for dissent. Clearly, Campine villages were characterised by political negotiation processes that were as important as formal functions. It would seem, therefore, that the practicalities and formally institutionalised aspects of village politics were firmly in the hands of the *melior pars* of society, however, this was accompanied – or more likely preceded and mediated – by more 'informal' mechanisms. The Campine independent peasants may have monopolised village offices, but they did not solely embody village politics. The vast quantity of 'ordinary villagers' were, in all likelihood, included since this was essential in maintaining the social status quo in the Campine region.

8

SOCIAL COHESION AND THE VILLAGE COMMUNITY. A FOCUS ON POOR RELIEF AND CHURCH LIFE.

“On this terrain, each stroke of the historian’s axe into the undergrowth of the past has revealed social relations to be more tangled than mythologized notions of community, obedience, and deference might suggest”

(Steve Hindle, 1998)⁶³⁴

The Saint Willibrord church in the village of Rijkevorsel, situated to the south of the small town of Hoogstraten and housing some 975 inhabitants in 1526, was one of the most central and important places in village life. Essential ‘happenings’ in village life were mostly located in or near the church. The weekly distribution of bread to the village poor took place outside the church porch, usually after Mass, where the village poor could line up to receive their part of the dole. The church building was also a central location in Rijkevorsel’s yearly procession. This was in all likelihood the main event of village life, bringing together villages of different rank and status. It was a lively cavalcade of giants, a dragon and trumpeters, whose music was accompanied by the ringing of the church bells. Both these ‘village events’ can be perceived in two different, even opposite ways. On the one hand they seem to suggest a convincing cohesion and unity in village life, epitomized by the solidarity with the village’s own poor. On the other hand, poor relief can just as easily be understood as being representative of ties of ‘paternalism, deference and subordination’⁶³⁵, whereas processions also materialised internal village differences.⁶³⁶

The above is underlined by recent research on communities and collectives, and it is the *raison d’être* of these institutions in particular which been scrutinized. In 2003, a thought-provoking study was published which dealt with the emergence of communities or collective organisations in medieval cities. Katherine Lynch’s work mainly emphasised the role of organisations such as fraternities, beguinages etc. as a supplement, or even alternative, to

⁶³⁴ Hindle, S. (1998). "Power, Poor Relief, and Social Relations in Holland Fen, c. 1600-1800." *The Historical Journal* 41(1): 68

⁶³⁵ Hindle, S. (2007). "Destitution, liminality and belonging: the church porch and the politics of settlement in English rural communities, c.1590-1660." C. Dyer (ed.). *The self-contained village? The social history of rural communities, 1250-1900*. Hatfield, University of Hertfordshire Press: 46

⁶³⁶ Bijsterveld, A. J. A. (2000/2001). "De kerk in het midden. De parochiekerk als centrum van de middeleeuwse dorpsgemeenschap." *Noordbrabants Historisch Jaarboek* 17-18: 105-107

kinship ties. In Lynch's view, kinship ties were much stronger in the countryside, but weakened in the much more anonymous medieval cities. In cities, family ties tended to be restricted to the nuclear family or household. In her view, the declining role of the extended family as network of support and solidarity in times of hardship or need was replaced by formal institutions of collective action (guilds, fraternities, parishes) or other, non family-based relationships (for instance among people living in the same neighbourhood).⁶³⁷ In a similar way, Tine De Moor has explained the spectacular rise of such 'corporate' (i.e. permanent and formalized) collective action in the later Middle Ages as follows: 'Guilds, commons and other forms of collective action were answers to the economic and social needs of the North-Western society, in response to a quickly developing but far from a fully developed market economy and to the social networks that due to the weakening of family networks were insufficient'.⁶³⁸ In her model, collectives were as much part of city life (such as beguinages, guilds, etc.) as of life on the countryside (such as commons). Furthermore, Steve Hindle has strongly emphasised the fact that communities were and are bound by more than mere economic or political relations. A 'sense of belonging' was created via diverse channels. Hindle addresses the pre-modern village community as a process, 'constantly reproduced by its members', and an ideal. The most tangible externalization of this was the parish, 'the locale in which community was reconstructed, reproduced, perhaps even consecrated'.⁶³⁹ However, he has suggested that communities were also forged by power relations, very much emphasising the presence of a paternalistic dominant group, steering community life to its own ideological and economical preferences.⁶⁴⁰ Historiography thus clearly presents us with a cohesion continuum when it comes to explaining the *raison d'être* of community-building, ranging between two extremes: solidarity and subordination.

The previous chapters focussed on economic differentiation and have greatly emphasised the existence of different social groups: a top layer of independent peasants, some 25 to 30 percent of the village community, and a large quantity of cottagers and micro-smallholders. These different social groups lived together in relatively small villages, in a convivium that was mainly characterised by stability. Several mechanisms or channels have already been mentioned as playing part in the sustained existence of relatively stable, peaceful social relations. The commons, for example, were vital for the continued existence of a social balance between independent peasants and less well-off villagers. Even though independent peasants benefitted more from them, the fact that every villager, irrespective of his or her social position, was entitled to use the commons, probably played a vital part in securing the survival of less well-off villagers and thus securing order and stability in the community which played a vital part in maintaining the social balance. Furthermore, the fact that decision-making concerning village politics or the village commons left quite some room – albeit often in more informal ways – for negotiation and a certain level of involvement, contributed to this. The Campine tax system played its part as well, acting as a redistribution mechanism - albeit a rough and

⁶³⁷ Lynch, K. A. (2003). *Individuals, families and communities in Europe, 1200-1800*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

⁶³⁸ De Moor, M. (2006). The Silent Revolution. The Emergence of Commons, Guilds and Other Forms of Corporate Collective Action in Western Europe from a New Perspective. *The Return of the Guilds*. Utrecht: 30

⁶³⁹ Hindle, S. (2000). "A sense of place? Becoming and belonging in the rural parish, 1550-1650." A. Shepard and P. Withington (eds.) *Communities in early modern England: networks, place, rhetoric*. Manchester, Manchester University Press: 96

⁶⁴⁰ Hindle, S. (2000). "A sense of place?": 96

imperfect one – which spared the lower social groups to a certain extent. For example, wage labour for the tenant farmers or peasants working larger holdings might also have played a part in securing the survival of the lower groups of society and thus in maintaining the social balance, but only to a limited extent.

However, there might be more that underpins this stable Campine convivium or co-habitational model. The previous chapter, focussing on village politics, already hinted at the fact that – at least when it came to discourse – the village community was clearly presented as one, often referring to the ‘common good’ as a central theme. This, however, only provides us with a limited view on community cohesion. A sense of unity, of belonging to the same community, might also have been essential. Parochial life and parochial institutions, often identified as being closely linked to communal identity and unification, might shed more light on this intriguing matter. The central question of this chapter is therefore the following: how were Campine villagers, consisting of different social strata, forged into one village community? And was this unity underpinned by mechanisms of solidarity, subordination, or a combination of both? This will be done by focussing on two quintessential parochial institutions: the Holy Ghost Table, responsible for poor relief on a parish level and the church fabric, dealing with the management of church affairs. Several questions need to be raised. When it comes to poor relief: who were the main recipients of relief and how substantial was it in the Campine? Can we formulate a hypothesis relating to the logic behind Campine poor relief and who decided on these matters? Concerning parochial life, as organised by the church fabric, the main questions are quite straightforward: who participated and to what extent? In the Campine area, most of these parochial institutions overlapped at the level of the village community, since almost all Campine villages only consisted of one parish. There are some exceptions to this rule⁶⁴¹, but all in all, the village and the parish were usually identical territorial units.

Two case studies will be put forward to shed light on these pressing questions, based on the available source material. First of all, the village of Rijkevorsel, which has already received its fair share of attention throughout the dissertation, will be examined. This village’s poor relief institution’s accounts were preserved from 1490 onwards – although with many interruptions.⁶⁴² The church accounts are also at our disposal, for the period 1493-1525.⁶⁴³ This can be completed with some scant information from village accounts, dating from the last quarter of the fifteenth century which sheds light on the village’s social life.⁶⁴⁴ Secondly, I will focus on Brecht, a rather large village and a centre of humanistic thought within a Campine context that is. For Brecht, several poor relief accounts for the second half of the sixteenth century have been preserved⁶⁴⁵, whereas scattered church accounts have survived for different junctures in the sixteenth century.⁶⁴⁶ A close scrutiny of this source material will allow us to reconstruct the ties that bound community members together. It will be argued that these ties were, yet again, steered by the independent peasants, but held in check by the specific

⁶⁴¹ Brecht is one exception being a large village with different hamlets, nevertheless, it had only one poor relief institution although it did have several church fabrics

⁶⁴² RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 4058-4098. A Accounts of the Holy Ghost table, 1490-1599. Accounts are available from 1490 onwards, however, unfortunately there is a gap between 1529 and 1568.

⁶⁴³ RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 4143 – 4164. Church accounts, 1493-1525

⁶⁴⁴ RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 3244-3256. Royal taxation, 1464-1475

⁶⁴⁵ RAA, KA Sint-Michielskerk Brecht, 274. – 286. Accounts of the Holy Ghost table, 1576-1598

⁶⁴⁶ RAA, KA Sint-Michielskerk Brecht, 32. Church accounts, 1529-1600; RAA, KA Sint-Michielskerk Brecht, 809-820. Accounts of Saint Lenaerts Chapel, 1512-1599 & RAA, KA Sint-Michielskerk Brecht, 1003. Accounts of the OLV op ‘heike chapel and the OLV Van Broekhoven chapel, 1559-1560

economic and social context of peasant communities. Although the top layer of Campine society might have enjoyed a relatively favourable position, in essence they remained peasants, interested mostly in maintaining their secure way of life which necessitated solidarity and strong communal ties.

8.1 Governing the village's poor. Formal structures of poor relief: the Campine Holy Ghost tables

[The bulk of the data analysis carried out for this particular part of the Phd has been executed by Hadewijch Masure, whom I would specifically wish to thank. Her findings can be consulted in the following report: 'Armenzorg op het platteland, 1450-1600' (2013)]

The first avenue to explore when considering the mechanisms behind the forging of a community, is poor relief. Poor relief in general has received quite some attention in recent research. This is probably due to the fact that poverty, and the battle against it in the past, has often been linked to our present-day welfare state and social security systems. The link is, of course, not linear, nonetheless it has provoked a great deal of historiographical attention. For a long time the dominant paradigm was that voiced by, among others, Abram De Swaan sketched a correlation between a rise in efficiency in poor relief with a rise in state interference.⁶⁴⁷ The English case in particular – and more specifically English poor relief after the national Poor Laws of 1598 and 1601, which were largely the result of state meddling – has been substantially researched. These Poor Laws introduced a uniform poor relief system to the whole of England. A vestry was installed in every parish which was responsible for the collection of taxes needed to provide for the poor. However, only the 'deserving' poor were to be supported. Those who were fit enough to work, were not entitled to relief. These evolutions were similar to those in, for example, the Low Countries where Charles V was responsible for a poor relief reform in 1576. Poor relief was centralised and the migration of poor people was, theoretically, severely limited. Recent research, however, has nuanced this teleological view of increasing state interference and growing efficiency. English poor relief still left room for regional and local differences within the broader context of the poor laws, and the same thing can also be said about the Low Countries.⁶⁴⁸ When it comes to the Low Countries, several cities organised poor relief centrally, however, the parish-based Holy Ghost Tables remained active, as did the relief systems of confraternities and guilds. Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk and Griet Vermeersch have pointed to the impressive efficiency of these locally organised poor relief provisions. Contrary to what Lynch's work might suggest, rural parishes thus had their own poor relief institutions as well in the form of Holy Ghost tables. Medieval and early modern

⁶⁴⁷ Van Nederveen Meerkerk, E. and G. Vermeersch (2009). Performing outdoor relief. Changes in urban provision for the poor in the northern and southern Low Countries (c.1500-1800). M. Van der Heijden, E. Van Nederveen Meerkerk and G. Vermeersch (eds.). *Serving the urban community: the rise of public facilities in the Low Countries..* Amsterdam, Aksant: 135-145.

⁶⁴⁸ See for example the following articles: Winter, A. (2008). "Caught between Law and Practice: Migrants and Settlement Legislation in the Southern Low Countries in a Comparative Perspective, c. 1700-1900." *Rural History* 19(2): 137-162 & Winter, A. and T. Lambrecht (2013). "Migration, poor relief and local autonomy: settlement policies in England and the Southern Low Countries in the eighteenth century." *Past and Present* 218: 91-126.

rural poor relief and its institutions in the urban-dominated Low Countries have, however, received near to no attention. Broadly speaking therefore, rural poor relief is a wasteland waiting to be reclaimed.⁶⁴⁹ This chapter will be a first attempt to shed some light on this fascinating subject, however, it represents only an endeavour, departing from one particular angle.

8.1.1 Book-keeping for the poor. Revenues and expenditure of the Campine Holy Ghost tables.

Before we turn to the recipients of poor relief, its scope and the logic behind it, it seems vital to make an assessment of the revenues and expenses (and the revenue/ expenses ratio) of poor relief in general. This will allow us to reconstruct the scale of Campine relief. The main focus will be on the village of Rijkevorsel, since this is the only Campine village for which the accounts of the Holy Ghost table were preserved for a relatively long, almost continuous period, from 1490 onwards.⁶⁵⁰ These findings will be supplemented with additional information for the village of Brecht⁶⁵¹. For this village, information is limited to the second half of the sixteenth century. For several sample periods, the accounts have been meticulously analysed.⁶⁵² To allow us to frame these findings, a comparison will be made with Coastal and Inland Flanders.⁶⁵³

Let us first focus on the revenue side of the picture (in species and in kind). For the Rijkevorsel accounts (Fig 8.1 & 8.2) dating from 1490 up until 1599, sample periods were taken every 10 years – except for the period between 1521 and 1568 when no accounts were preserved. The composition of the Holy Ghost table revenues is rather one-sided. Almost all of their income stemmed from annuities and *jaargetijden* (testamentary bequests for commemorative services). The majority of these were paid in kind (on average 65.7 percent), and a minority in species (on average 34.3 percent). This is consistent with the findings of Auke Rijpma, who has made a study of foundations and their public services during the late medieval period. He claims that poor tables, hospitals and new monasteries made frequent use of annuities (up to 40 percent of their total income).⁶⁵⁴ During this period, the Holy Ghost table's revenue apparently increased continuously – in kind, as well as in species. For the period between 1529 and 1568 no accounts were preserved, which somewhat limits and distorts our image. It appears as if income (in nominal and real terms) was lower after 1569 than in the previous period, however, it is possible that this trend resulted from the fact that the income of 1594 was exceptionally low, due to the consequences of the Dutch Revolt. However, the income structure underwent some slight changes from the 1560s onwards, or perhaps even earlier, as there no accounts have been preserved for the 1530s, '40s and '50s. The number of annuities

⁶⁴⁹ For the Campine area specifically, only the studies of Erik Vanhaute can be labelled as significant, but even those are not entirely relevant since they focus on the nineteenth century. See for example: Vanhaute, E. (2010). "De schrikkelijke hongersnood is genadig afgewend. Waarom de Kempen in de jaren 1840 niet verhongerden." *Taxandria* LXXXII: 255-267. & Vanhaute, E. (2011). "From famine to food crisis: what history can teach us about local and global subsistence crises." *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 38(1): 47-65.

⁶⁵⁰ RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 4058-4098. Accounts of the Holy Ghost table, 1490-1599

⁶⁵¹ RAA, KA Sint-Michielskerk Brecht, 274. – 286. Accounts of the Holy Ghost table, 1576-1598

⁶⁵² Sample periods: Rijkevorsel: 1490, 1499-1501, 1519-1521, 1568-1569, 1594, 1596, 1599, Brecht: 1571-1572, 1589-1591

⁶⁵³ The basic analysis of poor relief for all three regions has been carried out by Hadewijch Masure

⁶⁵⁴ Rijpma, A. (2012). *Funding public services through religious and charitable foundations in the late-medieval Low Countries*. History Department. Utrecht, University of Utrecht

and *jaargetijden* paid in kind had declined, as had those paid in species (although the decline in this type of annuity is somewhat less marked). However, a new type of income emerges in the accounts. The Holy Ghost table started to lease out land or other immovables, for example, a meadow, or even the lazaretto.⁶⁵⁵ However, apparently it appears that especially annuities collected in kind, were leased out for hard cash. The Holy Ghost table may have had problems with their cash flow due to the periods of unrest and employed these new strategies to overcome any shortcomings. This suggestion can, however, not be underpinned by strong evidence due to the lack of accounts for 1530-1567 and we are therefore left in the dark to a certain extent about the actual start date.

The Holy Ghost table expenses (in species and in kind) followed the exact same trend as the revenues, with a rise up until the 1520s and a decline in the last decades of the sixteenth century. This mainly proves that poor relief in the village of Rijkevorsel was supply-driven. This was not only the case in Rijkevorsel, but holds true for other Campine villages as well, such as Brecht (Fig 8.3 & 8.4). For this village we only have findings for the last quarter of the sixteenth century, but the same drop in revenues can be spotted at the end of the century. We can, furthermore, note the fact that the amount of money raised by the Campine Holy Ghost tables was quite significant holding up with or even exceeding other regions in the Low Countries (See appendix for findings on Lede & Oostkerke). For the village of Lede, situated in the proto-industrial region surrounding the city of Alost, in Inland Flanders, findings were comparable to those for the Campine area.⁶⁵⁶ At its peak, the Rijkevorsel table was able to collect approximately 4500 *Karolus stuiver*. The Brecht table, responsible for village double as large, collected somewhat over 8000 *stuiver* around 1580. The Lede table received a – still respectable – 12.000 *stuiver* at its best moments, but in ordinary years, the amount was quite comparable to that of Rijkevorsel. If we recalculate these totals in kind (in litres of rye) the same tendency becomes clear, with Rijkevorsel being able to spend between 8000 and 15.000 litres, Brecht at its most nearly 14.000 litres and Lede between 6000 and 20.000 litres. Lede had approximately some 1255 inhabitants⁶⁵⁷ at this point, whereas Rijkevorsel only had 975, which in all likelihood explains the differences⁶⁵⁸ Brecht had over 2000 inhabitants, which explains the larger sums collected in this village, compared to Rijkevorsel. The findings for Coastal Flanders, i.c. The Oostkerke table are harder to compare with, since data are much rarer, but it would seem that – in kind – the revenues and expenses were also comparable to those in the Campine area. For the village of Oostkerke populations numbers are very hard to come by, so a real trustworthy comparison cannot be made.⁶⁵⁹ However, it would seem that population numbers can by no means explain the differences in revenues. There is however one very outspoken difference between the peasant dominated regions of Inland Flanders and the Campine and the commercially oriented Coastal part of Flanders. In Lede and Rijkevorsel personnel expenses were nearly irrelevant, amounting at most to 5.6 percent in Lede and 4.4 percent in Rijkevorsel. In the Coastal Flanders village of Oostkerke, this amount could rise to as much as 28.1 percent. For administrative expenses the same holds true. In Lede and Rijkevorsel these

⁶⁵⁵ In all likelihood this was a house destined for the provision for lepers

⁶⁵⁶ Based on: RAB, GO23, 471-503. 1456-1591

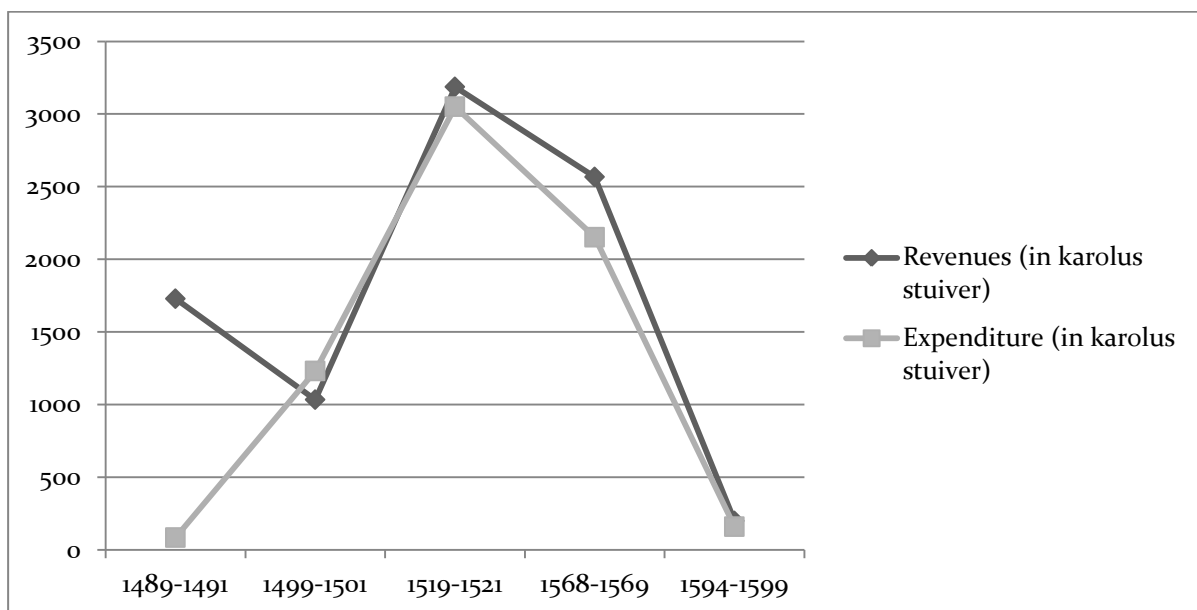
⁶⁵⁷ Based on: De Brouwer, J. (1968). *Demografische evolutie van het Land van Aalst, 1570-1800*. Pro Civitate, Brussel,

⁶⁵⁸ Calculations were made using: Cuvelier, J. (1912). *Les dénombrements de foyers en Brabant, 14e-16e siècle* Brussel, s.n.

⁶⁵⁹ Kristof Dombrecht has made an impressive reconstruction for population numbers in the fifteenth and sixteenth century Coastal area, but for the village of Oostkerke a reconstruction was deemed impossible

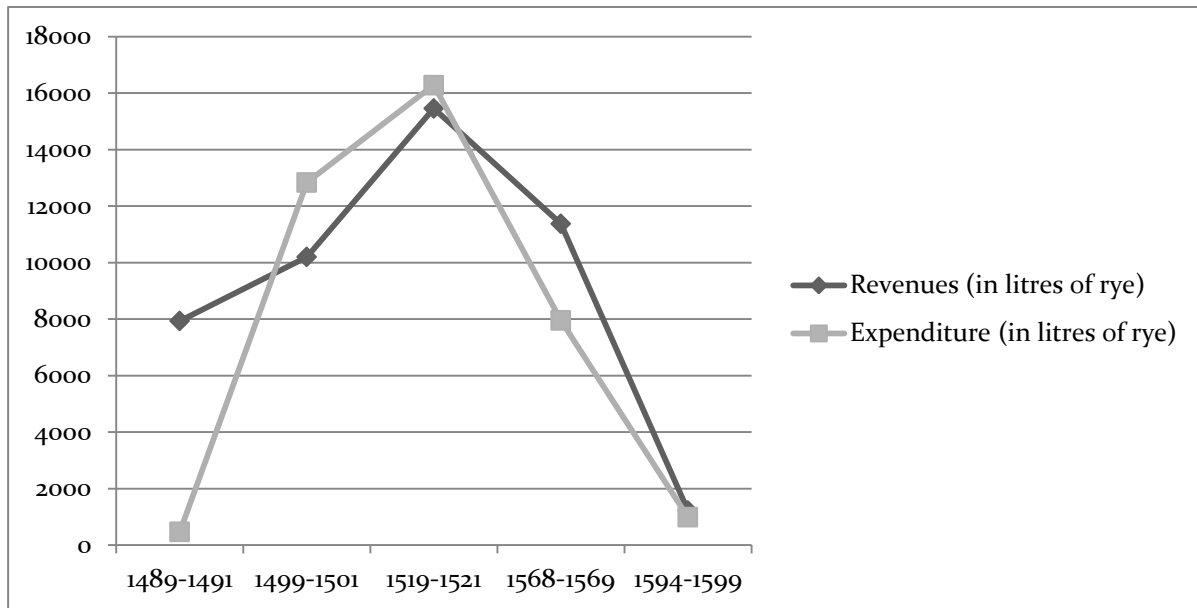
never rose above 5 percent. But for the village of Oostkerke they often rose above 50 percent. Part of these expenses were linked to obligatory revenues, linked to *jaargetijden*, but meals for the poor relief board were quite a slice out of the yearly income. When the revenues plummeted in the period 1589-1591 the Oostkerke table furthermore chose to save on poor relief itself, but not on administrative expenses. It appears that the Campine poor relief institutions had quite some money and / or grain at their disposal to possibly distribute among the poor and needy. This brings us to another quintessential question: who were the main 'beneficiaries' and of the Campine poor relief money; were they indeed the poor and destitute of Campine society and how substantial was the relief these paupers received?

