COQS DE VILLAGE OR UGLY DUCKLINGS? CAMPINE TENANT FARMERS AND THE VILLAGE COMMUNITY

Disclaimer: This paper is a first draft of a chapter of my PhD. My research mainly focuses on the characteristics and strategies of village elites in a region dominated by smallholding peasants and characterised by the extreme importance of commons: de Kempen (or the Campine area), situated near the city of Antwerp, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. However, even a region so clearly continuously dominated by peasants holding their lands in customary rent and strongly organising their society, according to their own needs, was not immune to the phenomenon of leasehold. Leasehold was indeed rather rare in a society dominated by customary rent and tenant farmers were really the odd-ones out in a society made up mainly of smallholding peasants. Still, I would like to shed some light on this a-typical group in Campine society to assess if and how they fitted in within the specifics of the Campine society model.

P. Breugel, Studie van twee boeren
http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/_die00494501_01/_die00494501_01_0018.php

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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 decided to lease a farm, owned by the underage orphans of Jan Wouter Ansems and Barbele Van Kochoven (quite likely a family member of Jan). A contract was drawn up by the village aldermen, stating the price and general conditions on which Jan and Digne could use this 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 rye.\(^1\) Thirty years later, on the first day of May 1539 another, similar contract was drawn up, between entirely different parties. The letter 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\(^2\) 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 rijns gulden and 12 lopen rye.\(^3\) 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 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 abundantly clear that leasehold was as diverse as it was highly frequent. Miriam Müller for example clearly points to the differences between inter-peasant leasing\(^4\), which was predominant in England before the Black Death and demesne leasing\(^5\), which became increasingly frequent afterwards.\(^6\) Both types of leasehold were prevalent in the Low Countries, with significant differences in between regions. And 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 form leases for very short terms (for instance for only one year) on the one hand, to leases for very long terms or for several lives 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”.\(^7\)

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

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\(^1\) RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 148. Schepenregisters, 1496-1513
\(^2\) The vorster was the officer checking on violations on the village byelaws, mainly concerning the commons
\(^3\) AAT, II, 283. Pachtvoorwaarden (registrum conventionum), 1525
\(^4\) Peasants leasing out their own customary land to other peasants
\(^5\) The leasing out of entire farm complexes, mostly by large institutions to tenant farmers
commercialised economic structure – and Inland Flanders – where leasehold was part of a peasant way-of-living.\(^8\)

However, what Van Bavel labels as ‘short-term leasehold’ in the before mentioned CORN volume, was clearly not omnipresent in the entire Low Countries. This is 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.\(^9\) This type of leasehold furthermore attracted a lot of historiographical interest in recent years, predominantly because of Robert Brenner’s pioneering thesis\(^10\); pointing out the core importance of leasehold in the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Leasehold was especially dominant in regions which went through a transition towards agrarian capitalism, such as the Gelders River area\(^11\) or the Flanders Coastal area\(^12\), where, in the sixteenth century, 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 predominant as in the aforementioned regions, since only about 40 to 50 percent of land was leased out.\(^13\)

In the more peripheral regions the extent of leased-out land remained rather modest. In Drenthe, for example, a sandy region with commons not quite 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 was leased out.\(^14\) In the tiny village of Minderhout, in 1569, this number even amounted to 25 percent.\(^15\) However, these numbers are significantly lower than for any other (studied) region of the Low Countries. Inter-peasant leasehold was thus not predominant, but still played a part in this peasant society. Demesne leasehold was even more rare. Not quite 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, characterised by fertile polder clay and a rather large-scale, quite commercial type of agriculture. Large tenant farms were thus not a prime characteristic of Campine society, but in


\(^{14}\) RAA, OGA Gierle, 344. stukken ivm Xe en XXe penning, 1554

\(^{15}\) SA Hoogstraten, Kerkarchief Minderhout, H9. Lijst van eigenaars voor de honderdste penning & H10. Lijst van huurders voor de honderdste penning, 1569

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a restricted number of villages, they were indeed a factor of importance. Especially powerful ecclesiastical institutions, such as the abbeys of Tongerlo and Averbode, or the Antwerp Saint-Elisabeth Hospital leased out farms – in a couple of clusters, limited to some villages, most notably in and around Tongerlo, Kalmthout, Essen and Wuustwezel.

The tenant farmers occupying this type of farms also received their fair share of historiographical attention. In the past tenant farmers were often portrayed as the haulers of commercialisation and specialised agriculture. Recently however this image has been adjusted and somewhat nuanced, even for regions involved in a rather commercialised agriculture. Van Bavel for example points for the Gelders river area to the fact 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. These farms were often 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 needs for foodstuffs of the large Saint John’s hospital, which often resulted in a quite personal relationship between letter and lessee. This leaves us wondering about the position of leasehold farmers, especially tenants of larger farms owned by absentee landowners with regard to the use and management of the commons (specifically the common waste), which were of prime importance in the Campine area and remained predominant up until the end of the Ancien Regime. Recent research namely nuanced the traditional link 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 movement. These viewpoints have been strongly nuanced by several researchers. Leigh Shaw Taylor for example emphasised the fact that especially better-off peasants and farmers were the main beneficiaries of the commons in Lowland England. Nadine Vivier furthermore suggested – for early-modern France – that the right of pasture was the most quintessential common right, suggesting that mainly animal-owners (and thus the richer peasants and tenant farmers) were the main beneficiaries of the French commons. In a recent paper Maïka De Keyzer 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 an equilibrium between social groups, who – to varying extents – benefitted from its use.

So, peasant societies dominated by commons were thus 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 tilling large holdings were quite exceptional. In the following chapter the Campine tenant farmers will be put to the forefront. Several questions

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7 Paper Lies Vervaet

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and issues will be addressed to shed light on the characteristics and strategies of this fascinating subgroup of Campine society. Firstly, I will briefly focus on the characteristics of the Campine area and its prime inhabitants, which were peasants. And secondly the extent and characteristics of leasehold in the Campine area in general, by sketching the different types of leasehold. Then, I will move on the central theme of this chapter: the position (and integration) of these tenant farmers in a peasant society. This topic will be addressed via two central sets of questions. First of all: were tenant farms 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 burdened down significantly by the lease pressure, which would clearly discern them from Campine peasants, or was this only slightly cumbersome? What was the role of the landlord (i.e. the abbey of Tongerlo) in deciding on these strategies? And secondly, I will focus on the position of the Campine farmers in this peasant society. When we for example look at early modern Inland Flanders, recently studied by Thijs Lambrecht and Reinoud Vermoesen, 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 both the land, credit, labour and commodity-market. The functioned as brokers, between a mass of cottagers and peasants on the one hand and the urban market and landowners on the other hand. 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 were they for example active on the Campine credit markets? And were they truly able to dominate these institutions, or were they just one player among the others or was the Campine area too much of a peasant region to be controlled by tenant farmers?