Fig 8.1 Revenues and expenditure of the Rijkevorsel Holy Ghost table (Campine area), in species (*karolus stuiver*)



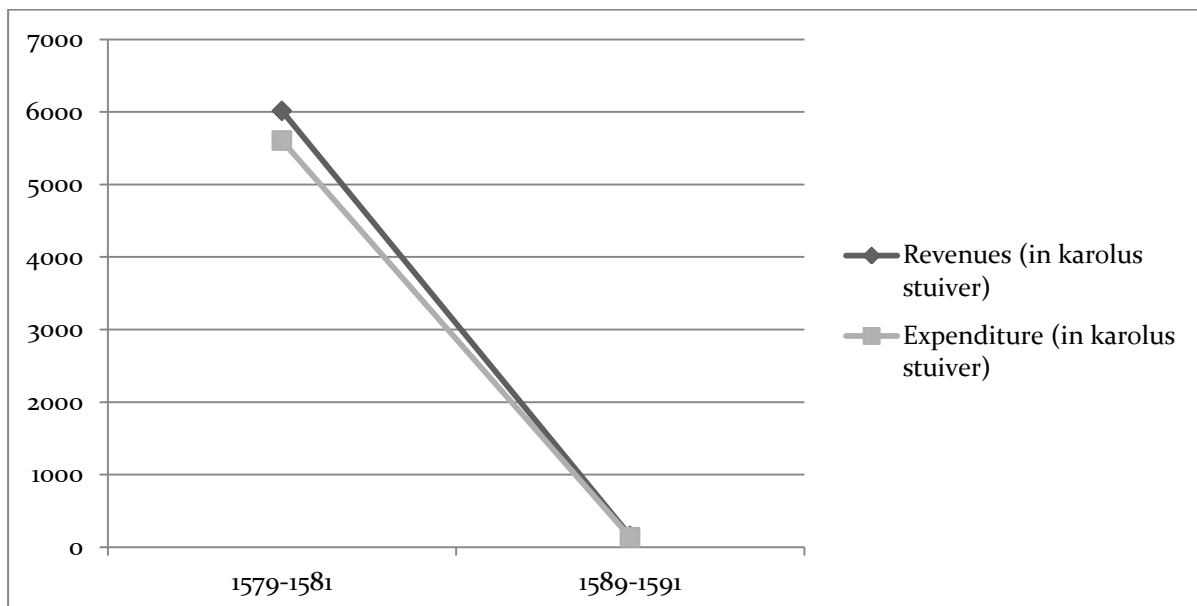
Sources: RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 4058-4098. Accounts of the Holy Ghost table, 1490-1599 (processed by Hadewijch Masure) Accounts of the Holy Ghost table, 1490-1599. Rye prices: van der Wee, H. (1963). *The growth of the Antwerp market and the European economy (fourteenth-sixteenth centuries)*. The Hague, Nijhoff, processed by Jord Hanus.

Fig 8.2 Revenues and expenditure of the Rijkevorsel Holy Ghost table (Campine area), in kind (litres of rye)



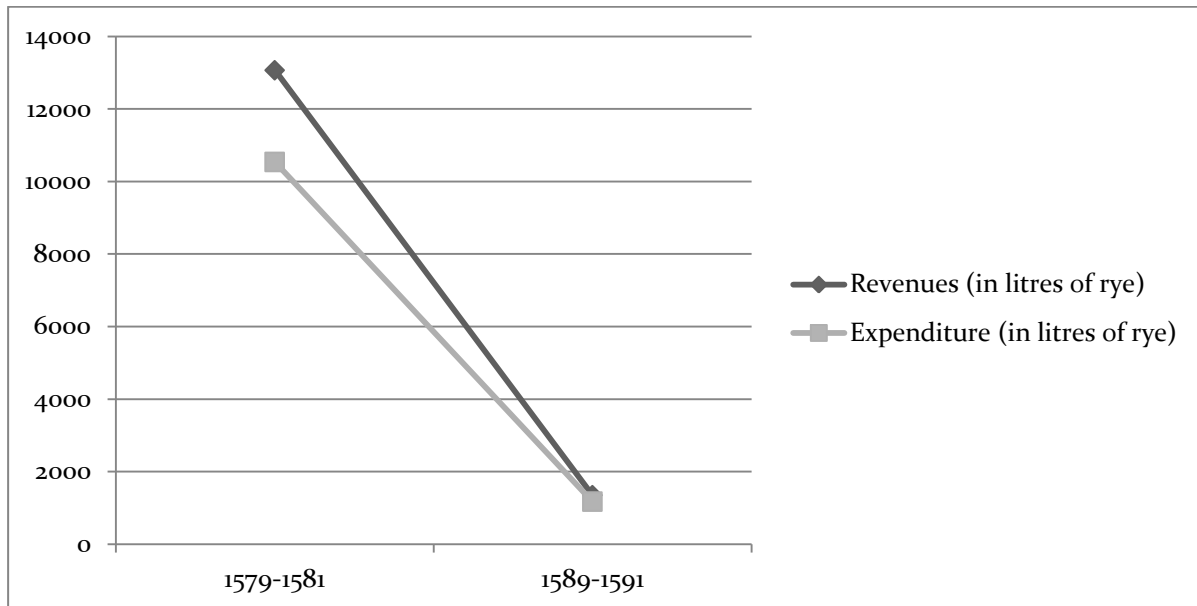
Sources: RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 4058-4098. Accounts of the Holy Ghost table, 1490-1599 (processed by Hadewijch Masure). Accounts of the Holy Ghost table, 1490-1599. Rye prices : van der Wee, H. (1963). *The growth of the Antwerp market and the European economy (fourteenth-sixteenth centuries)*. The Hague, Nijhoff, processed by Jord Hanus.

Fig 8.3 Revenues and expenditure of Brecht Holy Ghost table (Campine area), in species (karolus stuiver)



Sources: RAA, KA Sint-Michielskerk Brecht, 274. - 286. Accounts of the Holy Ghost table, 1576-1598. (processed by Hadewijch Masure). Rye prices: van der Wee, H. (1963). *The growth of the Antwerp market and the European economy (fourteenth-sixteenth centuries)*. The Hague, Nijhoff, processed by Jord Hanus.

Fig 8.4 Revenues and expenditure of the Brecht Holy Ghost table (Campine area), in kind (litres of rye)



Sources: RAA, *KA Sint-Michielskerk Brecht, 274. – 286. Accounts of the Holy Ghost table, 1576-1598.* (processed by Hadewijch Masure). Rye prices: van der Wee, H. (1963). *The growth of the Antwerp market and the European economy (fourteenth-sixteenth centuries).* The Hague, Nijhoff, processed by Jord Hanus.

8.1.2 ‘We take care of our own’. The characteristics of the recipients of poor relief in the Campine area

Let us first of all try to delineate the group receiving poor relief. As has already been suggested in chapter 3 (section 3.2.2), a large group of villagers owned less than 3 hectares, and among them a still significant group owned less than 1 hectare. As the findings of Nick Van den Broecke have suggested – and also discussed in chapter 3 – the group owning less than 1 hectare probably had to struggle to survive, whereas cottagers owning between 1 and 3 hectares might easily get into trouble only when harvests failed or when the taxation burden rose.⁶⁶⁰ There existed, therefore, a large group within Campine society that might, theoretically, benefit from poor relief. The latter group in particular, the cottagers that were only occasionally confronted with poverty, could potentially become the humbled ‘poor’. These nearly landless villagers, and the smallholding cottagers, were furthermore inhabitants of the village (since their *hofsteden* were mentioned in the sixteenth century *penningkohieren*), they were part of the village community, which made them – also theoretically – liable to parochial poor relief.

For those not belonging to the community – vagrants or vagabonds as the sources often call them – there was hardly any hope of receiving help from the Holy Ghost tables. We can find ample proof of the fact that communities became ever more hostile towards migrants and vagrants, and even more so throughout the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Campine byelaws, especially the additions from the first half of the seventeenth century,

⁶⁶⁰ Van den Broeck, N. (2013). *Graancrisis in de Kempen. Sociale allocatie op het vorstelijk domein te Turnhout (1470-1490).* Departement Geschiedenis. Antwerpen, Universiteit Antwerp: 47.

contain some clear illustrations of a rather 'xenophobic' attitude. In Gierle, for example, the byelaws mention the troublesome intrusion of 'strangers', who wished to benefit from the aid of the Holy Ghost Table, to the disadvantage to the village's own poor⁶⁶¹: 'we have found that many from outside the village came to live inside the village, not to work, but to profit from our good inhabitants and the Holy Ghost table, much to the disadvantage of the village's own poor inhabitants'.⁶⁶² The village government was therefore eager to prohibit the renting of houses to strangers (especially labourers), unless a bail is paid. The same can be said for Arendonk, where exactly the same rule was established somewhere in the first half of the seventeenth century.⁶⁶³

However, processes of in- and exclusion were not the invention of the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century. In reality this attitude was much older, as can be deduced from Katherine Lynch's impressive study, for example. She describes how medieval confraternities (the male-dominated guilds, for example, but also beguinages) provided people with a sense of community and – relevant for our case – spiritual and material support in times of need.⁶⁶⁴ For the Low Countries and departing from Lynch's findings, Hadewijch Masure has recently focussed on poor relief and community formation in Brussels (1300-1640). She confirms the strength of in- and exclusion mechanisms and a division between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor, but points to the fact that the roots of these developments can be traced to the Middle Ages; they were not a sixteenth-century novelty.⁶⁶⁵ In addition, in the Campine communities, relief was mostly limited to the *huysarmen*, the poor who belonged to the community, a category most frequently mentioned in the accounts. Poor people from other communities, or wandering vagrants, were excluded. These *huysarmen* were considered 'full' community members and were therefore allowed to use the commons, for example. It becomes clear that poor relief therefore played an important role in the forging of a village community, clearly defining a group of 'insiders' (of different social strata), and one of 'outsiders'. So, in a way, poor relief was a crucial building block underpinning village identity.

For those belonging to the village community, therefore, there was hope of receiving some help. In every Campine village some people were officially labelled as 'poor' and were officially entitled to relief. Most money went to these *huysarmen*, the village poor, as a whole group (cfr. Fig 8.5). Apart from the previous sample period – during the turmoil of the war – group doles were, by far, the main expenditure of poor relief institutions. This usually entailed bread distributions (or sometimes distributions of clothes and money) outside the church at some fixed periods of the year. The village poor were the target group of these dispensations.

⁶⁶¹ Database Maïka De Keyzer

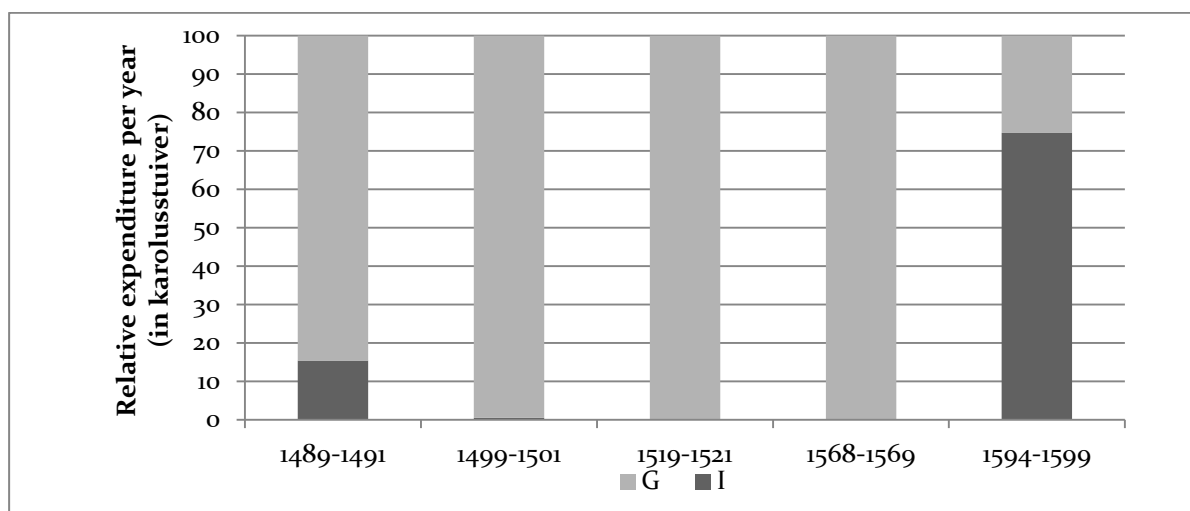
⁶⁶² 'men heeft bevonden dat vele van buiten binnen het dorp zijn komen wonen om met velen te werken of niet te handen te trekken, maar alleen om het geniet te hebben van de goede onderzaten en van de tafel van de heilige geest, tot grote schade en prejuditie van de schamele ingeboren onderzaten en huisarmen'

⁶⁶³ Database Maïka De Keyzer

⁶⁶⁴ Lynch, K. A. (2003). *Individuals, families and communities*

⁶⁶⁵ Masure, H. (2012). "Eerlycke huijsarmen of ledichgangers? Armenzorg en gemeenschapsvorming in Brussel, 1300-1640." *Stadsgeschiedenis* 7(1): 1-21.

Fig 8.5 Relative number of group doles (G) vs. individual doles (I) in Rijkevorsel (money + grain)



Source: RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 4058-4098, *Accounts of the Holy Ghost table, 1490-1599*, processed by Hadewijch Masure

We can go on, of course, to wonder about the precise extent of this group of ‘village poor’. I have already mentioned that many inhabitants – among the nearly landless and small cottagers – might have qualified, but exactly how many villagers were considered to be poor and thus rightful claimants of these distributions? Luckily the Brabantine hearth counts allow us to reconstruct the number of poor hearths for the Campine villages in different years: 1437, 1480 and 1496. The findings for 1437 and 1480 are interesting, however, since the accounts only start in the 1490s, they are only illustrative (table 8.1). It is, however, striking how several villages were characterised by huge numbers of poor people in 1480. This was, perhaps, linked to the political and economic turmoil of the period. It is furthermore notable that inter-village differences could be quite significant in the pre-1496 period. These are, of course, hard to explain, but it is perhaps possible that the criteria for defining poor hearths became more clearly delimited in the later period due to the growing influence of the state? For the earliest Rijkevorsel accounts, it would seem that approximately 25 percent of all village hearths can be labelled poor and were thus allowed to ‘profit’ from the table’s bread distributions. These findings are not exceptional when compared to other Brabantine villages much closer to the city of Antwerp or on the somewhat more fertile southern soils, which have been brought together in table 8.2. Internal differences are also quite striking in the pre-1496 period, however, in general the numbers are not extremely different and, especially in 1496, the differences are almost non-existent – although this might indeed be linked to state interference in calculation methods.

Table 8.1 Poor hearths in the fifteenth century Campine area

	Percentage of poor hearths in 1437	Percentage of poor hearths in 1480	Percentage of poor hearths in 1496
Arendonk	32.9%	36.2%	26.3%
Half-Brecht	26.8%	39.3%	25.0%
Essen & Kalmthout	22.4%	27.2%	20.3%

Gierle	14.3%	26.1%	24.8%
Loenhout	23.0%	60.8%	24.9%
Rijkevorsel	15.8%	23.9%	25.0%
Tongerlo	27.7%	57.1%	27.9%
Wuustwezel	22.6%	39.3%	25.0%
Zandhoven	25.0%	49.0%	25.0%

Source: Cuvelier, J. (1912). *Les dénombrements de foyers en Brabant, 14e-16e siècle* Brussel, s.n.

Table 8.2 Poor hearths in fifteenth century Brabant

	Percentage of poor hearths in 1437	Percentage of poor hearths in 1480	Percentage of poor hearths in 1496
Edegem	6.5%	37.5%	24.6%
Ekeren	25.6%	44.9%	24.9%
Stabroek	22.0%	26.8%	25.0%
Wijnegem	18.7%	20.0%	24.0%
Aartselaar	9.3%	32.3%	24.7%
Bonheiden	14.7%	43.6%	24.5%
Schelle	23.0%	37.7%	18.6%

Source: Cuvelier, J. (1912). *Les dénombrements de foyers en Brabant, 14e-16e siècle* Brussel, s.n.

If we know that the *penningkohieren* (as discussed in chapter 3) indicate that 20.9 to 31.3 percent of Campine villagers belonged to the less than 1 hectare property category, it would seem that the majority of the official poor or *huysarmen* stemmed from this group.

However, the anonymous distribution of bread and other necessities to the indefinite and large group of *huysarmen* is not the only type of relief the Campine tables provide. As fig 8.5 already indicates, there were also individual doles handed out. In absolute and relative terms these individual doles were much less important, but they can give us some additional information on the identity of the recipients of relief. Who was considered to be needy enough to receive individual aid? It is very difficult to shed light on the identity of these people, since names are often left out, but for the earliest and latest accounts more details are given which allows us to give at least an idea of the characteristics of those individual receiving poor relief. Unfortunately there are no taxation registers or *penningkohieren* from the same period, therefore the true identification of paupers is not possible. It seems that – at least in 1489-1491 and 1594-1599 - most individual Campine beneficiaries were women. In the Inland Flanders village of Lede, for example, this dominance of help for women be perceived (Table 8.3 & 8.4).

Table 8.3 Sex of relief recipients in Rijkevorsel (money and grain in karolus stuivers)

Period	Man	Woman	Unknown	Total
1489-1491 (n=41)	11.20%	29.24%	59.56%	100%
1594-1599 (n=8)	0.25%	73.98%	25.78%	100%

Sources: RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 4058-4098. Accounts of the Holy Ghost table, 1490-1599. (processed by Hadewijch Masure). Rye prices: van der Wee, H. (1963). *The growth of the Antwerp market and the European economy (fourteenth-sixteenth centuries)*. The Hague, Nijhoff, processed by Jord Hanus.

Table 8.4 Sex of relief recipients in Lede (money and grain in karolus stuiver)

Period	Man	Woman	Unknown	Total
1456-1459 (n=30)	13.52%	3.13%	83.35%	100%
1479-1481 (n=84)	63.95%	17.60%	18.45%	100%
1496 (n=26)	25.74%	41.82%	32.43%	100%
1519-1521 (n=40)	35.22%	52.40%	12.38%	100%
1539-1541 (n=324)	53.90%	36.93%	9.16%	100%
1574-1576 (n=146)	63.43%	35.24%	1.33%	100%
1589-1591 (n=39)	71.00%	28.51%	0.49%	100%

Sources: RAB, GO23, 471-503. 1456-1591. (processed by Hadewijch Masure). Rye prices: van der Wee, H. (1963). *The growth of the Antwerp market and the European economy (fourteenth-sixteenth centuries)*. The Hague, Nijhoff, processed by Jord Hanus.

When looking at the Campine *penningkohieren* and taxation registers, it appears that women – and especially single women, acting as household head – were over-represented at the lower ranks of society. In the Tongerlo *penningkohier*, 6 women were mentioned, 5 of them (or 83.3 percent) owning less than 1 hectare.⁶⁶⁶ In the Rijkevorsel tax list of 1475⁶⁶⁷, 47 of the 255 taxed individuals were women, corresponding to 18.4 percent. The majority of them belonged to the lowest deciles: 18.4 belonged to decile 1 (or the poorest 10 percent of taxed individuals) and 34 percent belonged to decile 2.

Since these women were taxed, they were in all likelihood household heads implying that they were single – often widowed. Literature has often focussed on the poverty-risk of women, which has often been considered to be much larger than for men. On the other hand, however, women were more easily identified as ‘deserving’, due to their gender. As is suggested by Katherine Lynch⁶⁶⁸, but also by Tine De Moor⁶⁶⁹, when it comes to the phenomenon of beguines in the Low Countries, women were especially inclined to form communities in order to protect themselves against the risks of being a single woman. This has also been acknowledged by Marjorie McIntosh who has emphasised the importance of networks of social capital for needy women.⁶⁷⁰ Diane Willen emphasises the fact that male paupers were more mobile, less burdened by children and likely to die younger. As she puts it: “the concept of a ‘deserving poor’ therefore created its own gender bias and resulted in gender differentiation in social policy”.⁶⁷¹

This is consistent with the findings for the Rijkevorsel poor relief as well. The women mentioned were indeed often widowed and thus clearly defined as ‘deserving’. Some of them were responsible for under-age children, others were labelled as ‘sick’. Women in childbed were also often assisted, funnily enough by providing them with beer. A population count (in

⁶⁶⁶ AAT, II, 896. 100th penny register (*100 ste penningkohier*), Tongerlo, 1569

⁶⁶⁷ RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 3253. Royal tax register, 1475

⁶⁶⁸ Lynch, K. A. (2003). *Individuals, families and communities*

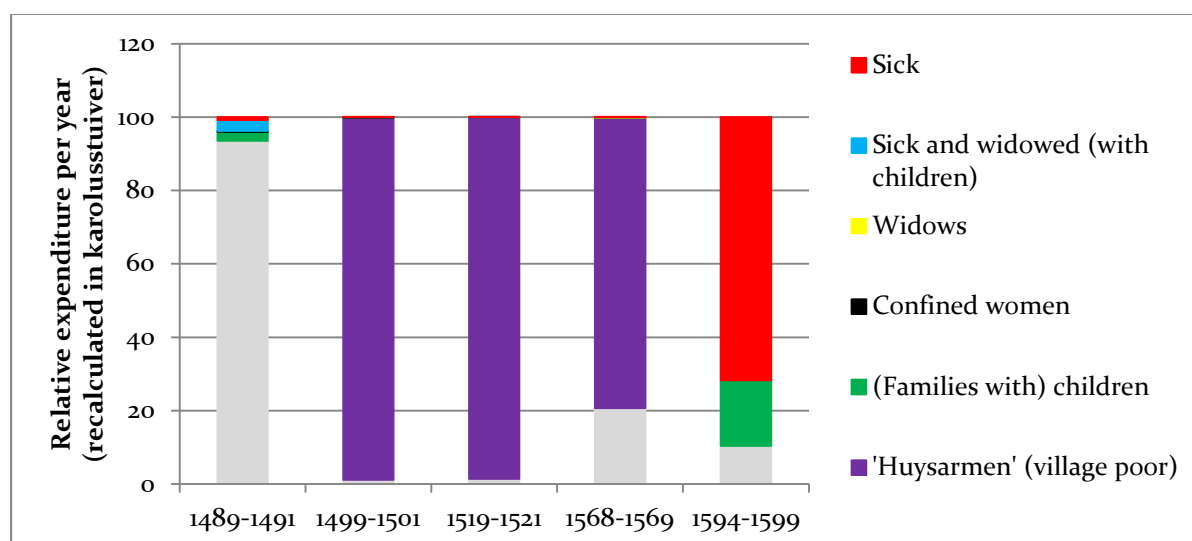
⁶⁶⁹ De Moor, T. (2013). “Single, safe and sorry? An analysis of the motivations of women to join the early modern beguine movement in the Low Countries.” *Working Papers from Utrecht University, Centre for Global Economic History*. Utrecht, University of Utrecht: 29.

⁶⁷⁰ McIntosh, M. (2005). “Poverty, charity, and coercion in Elizabethan England.” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* XXXV(3): 463-464

⁶⁷¹ Willen, D. (1988). “Women in the public sphere in early modern England: the case of the urban working poor.” *Sixteenth Century Journal* XIX(4): 564

all likelihood of household heads) for the village of Tongerlo in 1553 confirms the preponderance of widowed women.⁶⁷² Of the 186 listed individuals, 25 were listed as poor (corresponding to 13.4 percent). Four of these people were men, 19 of them were women, and all described as 'poor widows'. Furthermore, the Rijkevorsel accounts (see fig 8.6) suggest that being with child or being a poor mother (or even father) was clearly considered relevant, since it was regularly mentioned, mostly through the employment of the term: *schamele kinderen* (shabby children). Orphans were supported as well. Not only by the Holy Ghost table, but by the Rijkevorsel church fabric as well⁶⁷³, since this institution often paid villagers to look after these children (the so-called *houkinderen*), and probably also teach them a profession. The men that were mentioned were usually labelled as 'sick', sometimes suffering from leprosy, although these numbers are low. The care for lepers was quite expensive, since they had to be given separate housing and obviously needed food as well. Sometimes they were looked after in the village itself, however, on other occasions lepers were placed under the care of a hospital, for example, in Breda or Louvain. The costs were cut, however, since lepers usually 'bestowed' their property to the Holy Ghost table in order to provide for their livelihood.

Fig 8.6 Categories of poor-relief recipients in Rijkevorsel (percentages of the total of the distributed sum)⁶⁷⁴



Source: RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 4058-4098. Accounts of the Holy Ghost table, 1490-1599, processed by Hadewijch Masure

It is hard to assess whether the same individuals were subject to poor relief for several consecutive years since names have not been recorded consequently. However, for the sample periods that have been analysed, 43 names appeared in several accounts, whereas 57 did not. Since the findings are very incomplete, it is difficult to draw any clear conclusions from it. Furthermore, it appears that several families were in the grip of poverty that was subsequently inherited by the next generations since 7 family names appeared throughout several accounts.

⁶⁷² AAT, II, 169. Hearth money, 1553

⁶⁷³ RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 4143 - 4164. Church accounts, 1493-1525

⁶⁷⁴ The accounts of 1489-1491 and 1594-1599 contain much more detailed, individualised information. It therefore seems that less was given to the *huysarmen*, however, this is not actually the case since *huysarmen* were merely listed *ad nominatim*

Poverty, however, was not only a risk to certain families with a tradition of living on the verges of subsistence. When comparing the names found in the earliest poor relief accounts of the 1490s with the taxation lists of 1464-1475⁶⁷⁵, 6 people could be traced. These belonged to all layers (i.e. quartiles) of society thus indicating that poverty was a risk that threatened all peasants to a certain extent – especially when confronted with the death of one’s spouse or old age. Since 57 names only popped up once in the accounts⁶⁷⁶ it seems that the tables were also focussed (partly) on relieving the needs of those who suffered temporarily.

8.1.3 The nature of help. How substantial was Campine poor relief?

It is necessary to get an impression of the extent of Campine poor relief. To achieve this goal, the expenses (only those spent on the poor themselves, without administrative costs, etc.) have been converted to litres of rye. The number of poor families has been reconstructed based on the hearth count of 1496. Finally, the amount of grain spent per (poor) household for the village of Rijkevorsel has been calculated. In order to frame these findings, the same exercise has been carried out for the Inland Flanders village of Lede (Table 8.5). For the Rijkevorsel account of 1491, it appears that every poor household received the equivalent of 248 litres of rye. Since an average person needed 0.75 litres of rye a day⁶⁷⁷, this implies that one adult male needed 273,75 litres of rye to make it through the year. Since we know that - especially women and children - were prone to receive relief, it would appear that a substantial part of a poor household’s need for grain was covered by the donations of the Holy Ghost table. Moreover, poor households were probably somewhat smaller than regular households, since a lot of relief-recipients were widows. Without a male household head the need for food was quite obviously also smaller. Based on the limited findings we have, it would appear that Campine relief and Inland Flanders relief were comparable, although the findings for Lede are almost a century later and less complete, which somewhat nuances these statements.

Table 8.5 The extent of poor relief in the Campine area (Rijkevorsel) and Inland Flanders (Lede) in litres of rye

Village	Year account / hearth count	Litres of rye per village inhabitant (number of households/5)	Litres of rye per household	Litres of rye per poor household
Rijkevorsel	1499/1496	12.4 l	62 l	248 l
Lede	1574/1571	18.7 l	93.6 l	

Sources: OGA Rijkevorsel, 4058-4098. Accounts of the Holy Ghost table, 1490-1599. The total revenues in species in kind have been re-calculated in litres of rye (based on the Antwerp market prices of Van der Wee). Of this total, 10 percent has been deducted for administrative costs. The Rijkevorsel population

⁶⁷⁵ RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 3244-3256. Hertogelijke bedden, 1464-1475

⁶⁷⁶ Of course we have to be careful with these findings, since names have not been mentioned consequently mentioned, so these findings are only indicative

⁶⁷⁷ See calculations in chapter 3

numbers come from the hearth counts⁶⁷⁸, the Lede population numbers come from: J. De Brouwer, *Demografische evolutie van het Land van Aalst 1570-1800* (Brussel 1965), 30-31, processed by Hadewijch Masure & Eline Van Onacker

Poor relief in the Campine area, therefore, was quite substantial in general terms and could probably indeed make a significant difference to the life of the village poor. Poor relief was at the core of the activity of Campine Holy Ghost tables. This might sound self-evident, but this is not necessarily the case. This is mainly illustrated by the fact that the administrative costs were very moderate. They were usually below 10 percent and mostly even lower than 5 percent of the total expenses. Most money was spent on the maintenance of the housing of the table and on paper (to write the accounts on). Compared to, for example, poor relief institutions in the Coastal area, these sums were very moderate. The Oostkerke Holy Ghost table, situated in the coastal polders, spent impressive amounts of money on, for example, meals for the board and on masses that needed to be organised in exchange for *jaargetijden*. This was not the case in the Campine area, where the bulk of money that was collected for the poor did indeed find its way to its target.⁶⁷⁹

However, poor relief did not only consist of donations of grain; other types of goods were donated as well. Nonetheless, 90 percent of all poor relief expenses related to the food, mainly bread, but also butter, beer, peas and beans that was distributed. Clothing was provided as well, from time to time. Villagers often bequeathed clothing (skirts, coats, etc.) to poor relief institutions, which were subsequently passed on to the village poor. The Inland Flanders Holy Ghost tables spent a great deal of money on firewood for the paupers, however, this appears not to have been the case in the Rijkevorsel case. We know for the Campine village of Zandhoven that almost every villager was allowed, and did indeed dig, peat on the village commons for a tiny sum of money.⁶⁸⁰ This implies that the Campine Holy Ghost Tables did not have to invest in the provision of fuel. Cash was only seldom given, although it occurred a little more frequently towards the end of the sixteenth century.

We can, of course, wonder whether Campine poor relief was able to see to the needs of the village's destitute and poor in times of severe crisis, when revenues perhaps declined, due to circumstances. In several articles on nineteenth-century Campine poor relief, Eric Vanhoute has, however, strongly emphasised the resilience of Campine poor relief. When confronted with the potato crisis and famine of 1845-1850, the Campine area was hit significantly less hard than, for example, Inland Flanders, not to mention Ireland, which was completely ravaged. The Campine area was spared the worst of the crisis, due to several causes. First of all, the Campine mixed farming system⁶⁸¹, combining different types of crops with animal breeding, was still dominant and therefore even poorer peasants were not solely dependent on potato growing. Furthermore, the nineteenth century potato crisis was the last accomplishment of the Campine poor relief system. Especially Arendonk and Dessel, dominated by textile industries since the eighteenth century, were confronted with a rise in destitution, since the village's textile workers were quite dependent on potatoes for survival. The Campine poor relief system proved quite apt to deal with these challenges and saw the Campine village governments acting promptly and efficiently. The government itself started to subsidize the poor tables and

⁶⁷⁸ Cuvelier, J. (1912). *Les dénombrements de foyers*

⁶⁷⁹ See: Masure, H. (2013) *Armenzorg op het platteland, 1450-1600*

⁶⁸⁰ See chapter 4, section 4.2.2

⁶⁸¹ For more information on the Campine mixed farming system, see chapter 3

a larger group of people was entitled to support. Vanhaute suggests that the potato crisis was the last instance in which the traditional Campine poor relief system could prove its usefulness. From the second half of the nineteenth century, with the progressing dismantlement of the commons and the ongoing industrialisation process, structures were altered severely. However, the Campine poor relief system did show a remarkable continuity and resilience, since it functioned quite unaltered from the Middle Ages up until the nineteenth century. The continuous presence of poor relief tables in itself is already indicative of this.

Furthermore, the Campine tables seemed at first sight to be quite adept at coping with periods of high prices in pre-modern times as well. In 1521 rye prices on the Antwerp market were exceptionally high – they doubled, compared to the previous and following years. The Rijkevorsel poor relief table saw a slight drop in income – because some people apparently were not able to pay their annuities in kind – however, this decrease had no dramatic impact on relief provision. Relief was clearly supply driven which meant a drop in income was usually countered by providing somewhat less assistance, however, the drop was not dramatic. The account even mentions the fact that the poor table had a supply of rye in the granary – so the Campine Holy Ghostmasters were in all likelihood prepared to deal with hard times.

All in all, the Campine poor relief institutions were able to distribute quite large quantities of grain to a rather elaborate and diverse group of paupers, suggesting that this institution was of essential importance to Campine village life. It furthermore nuances the viewpoints of, for example, Lynch. Institutionalised, extra-family poor relief was decisive in small, rural communities as well. The Campine Holy Ghost tables were essential as an extra insurance mechanism, an extra income source, and a redistribution mechanism for the lower social strata, next to, for example, the use of the commons, or fiscal redistribution.

8.1.4 The reasons behind relief

The above leads to the glaring question: why were Campine communities and their (richer) members willing to ‘invest’ so much in poor relief? It is of course a mission impossible to identify the true motives behind the actions of those living over 500 years ago, in communities which were – in a way - so different from our own. Nonetheless, I will put forward some suggestions and lines of thought that might provide an - at least partial - explanation for the extent of Campine poor relief. The (economic) logics behind it can be identified, however, the grounds on which this was based are much more difficult to reconstruct. A rather complex and layered amalgam of motives, ranging from solidarity over self-interest to subordination, all played their part. When it comes to the logics behind poor relief, it is rather self-evident that a multitude of factors can be put forward. Marco Van Leeuwen has made an elaborate list of all the possible reasons pre-modern elites might have had to provide relief for the less fortunate, based on the extensive poor relief literature.⁶⁸² The first explanation he puts forward is the labour-reserve theory, suggesting that elites were willing to provide relief to the local labour force in order to prevent them from migrating elsewhere. He furthermore mentions the importance of poor relief in the stabilization of the existing social order and safeguarding public order, securing public health and morally disciplining the poor. This literature, however,

⁶⁸² Van Leeuwen, M. (1994). "Logic of Charity: Poor Relief in Preindustrial Europe." *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 24(4): 589-613

remains very urban and Anglo-Saxon focussed, so it remains to be seen whether it is really relevant for a rural, peasant-dominated region such as the Low Countries.

I want to make two suggestions in order to – partly – explain the girth of Campine poor relief. First of all, based on the analysis of individual doles, it would seem that women, and somewhat more specifically widows, were the ultimate ‘deserving poor’ of Campine village society. The preponderance of women was, of course, not limited to the Campine area, but a comparison with inland Flanders does indeed indicate that the Campine system was extremely supportive when it came to women. This vulnerability of women, who apparently often ended up poor and destitute, and the community’s inclination to support them, might have something to do with the structures of the Campine labour market. Perhaps Campine women had fewer options to engage in proto-industrial activities than, for example, their Inland Flanders counterparts, where poor relief was less gender-biased. Since these women were poor, had no direct means of income or labour options, and were unequivocally part of village society, they can truly be labelled ‘deserving poor’. Another possible process that can serve as an explanation for the predominance of individual doles for women is seasonal labour migration. To elaborate, we know, for example, from the dissertation of Jan De Meester, that a significant number of the new *poorters* – or official burghers – of the city of Antwerp were of Campine origin. Since he also emphasises the importance of chain migration, it seems rather likely that there was a great deal of seasonal or temporary migration of Campiners to the booming city of Antwerp, to work in the building industry which lay still during the winter period for example.⁶⁸³ If there were indeed seasonal labourers migrating to the city during the busy summer period, their wives were left behind and might have – partly – depended on poor relief to bridge this difficult period; yet another example of truly ‘deserving poor’ in the mindset of the pre-modern Campine inhabitants?

Another aspect in attempting to explain the extent of poor relief can be found in the specifics of the peasant life-cycle model. At the beginning or end of their active careers peasants had holdings that were smaller than in the middle of their life cycle. This meant that, even the better-off peasants were, quite vulnerable to poverty particularly when they retired. Those that were the better-off today, might have less economic assets at a later stage in life, due to old age, sickness, or mishap. Furthermore, poor village inhabitants might have been family members or close acquaintances of the richer inhabitants, making poverty more visible and tangible. Perhaps, therefore, there is a Lynchian twist to this story after all. Furthermore, literature (mainly on the industrial working classes) often suggests that small communities, were both characterised by relatively small internal differences and by a relatively larger degree of solidarity.⁶⁸⁴ In these small Campine villages, the poorer inhabitants were not face- or nameless strangers. The poor of a small village such as Rijkevorsel, with only 975 inhabitants, were not anonymous strangers, rather, they were family members and / or neighbours, people one interacted with on a daily basis. All these aspects may have played a part in the willingness of the village community as a whole, and the better-off inhabitants in particular, to maintain this rather elaborate institutionalised poor relief system. It therefore functioned as some sort of social security system *avant la lettre*. By investing significant amounts of money in the village’s own poor (not in ‘strangers’, vagrants or vagabonds), the Campine upper-layer secured

⁶⁸³ De Meester, J. (2011). *Gastvrij Antwerpen? Arbeidsmigratie naar het zestiende-eeuwse Antwerpen*. History Department. Antwerpen, Universiteit Antwerpen

⁶⁸⁴ Thompson, E. P. (1977). *The making of the English working class*. Harmondsworth, Pelican books.

peace and stability in their communities, created an institutionalised mechanism – in conjunction with kin support – in order to look after their neighbours and kin and this ensured them support when times got hard which was a risk every peasant had to live with. Poor relief therefore did bind community members together, since all of them had, in a way, an interest in maintaining it, and it proved crucial in safeguarding a level of social balance.

8.2 Participation in community life and community building

8.2.1 'No church in the wild'. The Campine church as community builder

Focussing on poor relief has indeed indicated that it forged ties between the different strata of Campine communities, which were all vulnerable in varying degrees, however, there was more that bound villagers together. In 1994 Chris Dyer defined the medieval village community as follows: "The 'medieval village community' refers to an association of people living within a specific territory, sufficiently organized to have some control over the use of resources (usually fields and pastures) and to have dealings with superior authorities such as the state".⁶⁸⁵ This prime focus on the political and economic aspects of community formation is present in the research of several other authors as well⁶⁸⁶, however, throughout his work Dyer has emphasised the importance of a 'cultural village life' as well something made tangible by different confraternities, shooting guilds, etc.⁶⁸⁷ These institutions, as well as village processions and other rituals⁶⁸⁸, were essential for village life and provided an externalization of village cohesion. The most tangible and visible representation of village identity and cohesion was the church building. The church held a special place in village life. As A.J.A. Bijsterveld has put it, the church was the 'physical externalization' of the unity of the parish or the village which, in the Campine area, were usually units which overlapped. He claims that the church, the parish and parochial institutions were essential in a community formation process. According to Bijsterveld, the parish church was a breeding ground for communal ties.⁶⁸⁹ Or, as Enno Bünz has put it, the parish church was *dorfbildend*.⁶⁹⁰ The church building itself was highly symbolic too. Steve Hindle describes, for example, how the early modern English poor often decided to reside in the church porch in order to symbolically 'claim' membership

⁶⁸⁵ Dyer, C. (1994). "The English Medieval Village Community and Its Decline." *The Journal of British Studies* 33(4): 408

⁶⁸⁶ Rodney Hilton, for example, was one of the first to emphasise the village community as main organisational unit for peasants. This is described in quite some detail by Charles Duchesne: Duchesne, R. (2003). "Rodney Hilton and the Peasant Road to 'Capitalism' in England." *Journal of Peasant Studies* 30(2): 129-145.

⁶⁸⁷ See for example: Dyer, C. (2004). *The Political Life of the Fifteenth-Century English Village*. L. Clark and C. Carpenter (eds.). *Political Culture in Late Medieval Britain*. Woodbridge, The Boydell Press. 4: 136-157.

⁶⁸⁸ Boundary visitations, for example, were executed on a yearly basis and was one of the most important rituals in peasant societies. See for example: Fletcher, D. (2003). 'The Parish boundary: A social Phenomenon in Hanoverian England', *Rural History* 14. & De Keyzer, M., Jongepier, I. & Soens, T. (forthcoming), 'Consuming Maps and Producing Space. Explaining Regional Variations in the Reception and Agency of Cartography in the Medieval and Early Modern Low Countries', in: *Continuity and Change*, to be published Spring 2014

⁶⁸⁹ Bijsterveld, A. J. A. (2000/2001). "De kerk in het midden": 91-119.

⁶⁹⁰ Bünz, E. (2000), 'Die Kirche im Dorf lassen... Formen der Kommunikation im spätmittelalterlichen Niederkirchenwesen' Rösener, W. (ed.). *Kommunikation in der ländlichen Gesellschaft vom Mittelalter bis zur Moderne*, Göttingen: 78

of the village community and thus a right to poor relief, something which often led to quarrels and lawsuits between villages who were fighting over who was responsible for certain wandering poor.⁶⁹¹ Bijsterveld mentions four reasons why the parish played such a decisive role in community building. First of all, the congregation was increasingly obliged to receive their sacraments in 'their' parish church. It therefore became increasingly necessary to determine who belonged to which parish, thereby creating a group of insiders and one of outsiders. This process was accelerated by a secondary development, namely the consolidation of the parish network. This added to a feeling of identification with the village's 'own' parish church. Thirdly, the territorial demarcation of parish boundaries became clearer as the collecting of tithes became better organised. And finally, the coming into being of parochial institutions also played its part in the 'communalisation' process. Poor relief institutions, for example, should be mentioned in this respect.⁶⁹² But what part did the church and parochial life play in Campine communities? Did it forge ties between members of different social groups? And were these ties strongly characterised by inequality or not?

It is not straightforward finding source material that sheds light on church matters, but for the villages of Rijkevorsel⁶⁹³ and Brecht⁶⁹⁴ several church accounts have been preserved, which allow us to reconstruct at least part of village life. Let us look first of all at the revenues and expenses of the Campine church fabrics in order to assess the scope of their activities and the importance – as far as money can shed light on this – of the church fabric in village life. I can only give a faint impression of income and expenditure for the village of Brecht since the accounts have been preserved extremely intermittently. The scarce findings are presented in fig 8.7. For the village of Rijkevorsel, almost uninterrupted figures were preserved from 1493-1525, as can be seen in fig 8.8. It is quite interesting to note that the income and expenditure of the church and chapels of Brecht consisted purely of money – no gifts or annuities in kind were part of its portfolio. Moreover, the ecclesiastical institutions of Brecht only received their income from gifts. Annuities are completely absent, which is rather intriguing since the bulk of the Rijkevorsel church fabric income stemmed from several annuities, partly in kind, partly in species. Moreover, the income was quite substantial and is comparable to what was collected by the Holy Ghost tables (cfr. supra). It is interesting to note that the village of Brecht, one of the largest in the Campine area, had different churches and church fabrics. This might suggest that the level of the hamlet played an essential part in villages, particularly the larger ones, and that processes of community building and solidarity were, at least in these villages, mainly stemming from the level of the hamlet. In Brecht, as well as in Rijkevorsel, income also came from bequests, often anonymous, (mentioned in the accounts as '*uten stocke gehaelt*' or '*appoert*'). Sometimes, however, the nature of the gift is noted. Animals (mainly sheep and pigs) were popular gifts, as were animal products (mainly butter, bacon and eggs, and clothes (*rokken* and *tabbaerts* especially)). Testamentary bequests were also quite common as were, of course, revenues derived from funerals. This last revenue type was probably not recorded meticulously, since it does not pop up in many accounts, however, it seems rather unlikely that

⁶⁹¹ Hindle, S. (2007). "Destitution, liminality and belonging": 46-71.