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SKETCHING THE ORDINARY. CAMPINE PEASANTS, THEIR COMMUNITIES AND THEIR CHARACTERISTIC

Fig 1. Map of the Campine area (De Kempen)  
Fig 2. Extract of the Ferraris map of the surroundings of Turnhout

The Campine area was situated in Brabant (in present-day Belgium), in the backyard of sixteenth century metropolis Antwerp, in the Maas-Demer-Scheldt area and was dispersed with modest-sized towns and countless villages. The soil was rather sandy and thus relatively infertile. The sandy parts were alternated with peat marshes, essential for the provision of fuel. One of the most defining features of the Campine area was the continued existence of commons (mainly common waste, but partly also common pasture), up until the end of the Ancien Regime. The common waste was impressively large, often covering up to 75 to 80 percent of village territory. The Campine village communities had a very strong grip on the management and functioning of ‘their’ commons and can, in general, be labelled as having a rather strong position, as they benefitted from a rather fragmented manorial structure, in which the landlord (previously the Duke of Brabant), local lords and powerful ecclesiastical institutions all played their part.

These village communities clearly consisted of different social groups. Farm sizes serve as an excellent tool to illustrate these outspoken differences (Table 1 and Fig 3). For the village of Gierle, several property groups can be discerned. First of all, there is a significant majority of nearly landless inhabitants. Some of these might have had lands and farmsteads in other

\[calculation by Maïka De Keyzer. In the Campine area, an average village measured 1822 ha of land, with exceptions of extended seigniories such as Kalmthout-Essen-Huibergen which measured 1586 ha. According to 16th century surveys and are calculations based on tax registers, only around 400 ha of this total was suited for cultivation. These cultivated lands even included the most barren pastures and enclosed heath fields. Therefore between 60-87% of the entire village remained unreclaimed waste land. Source: RAA, OGA, Gierle, 344, RAA, OGA, Tongerlo, 896 ; AAT, Section II, 373-380, 1518, AAT, Section II, 292-293. SAA Ancien regime Archief van de stad Antwerpen, Andere overheden, Lokale overheden en heerlijkheden, België, Hertogdom Brabant, Toestand der dorpen in het markgraafschap in 1593.\]

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villages, whereas others quite likely lived in, or on the verges of, poverty. Furthermore, there is a significant group of cottagers, owning in between 1 and 3 hectares, and struggling for subsistence. They probably had to look for additional income to make a living. The group owning over 3 hectares can be labelled as ‘independent peasants’. They were able – more or less – to make a living from the combined use of their own lands and the commons. Especially those owning over 5 hectares probably were relatively well off.

Table 1. Property composition of the village of Gierle (1554)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Property group</th>
<th>Relative number</th>
<th>% of total village surface</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 1 ha</td>
<td>36.5%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 - 3 ha</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 - 5 ha</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - 10 ha</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≥ 10 ha</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>26.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: RAA, OGA Gierle, 344. stukken ivm Xe en XXe penning, 1554

Fig 3. Relative distribution of farm sizes, Gierle (1554)

These Campine independent peasants were also the most important animal-owners. Most sheep-owners belonged to the highest three tax deciles, implying they belonged to the richest 30 percent of the village. Figure 4 indicates that the median number of lambs owned was 10, which implies flocks of at least 20 sheep, with a significant group of them owning 40 sheep or more. Many of them had several cows and other types of cattle, not to mention the fact that most of them owned, at least, one horse (Fig 5 and Table 2). For these independent peasants, sheep, their, wool, meat and hides were among the primary goods sold on the markets. Cattle,
milk and cheese probably also were marketed relatively often. They were thus indeed quite market-integrated, but by no means specialised in one aspect of agricultural production. The Campine peasants remained strongly engaged in a mixed farming system, combining animal breeding with the growing of several types of grain (such as rye, oats and buckwheat). These independent peasants furthermore were rather active on the Campine land and credit markets. They mainly used these to maintain their peasant lifestyle; creating dependency or accumulating wealth or land were no prime concerns.

Fig 4. Box plot of lamp possession, based on the lamb tithes of the Abbey of Tongerlo, for the villages of Alphen (1514) and Essen & Nispen (1553)

Source: AAT, II, 688. Lammertienden te Alphen en omgeving, 1514 & AAT, II, 806. (Lammer)tienden, Nispen en Essen, 16th en 17th eeuw

26 De Keyzer, M. & Van Onacker, E., (2012), Beyond the flock. Sheep farming, wool sales and capital accumulation in a medieval peasant society: the Campine area (Brabant, Flanders), paper presented at the ESSH-Conference in Glasgow


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Fig 5. Number of animals in the village of Rijkevorsel (1608)

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Animals in Rijkevorsel, ca. 1608</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of cows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2352</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

Source: RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 3141-3149, dierentellingen, 1608

Table 2. Number of animal owners in the village of Rijkevorsel (1608)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relative number of people owning cows / total number of animal owners</th>
<th>98,10%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relative number of people owning horses/ total number of animal owners</td>
<td>78,10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative number of people owning sheep / total number of animal owners</td>
<td>49,52%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 3141-3149, dierentellingen, 1608

These independent peasants furthermore were in firm control of village government and the collecting of taxation as well. Figure 6 indicates that an impressive majority of village aldermen (and tax officials for that matter) also belonged to the upper 3 deciles (or the group of independent peasants). Via their activities in the village government, they could not only steer village life, but they were also the main ones responsible for the management and control of the commons. Obviously, the independent peasants were no almighty Machiavellian potentates, since ‘poorer’ villagers were – albeit it to a lesser extent – also active in village government and since informal conflict regulating and participating mechanisms remained intact. Still, this group of independent peasants had a disproportionally large grip on the community as a whole.

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Fig. 6 Socio-economic profile of village aldermen in the village of Rijkevorsel (fifteenth and sixteenth centuries)

Socio-economic profile of the village aldermen, Rijkevorsel (n=36)

Source: RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 145-150. Schepenregisters (1465-1525) & RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 177-180. Schepenregisters (1580-1609)

THE EXTENT OF LEASEHOLD IN A PEASANT SOCIETY

PEASANTS AND LEASEHOLD: NUMBERS AND SIZES

As has been mentioned before, leasehold might not have been predominant in the Campine area, but it still 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. For the villages of Alphen, Gierle, Minderhout, and Tongerlo, I used the sixteenth century penningkohieren to assess the number of entire farms that were leased out in these communities, split up in two subgroups: 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, I only had the lease contracts, registered by the bench of aldermen, at my disposal, which implies that the findings for this village are less reliable, since they might not be complete. Where possible, the average size (in hectares) was listed as well (Table 3).