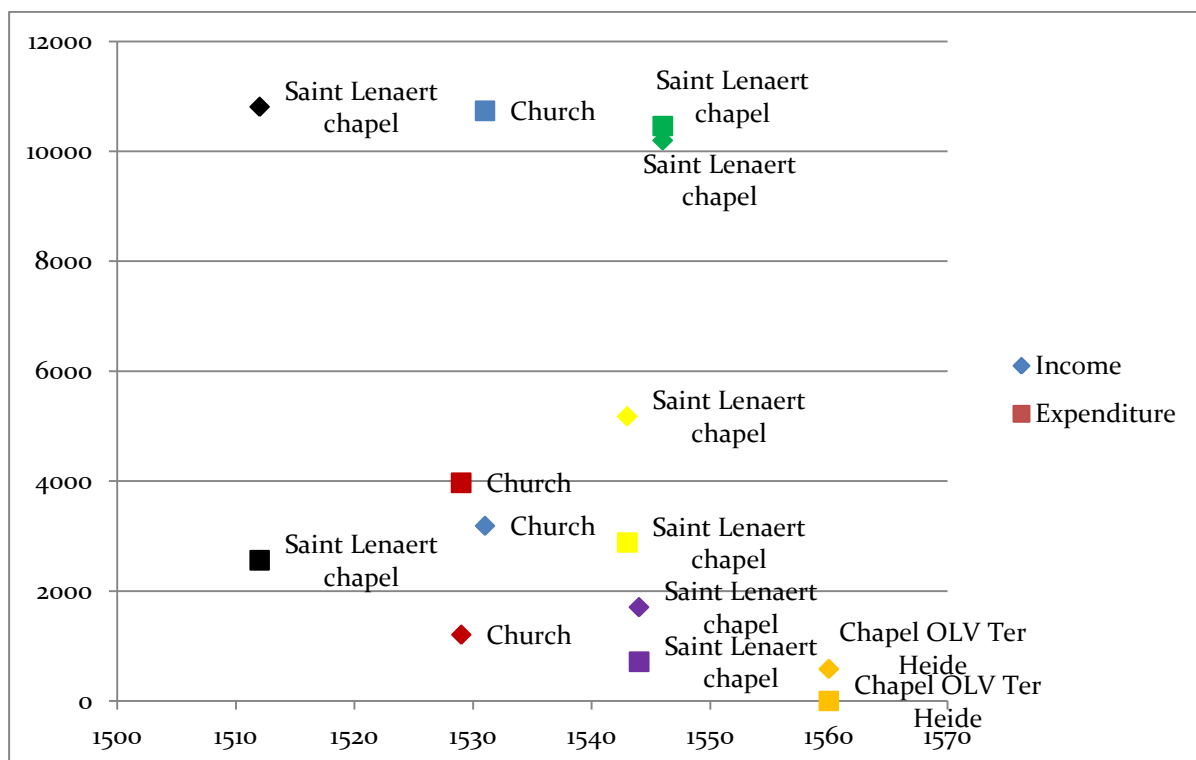
⁶⁹² Bijsterveld, A. J. A. (2000/2001). "De kerk in het midden": 94

⁶⁹³ RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 4143 – 4164. Church accounts, 1493-1525

⁶⁹⁴ The village of Brecht had one 'real' church, allowed to deliver sacraments, the Saint Michiels church and several chapels, of which sporadic accounts were preserved. RAA, KA Sint-Michielskerk Brecht, 32. Church accounts, 1529-1600; RAA, KA Sint-Michielskerk Brecht, 809-820. Accounts of Saint Lenaerts Chapel, 1512-1599 & RAA, KA Sint-Michielskerk Brecht, 1003. Accounts of the OLV op't heike chapel and the OLV Van Broekhoven chapel, 1559-1560

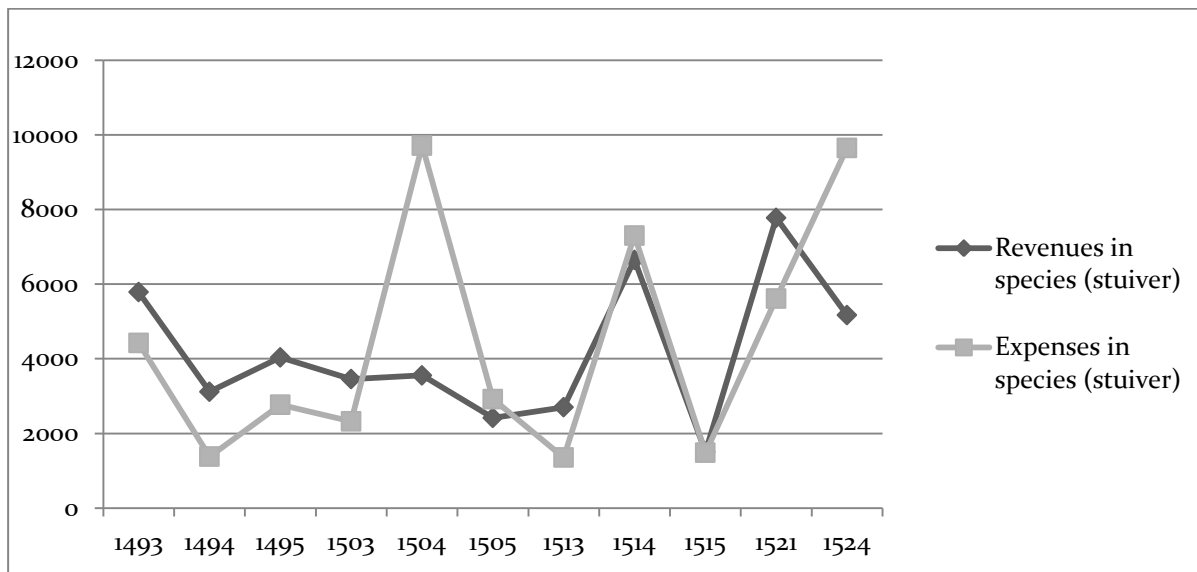
years went by without any villagers passing away. The names of donors were only rarely recorded, and due to a lack of source material, it was not possible to identify those people whose names popped up. From time to time, rather odd revenues can be detected, giving us a rare insight in the day-to-day practices and little amusements within these communities. In Brecht, in 1533, the church fabric got money out of for example, a sick pig and ‘*eenen potten gevonden inden scappraeyen*’, a little pot, lost and found in a cupboard, with money in it. When it came to expenses, a lot of money was invested in the maintenance, repair and renovation of church buildings, but most of the recurring costs were the ones you would expect a church to make, namely on bread, wine, candles, chrism and incense, but also on, for example, processions.

Fig 8.7 Revenues and expenditure of the Brecht church and chapels (sixteenth century) (*karolus stuiver*)



Sources: RAA, KA Sint-Michielskerk Brecht, 32. Church accounts, 1529-1600; RAA, KA Sint-Michielskerk Brecht, 809-820. Accounts of Saint Lenaerts Chapel, 1512-1599 & RAA, KA Sint-Michielskerk Brecht, 1003. Accounts of the OLV op't heike chapel and the OLV Van Broekhoven chapel, 1559-1560

Fig 8.8 Revenues and expenditure of the Rijkevorsel church fabric (1493-1529) (*karolus stuiver*)



Source: RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 4143 – 4164. Church accounts, 1493-1525

In Rijkevorsel income and expenditure roughly followed the same trend, income mostly exceeding expenditure or just under it. The only exception is the account of 1504/05 when a great deal of money was spent on reparation to the church building. 13.000 stones were bought and chalk and workmen also had to be paid for. For the Brecht church, expenditure topped income for the two years of which the accounts were preserved, however, this was also due to renovations to the church building and the buying of a new bell, for the sum of 35 pounds, more than half of the total expenses of that year (or to be more precise, 54.7 percent). As Bijsterveld suggests, the church building itself was deemed important enough to spent quite some money on probably because, as he claims, the church reflected village identity and was a source of pride.⁶⁹⁵ The church bell especially was clearly a village symbol. The importance of the village church bell is beautifully illustrated in a case that came before the magistrate of Turnhout, described by Raymond Peeters and Walter van den Branden in a small article.⁶⁹⁶ In the last quarter of the sixteenth century, the Campine area was heavily afflicted by the Dutch Revolt. Herentals was the bulwark of the Dutch troops, whereas Turnhout was a stronghold of the Spanish. Due to warfare, the Campine countryside was ravaged, burnt and pillaged. The Campine church bells were claimed by the troops in order to forge naval guns. Among others, the villages of Vosselaar, Lille and Gierle lost their bells. The story takes a unexpected turn, when, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, at a time when warfare had ceased to a certain extent, Willem Van De Moer recognised the sound of the Vosselaar church bell, which had somehow ended up in Kessel, while walking on the Lier market. The exceptional finesse of Willem's hearing put an entire trial in motion, in which the people of Vosselaar claimed their village bell back. The Vosselaar inhabitants did indeed manage to achieve their goal, but when they were busy transporting it back to its hometown, several inhabitants of the village of Gierle

⁶⁹⁵ Bijsterveld, A. J. A. (2000/2001). "De kerk in het midden": 91-119.

⁶⁹⁶ Peeters, R. (1994). "Hoe die van Lille en Gierle anno 1596 op zoek gingen naar hun gestolen klok." *Jaarboek van de Heemkundige Kring Norbert De Vrijter*: 109-118.

decided to intervene, claiming – backed-up by several witnesses – that it was in fact their church bell. In the end, it was the magistrate of the city of Turnhout which had to decide the outcome, however, the final judgement of this trial is sadly lost to us.

However, the fact that the inhabitants of Vosselaar and Gierle made such an impressive, and to our understanding somewhat odd, frenzied attempt to get their church bell back, certainly suggests that a church bell was more than just a huge piece of metal. It was meaningful to the Campine commoners and they were prepared to invest time and money in order to get it back. Another interesting detail, related to this story, dates back to 1598 when the village of Gierle, whose bell had also disappeared, decided they needed money to buy a new one and installed a ‘godparents system’ to finance it. 21 men and 16 women were found, eager to each pay 2 *gulden* and 2 *stuiver*. Jan Muydens and August Nuyts were sent to Antwerp by the community, the *gemeynte*, to order a new bell.⁶⁹⁷ Many of the surnames which pop up in this list are found in the mid-sixteenth century *penningkohier* and registers of the bench of aldermen. The families Van Luysterborch, Proest, Diericx and Jacobs were omnipresent in the list of ‘bell-supporters’, and their predecessors or family members clearly predominantly belonged to the stratum of independent peasants and several of their namesakes were also active as village aldermen. This is yet another indication of the importance of the church bell and the fact that several villagers – especially those belonging to the economic and political top-layer – were indeed prepared to bear the costs. Did involvement in parochial or community life go further than this somewhat elite-dominated perspective, however?

8.2.2 Zooming in on community life and involvement

The church accounts also suggest that the church was also important for village life in other respects. These accounts bear witness to a lively amalgam of processions and pilgrimages, brightening up a life characterised by agricultural labour. In Rijkevorsel, for example, in the account of 1493/94, several pilgrimages are mentioned which consisted of groups from a number of different villages such as Merksplas, Beerse, Hoogstraten, Baarle, Ginneken, Rijsbergen and Oostmalle. Little is known about pilgrimages preceding the Council of Trent and for the Campine area little research has been done apart from one master’s thesis by Anne De Roeck which focusses on seventeenth and eighteenth century pilgrimages.⁶⁹⁸ The impressive amount of seventeenth century pilgrimages in the deanery of Hoogstraten, and the fact that she often suggests a medieval origin to these practices, indicate a lively late medieval and early modern pilgrimage culture. In Minderhout, for example, in a 1571 church account, a pilgrimage – or *beevaerde* – produced 5 gulden, 7 stuiver and 1 ort (or 10.2 percent of total revenues). In all likelihood, the *beevaerde* mentioned is linked to the devotion of *OLV in den akker of van zeven weeën*, ‘specialised’ in curing fevers and ‘bringing consolation’.⁶⁹⁹ Processions also seem to have been important events in the village calendar. In Rijkevorsel every account mentions the costs of a yearly procession. Every year a carpenter was paid to do some woodwork; nails, ropes and fabrics were ordered as well as immense amounts of soap. Someone (or several people) was (or were) paid to ring the bells and musicians were hired as

⁶⁹⁷ RAA, KA Gierle, 41. Purchase of a church bell with a list of godfathers and -mothers, 1598

⁶⁹⁸ De Roeck, A. (2003). *Devotie aan de grens. Bedevaartplaatsen in de dekenij Hoogstraten in de 17e en 18e eeuw*. Department of History. Leuven, Catholic University of Leuven.

⁶⁹⁹ De Roeck, A. (2003). *Devotie aan de grens*: 71

well and furthermore, a number of people were hired in order to carry one giant and two dragons.

The Rijkevorsel village accounts, preserved in the late fifteenth-century tax registers⁷⁰⁰, shed some light on the economic profile of those participating in village life at its broadest, ranging from the inclusion in the village procession, to involvement in the practical settlement of taxation as represented in table 8.6. Some ways of participating were also clearly dominated by the economic upper-layers. Quite unsurprisingly, negotiating taxes (mainly on the division of the lump sum among several villages) and the delivery of the tax – usually the total taxation sum had to be brought to Antwerp – was mainly undertaken by villagers from the highest deciles. Many of the men engaging in these activities were at some point active as tax officials, a group also dominated by the highest deciles. The lending out of money to the village was – quite logically – also dominated by the economic better-off. ‘Ordinary’ village loans were never specified and we therefore do not really know what the money was used for. The military loans were mostly used to buy weapons or send *sondeniers* (possibly at type of mercenary) into battle. The lending-out of military equipment was, however, less socially biased. Apparently owning a harness was not unusual even for ordinary villagers. Participating in processions was the most democratic way of interacting as it involved villagers from all social layers being present. Even women – mostly absent from the other categories – were active in this domain. We can find examples of villagers carrying the giant and the dragon, which were apparently part of the procession, villagers sowing and painting decorations, people responsible for buying the ingredients to make fireworks, etc. The village procession was probably one of the highlights of village life and the festivities therefore included all sorts of villagers. These processions in all likelihood consisted of the main village event, representing village identity and cohesion, leaving room for all sorts and conditions of people to engage in the festivities. It was during these occasions that the village community staged itself as one unit – even though, in reality, socio-economic and socio-political differences were omnipresent.

Table 8.6 Informal Participation in Rijkevorsel, 1464-1475

	% decile 10	% decile 9	% decile 8	% other deciles (7-1)
Tax negotiation / delivery	37,04% (10) ⁷⁰¹	18,92% (7)	3,70% (1)	33,33% (7)
Military loan to village	55,26% (21)	21,05% (8)	13,16% (5)	10,53% (4)
Loan to village	40,91% (9)	31,82% (7)	13,64% (3)	13,64% (3)

⁷⁰⁰ RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 3244-3256. Royal taxation, 1464-1475

⁷⁰¹ Between brackets: the absolute number

Loan of military material	42,86% (3)	14,29% (1)	0,00% (0)	42,86% (3)
Processions & village life	27,78% (5)	5,56% (1)	11,11% (2)	44,44% (10)

Source: RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 3244-3256. Royal taxation, 1464-1475

8.2.3 Confraternities and community

In his article on the ‘political life of the fifteenth century English village’, Chris Dyer not only mentions institutions and villagers who were preoccupied with politics in the strict sense, he also portrays English villages as buzzing with the activities of countless fraternities. Or, as he describes it:

“The institutions founded by the villagers themselves included the now celebrated fraternities. The well-established guilds which elected an alderman, built a guild hall, employed at least one chantry priest, and occupied an altar and side chapel in the parish church, were especially common in eastern England. In the western parishes the associations sometimes consisted of peer groups – young women, young men, wives, ‘hogglers’ (entertainers) and so on – who met to dance or perform a Robin Hood play, or simply to drink ale, and made some contribution to the churchwardens’ funds”.⁷⁰²

Lively is the least we can say about late medieval village life, based on this description and the proof we have for various pilgrimages and processions. Indeed it does seem that Campine villages were home to a multitude of confraternities. Evidence, however, is scattered and imprecise, nonetheless, I will present some snippets of information and suggest the importance of fraternities for the Campine area as well.

The Gierle registers of the bench of aldermen make occasional mention of the Confraternity of Saint Barbara. In 1546 the governors of the confraternity were the creditors of an annuity, something repeated in 1558.⁷⁰³ Apart from these coincidental references we know nothing about the Gierle confraternity of Saint Barbara since it left no other source material. Another source, shedding light on the existence and functioning of confraternities in the Campine countryside, is a membership list and a statute of the confraternity of Saint Anthony, Saint Catherine and Saint Barbara from the village of Weelde dating from the 1590s.⁷⁰⁴ The statutes give only limited information on this institution and it consists mainly of the oath the brethren and sisters had to make and rules concerning prayer (5 *paternosters* every day – redeemable with one silver *stuiver* a year). Somewhat more intriguing is the list of founding members that can be found at the end of the document, consisting of 281 names of men and women. We have no precise population figures for the end of the sixteenth century, but since the villages of Ravels, Poppel and Weelde counted 341 hearths in 1526, it seems quite likely that a significant part of (if not all) community members belonged to this confraternity. This does, however, not necessarily imply a relatively democratic structure. Maarten Van Dijck, for

⁷⁰² Dyer, C. (2004). “The Political Life”: 141

⁷⁰³ Database, based on: RAA, OGA Gierle, 350. Registers of the bench of aldermen, 1538-1558

⁷⁰⁴ RAA, KA Weelde, List of members of a confraternity, end of the 16th century

example, focussed on seventeenth and eighteenth century Brabantine⁷⁰⁵ lay and religious confraternities and found that the latter were substantially less democratic and more oligarchic and vertically organised.⁷⁰⁶ Members had no real power, the governors decided on all things important and these governors often formed a very oligarchical group.

Lay confraternities were present in the Campine area as well, especially in the sixteenth century source material is more scarce than for religious confraternities, however. Chambers of rhetoric, confraternities uniting amateur-poets and engaging in rhetorical competitions, for example, were widespread in the Netherlands.⁷⁰⁷ Several Campine cities had a chamber of rhetoric such as, for example, Turnhout, Herentals, Hoogstraten and Geel.⁷⁰⁸ Only two Campine villages hosted a chamber in the late medieval or early modern period, namely Mol (De Lindeblomme, founded in 1618) and Brecht, which had a chamber of rhetoric in the sixteenth century already. These are, however, the exceptions as chambers of rhetoric seem to have been limited to the cities or to regions in the countryside with very commercial, urban cultures as was the case, for example, in Coastal Flanders.⁷⁰⁹ It is no coincidence that the village of Brecht was in on this humanist, renaissance trend. Brecht was a centre of humanism in the sixteenth century Campine area, albeit a modest one. The village had a Latin school that was founded in 1515 by Johannes Custos. Custos was not the only Brecht humanist, Jan Van der Noot, the renaissance poet, was a descendant of the Brecht family. The philosopher and counsellor of Albert and Isabella, Leonardus Lessius attended the Brecht Latin school, as did the jurist Gabriel Madaeus. Unfortunately, hardly any source material of this exceptionally rich cultural life of the village of Brecht has been left to us. Shooting guilds were present in the Campine villages as well, although, yet again, frustratingly only source material from the second half of the seventeenth century onwards remains from them. The only exception is the village of Brecht, for which an account of the Saint George (*Sint Joris*) guild, who used the crossbow, was preserved. This account, dating from 1576, mainly lists members and their membership fees.⁷¹⁰ Furthermore, we know that the village of Brecht had yet another shooting guild, the Saint Sebastian guild, which used the longbow and was re-established in 1594.⁷¹¹ Without doubt countless other villages must have had their own archer's guilds, however, to reconstruct this would be far beyond the scope of this chapter. However, it seems quite clear that an average Campine village had quite an intense, varied and busy social / cultural life. Confraternities were therefore clearly not unilaterally linked to the anonymity and pressure of city life as, for example, Lynch has strongly emphasised, but were as much a rural phenomenon as an urban one. In the countryside confraternities and consorts helped to build

⁷⁰⁵ More specifically in the southern-Brabantine region of the Hageland which was quite a fertile region

⁷⁰⁶ Van Dijck, M. (2005). "Het verenigingsleven op het Hagelandse platteland. Sociale polarisatie en middenveldparticipatie in de 17de en 18de eeuw." *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis* 2(2): 81-108.

⁷⁰⁷ One of the most famous works on chambers of rhetoric is written by Herman Pleij: Pleij, H. (1988). *De sneeuwpoppen van 1511. Literatuur en stadscultuur tussen middeleeuwen en moderne tijd*. Amsterdam, Meulenhoff. For more information on the chambers of rhetoric in the Southern Netherlands, there is the impressive doctoral thesis of Anne-Laure Van Bruaene: Van Bruaene, A.-L. (2008). *Om beters wille: rederijkerskamers en de stedelijke cultuur in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden (1400-1650)*. Amsterdam, Amsterdam University.

⁷⁰⁸ A list of chambers of rhetoric in the Southern Low Countries can be found online: <http://www.dbnl.org/titels/titel.php?id=brua002repeo1>

⁷⁰⁹ Dombrecht, K., E. Van Onacker, et al. (2013). The regional differences of officeholding by rural elites. A comparative study for late medieval Flanders and Brabant (14th-16th century). D. Freist and F. Schmeckel (eds.) *Hinter dem Horizont. Projektion und Distinktion ländlicher Oberschichten im europäischen Vergleich, 17. Bis 19. Jahrhundert*. Münster, Aschendorff Verlag: 213-224.

⁷¹⁰ RAA, KA Sint-Michielskerk Brecht, 1076. Account of the Saint Jorisgild, 1576

⁷¹¹ RAA, KA Sint-Michielskerk Brecht, 1071. Loose documents concerning the Saint Sebastiansgild, 1594

and strengthen a community, however, it was one that already existed. This suggests that confraternities had other functions besides being an alternative for weakening kinship ties. More research into this intriguing domain would be extremely welcome and it would – albeit mostly from the seventeenth century onwards – be quite feasible to undertake.

8.3 Setting the beacons of belonging. A focus on the decision makers of Campine community life

As has already been suggested, a village's social and cultural life was clearly institutionalised which implies that some people were in charge of governing these institutions. The Campine Holy Ghost tables and the church fabric were each led by two masters. The Campine Holy Ghost masters were responsible for the daily government of poor relief, the church masters for the day-to-day functioning of the church fabric. Every master served for two consecutive years, the first year as an aide, the second year as headmaster. The accounts do not enlighten us as to the selection procedure of the masters, however, a seventeenth century document for the Holy Ghost table of the village of Minderhout gives us an indication.⁷¹² The document mentions how, on a yearly basis, the community needed to nominate two names, of which one was to become the new master. Candidates had to be '*van goeden naeme ende tot dese officie bequam*', in other words with a good image and capable of filling the office. The final decision was made by the lord who held the right to choose the new master. The practice of appointing only one new master every year can be found when all Campine Holy Ghost tables and church fabrics are analysed. The Campine poor relief officials and church masters were therefore responsible for the administration of their institution and the collecting and distributing of money and goods in kind, but can we say anything about the socio-economic position of these masters? Unfortunately it is quite impossible to present any detailed information about this particular aspect since there is hardly any overlap between the table's accounts and sources (mostly taxation related) allowing us to make an economic cross-section. For the village of Brecht, some accounts⁷¹³ can be linked to a tax register from 1576.⁷¹⁴ However, only three names (out of 26) of Holy Ghost masters could be traced in the tax register. Jan Gheenkens, Jan Meerijts and Jan Huefkens had not only their first name in common, but also their socio-economic position, since all of them belonged to the highest two deciles (9 & 10). This at least suggests that the office of Holy Ghostmaster showed striking similarities with other – more political – offices, as described in chapter seven, since these were also dominated by a rather wide group of the 30 percent of 'richest' villagers.

Roughly the same can be said about the Rijkevorsel church masters. Four of them can be identified with relative certainty, by linking them to the tax lists of 1464-1475. Three of them, Jan f. Wouter Delien, Jacop De Visscher and Joes Jacops, belonged to the highest quartile. One of them, Aert Denijs, belonged to the second quartile. Due to the time lapse between the tax lists and the church accounts, these findings should, of course, be interpreted with care. The

⁷¹² SA Hoogstraten, KA Minderhout, D37. Election of the Holy Ghostmasters, 17th century

⁷¹³ RAA, KA Sint-Michielskerk Brecht, 274. – 286. Accounts of the Holy Ghost table, 1576-1598

⁷¹⁴ RAA, OGA Brecht, 2482. Account of the royal aide, 1576

mutation rates of the offices of Holy Ghost master and church master for the village of Rijkevorsel can shed some more light on the democratic / oligarchic nature of these offices. These findings (tables 8.7 to 8.10) suggest that the office of Holy Ghostmaster was indeed claimed, to a certain extent, by a restricted group, although a rather large restricted group. The same holds true for the office of church master which was also controlled by a 'broad oligarchy'. Five people were active as Holy Ghostmaster as well as church masters. Furthermore, since the same surnames often return in the sources, it would seem that members of the same family were active at both institutions at the same time. Yet again, this is quite similar to other offices in the Campine area. Poor relief was, therefore, controlled by the same group that also had a strong grip on other political functions of the village, and who also enjoyed a relatively strong economic position. They were also the ones deciding on who had a right to poor relief and who did not. The same can be said about church life where people from the same socio-economic group decided on church spending. This means that we must keep in mind that – at least on a formal institutional level – the independent peasants, yet again, had a strong grip on the social life of their villages as well. However, as was established in the previous sections, they were to a certain extent forced or inclined to make decisions that bound the community together, dealing with a large mass of poorer fellow-villagers with whom they had to co-operate and live with, and who were, in all likelihood, often closely related to them.