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29 In only included complete farm complexes – usually denominated as (hof)stede and no individually leased-out parcels. For the findings on the leasing out of parcels, see: chapter huppeldepup (property is power)

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Table 3. Number of tenant farms per village, sixteenth century

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Number of tenant farms (institution)</th>
<th>Number of leased farmsteads (peasants)</th>
<th>Total number of leased farmsteads</th>
<th>Number of households30</th>
<th>% of leased out farms compared to households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alphen31</td>
<td>4 (23.55 ha32)</td>
<td>1 (unknown)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gierle33</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7 (2.3 ha)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minderhout34</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17 (unknown)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rijkevorsel35</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tongerlo38</td>
<td>8 (38.6 ha39)</td>
<td>35 (2.6 ha)</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Several things pop up. 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 in between villages are the real eye-catchers 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 village, a small, but nevertheless significant group of peasants did not own their land, but leased 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 leased out farms could 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 was able to determine to which quartiles these peasant-tenants belonged. In Tongerlo, only the lowest quartile (1) was clearly underrepresented, with only 5.7

30 Based on: Cuvelier, J. (1912). Les dénombrements de foyers en Brabant, 14e-16e siècle Brussel, s.n.
31 AAT, II, 689. Register van het dorp Alphen voor de 100ste penning, 1559-1578
33 RAA, OGA Gierle, 344. stukken ivm Xe en XXe penning, 1554
34 SA Hoogstraten, Kerkarchief Minderhout, H9. Lijst van eigenaars voor de honderdste penning & H10. Lijst van huurders voor de honderdste penning, 1569
35 RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 148. Schepenregisters, 1496-1513
36 Number not based on penningkohier, but on lease contracts, so not necessarily entirely correct
37 Number not based on penningkohier, but on lease contracts, so not necessarily entirely correct
38 AAT, II, 896. Penningkohier rooste penning, Tongerlo, 1569

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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 a bit mixed and differs from village to village, but it seems safe to say that leased-out holdings, involved in inter-peasant leases, were not very different from the owner-occupied holdings. Their holdings were not larger or smaller than the ones tilled by their landowning counterparts. To explain the existence and – in some villages – relative importance of inter-peasant leases, we probably must turn to the peasant-life cycle, and 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 to start-up a farm for young ones. And perhaps, richer peasants at some point decided to live of rents, leasing out their farm and collecting the lease and maybe some annuities, to make a living.

LARGE LANDOWNERS: NUMBERS AND SIZES

However, some Campine villages were 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 prime letter of tenant farms in the Campine area was the powerful Abbey of Tongerlo. This Premonstratensian abbey, founded in 1130/33, was some sort of spin-off from the Antwerp Saint-Michael’s 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. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the Tongerlo monks were able to gather quite some 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 often suggested, the abbey was not the great reclamators of the Campine area. Willy Steurs, for example, clearly points to the fact that abbeys usually were bestowed with already existing property complexes. The Campine tenant farms were thus mainly ‘construites sur d’anciennes exploitations laïques’.40 Thanks to the support and the 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 Premontré abbey, but when the lift-off took place, 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 the soon-to-be landlord.41


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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 they were not only the most important landowner (seigneurie foncière), but they also possessed (part of) the jurisdiction in these villages (seigneurie banale). The peasants living in these villages thus had to pay their customary rents (on cijnsland) to the abbey and furthermore lived under the jurisdiction of said institution. The village of Tongerlo, for example, was not only situated close to the abbey’s main housing complex; the shadows of the abbey loomed over the village even 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 was also based in these communities. In an article in the journal Taxandria, based on his master’s thesis, Cedric Heerman has reconstructed the number and location of the abbey’s fifteenth and sixteenth centuries tenant farms. Quite a yeoman’s work, 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 could 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 in total 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 present in the region as well. The Antwerp-based Saint-Elisabeth hospital, for example owned 2 tenant farms in the village of Wuustwezel. 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 – albeit it sometimes haphazard – reconstruction of farm sizes in the villages Tongerlo, Essen and Kalmthout (Fig 7).

43 Based on: AAT, II, 283. Pachtvoorwaarden (registrum conventionum), 1525 & AAT, II, 292 & 293. Beschrijvingen van hoeven en bijhorende grond (fines culturam), 1510-1653

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It is immediately abundantly clear that these tenant farms were much larger than the holdings of ‘ordinary’ peasants. Even the big-shot peasants rarely owned over 10 hectares, whereas the average tenant farms measured on average 37 hectares (median: 33.5 hectares). If we compare this with findings for Coastal Flanders (Fig 8) – a region increasingly dominated by large tenant farms in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries – the Campine tenant farms at first strike us as relatively modest. The average farm, owned by the Bruges Saint Johns’s hospital, in the Coastal area was indeed 71.7 hectares (median: 50 hectares). But the difference between the arithmetic 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 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 are in reality still somewhat smaller than their coastal counterparts, but the differences were not as outspoken as suggested by the arithmetic average. 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.\textsuperscript{44} Based on these findings, one would be tempted to conclude that – when it came to size – the Campine tenant farms were comparable to those in Inland Flanders.


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Fig 8. Farm surfaces of the tenant farms in the coastal area

Source: Based on the findings of Lies Vervaet & Kristof Dombrecht

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THE ECONOMIC SIDE OF THE PICTURE: THE CAMPINE TENANT FARMERS AND THEIR AGRICULTURAL STRATEGIES - COMMERCIAL OR LANDLORD DRIVEN?

In historiography, tenant farms and their occupants are often linked to large-scale commercial (and thus market-oriented) activities.\(^45\) Recently however, these statements have been nuanced, for example by Lies Vervaet who, for tenant farms in Coastal Flanders of the Bruges’ Saint John’s Hospital, emphasised a strong focus on food provision for the hospital and its patients. The same quite likely held true for the Campine tenant farms. Being the main exploitation centres, these farms were used to supply the abbey with basic raw materials and foodstuffs.\(^46\) For that reason, the tenant farms, quite like their peasant neighbours, were made up of the same types of farm land but with a larger proportion of pasture. Since they owned more animals, this created the necessity to add more pasture and meadows to generate enough fodder.

Fig 9. Scatter plot of the relationship between total surface of arable land and pastures of the abbey tenant farms in Kalmthout, Tongerlo and Hapert in 1510.

Yet, as this scatter plot indicates, a significant relationship existed between the arable property and pastures. All the more arable land a tenant farmer leased, so much more pasture was


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present as well. Both rye, oats and even buckwheat were combined. The same goes for animal husbandry. Almost on every farm, considerable amounts of cattle, horses and substantial flocks of sheep were present.\textsuperscript{47} Tenant farms thus developed the same agricultural strategies as ordinary independent peasants, namely combining arable production of different types of grains with the breeding of different types of animals, but on a much larger scale. The Campine area was thus pre-eminently a mixed farming region, not only because of its peasant inhabitants, but also when it came to its tenant farmers. The contours of this tenant mixed farming system were drawn out by lease contracts. The abbey of Tongerlo set up a list of conditions to which the tenant farmers had to adapt themselves and which set the 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 1560’s. To add some nuances and extras, I have furthermore analysed 18 lease contracts registered before the bench of aldermen of the village of Rijkevoer, between 1500 and 1512. These findings are completed with the status bladorum (et bestiarum) of the abbey of Tongerlo\textsuperscript{48}, already used by Herman Van der Wee in his famous ‘The growth of the Antwerp market’.\textsuperscript{49} Recently they were analysed in a thesis by Cedric Heerman\textsuperscript{50}, for certain sample years (1402, 1415, 1439, 1462, 1490, 1507 and 1554). Since the analysis of these findings is extremely time consuming, I will mainly base my analysis on the work of Van der Wee and Heerman. I will mainly focus 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 the differ from those of the Campine independent peasants?

**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 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 the 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 usually meant that the abbey provided all the animals, but the farmers paid for half of them.\textsuperscript{51}

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\textsuperscript{47} For example the farm Ter Uytscholen 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 and AAT, Section II, 292-293.

\textsuperscript{48} AAT, II, 198-212. Status bladorum (et bestiarum), 1393-1554


\textsuperscript{51} Heerman, C. (2006). "Het abdijdomein van de abdij van Tongerlo in de 15de - 16de eeuw (met speciale aandacht voor de pachthoeven van de abdij)." *Taxandria. Jaarboek van de koninklijke geschied - en oudheidkundige kring van de Antwerpse Kempen* LXXVIII pp. 149

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When a new tenant occupied the farm, the abbey equipped him with all necessary animals. The tenant had to pay the value of half of them. The returns were likewise divided among abbey and tenant. When it came to sheep, lambs, wool and hides were divided among tenant and landlord, whereas for cattle, only 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 had to breed.  

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 tenants 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. They were expected to keep cows (and deliver at least 2 calves to Adriaen every year) and at least 60 sheep. Also in Rijkevorsel, Aernout De Proost and his wife Anthonie Brugmans leased a farm from a widow, Katelijne Jacops and had to breed 2 horses, 4 cows and at least 70 sheep. According to Lindemans these numbers were often explicitly mentioned, to put some pressure on the tenant farmers to meet their ratios.

Shareholding has not always received good publicity, especially in some older works. Van Bavel mentions critiques from Jan De Vries, S.R. Epstein and Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly. These authors mainly saw sharecropping-systems as a hindrance for commercialisation. However others are more nuanced. Cheung and North for example point to the potential of sharecropping. And Jan Bieleman for instance suggests that sharecropping in Drenthe functioned as some sort of joint-venture, mutually beneficial for both parties. Shareholding has often been portrayed as a suitable and useful alternative for ‘ordinary’ leasehold in regions that were for example not extremely fertile or in periods in which turmoil was roaming through 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; in normal circumstances farms were leased out under ordinary conditions. The fact that shareholding – or at least the shared ownership of cattle – was dominant in Campine leasehold, was probably due to the challenging ecological circumstances. Farms in this region were probably not able to make the necessary investments in livestock on their own, so if the abbey wanted to find tenants to till their farms, they – in all likelihood – had to lend a helping hand, by co-investing in the purchase of livestock. In a recent paper, Maïka De Keyzer calculated that the average Tongerlo tenant farmer’s meadows and pasture were only able to produce 43 percent of the fodder his animals required. She convincingly claims that tenant farmers were thus strongly dependent on the Campine commons, to feed their herds of cattle and flocks of sheep. Animal breeding was quite the challenge in the Campine area. Therefore,

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55 All examples come from: AAT, II, 283. Pachtvoorwaarden (registrum conventionum), 1525 & RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 148. Schepenregisters, 1496-1513
59 De Keyzer, M. (2012), The common denominator: regulation of the community of users of common waste lands within the Campine area during the 16th century, forthcoming

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cows and sheep were ‘shared’ property of lord and tenant. Horses did not belong to this shareholding arrangement; farmers had to provide these themselves. Pigs were also excluded and they were furthermore not extremely popular. Farmers were only allowed to breed a limited number of pigs, sufficient to feed their 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 as rather mischievous. This Kempisch stalrecht was inherent to all lease contracts drawn up by the abbey of Tongerlo, but shareholding could indeed be found in arrangements between peasants 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 were quite impressive. Based on the findings of Cedric Heerman, I calculated the average amount of sheep and cattle on farms in two clusters: one around Kalmthout and Essen and one in the village of Tongerlo itself. The Essen & Kalmthout (Fig 10) flocks of sheep (ranging around 90 sheep) were somewhat larger than those in Tongerlo (around 70 sheep). The same difference can be noted when looking at the cattle numbers (Fig 11). In Essen and Kalmthout the average number of cows fluctuated around 20 to 25, whereas this was a bit lower in the village of Tongerlo (around 10 to 15). This was probably due to the fact that the common was around Essen & Kalmthout was exceptionally large. One clear tendency emerges, when we take a closer look at the numbers. The Tongerlo farms clearly 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, but perhaps the village of Tongerlo was a direct havoc victim, or, equally possible, it might have suffered from the upheaval on the markets, impacting the supply-side. The Kalmthout and Essen sheep breeding 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, although fluctuations were always present.
Fig 10. Average number of sheep on tenant farms of the abbey of Tongerlo (for the villages Essen-Kalmthout and Tongerlo), 1402-1554

![Average number of sheep on tenant farms, 1402-1554](image1)


Fig 11. Average number of cattle on tenant farms of the abbey of Tongerlo (for the villages Essen-Kalmthout and Tongerlo), 1402-1554

![Average number of cattle on tenant farms, 1402-1554](image2)