Table 8.7 The officers of the Rijkevorsel Holy Ghost table

Rijkevorsel Accounts 1490-1529	
Total number of accounts	32
Total number of offices	64
Number of people filling in an office	26
Offices/Person	2,46

Sources: OGA Rijkevorsel, 4058-4098. Accounts of the Holy Ghost table, 1490-1599

Table 8.8 The mutation rate of the Rijkevorsel Holy Ghost table offices (1490-1529)

Number of functions per career	Number of people	%
1	2	8
2	17	68
3	1	4
4	4	16
5	0	0
6 or more	1	4

Sources: OGA Rijkevorsel, 4058-4098. Accounts of the Holy Ghost table, 1490-1599

Table 8.9 The officers of the Rijkevorsel church fabric

Rijkevorsel Accounts, 1493-1525	
Total number of accounts	22
Totaal number of offices	44

Number of people filling in an office	13
Offices/Person	3,4

Source: RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 4143 – 4164. Church accounts, 1493-1525

Table 8.10 The mutation rate of the Rijkevorsel church fabric (1493-1525)

Number of functions per career	Number of people	%
1	2	15,4
2	2	15,4
3	1	7,7
4	7	53,8
5	0	0
6 or more	1	7,7

Source: RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 4143 – 4164. Church accounts, 1493-1525

8.4 Conclusion

In the previous chapters we already hinted at, and established, certain mechanisms that enabled a stable co-habitation between the mass of ‘ordinary’ villagers and the better-off independent peasants. In this chapter I have tried to find out how these different social groups were bound together and formed one community, and whether this social carapace was supported by mechanisms of solidarity, subordination, or both. First of all, it is worth mentioning that mechanisms of community formation and solidarity were firmly institutionalised. Many historians – with Katherine Lynch as the most notable example – have emphasised the importance of the urban factor in explaining the coming into being of collective organisations, but it would seem – as was already hinted at by Tine De Moor – that these were equally relevant in a rural context still characterised by strong kinship ties.

Furthermore, these institutions – all Campine institutions discussed so far in this study – were firmly controlled by the independent peasantry. Holy Ghostmasters and churchmasters were, as far as I could establish, members of this social group, which also had a strong formal grip on the commons and on purely political institutions. This might suggest that social groups in Campine communities were mainly tied together by ties of subordination, but as already hinted at in the chapters on commons and politics, the underlying picture was much more complex. Unity and solidarity (as far as these terms are not anachronistic) were equally part of the story. When it came to Campine poor relief, this was – as was the case in every late medieval and early modern city or village – limited to those already belonging to the village community. Vagrants and vagabonds were firmly excluded. There are some indications that rules concerning these ‘undeserving poor’ became even stricter from the seventeenth century onwards, but this is beyond the scope of our research.

So, when it came to Campine poor relief, the basic rule was: ‘if you’re in, you’re in’, meaning that if you were a member of the community and were reduced to poverty, you could rely on village (or to be exact parochial) poor relief. Women, especially, were a vulnerable

group and clearly considered to be deserving of aid, but men were not excluded from help. Furthermore, the relief received by the poor and destitute was substantial, especially when compared to other regions such as Inland Flanders. An even more striking picture emerges when the comparison is made with Coastal Flanders). The reason for this elaborately institutionalised system of poor relief is perhaps rather pragmatic in nature, but suggests a certain level of village solidarity as well: the fact that women in general, and widows in particular, were the main beneficiaries, could be linked to the specific economic structure of the Campine region. A region which created less labour options for women than, for example, inland Flanders, therefore making them dependent on male breadwinners. It is possible – although hard to prove – that a significant number of Campine men worked as seasonal labourers – for example in the Antwerp building industry – making them and their women somewhat vulnerable to the whims of larger economic fluctuations. Furthermore, and perhaps even more fundamentally, it is important to take into account the fact that the Campine area was of course, first and foremost, a peasant society. This implies that community members knew each other on a first-name basis, or were related to each other through kinship ties, or by being neighbours. This might have played a part in the presence of a large degree of ‘solidarity’ as well. In addition, of course even independent peasants – and especially their women and daughters – were vulnerable too. Old age, sickness, a death in the family, all these factors might push even better-off peasants over the edge and drive them into poverty. The existence of elaborate poor relief, almost functioning as a social security system, was also in the best interest of even the most well-off independent peasant, as his continued independence was never guaranteed.

The unity (and perhaps cohesion) of these Campine villages was mainly embodied in social, which is to say parochial, life. Yet again independent peasants seem to have been somewhat more engaged than others, being the main pillars of church life and community life in general. They were even prepared to invest their own money in the community as a whole, by lending it to the village government or by helping to buy a new church clock. Prestige was an essential motive no doubt, however, a certain ‘true’ interest and concern for the community can never be excluded. One might even suggest these are two sides two the same coin. Furthermore, parochial life, and especially its processions – so crucial for late medieval and early modern life – was more than able to accommodate all community members, rich or poor, man or woman. These processions, together with rituals such as boundary visitations or the reading aloud of the preambles of the byelaws for example, were symbolic manifestations of village unity and cohesion. To a certain extent this unity was characterised by a level of inequality and fragmentation, however, there were indeed ties that bound Campine villagers together, confronted as they were by several similar experiences. Poor relief and parochial life therefore in their way also played an essential part in the support and reproduction of the Campine social balance, making a peaceful, communal existence possible.

9

CONCLUSION. SOCIAL BALANCE AND STRUCTURAL STABILITY.

“My thesis would rather be that many of the divergent phenomena that we refer to as ‘anti-modernism’, and especially peasant resistance, have been important positive contributions to technological modernisation and economic growth. By slowing down the process, it has become more controllable and smooth, avoiding legitimacy crises and the political hazards produced by disregarding the fate of large voting elements of the population.”

(Ottar Brax on the link between peasant characteristics, industrialisation and democracy in Norway, 2006)⁷¹⁵

At the onset of this dissertation we met Henrick Coppens alias Coutreels, Henrick Stakenbroeck, and Godevaert Wuyts, respectively a fifteenth-, sixteenth- and eighteenth-century alderman of a Campine village. These three aldermen governed their villages, acted as notaries, took part in a village law court in a type of village society all three would have recognised. As much as the political and economic edifice, and society as a whole, changed throughout this extensive period of time, Campine structural features remained firmly intact. Indeed, throughout the eventful fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Campine area was characterised by a remarkable stability and continuity. In this dissertation I have focussed on the social structures and stratification underpinning this stability, with a main focus on the leading groups of this society – such as those the three aldermen mentioned above belonged to. In this conclusion I want to argue that the specific social constitution of this region and the specific roles played by the village elites are an important aspect in explaining Campine continuity. These elites were clearly leaders of their community, but of a rather different kind than the one focused on most by historiography. This was a truly peasant elite, characterised not by distinction but rather by a marked resemblance to the ‘ordinary’ peasant inhabitant of the Campine region.

⁷¹⁵ Brox, O. (2006). “Let Us Now Prais Dragging Feet!” O. Brox (ed.). *The Political Economy of Rural Development*. Delft, Eburon Publishers: 35

9.1 Reconstructing inequality in a peasant society: delineating an elite

Typologies of pre-modern rural elites usually distinguish between *coqs de village* (one or two large farmers, monopolising economic and political village life), yeomen (a broader elite of landowning farmers) or big commercial tenant farmers (operating on large farms leased from an absentee landowners in a competitive economic environment). In all of these cases, the elite was much richer, much more commercial, and much more influential than their fellow-villagers, to whom they were connected by hierarchical relationships of dependency and unequal exchange. However, the societies in which these elites operated were – in several aspects – very different from the Campine area. According to Erik Thoen⁷¹⁶ and Bas Van Bavel⁷¹⁷, regional specificities in economic substructure or socio-institutional lay-out explain the divergent evolutions in the Low Countries. The characteristics and strategies of elites were thus largely formed by the (regional) social context and structures in which they operated, and the peasant and relatively communal nature of Campine society, thus went hand in hand with its own ‘elite-type’, different from the ‘*coq de village*’ model, due to its regional specificities. The Campine social context, and its structures in general, therefore received quite some attention in this dissertation, to frame the specifics of its village elites. The delineation of this elite was built upon a reconstruction of the social structures as a whole.

First of all, I was able to establish that Campine villages had – quite obviously – social structures that allowed for a certain degree of differentiation. And even though Campine villages were characterised by identical structural features – smallholding, strong property rights, mixed farming, powerful communities and quintessential commons – inter-village differences could be clear-cut. Especially at the top of the stratification pyramid, the contrasts seem rather striking. In some villages, an absolute top-layer was missing. In these locales, following the Gierle model (Fig 9.1), no-one stood at the very peak of the pyramid – perhaps making it more like a ziggurat. In several other villages, roughly following the Tongerlo model (Fig 9.2), there was a clear group elevated above the ‘ordinary’ villager, the tenant farmers, tilling farms that were two to six times larger than those of the peasants with the largest holdings. However, as chapter 6 elaborately proved, they were not able to completely steer or dominate village life, as they were set somewhat apart from the rest of society. Finally, in a village such as Brecht (Fig 9.3), there were some (one or two) families that were of noble stature. In Brecht, the Van der Noot family stayed in the village from time to time, and thus must have felt at least a sense of belonging, but they were by no means included in day-to-day village life. So, some Campine villages clearly housed a group filling in the peak of the pyramid – be it tenant farmers or ‘local’ nobility. However, these groups cannot necessarily be labelled village elites. The Campine nobility had hardly anything to do with daily agricultural activities and village affairs. They furthermore spent much of their time in the city. This is consistent with the recent findings of Jim van der Meulen, pointing to the continued association of the Brabantine nobility with their rural possessions.⁷¹⁸ They did however – contrary to Van

⁷¹⁶ Thoen, E. (2004). ‘Social agrosystems’ as an economic concept to explain region differences. An essay taking the former county of Flanders as an example (Middle Ages - 19th century). P. Hoppenbrouwers & B. J. P. Van Bavel. (eds.) *Landholding and land transfer in the North Sea area (late Middle Ages - 19th century)*. Turnhout, Brepols

⁷¹⁷ Van Bavel, B. J. P. (2010). *Manors and markets: economy and society in the Low Countries, 500-1600*. Oxford University Press.

⁷¹⁸ van der Meulen, J. (2013). *Landowners, rulers and fighters. Knightly life in Brabant, ca. 1330-ca.1400*. Medieval History. Amsterdam, UVA: 45-46

Uytven's still dominant theory⁷¹⁹ –spent quite some time in their rural seigniories and certain family members even contributed to the village taxes. Campine tenant farmers, on the other hand, did live and operate within the Campine village communities, but they were never really able to leave their mark on them.

⁷¹⁹ Van Uytven, R. (1976). "Vorst, adel en steden: een driehoeksverhouding in Brabant van de twaalfde tot de zestiende eeuw." *Bijdragen tot de geschiedenis* 59(1-2): 97-100

Fig 9.1 Social stratification – The Gierle model

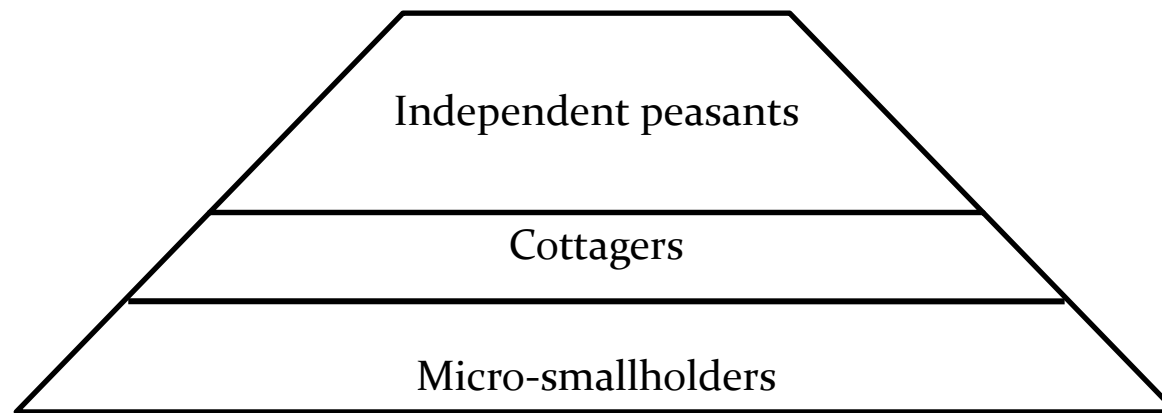


Fig 9.2 Social stratification – The Tongerlo model

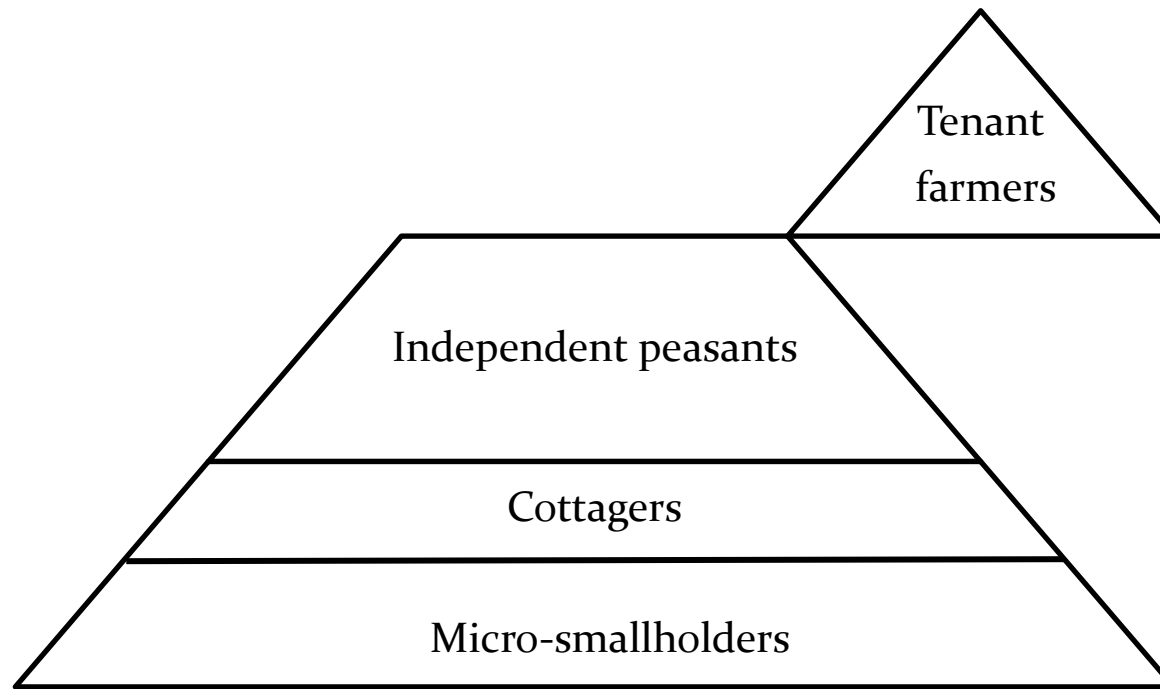
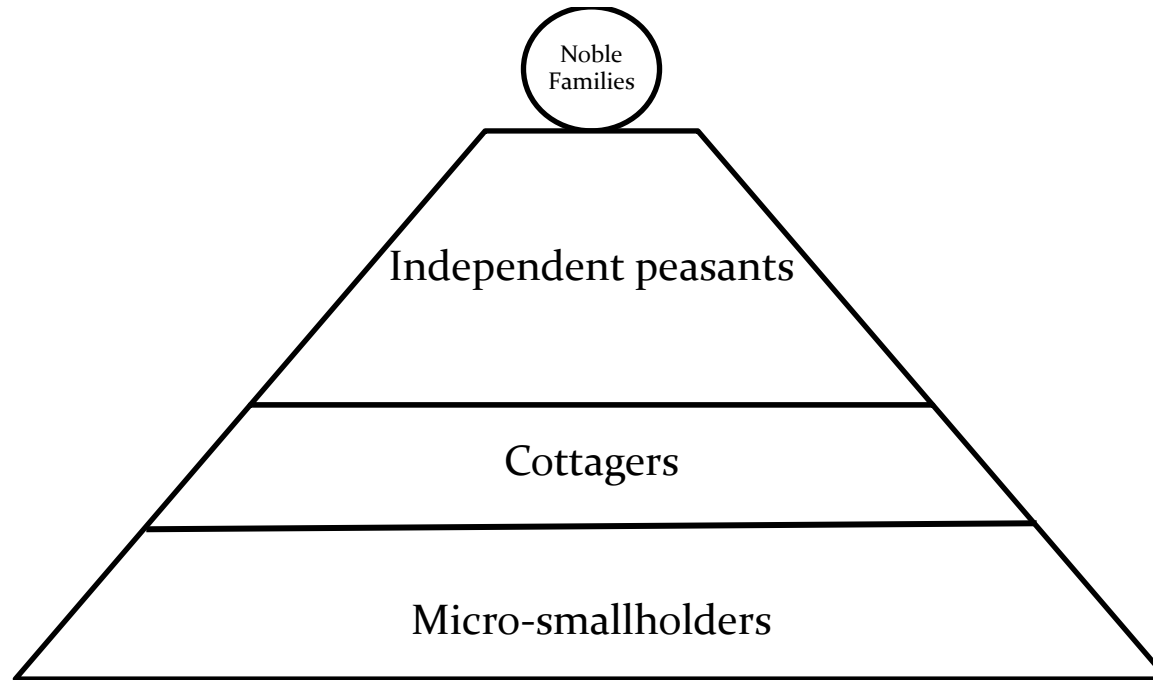


Fig 9.3 Social stratification – the Brecht model



At first sight, there does not seem to have been a genuine elite – tenant farmers and nobility were unable or unwilling to fill in the peak of the pyramid, so there were indeed no traditional ‘*coqs de village*’. In peasant societies, inequality is thus less eye-catching. However, if one digs a little deeper, it can be uncovered nonetheless. To reconstruct Campine social stratification and to identify an elite, our starting point was land distribution. Private land was a prime asset in a peasant society, since it was of course the basic mean of production. A reconstruction of social stratification based on land use (as could be found in the sixteenth-century *penningkohieren*) led to the identification of clearly differentiated social layers. First of all, a broad group of micro-smallholders could be discerned, owning less than 1 hectare, consisting of between 20 and 30 percent of village society. Furthermore, there was a significant group of cottagers (also between 20 and 30 percent), owning between 1 and 3 hectares and therefore flirting with the subsistence level. The independent peasantry, representing some 25 percent of village household heads, owned an average of over 3 hectares of land, which implied that they had a more or less secure survival base – especially if their farms were larger than 5 or even 10 hectares, as was the case with a small minority in almost every village. These differences might not seem impressive at first sight, but the difference between struggling for survival and a secure subsistence with even some surplus was quintessential and with Gini’s ranging around 0.50 and 0.55 not negligible. This landed property was the economic basis, the foundation, for what we can label a broad peasant elite. So, this dissertation amply proved that there was indeed an elite within Campine society, one of independent peasants, corresponding with approximately a quarter of all household heads. The characteristics and strategies of this elite were however very specific and significantly different from those established for the pre-modern ‘*coqs de village*’ or yeoman elites.

9.2 Elite characteristics

9.2.1 Distinction through independency

Their subsistence farm was thus the foundation of their social position. And it was a stable one, since Campine peasants had a strong grip on their lands, holding it in customary rent. Leasehold was, even in the sixteenth century, a limited phenomenon. The number of leased-out plots never exceeded 25 percent – a figure quite typical for peasant regions with commons⁷²⁰. On this foundation different assets were constructed. The real differences between Campine elites and their fellow villagers was not only the size of their farms, but mainly what I have labelled the three C’s: commercial activities, control over the commons and control over the community as a whole. The crux here was their economic and political independence, that is to say, their elaborate grip on their own lives. A first factor enabling this independence was the fact that Campine communities had quite some economic and political manoeuvring space, as was argued in chapter 2. Campine villages were not severely burdened

⁷²⁰ The number is somewhat lower than in Drenthe, where 39 percent of farms was held in lease in 1630 – see chapter 3, based on: Bieleman, J. (1987). *Boeren op het Drentse zand 1600-1910. Een nieuwe visie op de 'oude' landbouw*. Utrecht, HES Uitgevers: 252-261

down by seigniorial or stately structures. It was not – like Holland or Coastal Flanders– a region devoid of local feudal power (notably the *seigneurie banale*)⁷²¹, but as in Inland Flanders⁷²² and the Southern and Western part of Brabant⁷²³, the feudal impact was moderate. The only seigniorial burden that seemed to have had a significant impact was the obligation to use the lordly mills and to pay a (proportional) sum for this. The economic impact of the emerging state mainly reflected itself via the *aides*, the stately taxation. However, as was already suggested for the County of Flanders⁷²⁴, the global impact of taxation remained fairly limited, even in the sixteenth century, only becoming burdensome in times of hardship. Furthermore, due to the complex and scattered lordly structures and the absence of firm regional institutions, the village communities were powerful institutions, with extensive competences. Perhaps the biggest difference with other regions, notably Coastal and Inland Flanders, but also the southern part of Brabant, was not the lack of feudal pressure – since this was nowhere extremely burdensome – but the relative lack of urban interference. In Flanders and the Brabant region surrounding Antwerp, there was a strong penetration of urban capital in the countryside, as townsmen – especially urban merchants – bought up land, or even entire seigniories and were important creditors.⁷²⁵ The city was by no means absent from the Campine peasant’s social environment, but in a somewhat more distant and less direct way than in Flanders or the immediate rural surroundings of Antwerp. There was the occasional provision of urban capital or the odd land transaction – on average one transaction per year was recorded in the Antwerp aldermen’s registers for an average Campine village between 1491 and 1495 – but all in all urban penetration on this terrain was limited.

The economic foundation of this independency was – as has already been mentioned – their farm and its arable land, securing a – more or less – stable income for these independent peasants. Land was however not the only means of production they held firmly in hand: ploughs and traction animals were a frequently owned asset among this group. In a way, Campine independent peasants had their own form of ‘mincome’. This term refers to an experiment that was carried out in the 1970s in Canada, giving a "Guaranteed Annual Income" to families in Winnipeg and the rural community of Dauphin.⁷²⁶ An annual income provided by a twentieth-century welfare state is of course hardly comparable to the security offered by a farm that covered subsistence needs. Still, a firm level of security and off-market provision of a livelihood is present in both cases. It is quite thought-provoking that this experiment had a

⁷²¹ Van Zanden, J. L. (2001). "A third road to capitalism? Proto-industrialization and the moderate nature of the late medieval crisis in Flanders and Holland, 1350-1550." P. Hoppenbrouwers and J. L. Van Zanden (eds.). *Peasants into farmers? The transformation of rural economy and society in the Low Countries (Middle Ages-19th century) in light of the Brenner debate*. Turnhout, Brepols: 85-101.

⁷²² Thoen, E. (2001). "A commercial survival economy in evolution. The Flemish countryside and the transition to capitalism (Middle Ages - 19th century)." P. Hoppenbrouwers and J. L. Van Zanden. (eds.) *Peasants into Farmers? The transformation of rural economy and society in the Low Countries (Middle Ages - 19th century) in light of the Brenner debate*. Turnhout, Brepols: 102-157.