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We can then of course wonder about what happened with these animals. The archival material of the abbey of Tongerlo formulates at least a partial answer to these questions. We know from the ‘lease books’ of the abbey that every year, in the month of may the animals and the produces were uitgedaan, meaning that they were divided among the tenant farmer and the abbey. May was by far the best month to do this, since the sheep fleeces would have reached their maximum girth and all calves and lambs had been born. When it came to wool, the division was meticulously done. The wool had to be split up in the presence of the meier, the representative of the abbey, and even the leftovers were accurately split in two. The animals themselves – or at least the ones that were selected by the tenant farmer – were also divided. The abbey was self-evidently able to do with these as it pleased, but it would seem that they often sold (at least part of) it. Heerman mentions that there are examples of tenant farmers already selling the abbey’s share and providing them with the money this generated. The tenant himself was furthermore obliged to sell his part of the cattle and sheep. Most lease contracts specifically stated that tenant farmers were not allowed to keep their own animals, as for example this contract concerning the farm ‘ten Donk’ in Essen mentions. Tenant farmer Henrick Stuyt had to live by the following rule: ‘... 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’.

It is quite hard to get a clear view on the prices that were paid for the tenant farmers’ sheep and cattle. The abbey’s pachtboeken (lease books) only occasionally mention prices, most notably when the tenant still had arrears in payment. Based on these scarce findings, Cedric Heerman reconstructed the prices of sheep and cattle. However, these findings need to be approached with due diligence. For some years, the number of attested cases was so low that the findings are not very reliable, as can be perceived in table 4. When we zoom in on the prices of sheep (Fig 12), the Tongerlo farms roughly follow the trend on the Antwerp market (Fig 13). Throughout the largest part of the fifteenth century, there were no significant upheavals, but the 1490’s Antwerp prices also had a tendency to decline. In 1490 a sheep cost 42 denieren, whereas in the previous 5 years prices ranged 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. The cattle prices show a similar tendency – although our interpretation is somewhat hampered by a lack of findings for the sample year of 1490. The Tongerlo cattle prices roughly followed the same trend as the sheep prices (Fig 14). The prices for cows – beef cows, as Heerman claims – of the Tongerlo farms were furthermore also prone to the same evolutions as the Antwerp prices (Fig 15), relatively stable from 1415 onwards, then declining, followed by a sixteenth century rise, halted by the turmoil of the Dutch Revolt.

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58 AAT, II, 206. Status bladorum, 1509-1513

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Table 4. Number of animals for which prices were recorded in the Tongerlo account books, for sample years (fifteenth and sixteenth century)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Sheep</th>
<th>Cows</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1402</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1415</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1439</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1462</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1490</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1507</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1554</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Fig 12. Sheep-prices on Tongerlo tenant farms (1402-1554)


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Fig 13. Sheep-prices on the Antwerp market, based on the accounts of the Saint Elisabeth hospital (1426-1599)

![Prices of sheep and wethers at the Saint Elisabeth hospital (in denieren brabants)](image)


Fig 14. Cattle-prices on Tongerlo tenant farms (1402-1554)

![Price of cows on Tongerlo tenant farms (in rijnsstuiver)](image)


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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 was clearly market integrated. The Campine tenant farmers partly bred cattle and sheep for the benefit of the abbey, who often decided to market (or 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 quite probable that even a significant part of their wool produce was destined to be marketed. The fact that animal breeding was pre-dominantly market-oriented is furthermore clearly abbey instigated: tenant farmers contractually were obliged to sell. The commercial activities of the large tenant farmers were thus largely a landlord-driven phenomenon in the Campine area. However, specialisation was never achieved. Throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Campine tenant farmers continued to combine the breeding of different types of animals with the growing of different sorts of grain.

GRAIN. THE LEASE SUM AND ITS IMPACT

The lands the Campine tenant farmers tilled, were usually leased out under a normal system. In the fifteenth century, a minority of farms was also leased out under a sharecropping system, but this was clearly only of limited importance and almost but all disappeared in the sixteenth century. 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

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between pasture on the one hand and arable land on the other hand. For the use of pasture, dry (eusels) as well as wet (beemd) a voorlijf or praelevium had to be paid, every year on Saint Martin’s day. This praelevium usually had to be paid partly in species, partly in kind. These payments in kind came in all shapes and sizes. Usually linen sheets were part of the payment, but a variety of other things popped up as well: jute sacks, rape seed, pigs, or 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 in sub-regions with commons of a lesser extent (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, but with less pasture (hence less praelevium needed to be paid), since they were able to use the commons as an alternative.63

When it came to arable land, an ‘ordinary’ lease sum had to be paid, which 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 thus 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.64 There is of course a disclaimer: we need to keep in mind that these lease prices are in fact only applicable to arable land. As has been mentioned before, cattle was part of a shareholding system and the lease of all types of pasture was taken care of via the praelevium.

Fig 16. Lease prices (in mudde rye) of Tongerlo tenant farms for the villages of Essen-Kalmthout and Tongerlo (1402-1554)

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64 I only included tenant farms which were continuously present from 1402 to 1554 – Cedric Heerman’s sample periods

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The most remarkable feature of the evolution of the Campine lease prices (all expressed in *mudde* rye, oats or buckwheat, Fig 16), is the fact that, really, there is no real evolution. The Campine lease prices show a remarkable constancy. The most extreme example of this is the farm *Ten Wildert* in Essen, where the lease price remains identical throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. On most other farms there is the occasional rise or decline of the lease sum, but the general trend is 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 indeed indicate that the number of people competing for the role of tenant farmer must have been rather limited.

These stable lease prices (in kind) imply furthermore a stable level of lease pressure. In table 5 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 these 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. It is for instance remarkable how lease pressure per hectare varied significantly from farm to farm. This might have something to do with soil quality or even differences in livestock numbers. Lease pressure appears to be relatively comparable to what has been found for Coastal Flanders. 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, since leasehold was so widespread among the Coastal area these numbers include all types of leasehold and not just the leasing out of exceptionally large tenant farms.65 In the sixteenth century *Bassin de Paris* lease pressure fluctuated between 86 and 240 litres per hectare.66 These numbers all seem highly similar to what has been found for the Campine area. However, the notoriously infertile Campine soils might make the burden

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heavier for the Campine tenant farmers, than for their counterparts in much more fertile regions.

Table 5. Lease pressure on the abbey’s tenant farms of the village of Tongerlo (1569)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Farm</th>
<th>Lease sum in rijns gulden</th>
<th>Lease sum in litres of rye</th>
<th>Surface tenant farm (ha)</th>
<th>Lease pressure per ha (in litres of rye)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nieuwen Huis</td>
<td>73,8</td>
<td>6464,16</td>
<td>23.08</td>
<td>280.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoeve op ’t Coenincxblokk</td>
<td>75,8</td>
<td>6639,341</td>
<td>35.05</td>
<td>189.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoeve te Gemeynde</td>
<td>70,8</td>
<td>6201,39</td>
<td>?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoeve Ten Bosch</td>
<td>58,3</td>
<td>5106,512</td>
<td>77.62</td>
<td>65.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoeve Ten Goer</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3065,659</td>
<td>27.84</td>
<td>110.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoeve Ter Locht</td>
<td>43,3</td>
<td>3792,658</td>
<td>40.25</td>
<td>49.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoeve Ter Heyden</td>
<td>49,05</td>
<td>4296,302</td>
<td>57.64</td>
<td>74.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoeve Ten Broeck</td>
<td>58,5</td>
<td>5124,03</td>
<td>35.21</td>
<td>145.53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Calculations based on: AAT, II, 896. Penningkohier 100ste penning, Tongerlo, 1569

An important side note must be made however: money was by no means absent from the Tongerlo lease. If the tenant was not able 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 the current market prices, although sometimes, the verdingde prices were lower than those on the market, to encourage payment. 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. He concluded that all farms had arrears in payment, mostly ranging between 0.5 and 2.5 times the yearly lease sum, but with a tendency to drop during the sixteenth century. Theoretically, the abbey had the right to put tenant farmers, with arrears of payment, out of their farm, but in practice this never happened. The abbey of Tongerlo was thus indeed rather forbearing 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 1580’s. During the war, the tenant farmer, Peeter Van Eeckelen was not able to pay the lease sum. The hospital was exceptionally sympathetic. This is consistent with the findings of other historians as well. Van Bavel already pointed out how letters often were rather lenient when it came to collecting the lease sum, especially in periods

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of severe economical crisis, war or turmoil.\textsuperscript{71} This was recently confirmed by Lies Vervaet, who emphasised the strong, even personal ties between the Bruges Saint John’s Hospital and its tenants, which made the hospital rather obliging when it came to lease in arrears. These personal ties went hand in hand with a relatively low tenant-mobility, especially on the larger farms. Tenants often occupied the same farms for several years and were often succeeded by their widow or son. Letter and lessee probably trusted each other, which explains the hospital’s relative compassionate attitude.\textsuperscript{72} The hospital’s main concern was to ensure the continuous exploitation of the land – to avoid degeneration and heath growth – and to make this possible, arrears of payment were tolerated.\textsuperscript{73} Continuity was thus 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. 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 abbeys were not able to adapt the lease prices to market values for quite a long period of time.\textsuperscript{74}

**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. The lease contracts of the abbey of Tongerlo for the tenant farms in Essen and Kalmthout (1525-1546) are very clear and consistent. Indeed, several ‘hot topics’ come forward. All of these contracts more or less zoom in on the following subjects: maintenance and repair, farming practices, personal services and dealing with the commons. The same topics were addressed in the Rijkevorsel lease contracts, which will be analysed as well, to stress the similarities in conditions between both types of leasehold. Most of these subjects can be found as well in the lease contracts Bas Van Bavel analysed for the Gelders River Area. And if we look at Paul Lindemans 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.\textsuperscript{75} This suggests that letters 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; which was of course absent from the Campine contract, since dikes were not exactly a defining feature of the sandy Campine. In what follows, I will – concisely – zoom in on these different aspects of the Campine lease contracts.

First of all, let us take a look at the specifications concerning **the maintenance and repair of the farm and its premises**. The Tongerlo tenant farmers are obliged to administer the farm


\textsuperscript{72} Lies Vervaet, Clementie of neglijentie


\textsuperscript{74} Hanjoul, M. (2005). *De uithoven van de abdij van Averbode en het economische belang hiervan voor de ontwikkeling van de Kempen*. History Department, Leuven, Catholic University of Louvain: 32


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and its buildings with due diligence. When reparations were deemed necessary the abbey was responsible for the payment of the workers and their equipment. The tenant ‘sal hen de montcost gheven’, so he was responsible for feeding these workers and more importantly, providing them with beer. The tenants furthermore had to keep the fences and ditches, which were considered immovable goods, in good condition. Every lease contract furthermore 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 thus 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 stated for the Gelders river area and Lindemans for the Southern Low Countries in general, where tenants were in general only responsible for everyday maintenance. The letter on the other hand had to foot the bill and take responsibility for the structural costs. The 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. The tenants had to take care of the buildings and the lands. A condition stipulated in all lease contracts is that the tenants had to cover the roof with straw. Peter Dibbouts for example, who leased a farm from Jan Jacops had to renew the roof cover every year with *twelve mandelen goets eusbaers rechts ruggens stroes*, or straw of good quality. If more structural reparations were deemed necessary the letter was responsible for the provision of the worker’s wages and necessary equipment. The tenant was, similar to the Tongerlo contracts, obliged to provide the *montcost* – or food provisions – for the labourers. The tenant furthermore had to maintain fences and ditches.

Lease contracts subsequently contained stipulations concerning agricultural practices. Conditions concerning animals have been addressed previously, when I talked about the particular shareholding system of the Campine area: the *Kempisch stalrecht*. We can furthermore find several conditions on the crops that had to be grown and some smaller stipulations on 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 summer crop. The other two thirds had to be sown with rye (= winter grain). A similar prescript can be found in all lease contracts drawn up in Rijkevorsel. Some Rijkevorsel contracts furthermore list specific crops that needed to be grown, mostly oats or buckwheat. The Tongerlo contracts do not contain this type of preconditions. Another thing both types of contract have in common is 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, to make sure the landlord got back as much vette as the tenant found on his farm.

Another subject pops up when reading through these sixteenth century lease contracts, and 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 Rijkevorsel contracts mention quite explicitly when the tenant was allowed to dig peat or mow


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heath and how much. Gheert Peter Gheerts and his wife Helene, leasing a farm from Cornelis Coppens were allowed to dig peat, one day a year in the Daesebroeck and one day in the Vredeheyde. They furthermore were permitted to mow heath one day per year in the Cochovense heyblok. Other entries in these lease contracts contain specifications on the whereabouts of animals, specifying where they could and could not go. Sheep especially were often banned from certain valuable (common) meadows. Tenants furthermore – as well as their customary rent paying counterparts – had a duty to fight the sandbanks that often threatened the late medieval and early modern Campine villages, by planting trees (most notably birches) on the sandy commons. One could suspect these rules were identical to the ones in the village byelaws. Sadly enough, the Rijkevorsel byelaws were lost, but the contract rules bear a striking resemblance to those we can find in other Campine village byelaws. These leaseholding peasants thus in all likelihood had exactly the same rights and obligations concerning the commons, as peasants who held their land in customary rent.