⁷²³ As described by Limberger in: Limberger, M. (2008). *Sixteenth Century Antwerp and its Rural Surroundings*. Turnhout, Brepols.

⁷²⁴ As can be found in: Thoen, E. and S. T. (2008). "The social and economic impact of central government taxation on the Flemish countryside (end 13th-18th centuries): some reflections." *Fiscal systems in the European economy from the 13th to the 18th centuries*: 957-971.

⁷²⁵ A process excellently described in: Limberger, M. (2001). "Merchant capitalism and the countryside. Antwerp and the West of the duchy of Brabant." P. C. M. Hoppenbrouwers and J. L. Van Zanden (eds.) *Peasants into farmers? The transformation of rural economy and society in the Low Countries (Middle Ages-19th century) in light of the Brenner debate*. Turnhout, Brepols: 158-178

⁷²⁶ Forget, E. (2011). *The town with no poverty. Using health administration data to revisit outcomes of a Canadian guaranteed annual income field experiment*. Manitoba, University of Manitoba: 37.

rather beneficial effect on its participants. Preliminary research of the mincome-effect on these twentieth-century Canadian communities suggests that the level of education rose, whereas the amount of labour performed decreased – but only to a very limited extent. The main effect that was observed, was a decline in the need for physical and mental health care.

The striving for and maintenance of a stable resource base is seen by Van der Ploeg – in true Chayanovian fashion – as one of the ultimate defining characteristics of peasant societies in general. According to Van der Ploeg, peasants for example ‘patterned’ their relations with markets, since stable, secure income was thus of prime importance.⁷²⁷ Securing autonomy and reducing dependency were the prime goals of peasants. Most peasant studies literature is consistent with these statements, often focussing on peasant uprisings – the so-called peasant wars⁷²⁸ or the more subtle ‘weapons of the weak’⁷²⁹ as the main tools for achieving at least a degree of political and economic independency. However, these theories leave limited room for social stratification within the peasantry itself. If my research has shown one thing, it is that this ‘struggle’ for independency and a stable income was one only the top-layer of Campine society could afford to engage in. The independent peasants were the only ones in Campine society able to achieve this ‘peasant dream’ to at least some degree. Most of their fellow-villagers were not able to live off their lands, had to look for additional sources of income and were thus, to peasant standards, notably less well-off.

The fact that this peasant elite had a stable base to build on also enabled them to built up a rather diverse array of economic activities, without reducing their economic autonomy all too much. If we only look at farm sizes, the Campine independent peasants were somewhat better-off, but the differences are not breathtaking. But, on an economic level, the largest difference is perhaps that these independent peasants were able to engage in market activities, mainly through animal breeding and the selling of wool, meat, butter, etc. Next to their stable subsistence farm, animal possession – most notably of sheep – was clearly what (economically) distinguished them from their fellow-villagers. Most sheep-owners belonged to the upper three deciles, the richest 30 percent of the village community: the independent peasants. The Campine independent peasants had relatively large flocks of sheep and this research suggested that sheep-breeding had indeed every potential to be a profitable undertaking. They were furthermore also overrepresented as land and credit market users, using them for their own ‘peasant strategies’. Villagers were the main buyers, sellers, creditors and debtors; urban capital was but a rare intruder. The land market was an essential allocation mechanism, allowing older peasants to dispose of redundant land, while at the same time allowing those wishing to start their own family (farm) to buy the necessary extra’s. The credit market played a similar role in peasant life cycle strategies. For creditors it was a way to secure an extra-agricultural income, often used by women or by those too old or too young (i.e. orphans. For debtors it was in all likelihood a way to invest in their farms. Accumulation was absent, contrary to how

⁷²⁷ Van der Ploeg, J. D. (2009). *The new peasantries: struggles for autonomy and sustainability in an era of empire and globalization*. Abingdon, Earthscan: 23-35

⁷²⁸ A ‘historical’ example can be found in: Hilton, R. H. (1973). *Bond men made free: medieval peasant movements and the English rising of 1381*. New York, Viking Press.

⁷²⁹ A concept introduced in: Scott, J. C. (1985). *Weapons of the weak: everyday forms of peasant resistance*. New Haven, Yale University Press.

credit functioned in more commercial, or more polarised regions, such as late medieval Coastal⁷³⁰, but also eighteenth-century Inland Flanders.⁷³¹

An essential factor contributing to this diverse economic portfolio is the fact that they also firmly controlled the quintessential common wasteland. These commons were – in their own very specific way – another prime economic resource of Campine communities and their inhabitants, delivering fuel, providing grazing opportunities and securing a steady manure supply. The independent peasants were the main – although by no means the only – beneficiaries of the commons, since they were able to benefit from everything the commons had to offer. Unlike ‘ordinary’ villagers, they were able to maximally use the grazing potential the commons had to offer, since they were the main sheep-owners – an enterprise which would not have been possible without the existence of the common waste, since sheep needed an enormous amount of grazing land. The independent peasants were not only able to take advantage of all common resources, they furthermore had a strong grip on the control of the commons, together with the lordly representative. The design of rules, and their enforcement was in the hands of exactly this group – with, however, the presence of informal mechanisms and room for negotiation and conflict, to secure a smooth survival of this vital institution.

This independency was not limited to a control over economic means of production and a relatively favourable relationship with markets. On a socio-political level, a case can be made for independency as well. Formal village institutions shaping life on the countryside were firmly controlled by the Campine upper-layer. Due to the fractured feudal power structures and the lack of a regional intermediary level, the institution of the village community had important competences, linked to village and common government, the allotment and collection of taxation, etc. Most village aldermen came from the upper three deciles, the 30 percent of community members that were most heavily taxed. By serving as village aldermen – the office most closely linked to village government – and clearly dominating this office as a group, they had a grip on the village’s political decision making processes, on jurisdiction and on sanctioning – always of course in close cooperation with the lordly representative, the bailiff. This way they had a strong grip on the organisation of their own lives and that of their neighbours, via the organisation of the institution that determined most of it. When it came to a village’s social life, often linked to the parish level, the same predominance of independent peasants could be perceived in steering it. Parochial life, i.e. the management of church income and expenditure, was also firmly in the hands of the independent peasants, as most – if not nearly all – church masters came from their ranks. So, although all social layers participated in village life, as embodied by processions and feasts, the formal control over it was mostly dominated by one social group. These same independent peasants furthermore also organised formal poor relief, governing the Holy Ghost Table. The relief system was elaborate, but the control over it lay in the hands of yet again the same group. So, their independency was not limited to the economic aspect of village life; a vital aspect underpinning their independency was the fact that they had a – demographically – disproportionate grip on the village institutions that determined it.

⁷³⁰ As is described in: Thoen, E. and T. Soens (2009). “Credit in rural Flanders, c.1250-c.1600: its variety and significance” P. R. Schofield and T. Lambrecht *Credit and the rural economy in North-western Europ, c.1200-c.1850*. Turnhout, Brepols: 19-38.

⁷³¹ See for example: Vermoesen, R. and A. De Bie (2008). "Boeren en hun relaties op het Vlaamse platteland (1750-1800)." *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 121(2): 430-445.

9.2.2 Assimilation through a lack of dependency relations

According to the existing literature and research on rural elites, the main characteristic of this group was the fact that their neighbours were dependent on them. The ‘*coqs de village*’ elite model, for the Low Countries mainly described for eighteenth-century Inland Flanders, emphasises the fact that ordinary villagers truly needed the farmers’ elite, because they were the main link between them and the (urban) factor and commodity markets and the intermediary between village society as a whole and the lord, via officeholding.⁷³² These elite groups were economically much better-off, had a much stronger position when it came to interacting with the market and were able to accumulate resources. Perhaps the most intriguing and defining feature of a peasant elite, such as the Campine one, is the almost complete lack of this ‘traditional’ elite feature of strong hierarchical relationships of dependency. Their fellow-villagers were different from them in the fact that they had a less favourable position when it came to securing a livelihood, interacting with the market and steering the institutions that determined their lives, but they were not directly dependent on them. Our Campine independent peasants might have firmly controlled their own economic resources as well as the commons, combining this with a strong grip on village institutions, but – as this dissertation amply indicated – this by no means led to the creation of a dependent underclass.

If we look at what the historiography on rural elites suggests on the creation of economic dependency, several channels are mentioned⁷³³: the main ones are the credit market, the labour market and transport services. Formal and informal exchanges of credit, labour and transport were present in the Campine area as well. They were furthermore – on an institutional-organisational level – not that different from those in more commercial, more ‘polarised’ regions. However, we have not discovered any sign of the ‘unequal’ terms of trade that characterised the exchange of transport services, credit, land and labour transactions between the minority of larger farmers on the one hand and smallholders on the other, as in many other regions. Activity on the credit market or transport services (for instance in the long-distance trade to Antwerp), apparently did not create dependency, but primarily played a part in securing the independence of the Campine village top-layer and to sustain their peasant mode of life and the societal stability that was of paramount importance to them. When it came to the Campine credit and land market, it appeared that both of these mainly functioned as a mechanism to support a peasant lifestyle and life cycle. Especially in the fifteenth century, the independent peasants were overrepresented as factor market users, but no traces of accumulation of land or dependency through credit could be traced. Our image of the Campine labour market sadly remains rather vague. There might have been proto-industrial activities, linked to the elaborate Campine sheep-breeding industry, but basically, we just do not know. There are some indications that ‘poorer’ peasants made use of some seasonal labour possibilities on the few larger tenant farmers spread all over the Campine

⁷³² These processes were beautifully depicted in: Lambrecht, T. (2003). "Reciprocal exchange, credit and cash: agricultural labour markets and local economies in the Southern Low Countries during the eighteenth century." *Continuity and Change* 18(2): pp. 237-261 & Vermoesen, R. (2010). "Paardenboeren in Vlaanderen. Middelaars en commercialisering van de vroegmoderne rurale economie in de regio Aalst 1650-1800." *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis* 7(1): 3-37.

⁷³³ As can be found – for the Low Countries – in: Lambrecht, T. (2002). *Een grote hoeve in een klein dorp: relaties van arbeid en pacht op het Vlaamse platteland tijdens de 18e eeuw*. Gent, Academia Press & Vermoesen, R. (2008). *Markttoegang en ‘commerciële’ netwerken van rurale huishoudens: de regio Aalst, 1650-1800* History Department. Antwerp, University of Antwerp

region, but such farms were not present in every village, so we must not overestimate the labour dependency stemming from this. It seems furthermore highly unlikely that the independent peasants – never tilling farms larger than 10 hectares had a great need for additional extra-family labour. Perhaps some cottagers earned an additional income in sheep-herding (but there were far more cottagers than herds of sheep). Seasonal migration probably was more important as additional source of income for the Campine smallholders. For instance, the booming building industry of sixteenth century Antwerp needed a lot of skilled and unskilled labour, and might have attracted a lot of Campine labourers seeking for additional income but not (yet) prepared to leave their family land and migrate to the city. This seasonal migration and the function of cities as some sort of absorbent, might furthermore explain the relatively stable demography of the sixteenth century, as already indicated in chapter 1 (Table 1.2).

Historiography furthermore often indicated that elite-membership stemmed from an intermediary position, by acting as middlemen between ordinary villagers and the urban commodity market. A clear manifestation of this unequal exchange was the provision of transport services. The Inland Flanders '*coqs de village*' often transported peasant produce to the urban market in exchange for their labour, or bought up the harvest or linens of their neighbours to sell it in bulk on the urban markets. These '*coqs de village*' were furthermore the only ones able to maintain horses and a plough and often lent these to their fellow villagers, again in exchange for agricultural labour during seasonal peak periods. The Campine independent peasants did indeed often own horses, carriages and ploughs, so it is theoretically possible that the Campine independent peasants indeed acted as middlemen, bringing goods to the market or lending out ploughs. However, there are reasons to assume such provisioning of labour services to the smallholding cottagers was not particularly relevant. Even if less well-off villagers would have resorted to the Campine independent peasants to borrow a plough or to deliver their goods to the market, this in all likelihood resulted in a different kind of relationship. In Flemish villages one, two or three tenant farmers were the ones 'offering' these services, whereas in Campine villages up to half of the village owned at least half a plough or a horse. The social gap between the Campine independent peasants and the smallholders was also much smaller than in Inland Flanders, with its clearly distinguished elite of horse-owning farmers, and a huge mass of smallholders which depended on the large farms for both their agricultural and proto-industrial activities.

So, the fact that the Campine independent peasants were able to distinguish themselves economically from their less well-off counterparts does not translate itself in economic dependency of said fellow-villagers. And the same more or less holds true for socio-political dependency as well. Because even though Campine independent peasants firmly controlled the formal institutions governing the village community and its commons, this did not imply that they had a totalitarian grip on village life – quite the contrary! A first indication of this can be found in the discourse that can be found in village byelaws, which very much emphasised village unity and the need for the – albeit passive – participation of all community members. More to the point in the actual practice of village government, particularly with regards to the management of the village commons, there was quite some room for ordinary villagers to have their say. Furthermore, villages had quite a number of (often more informal) mechanisms that allowed for a relatively broad participation in local politics. So, even though the independent peasantry formally controlled village institutions, this does not mean that ordinary villagers

were completely dependent on their decision-making. Although the evidence on political practices in the Campine villages is very limited, we sometimes get a glimpse of an elaborate culture of consultation and negotiation in the villages, for instance in Rijkevorsel when a majority of the villagers of Rijkevorsel agreed with the payment of a new tax, but a small but significant minority dissented. Village politics and social life were a process rather than a given; negotiations and disputes were an integral part of village life.

9.3 A Campine convivium: explaining stability and continuity

Within this dissertation, I have not only tried to propound a typology for village elites in a peasant society characterised by smallholders and a communal way of living, I have also formulated the ambition to look for an explanation for the remarkable stability of the Campine area's economic, social and political structures and determine the part played by the village's upper layer. In the preceding paragraphs, I argued that there was indeed a distinguishable top-layer within all Campine villages. What made them different was first and foremost their independence, implying that they were able to design their own lives, economically, socially and politically. What they did not do was create dependency. The relationship between these independent peasants and their somewhat less well-off counterparts was thus characterised by a relative symbiosis. Even though the independent peasants made up 25 to 30 percent of village society, the large mass of village population was a force not easily neglected. Within Campine society, several mechanisms were present to secure a stable and peaceful cohabitation or *convivium* between micro-smallholders, cottagers and independent peasants. Campine society was not characterized by an omnipotent group pulling all the economic and political strings, but by a precious social balance, created through an ongoing negotiation process.

These Campine structures were formed during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when there was an acceleration in Campine development. It was a period of radical upheaval and growth. The Campine area witnessed a significant population growth, partly due an influx of 'colonists'.⁷³⁴ Settlement underwent important changes as well, with a pronounced '*encellulement*'⁷³⁵ of Campine society forged by new elites (including the Premonstratensian and Cistercian abbeys, and of course the Duke of Brabant (previously only count of Louvain), who extended his grip on the area. The latter's political and economic strategy of founding new villages and towns – *nova oppida* – in the Campine area has been carefully reconstructed by Willy Steurs.⁷³⁶ Villages – as we know them nowadays – relocated to stream valleys – and a mixed farming system with intensive arable production and extensive animal breeding on the increasingly institutionalised commons, partly aimed at urban markets, emerged.⁷³⁷ In the

⁷³⁴ Leenders, K. A. H. W. (2002). "Het dynamische landschap van Noord-Brabant." *Noordbrabants Historisch Jaarboek* 19: 55-58

⁷³⁵ Fossier, R. (1982). *Enfance de l'Europe. Aspects économiques et sociaux*, PUF.

⁷³⁶ See for example: Steurs, W. (1993). *Naissance d'une région: aux origines de la mairie de Bois-le-Duc: recherches sur le Brabant septentrional aux 12e et 13e siècles*. Bruxelles, Académie Royale de Belgique.

⁷³⁷ Spek, T. and Vangheluwe D. (2008). "De laatmiddeleeuwse transitie van landbouw en landschap in de Noord-Brabantse Kempen." *Historisch-geografisch Tijdschrift* 26(1): pp. 1-23. & Steurs, W. (1993). *Naissance d'une région: aux origines de la mairie de Bois-le-Duc: recherches sur le Brabant septentrional aux 12e et 13e siècles*. Bruxelles, Académie Royale de Belgique.

fifteenth and sixteenth century the Campine structures were therefore well-established, as was the Campine convivium that – in all likelihood – also came into being in this formative period.

In this dissertation several mechanisms were identified by which this convivium was secured and maintained during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. These mainly ensured the survival of less well-off groups in society, thus securing a relative peace and quiet in the community. Furthermore, these also functioned as a vent, allowing cottagers and micro-smallholders a say in village life. These cottagers and smallholders are, for that matter, the great enigma of Campine society. They have left only traces in the archives, allowing us only a glimpse of the great unidentified mass that constituted the ‘other half’ of the Campine convivium. Thus, unfortunately, the overwhelming majority of Campine villagers – constituting up to 70 percent of village population – is knowable only via sources established by the upper 30 percent. Their economic and political strategies stay largely under the radar. Some sources allow us scrape away the polish of formal unanimity and find traces of dissent and negotiation, but the image remains rather patchy. An extra factor is of course that this social group was in all likelihood a lot more ‘fluid’ than the independent peasants, more likely to (seasonally) migrate to neighbouring villages or the cities, in search of an income, thus leaving less of a mark on village society. However, the Campine village elites clearly took their neighbours into consideration, as this dissertation amply proved.

The first and most visible mechanism is the use of the village commons. The Campine commons were relatively inclusive. A combination of normative sources and sources shedding light on the daily use of the commons clearly indicated that virtually all villagers made use of this institution. The commons were clearly not equalizing, since the independent peasants benefitted to a larger extent. But the fact that the commons were easily accessible to all villagers, in all likelihood played an essential part in securing the survival of ‘poorer’ peasants.

Another mechanism propping up less well-off inhabitants might have been the village allotment of stately taxation. When comparing fiscal inequality with actual inequality, as derived from the sixteenth-century *penningkohieren*, it appeared that the fiscal Gini’s based on stately taxation (fluctuating around 0.60) were significantly higher than the ‘actual’ ones, based on land use (fluctuating around 0.50-0.55). Especially the upper three deciles (corresponding with the independent peasants) bore a significant part of the village tax burden. I hypothesised that this implied that these independent peasants paid more than would be proportionate to their actual wealth in order to lessen the burden for their fellow villagers. Taxation allotment therefore functioned as a redistribution mechanism. Solidarity might have been one motivation, but it might also have been a way to conciliate their neighbours and thus secure order and stability. This rather ‘progressive’ character of Campine taxation, also warns us against an uncritical comparison of fiscal inequalities. If we only look at the fiscal data, the Campine area would come across as impressively unequal, but by delving deeper the underlying mechanisms point to a different story.

Poor relief also played a significant part in the Campine convivium. According to the hearth counts, up to 20 percent of all villagers was considered poor – which is linked with the large group of micro-smallholders within Campine villages. Campine poor relief was relatively elaborate. This was a characteristic of Inland Flanders’ poor relief as well, suggesting that it was quite common for poor relief in peasant regions, although further research is needed to make firmer statements. Yet again, this probably served as a mechanism to ensure societal stability. Furthermore, the relatively small distance between elites and their neighbours played

a part as well. Even better-off peasants might benefit from an elaborate poor relief, since they faced the perennial risk of hardship in old age or due to the vagaries of the peasant life cycle. Poor relief, thus secured the survival of the lower groups, while at the same time underwriting a peaceful cohabitation.

It is also worth mentioning that a more external factor, namely the (urban) labour market – and thus the late medieval and early modern cities – might also have been fairly relevant to the survival of the Campine lower groups and for stability within Campine communities. I have suggested that seasonal labour in, for example the booming building industry of Antwerp might have been a survival strategy of sixteenth-century Campine commoners. It is equally possible that Campiners worked in the textile industries of the regional towns, or those of Antwerp itself. There is no hard evidence for the existence of pre-seventeenth-century proto-industrial activities, but the option cannot be excluded. This obviously raises questions on the impact of the decline of Antwerp after 1585 on the Campine area. Since the structural features of this region remained intact well after the early modern period, it would seem that the Campine inhabitants found alternative sources of income, perhaps by focussing on the above-mentioned proto-industrial activities. However, without further research, this remains a mere hypothesis.

The fifteenth- and sixteenth-century economic, political and institutional changes thus did indeed permeate the Campine area, but their impact was filtered through the region's specific social structures and the social balance arising from these. As such, that these new institutions were used within the framework of a peasant life cycle. Partly of course, this was due to the fact that no (social) group **could** breach this specific balance and these structures. Campine lords nor urban landowners had enough grip on the Campine communities to do their bidding. The only attempt to enclose a part of the commons for commercial purposes, carried out by the entourage of Mary of Hungary in the 1550s, failed miserably. The Campine cottagers and micro-smallholders were strong in numbers but perhaps not quite strong enough to achieve profound changes. Some of them might have fostered some hope of climbing up the social ladder, since – due to the specificities of the peasant life-cycle – the lines between social groups might have been rather blurred. Social mobility *an sich* was not addressed in this dissertation, since fifteenth- and sixteenth-century sources do not really allow us to follow families or households through time. Since the Campine convivium ensured their continued survival – more or less, at least – they might furthermore not have felt the need to make the attempt. The Campine independent peasants were perhaps not able to substantially change these structures, since they had to take into account their lords and fellow-villagers, but one could ask: why would they want to change it in the first place? This dissertation amply proved that they were the main beneficiaries of the system as it was, since it was firmly embedded within a peasant life cycle model, securing the survival and independence of this specific group and reducing the risks that were an integral part of peasant life, while at the same time ensuring a 'peaceful' cohabitation with fellow-villagers. Because of this, these Campine 'leaders of the pack' can easily be identified as the main custodians of the remarkably stable Campine model.

There are some indications that this continued to hold true throughout the seventeenth and even the eighteenth century. Research on the late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Campine area suggest that even then several structural features were still present, even though societal evolutions were gnawing at the edges. Smallholding remained absolutely dominant

and the division of property was still less outspokenly unequal of than in more commercial regions (notably Inland Flanders) and still quite similar to that of the sixteenth century. Leasehold remained a minor phenomenon, although it slightly increased with 40 percent of parcels leased out in 1850.⁷³⁸ The common waste was still a dominant factor, although from 1772 onwards increasingly enclosed and exploited. Mixed farming was still predominant, but the relevance of sheep as 'commercial animals' had all but disappeared. It seems that activities in the textiles industries might have been the most important commercial activity, even though its exact importance greatly differed in between villages.⁷³⁹ The impact of these differences (textile-oriented vs. agriculture-oriented) and its implications for social stratification and especially dependency relations. There are some indications that at least the poor relief aspect of the social convivium remained in operation. During the potato crisis of the 1840's Campine poor relief was quite able to react, propped up by monetary support from the village government.⁷⁴⁰ The precise extent and characteristics of village elites in this period remains largely under the radar, although the scarce studies focussing on this aspect tend to suggest a trend towards a more oligarchic formal government.⁷⁴¹ Informal arrangements however have not been addressed, even though seventeenth- and eighteenth-century source material would make this possible. However, due to population growth, the industrialisation process and the slow, but increasing disintegration of common land and communal structures, the Campine system did indeed have to give in, finally disappearing in the second half of the nineteenth century.