And last but not least, the Campine contracts contain several specifications concerning personal services of the tenant in favour of 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 Tongerloe 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 services can be found in the Rijkevorsel contracts, although this was rather rare. Anthonis Goese, the tenant of Jacop Pouw was supposed to travel to Antwerp three times a year, in the services of the before mentioned Jacop. The precise content of his task is however not mentioned.

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79 Item de late sal sant weerent boomen setten opte vroente  
80 Database Maïka De Keyzer

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THE SOCIAL SIDE OF THE PICTURE: AN IDEAL-TYPICAL 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*, real 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 and 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 another 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 get 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 lend out their horses to their fellow-villagers – for ploughing obviously – and were the main creditors in their villages. The smaller peasants were thus clearly dependent on these *paardenboeren*, to maintain their own small farms and make a living on them.\(^8\)

Still, 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. And even the sandy villages from Inland Flanders were different from those in the Campine area, especially because commons were an integral part of Campine society, which was virtually absent from the 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 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 fill in political functions. And can we find indications of the degree to which they were integrated in village life? The focus will be on the tenant farmers of the Abbey of Tongerlo, those of the Antwerp Saint-Elisabeth hospital in the village of Wuustwezel, and the tenant of Mary of Hungary in the Land of Turnhout. The peasant-tenants of Rijkevorsel are not taken into account, since these cannot be considered as classical examples of *coqs de village*, since they were not

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different from their fellow-villagers at all – the only striking dissimilarity 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.

An Inland Flanders model – or not quite? The Wuustwezel tenant farmers

First of all, let us zoom in on the creation of economic dependency as described for the Inland Flanders tenant farmers, namely by ploughing and credit. However, the Campine context was different and did not really allow for this kind of dependency relations. When it came to ploughing for example, it would seem that a significant majority of the Campine population had access to a plough. In the village of Loenhout, in 1575 (Table 6) 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 thus able to plough them manually, whereas somewhat better-off peasants could pair their 0.5 plough to one of their neighbours and make do. Tenant farmers and their ploughing equipment was thus 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.

Table 6. Plough ownership in the village of Loenhout, 1575

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Absolute</th>
<th>Relative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People owning 2 ploughs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People owning 1 plough</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>25.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People owning 0.5 plough</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>43.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People with access to at least 0.5 plough</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>69.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total population</td>
<td>267</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SAA, VG, 5

Credit is also often linked to the creation of dependency as well. So, it might pay off to try and get an impression of the behaviour of tenant farmers on 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. And, secondly, we need to have a more or less complete overview of all credit transactions for the same time period. This combination of prerequisites was met for only one village, namely Wuustwezel. This village, situated some 30 kilometres to the north-east of Antwerp, was one of the locations were the Antwerp Saint-Elisabeth Hospital owned quite some land and leased out one (from 1447 onwards two) tenant farm. These tenant farms had to provide the hospital with foodstuffs, for the nurses / nuns and their patients.

The accounts of the hospital provide us with the names of the tenants, whereas the registers of the bench of aldermen give us the necessary information on credit transactions. Plunging through the registers of the bench of aldermen is very intensive, time-consuming work, so I decided to work with a sample period, namely 1570-1575.83 The tenant of the Grote

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83 This period was chosen because it could be linked to a 1581 penningkohier

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Gasthuishoeve at that moment 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) thus was a stable factor in Wuustwezel village life, but 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 & credit, and quarrels concerning debts and inheritances) his name is mentioned. Credit markets were not used by better-off villagers to accumulate land or create dependency via credit. It seems furthermore rather unlikely that the Campine tenant farmers, who even depended on the abbey for the buying of their animals, had a large enough money supply to act as creditors. But of course, this does not necessarily imply that Peeter Van Eeckelen, 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 these families were a stable factor in village life. in 1485 Jan Van Eeckelen occupied the Grote Gasthuishoeve, he was succeeded by Peeter Van Eeckelen and next on was Cornelis Van Eeckelen. The precise family ties were not made explicit, but it is beyond doubt that they, indeed, were family. Furthermore, Peeter Van Eeckelen’s family for example, seemed rather keen on firmly establishing itself 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. Maybe the Van Eeckelens were already present in Wuustwezel before they took on the tenant farm. This impressive stability is, as has been mentioned before, typical for large tenant farms, as is the almost hereditary nature of these farms. Another indication of integration in village life is the fact that Jan Van Eeckelen, who leased a Wuustwezel tenant farm, acted as village aldermen in the 1520’s. Dries Kools states, in his thesis on the seventeenth and eighteenth century tenant farms in the villages of Essen and Kalmthouth, that several tenants served as village aldermen, but sadly enough he does not provide us with hard quantitative material. 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, since they were ‘intermediaries’ between their peasant co-villagers and the (urban) market. We have some indications that these ‘broker-like’ figures were present in the eighteenth century Campine area as well. In the village of Beerse, a certain Gillis Somers pops up as buyer-up of cattle of many of the inhabitants. He then sells the animals, mainly on the urban markets. However, little is known about the economic structures and functioning of the eighteenth century Campine area, so it would be a bit risky to project this findings on the fifteenth and sixteenth century. However, it might be possible that the fifteenth and sixteenth

86 RAA, OGA Wuustwezel, 366. Cijnsboek, 1599
87 RAA, OGA Wuustwezel, 4. Schepenregisters, 1518-1526
88 http://www.ethesis.net/essen/essen_hfst_3_4.htm#Hoofdstuk%2004%20De%20sociaal-economische%20toestand%20van%20de%20abdijpachters%20in%20Essen%20Kalmthout, 09-08-2013
90 RAA, OGA Beerse, 6. Lijsten van verkochte koeien, schapen en lammeren..., 1777-1783. Processed by Filip Van Roosbroeck

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century tenant farmers, who clearly were engaged in the early-modern market, indeed acted as intermediaries for their peasant counterparts. Unfortunately however, sources do not allow us to make any bold claims on this subject.

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, since 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 rather ‘ancient’ studies\(^91\) these tenant farms were originally part of the abbey’s reserve, 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 her 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 count\(^92\), namely Cornelis Peeters, Stoffel Luyckx, 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 have suggested earlier on, the abbey clearly opted for a politics of stability when it came to leasing out farms, which implies that tenant farmers probably were rather continuously present in village society. Secondly, it might also be in line with what Chris Dyer suggests in his article on Robert Parman, a fifteenth century Suffolk farmer. When the abbey of Bury St. Edmunds was on the lookout for a tenant for one of their farms, they chose Robert, since he had already acted as bailiff in their behalf, so they 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 Couwenbergh, 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 peasant tenants’, coming from the higher ranks of peasant society, and well known by the landlord.\(^93\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenant farm</th>
<th>Tenant Farmer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nieuwen Huis</td>
<td>Jacob Geertssen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoeve op ’t Coenincxblock</td>
<td>Weduwe Mark Reymans</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\(^92\) AAT, II, 169. Schouwigelt, 1553


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Labour possibilities: the Land of Turnhout

However, the ties that bound tenants and their farms to the village community, were indeed wider than this. In a tenant farm, based on a mixed farming model, several labourers were needed. Lies Vervaet for example mentions the need for fixed personnel, such as sowers, ploughers, kitchen personnel, and people to look after the sheep and cattle. Temporary workmen (or – women) were of course also needed, especially in the harvest period, when grain needed harvesting and threshing. For the seventeenth and eighteenth century villages of Essen and Kalmthout, 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 the 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. Tenant farmers were thus clearly employers, with some fixed manpower, but also a need for temporary labourers, as Vervaet indicated. Sadly, we do not have indications on the number of labourers needed on the fifteenth and sixteenth century tenant farms of the abbey of Tongerlo. We do however have information on 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 Turnhout, we can find indications of the number of labourers working for Willem Wils, who was responsible for a sheep-breeding enterprise, set up by the governess (Table 8). To achieve this, she claimed a significant amount of wasteland from the communities of Turnhout and Arendonk. In 1551, 16 men were paid to mow the meadows, for which they each received 8 denieren per 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, but again there were people working over 130 days. And finally, 5 men were paid to maintain the ditches.

Table 8. Agricultural labour and wages in the Land of Turnhout, 1551

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Number of</th>
<th>Wage per day (in denieren)</th>
<th>Wage per day of mason’s labourer in</th>
<th>Average number of working days</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hoeve te Gemeynde</td>
<td>Cornelis Peeters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoeve Ten Bosch</td>
<td>Peeter Van Paschel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoeve Ten Goer</td>
<td>?? Dockels</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoeve Ter Locht</td>
<td>Stoffel Luycx</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoeve Ter Heyden</td>
<td>Sebastian Van de Goer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoeve Ten Broeck</td>
<td>Gielis Sannen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: RAA, OGA Tongerlo, 3. Kohier van de 100ste penning, 1569

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94 Lies Vervaet, rurale arbeidsorganisatie
95 http://www.ethesis.net/essen/essen_hfst_3_4.htm#Hoofdstuk%204%20De%20sociaal-economische%20toestand%20van%20de%20abdijpachters%20in%20Essen-Kalmthout, 09-08-2013
96 ARA, Rekenkamer, 5123. Domeinrekening Land van Turnhout, 1551
97 ARA, Rekenkamer, Administratieve dossiers ‘cartons’, 83/2 nr. 37B

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The fact that Willem Wils’s enterprise provided seasonal work for quite some people, probably from villages around Turnhout, and this for – sometimes – rather prolonged periods. Wages were significantly lower than those for an Antwerp mason’s labourer, which is quite logical, since these Campine labourers were in all likelihood peasants or cottagers who also derived a substantial part of their income through agriculture. Willem Wils’s workforce might not be completely representative for your average Campine tenant farm, since it had to be built out from scratch, starting from the extremely sandy wastelands, but it gives a hint of the type of labour that was needed in Campine agriculture. And indeed, 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 limited to only some villages. Several Campine villages were void of this type of enterprise, so we must be careful not to overstate their importance for the labour market. Moreover, agricultural labour could not have been more than an extra means of requiring some income.

CONCLUSION

Leasehold never occupied a central place in the peasant- and commons-dominated Campine area. Inter-peasant leasehold was present, but mainly as an extra allocation mechanism, next to customary rent, which was and remained predominant. Demesne leasehold (or the leasing out of tenant farms by landlords) was a-typical as well, but still significant in some villages. However, it was nonetheless worth it to focus on this intriguing group within Campine society, mainly because they appeared to be so very different from the ‘ordinary’ peasant living in this region. So, how did these odd-ones out fit in, if they fitted in at all? How did tenants tilling large farms function in a smallholding society, dominated by commons? And were they indeed so very different from their peasant counterparts?

When it comes to their agricultural and economic strategies, the Campine tenant farmers were clearly engaged in a mixed farming system, combining arable production with animal breeding and clearly depending on the commons to make this possible. Their prime goal was serving their landlord’s needs for foodstuffs and raw materials. Still, they marketed a significant part of their produce (as it would appear: mainly animals and their by-products), but an intensive commercialisation or specialisation was never attempted, let alone achieved. The market activities of Campine tenant farmers were clearly landlord-driven and only were allowed as far as the abbey wanted it. Furthermore, the lease market did not appear to be highly competitive.

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Landlords clearly chose continuity over competition. Most tenant farmers served ‘for life’, lease prices were relatively stable and lease pressure seemed bearable – especially since landlords were particularly lenient in tolerating payment in arrears. This way, long-lasting relationships between landlords and tenant farmers were established. So, these tenant farms were no islands of commercial, individualist agriculture within a society dominated by smallholding peasants and commons. The economic and agricultural strategies of tenant farmers were thus not so very different from those of peasants. They of course were active on a much larger scale, but were equally dependent on the commons and production for the market was not sanctifying. Continuity and stability – in the abbey’s interest – seem to have been the keywords. Their relationship with the village community was one of integration, but no complete domination. The Campine tenant farmers were no commercial big shots controlling village politics and economics. On a political level, they were apparently relatively well integrated in village life. On an economic level, they clearly played their part, providing labour opportunities, and perhaps, even linking their peasant counterparts to urban markets, but all in all economic dependency was much more limited than in, for example, eighteenth century Inland Flanders. So, our Campine tenant farmers were no real coqs de village, since their powers were rather modest, but they were no ugly ducklings either, since they appear to have been relatively well integrated in Campine society and the Campine economic system. So, in the end, it seems that tenant farmers could indeed function in a peasant society, but only because leasehold, and by extension tenant farmers, were not naturally inclined to be ‘commercial’. Leasehold was indeed a multi-layered phenomenon and not limited to the big commercial regions. It would appear that there was indeed a demesne leasehold à la Campine, firmly operating within the boundaries set out by the Campine landlords and the Campine system as a whole.