9.4 The Campine area as a laboratory for subaltern history

The Campine area was of course not the only communally organised peasant region, following an alternative path of development. Communal traditions, and agricultural and peasant societies survived and even blossomed in the whole of (Western) Europe. This does not imply that all of these regions were interchangeable. Each peasant region was, to a certain extent, stratified in its own way. Detailed research into the social stratification of peasant regions is still rather rare, but we know for example that access rights to common land could be very unequally divided in different regions sharing a similar ecological background and similar economic strategies. In the Norfolk Brecklands for example, a region with the same ecological characteristics as the Campine area and a communal organisation of land, lords tended to informally monopolise sheep-breeding on the commons after the Black Death. In the Geest region, yet again a region with the same basic outlay in present-day Germany and Denmark, society and commons were dominated by the Hūfner, those owning the originally founded

⁷³⁸ Thoen, E. and E. Vanhaute (1999). The 'Flemish Husbandry' at the edge: the farming system on small holdings in the middle of the 19th century. B. J. P. Van Bavel and E. Thoen. (eds.). *Land productivity and agro-systems in the North Sea area. Middle Ages - 20th century. Elements for comparison*. Turnhout, Brepols: 271-295

⁷³⁹ Vanhaute, E. (1990). *De invloed van de groei van het industrieel kapitalisme en van de centrale staat op een agrarisch grensgebied: de Noorderkempen in de 19de eeuw (1750-1910)*. Brussel, Gemeentekrediet: 180-188

⁷⁴⁰ Vanhaute, E. (2010). "De schrikkelijke hongersnood is genadig afgewend. Waarom de Kempen in de jaren 1840 niet verhongerden." *Taxandria*. LXXXII: 255-267

⁷⁴¹ Vanhaute, E. (1990). *De invloed van de groei van het industrieel kapitalisme.*: 224-229 & Van den Branden, W. (1988). "De schout of officier van de landsheer te Lille, Wechelderzande en Vlimmeren." *Jaarboek van de Heemkundige Kring Norbert De Vrijter*: 57-99.

farms⁷⁴², something which also holds true for the *marken* in Drenthe.⁷⁴³ The Campine area lacked such clear juridical delimitation of the elite of *Hüfner* and '*gewaarden*', and such an institutional difference did indeed have an impact on social stratification. This is already an indication that even within peasant societies with commons, stratification might have differed according to certain socio-institutional features.

Nonetheless, research does indeed point to one feature that pops up in most – if not all – of these societies. It seems that in peasant-dominated regions, farm sizes – the classical proxy to reconstruct inequality in the countryside – are not all-important. Differences in the amount of (arable) land obviously mattered, but it were the extra economic strategies that really distinguished the peasant upper-layers from their neighbours. For the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Campine independent peasants this strategy was clearly sheep-breeding, something which was also relevant in seventeenth-century Drenthe. Later on, the Drenthe elite turned to horse-breeding⁷⁴⁴, something which was also part of the economic portfolio of the peasant elite of Western-Slovenia.⁷⁴⁵ These same Slovenian peasants also engaged in mining activities, as did their Swedish counterparts.⁷⁴⁶ And for the Alpine peasants dairy farming was the crucial activity.⁷⁴⁷ Combined with the specific institutional structures and the room for power and control they created, these were the fundamentals of peasant elite belonging. However, more thorough, comparative research on peasant elites is needed to elaborate this somewhat sketchy image.

All in all, these regions have not yet received the attention they deserve. The main plot of the story on European development strongly focuses on evolutions leading to what Pomeranz labels 'the Great Divergence'⁷⁴⁸: the isolation of elements in pre-modern European economy and society which might explain its capacity of producing 'modern' economic growth and its ascendance to world supremacy. In an agrarian economy, such elements include the development of competitive markets for land and labour, easy access to credit, secure property rights, profit maximizing mechanisms, juridically sanctioned rights of association and cooperation, etc. Such research agenda has privileged the study of commercial rural regions which embarked on a transition to capitalism in an early stage and functioned as hubs of economic development, innovation and modernity. The Campine storyline – and that of other, communal, peasant regions is only a subplot, but an important one. It makes clear that there was another societal model, equally possible within a general context of change and development. Campine society was not based on the primacy of private property and profit. The continued existence of communal structures and stability were crucial and the main concern of the village elites, as its main stakeholders. Stability and a relatively broad

⁷⁴² De Keyzer, M. (2013). "The impact of different distributions of power on access rights to the common wastelands: the Campine, Brecklands and Geest compared." *Journal of Institutional Economics* 9(4): 517-542.

⁷⁴³ Van Zanden, J. L. (1999). "The paradox of the Marks. The exploitation of commons in the eastern Netherlands, 1250-1850." *The Agricultural History Review* 47(2): 125-144

⁷⁴⁴ As is described in: Bieleman, J. (1987). *Boeren op het Drentse zand*

⁷⁴⁵ Panjek, A. (2012). *Land Reclamation in Pre-Industrial Societies: Economics and Sustainability. Reclamation of commons in an integrated rural economy: Preindustrial Western Slovenia (An Alpine area)*. World Economic History Congress. Stellenbosch: 3-4

⁷⁴⁶ Ahrland, A. (2013). *Gardens as exponents of rural elites. Peasant miners and ironmasters in Sweden. 1600-1830*. Lecture on the Rural History Conference. Berne, 19/08/2013

⁷⁴⁷ Vivier, N. (2013). Conflicts about commons and management of common land in western Alpine regions, 18th-19th century. Lecture on the Rural History Conference. Berne, 19/08/2013

⁷⁴⁸ Pomeranz, K. (2000). *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the making of the Modern World Economy*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.

participation were not only a matter of discourse – as they were in urban and commercial environments – but had a practical component. As this dissertation amply proved, the Campine area was characterised by inequality as well, but the specifics of society's structures and the interests of the broad peasant elite, explain why – relative – stability was indeed the watchword. This societal model proved to be rather resilient, maintaining the same structural features up until modernity knocked at the door. The experiences of Campine peasants of the past can therefore be seen as relevant for present-day subaltern groups, The Campine area, and the manifold other peasant regions in pre-modern Europe, can serve as a laboratory for a 'subaltern' history. The Campine area illustrates, first and foremost that it was possible – for a society and for its members – to avert from the dominant route of history, focussed on commercialisation and growth, and turn into a side-street with its own logic, its own reason and its own attractions.

APPENDIX

Fig A.1. Land transactions in Rijkevorsel (1465-1585)

Note: for the periods 1489-1492 / 1514-1516 / 1547-1550 no registers were preserved

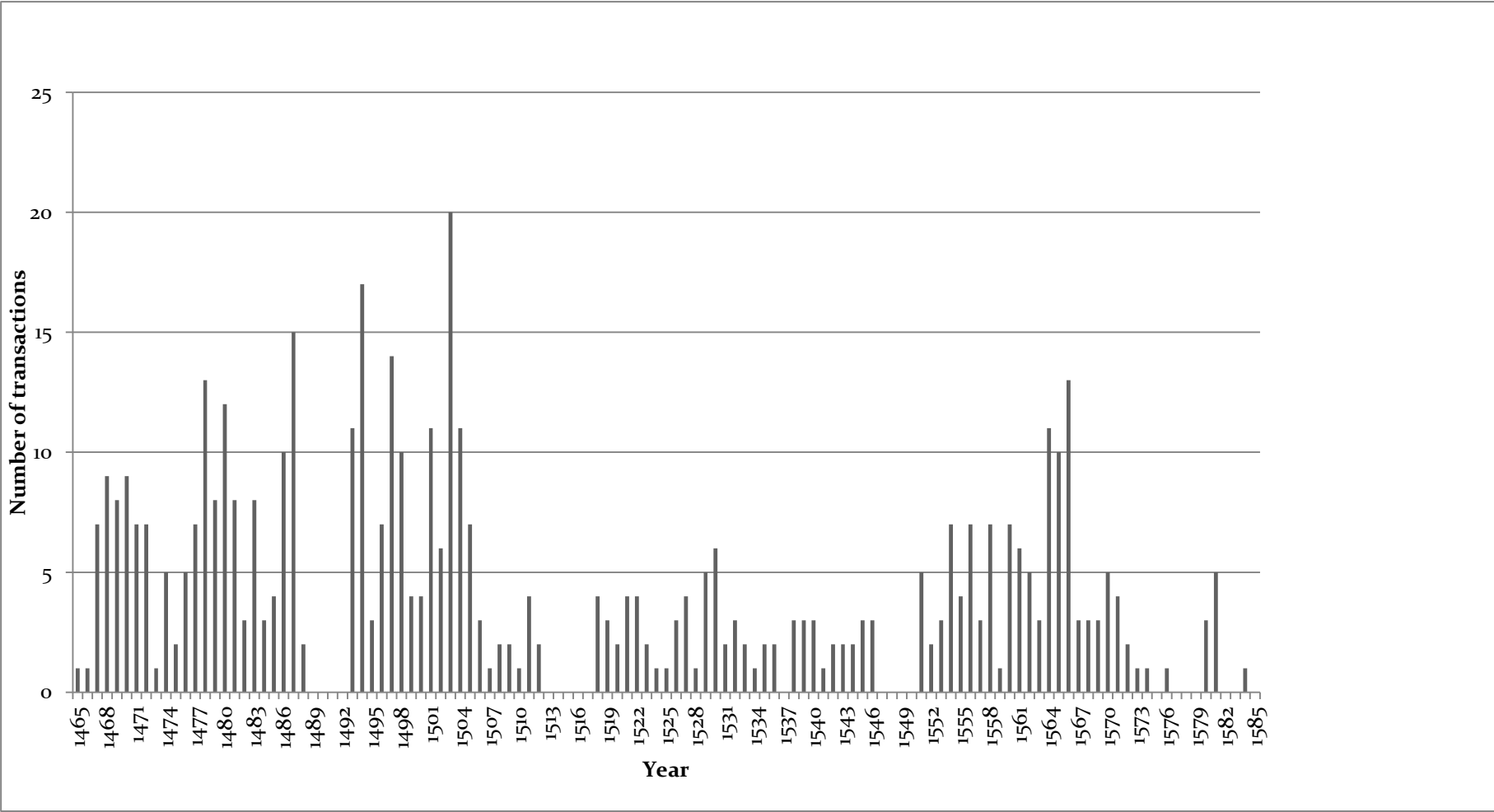


Fig A.2. Land transactions in Gierle (1471-1558)

Note: for the periods 1498-1512 & 1535-1537 no registers were preserved

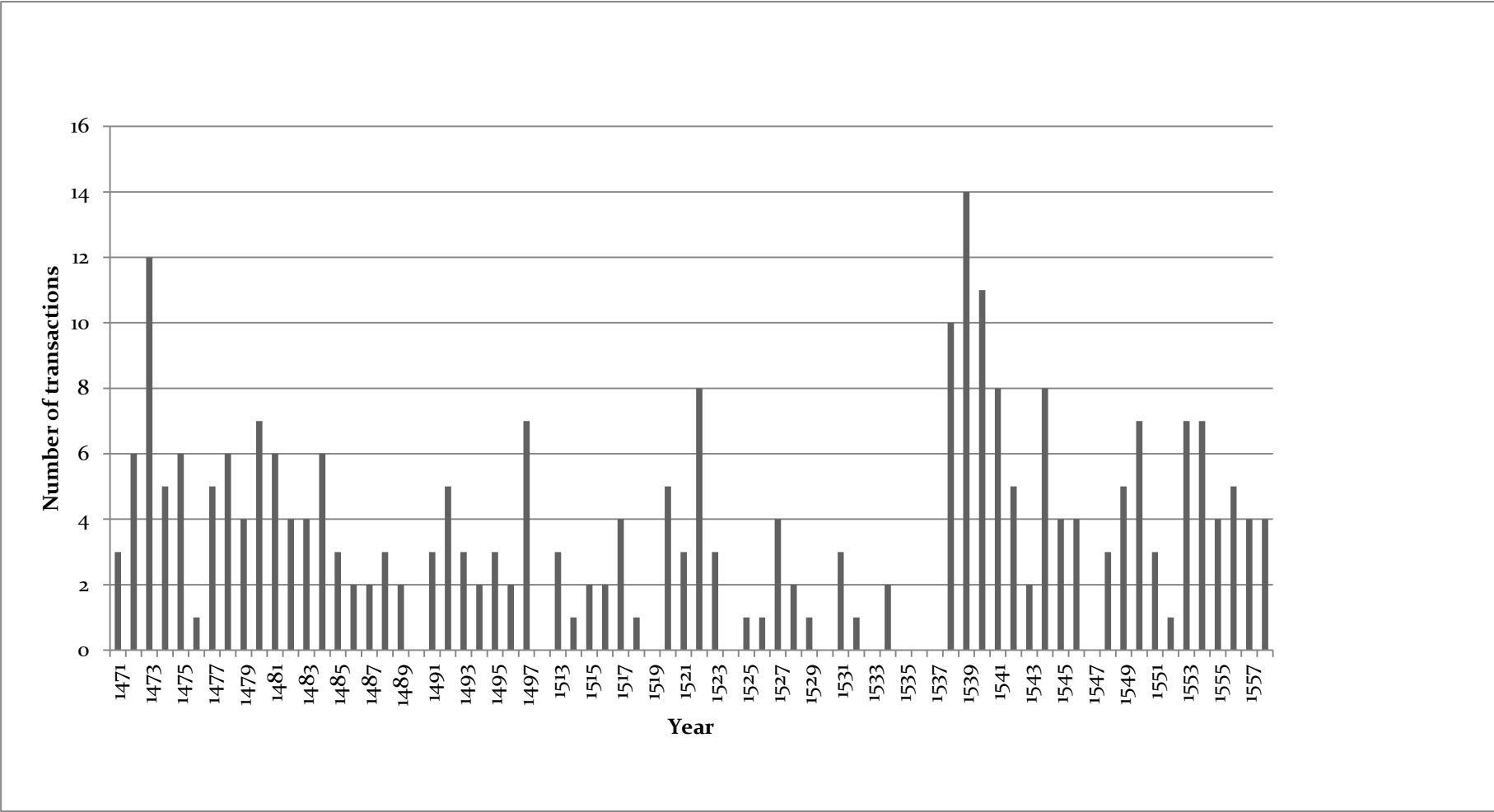


Fig A.3. Credit transactions in Rijkevorsel (1465-1585)

Note: for the periods 1489-1492 / 1514-1516 / 1547-1550 no registers were preserved

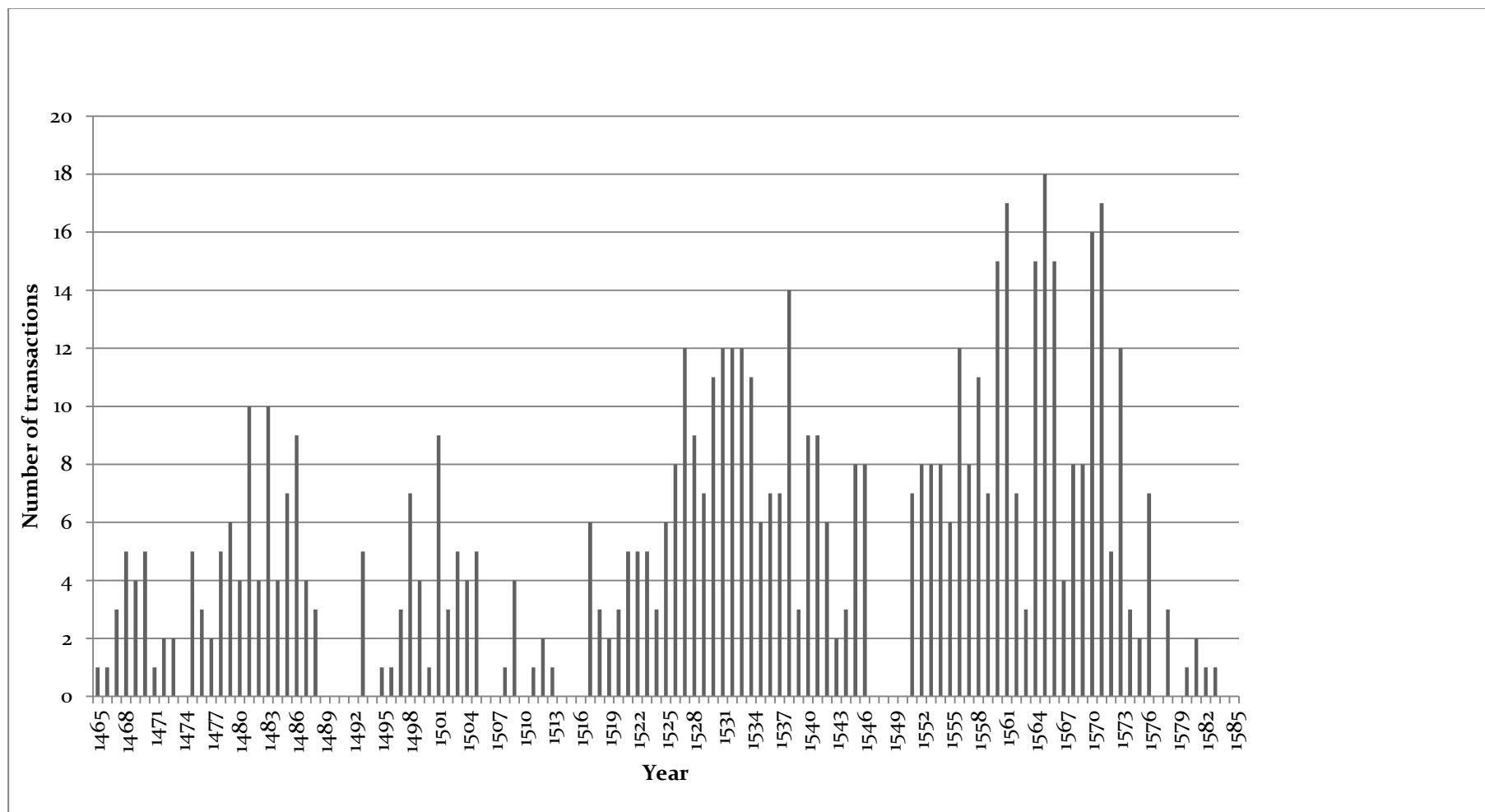


Fig A.4. Credit transactions in Gierle

Note: for the periods 1498-1512 & 1535-1537 no registers were preserved

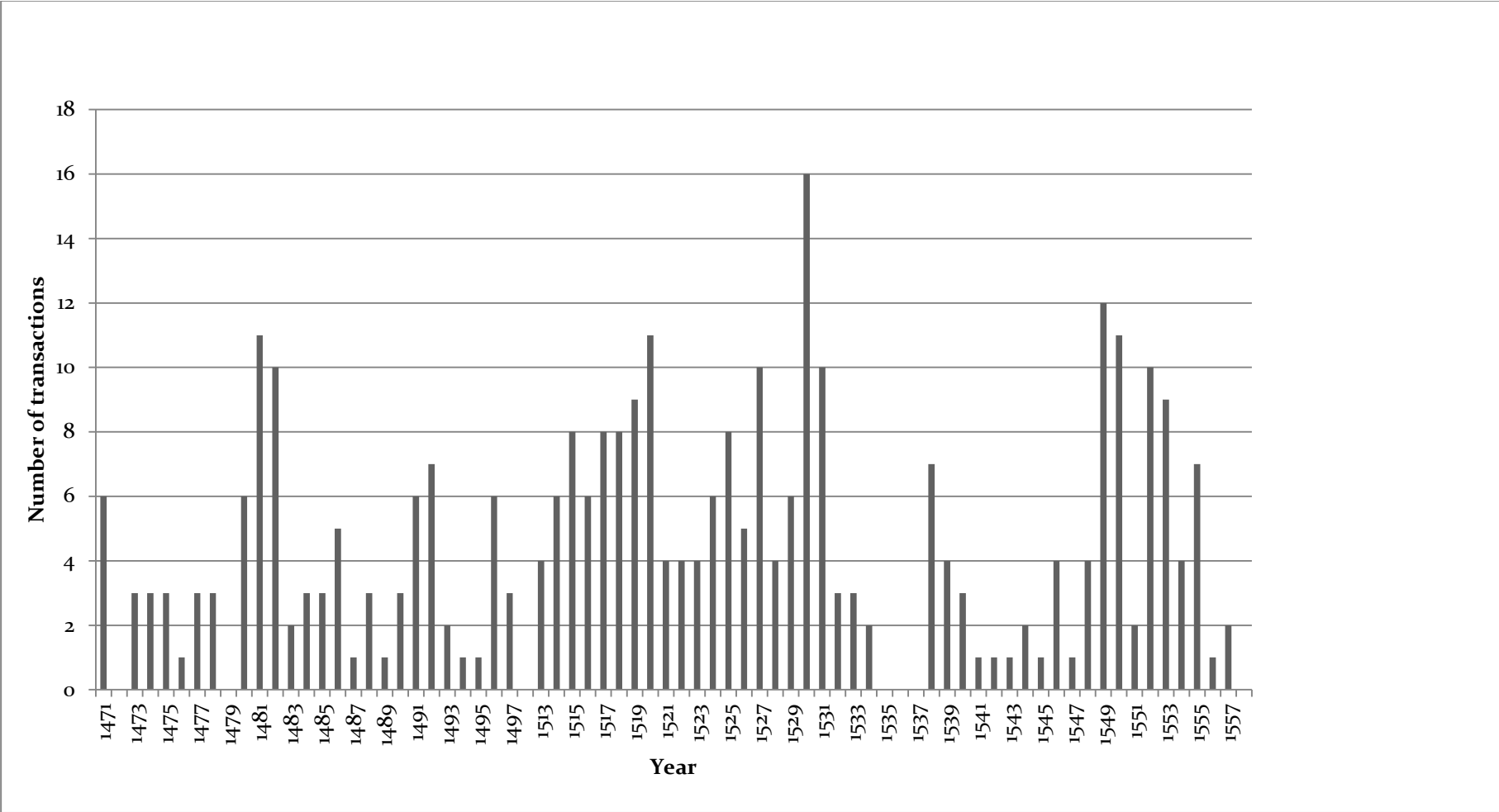


Table A.1. Economic position of land market participants (sellers / buyers vs. total population, based on tax registers), Rijkevorsel, 1464-1485

	Sellers	Buyers	Total population
Continuously Q₁	8 (25.8%)	6 (16.7%)	128 (25.39%)
Continuously Q₂	3 (9.7%)	2 (5.6%)	60 (11.90%)
Continuously Q₃	2 (6.5%)	2 (5.6%)	69 (13.69%)
Continuously Q₄	3 (9.7%)	13 (36.1%)	71 (14.09%)
highest Q's⁷⁴⁹	7 (22.6%)	6 (16.7%)	46 (9.13%)
lowest Q's⁷⁵⁰	1 (3.2%)	3 (8.2%)	57 (11.31%)
middle Q's⁷⁵¹	7 (22.6%)	4 (11.1%)	38 (7.54%)

⁷⁴⁹ People with positions (based on tax registers 1465-1485) fluctuating between Q₃ and Q₄

⁷⁵⁰ People with positions (based on tax registers 1465-1485) fluctuating between Q₂ and Q₃

⁷⁵¹ People with positions (based on tax registers 1465-1485) fluctuating between Q₁ and Q₂

Table A.2. Economic position of land market participators (sellers/buyers vs. total population, based on *peningkohier*), Gierle, 1538-1558

	Sellers	Buyers	Total population
< 1 ha	5 (33,33%)	6 (24%)	69 (36,51%)
1-3 ha	2 (13,33%)	9 (36%)	52 (27,51%)
3-5 ha	3 (20%)	4 (16%)	24 (12,70%)
5-10 ha	5 (33,33%)	3 (12%)	21 (11,11%)
≥ 10 ha	0 (0%)	3 (12%)	11 (5,82%)

Table A.3. Economic position of credit market participants (sellers / buyers vs. total population, based on tax registers), Rijkevorsel, 1464-1485

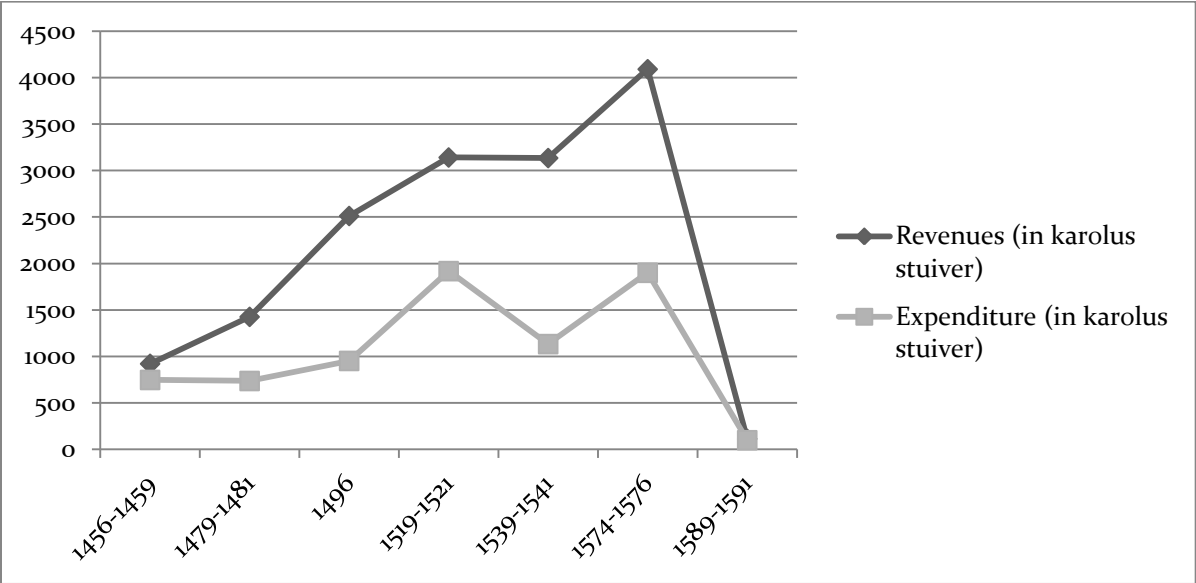
	Creditors	Debtors	Total population
Continuously Q1	4 (18.2%)	3 (16.7%)	128 (25.39%)
Continuously Q2	1 (4.5%)	0 (0.0%)	60 (11.90%)
Continuously Q3	5 (22.7%)	3 (16.7%)	69 (13.69%)
Continuously Q4	6 (27.3%)	5 (27.7%)	71 (14.09%)
Highest Q's	3 (13.6%)	2 (11.1%)	46 (9.13%)
Lowest Q's	1 (4.5%)	1 (5.6%)	57 (11.31%)

Middle Q's	2 (9.2%)	4 (22.2%)	38 (7.54%)
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Table A.4. Economic position of credit market participators (sellers / buyers vs. total population, based on *peningkohier*), Gierle, 1538-1558

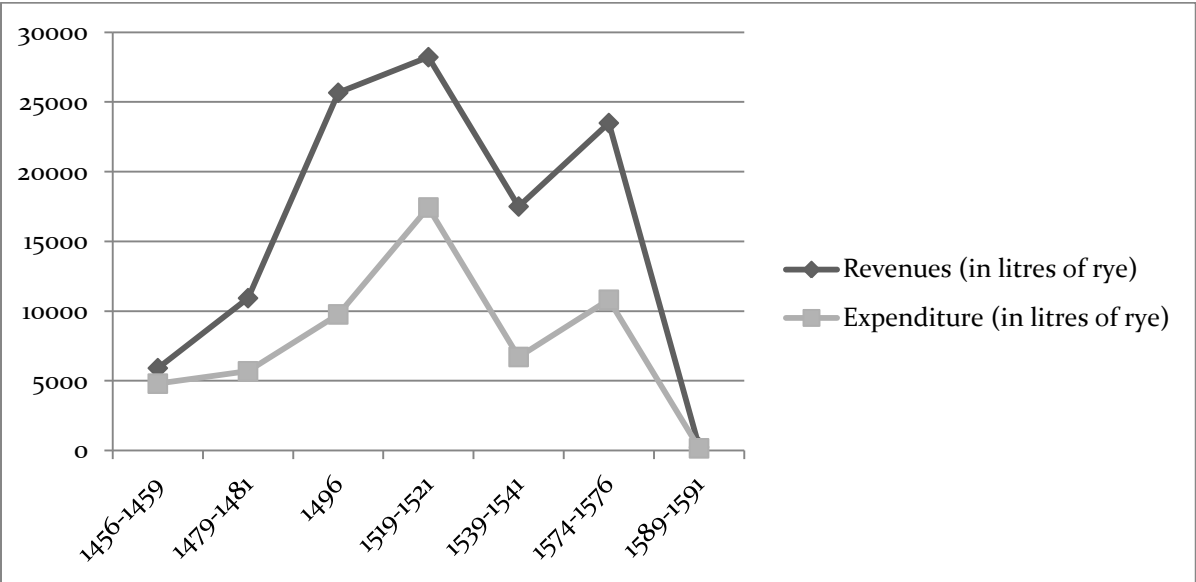
	Creditors	Debtors	Total population
< 1 ha	4 (23,53%)	6 (22,22%)	69 (36,51%)
1-3 ha	3 (17,65%)	8 (29,63%)	52 (27,51%)
3-5 ha	4 (23,53%)	1 (3,70%)	24 (12,70%)
5-10 ha	5 (29,41%)	10 (37,04%)	21 (11,11%)
≥ 10 ha	1 (5,88%)	2 (7,41%)	11 (5,82%)

Fig A.5. Revenues and expenditure of the Lede Holy Ghost table (Inland Flanders), in species (karolus stuiver)



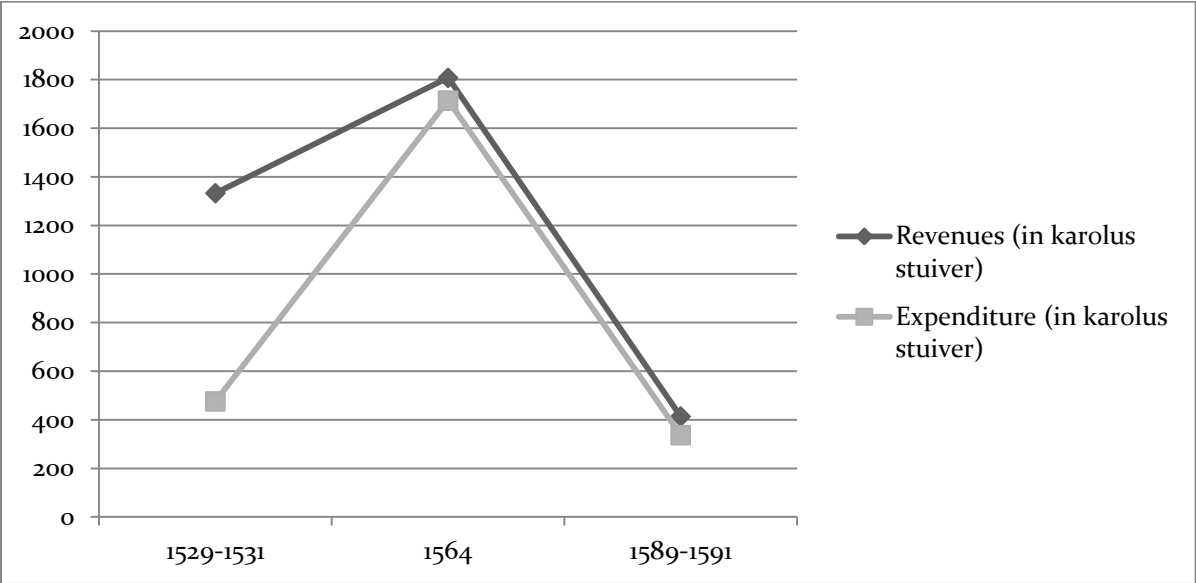
Sources: RAB, GO23, 471-503. 1456-1591. (processed by Hadewijch Masure). Rye prices: van der Wee, H. (1963). *The growth of the Antwerp market and the European economy (fourteenth-sixteenth centuries)*. The Hague, Nijhoff, processed by Jord Hanus.

Fig A.6. Revenues and expenditure of the Lede Holy Ghost table (Inland Flanders), in kind (litres of rye)



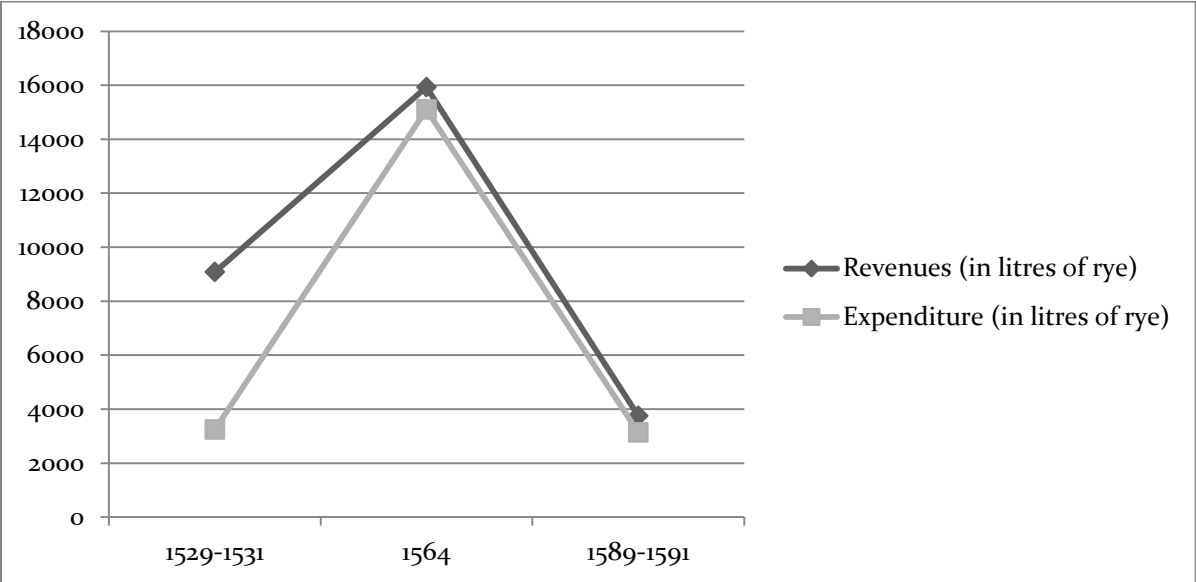
Sources: RAB, GO23, 471-503. 1456-1591. (processed by Hadewijch Masure). Rye prices: van der Wee, H. (1963). *The growth of the Antwerp market and the European economy (fourteenth-sixteenth centuries)*. The Hague, Nijhoff, processed by Jord Hanus.

Fig A.7. Revenues and expenditure of the Oostkerke Holy Ghost table (Coastal Flanders), in species (*karolus stuiver*)



Sources: RABr, TBO32, 149-154. 1530-1590. (processed by Hadewijch Masure). Rye prices: van der Wee, H. (1963). *The growth of the Antwerp market and the European economy (fourteenth-sixteenth centuries)*. The Hague, Nijhoff, processed by Jord Hanus.

Fig A.8. Revenues and expenditure of the Oostkerke Holy Ghost table (Coastal Flanders), in kind (litres of rye)



Sources: RABr, TBO32, 149-154. 1530-1590. (processed by Hadewijch Masure). Rye prices: van der Wee, H. (1963). *The growth of the Antwerp market and the European economy (fourteenth-sixteenth centuries)*. The Hague, Nijhoff, processed by Jord Hanus.

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Abbreviations

AAT: Archives of the Abbey of Tongerlo

ARA: *Algemeen Rijksarchief* = National Archives of Belgium (Brussels)

RAA: *Rijksarchief Antwerpen* = State Archives in Antwerp

RAAnd: *Rijksarchief Anderlecht* = State Archives in Brussels (Anderlecht)

RAB: *Rijksarchief Beveren* = State Archives in Beveren

RABr: *Rijksarchief Brugge* = State Archives in Brugge

RAM: *Rijksarchief Mons* = State Archives in Mons

SA: *Stadsarchief* = City Archive

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DUTCH SUMMARY

De dorpsgemeenschappen in de vijftiende- en zestiende-eeuwse Kempen werden gedomineerd door klein boerenbezit en gekenmerkt door sterk uitgebouwde communale verbanden, die nauw samengingen met de alomtegenwoordige gemene gronden, die tot het einde van het Ancien Regime het Kempische landschap bleven domineren. De vraag die centraal stond in deze thesis was dan ook: hoe zag een elite eruit in een echte 'peasant'-samenleving, waar veel minder ruimte was voor distinctie en de creatie van afhankelijkheidsverbanden dan in meer gepolariseerde samenlevingen. Wat waren de kenmerken van een dorpselite in een regio als de Kempen? En wat was de link tussen het specifieke karakter van Kempische dorpselites en de stabiliteit en continuïteit die de Kempen als regio kenmerkt, van de late middeleeuwen tot de negentiende eeuw?

Een eerste stap in het beantwoorden van deze vragen was de reconstructie van de precieze manoeuvreerruimte die deze dorpsgemeenschappen precies ter beschikking hadden. De feodale / heerlijke druk op deze samenlevingen was bijvoorbeeld eerder beperkt. De feodale structuur was sterk verbrokeld, wat de greep van heren op deze dorpen sterk inperkte. Heerlijke lasten waren ook eerder beperkt; de enige significante last was het maalgeld dat moest betaald worden bij gebruik van de banmolens. Hetzelfde kan gezegd worden over de druk (i.c. belastingsdruk) van de 'prille' Bourgondische en Habsburgse staat. De som die dorpsgemeenschappen als geheel moesten ophoesten was veeleer bescheiden te noemen en vormde slechts een zeer beperkt deel van het gemiddelde boereninkomen. Enkel in crisisjaren was de betaling van heerlijke en statelijke lasten vermoedelijk een hele uitdaging en een echt probleem.

We weten dus dat de dorpsgemeenschappen als geheel heel wat manoeuvreerruimte hadden, maar dat betekent natuurlijk niet dat ieder lid van de gemeenschap daar op dezelfde manier van kon profiteren. Sociale ongelijkheid was een factor van belang – ook in peasant samenlevingen. Het reconstrueren van de sociale structuur en het identificeren van verschillende sociale groepen (waaronder ook de dorpselite) bleek dus absoluut essentieel. De reconstructie van bezitsverhoudingen is de beste manier om hier licht op te werken. Drie verschillende groepen konden onderscheiden worden. Allereerst een groep van 'micro-smallholders', die minder dan 1 hectare bewerkten, ver onder het subsistentieniveau zaten, wat vermoedelijk betekende dat ze nood hadden aan een substantieel additioneel inkomen en sterk afhankelijk waren van de gemene gronden. Vervolgens een groep die ik labelde als 'cottagers', die tussen 1 en 3 hectare bewerkten, wat nog steeds een additioneel inkomen noodzakelijk maakte, zeker in tijden van crisis. Beide groepen maakten ongeveer 30 procent uit van de dorpsgemeenschap, al verschilde het exacte aantal enigszins van dorp tot dorp. Dan waren er de peasants die meer dan 3 hectare bewerkten, waarvan een groot deel zelfs meer dan 5 of 10 hectare. Het grootste deel van dit land was cijnsgrond, wat betekent dat deze boeren een zeer sterke greep hadden op alvast dit productiemiddel. Deze independent peasants bewerkten voldoende land om zichzelf van voedsel te voorzien en waren ook de ultieme 'mixed farmers', aangezien hun bedrijven deels uit akkerland en deels uit weiland samengesteld waren. Deze groep was de echte elite van de Kempische dorpsamenlevingen.

Deze reële ongelijkheid vertaalde zich ook in fiscale ongelijkheid, maar niet letterlijk. De Gini-coëfficiënten op basis van belastinglijsten schommelden rond 0.6, terwijl die op basis van grondgebruik ongeveer 0.5 bedroegen. Ik schoof de hypothese naar voor dat de rijkste 30 procent van het dorp - wat ruwweg overeenstemt met de groep van independent peasants - meer bijdroeg aan de dorpsbelastingen dan hun eigenlijke bezit vereiste. Op die manier speelden de pre-moderne belastingen een rol als embryonaal herverdelingsmechanisme, wat ook in het belang was van de elite zelf, aangezien die zo orde en stabiliteit binnen hun gemeenschap konden garanderen.

Toch rustte de positie van deze elite niet enkel op hun grondbezit, de 3 C's waren minstens even belangrijk: controle over de commons, commerciële activiteiten en controle over de dorpsgemeenschap. Deze aspecten kwamen dan ook ruimschoots aan bod. Wat de gemene gronden betrof, daar was het duidelijk dat deze 'independent peasants' heel wat voordeel haalden uit het gebruik van deze gemene gronden, meer dan hun burenen. Zij konden er maaien, turf halen en schapen laten grazen. En ze gebruikten de gemene gronden niet alleen, ze hadden ook de formele controle over het beheer in handen - samen met de vertegenwoordiger van de heer, de baljuw. Het formuleren van de regels en het controleren op de naleving ervan gebeurde voornamelijk door of onder het toezicht van deze groep. Deze formele dominantie vertelt echter niet het volledige verhaal. Op een informeel niveau was er wel wat onderhandelings- en manoeuvreerruimte en konden ook dorpingen uit lagere 'klassen' hun visie kenbaar maken, onder meer door symbolische acties.

De 'independent peasants' waren ook in staat om te profiteren van een zekere mate van marktintegratie. Vooral hun schapenbezit speelde een belangrijke rol op dit vlak. De independent peasants waren de belangrijkste schapenkwekers van de Kempische dorpen, vaak met kuddes van een 50 à 100 dieren. Hun vlees en wol konden deze groep van een belangrijke vorm van extra inkomsten voorzien. Deze groep was ook meer dan gemiddeld actief op de Kempische land- en kredietmarkten. Deze activiteiten waren echter niet gericht op accumulatie van land of kapitaal, en speelden dus geen rol in een polarisatieproces. Ze waren daarentegen vooral van belang in een peasant life-cycle model, bij het af- of opbouwen van een bedrijf en om in datzelfde bedrijf te investeren.

In een volgende hoofdstuk werd aandacht besteed aan de groep die in de traditionele historiografie vaak naar voor wordt geschoven als de ultieme economische plattelandselite: de pachtboeren. Pacht was een zeer beperkt fenomeen in de Kempen, waar nooit meer dan 25 procent van alle percelen werd verpacht. Grote pachthoeves waren ook niet ontzettend veelvoorkomend; vooral beperkt door de dorpen die toebehoorden aan de Abdij van Tongerlo en enkele andere kernen (Wuustwezel bijvoorbeeld, waar het Antwerpse Sint-Elisabethgasthuis een aantal hoeves verpachtte). Deze pachtboeren verschilden qua landbouwstrategie eigenlijk niet eens zo ontzettend van gewone Kempische peasants. Hun bedrijven waren natuurlijk veel groter, maar ook zij combineerden akkerbouw en veeteelt, en subsistentielandbouw (evenwel vooral gericht op het voorzien van landheer) met commerciële activiteiten, vooral gelinkt aan het kweken van vee en schapen. De landheer (i.c. de abdij van Tongerlo) speelde een zeer sturende rol in het voorschrijven van specifieke landbouwstrategieën, waardoor deze pachtboeren misschien wel minder onafhankelijk waren dan de echte peasant-elite. Deze pachtboeren waren zeker geen outsiders in de dorpsgemeenschap, ze waren vaak generaties lang aanwezig in bepaalde dorpen en speelden

vaak een rol in het dorpsleven, bijvoorbeeld als schepen. Toch slaagden ze er nooit in het dorpsleven compleet te domineren, dat bleef het 'voorrecht' van de independent peasants.

Deze independent peasants onderscheidden zich niet alleen op het economische vlak, door hun grote greep op hun eigen productiemiddelen, op de commons en door hun commerciële strategieën, ook hun (politieke en sociale) greep op het dorpsleven was bijzonder groot. Zeker op het formele-institutionele niveau controleerden zij de dorpsgemeenschap. Het *melior pars* van de Kempische samenleving – de 30 procent independent peasants – had een quasi-monopolie op schepenambten en op de functie van belastingsambtenaar. Dorpsbestuur en – administratie werden dus duidelijk sterk gedomineerd door deze groep. Maar, net zoals bij het bestuur van de Kempische gemene gronden was er een sterke informele participatiecomponent aanwezig. Er was verder ook duidelijk ruimte voor het uiten van afwijkende meningen, aangezien dus soms zelfs formeel werden genoteerd. Er waren dus duidelijk verschillende mechanismen aanwezig die 'lagere' sociale groepen toelieten om hun visie en bekommernissen duidelijk te maken, wat vermoedelijk ook essentieel was om orde en stabiliteit te vrijwaren.

Ook de sociale component van het dorpsleven werd in belangrijke mate door hen vormgegeven. Ze stuurden niet enkel de armenzorg, maar beheerden ook de kerkfabriek. Opnieuw werden de formele ambten gedomineerd door dezelfde groep independent peasants. Toch waren armenzorg en kerkelijke activiteiten behoorlijk inclusief. De Kempische armenzorg ondersteunde een relatief brede groep en was ook behoorlijk substantieel. De uitgebreide Kempische armenzorg kon gedeeltelijk verklaard worden door de specifieke economische structuur van de Kempen, met een grote groep dorpelingen met mini-bedrijfjes, vermoedelijk afhankelijk van de seizoensarbeid van het mannelijke huishoudhoofd. Ouderdom of weduwschap kon mensen in deze omstandigheden dan ook heel kwetsbaar maken. Dat laatste gold trouwens even goed voor de groep independent peasants. Hun eigen kwetsbaarheid en hun hang naar stabiliteit binnen de dorpsgemeenschap zijn, naar alle waarschijnlijkheid, de belangrijkste verklaringen.

Deze scriptie kon dus effectief een groep identificeren die de stempel elite verdient. Deze groep onderscheidde zich voornamelijk door haar onafhankelijkheid, wat zich uitte in een grote controle over de eigen – en bij uitbreiding de dorps – productiemiddelen. De combinatie van subsistentie-akkerbouw en veeteelt die grotendeels op de markt gericht was, droeg hier ook toe bij, net als hun uitgebreide greep op de formele dorpsinstituties die het leven op het Kempische platteland vormgaven. Een verschil met de klassieke *coqs de village* elites in meer gecommmercialiseerd en gepolariseerde regio's is de afwezigheid van sterk uitgebouwde economische afhankelijkheidsrelaties, vooral op het vlak van arbeid. Het kernkenmerk van de Kempische samenleving is de aanwezigheid van een sociale balans, een convivium tussen de dorpselite en andere sociale groepen. De 'independent peasants' hadden er alle belang bij dit convivium in stand te houden en dus ook ruimte te laten voor participatie, inbreng en zelfs protest van andere groepen, aangezien zij er de voornaamste begunstigde van waren. Stabiliteit en continuïteit zijn dus de kernwoorden, maar deze konden enkel gevrijwaard worden door de aanwezigheid van bepaalde herverdelingsmechanismen (de gemene gronden, belastingen, armenzorg) en door ruimte te laten voor (informele) participatie en onderhandeling.

