Beyond the flock. Sheep farming, wool sales and social differentiation in a sixteenth-century peasant society: the Campine in the Low Countries*

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Abstract

In the existing literature late medieval sheep keeping has been perceived as a landlord and tenant-farmer strategy, aimed at international export markets. In this article we want to show that there was another side to those activities. Up until the early modern period, some regions – such as the Campine district in the Low Countries – managed to maintain viable peasant sheep-breeding enterprises. Two things were vital for the survival of peasant sheep breeding in the Campine. First of all the specific social structure and power structure of the region, allowing the peasants to keep control over their common lands and use them for their own (commercial) strategies. And secondly, there were lively local and regional markets, where demand for lower quality textiles was and remained strong.

The late medieval Low Countries were especially renowned as a centre of cloth production. Their original fame came from the luxurious 'Old Draperies' (*gesmoutte draperie*), and later from the cheaper 'New Draperies'. But in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the much cheaper 'light drapery' or 'dry drapery' – of which the Hondschoote *saies* were perhaps most famous – increasingly flooded the markets of Europe and the New World. Historiography on these export-driven industries is extensive,[1] as is research on the production of wool for the old draperies.[2] The literature tends to concentrate on the supply of high-quality wool, imported

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[1] See, for example, on the old draperies, P. Chorley, 'The cloth exports of Flanders and northern France during the thirteenth century: A luxury trade?', *EcHR* 40 (1987), pp. 349–79; J. Munro, 'Industrial transformations in the north-west European textile trades, *c.*1290–1340: Economic progress or economic crisis?', in B. M. S. Campbell (ed.), *Before the Black Death. Studies in the crisis of the early fourteenth century* (1991). For the light draperies, E. Coornaert, *Un centre industriel d'autrefois. La draperie-sayetterie d'Hondschoote (xive–xviiie Siècle)* (1930); J. Munro, 'The origins of the English "New Draperies": The resurrection of an old Flemish industry, 1270–1570', in N. B. Harte (ed.), *The New Draperies in the Low Countries and England* (1997); P. Chorley, 'The "Draperies Légères" of Lille, Arras, Tournai, Valenciennes: New materials for new markets?', in M. Boone and W. Prevenier (eds), *La draperie ancienne des Pays-Bas: Débouchés et stratégies de survie (14e–16e Siècles)* (1993).

[2] E. Coornaert, *La draperie-sayetterie d'Hondschoote*; A. Verhulst, 'La laine indigène dans les anciens Pays-Bas entre le xiie et le xviie siècle', *Revue Historique* 96

from England or Wales and, later on, especially for the new draperies, Spanish merino wool.[3] The sheep that produced this wool were bred by wealthy farmers on large estates or employing elaborate transhumance practices. This is a well-known story, but there is more to late medieval wool production than the focus on large-scale sheep breeding aimed at provisioning the export industries of the Low Countries, England and Italy would suggest. In this article we want to describe a much less familiar type of sheep farming, by peasants, which managed to survive and thrive in several European regions, one of which – the Campine in the southern Low Countries – will be at the centre of this article.

Until now, sheep breeding for commercial wool production has been associated with ecclesiastical institutions, manorial lords and urban or rural elites. The first instances of seigneurial and commercial animal husbandry can be found in the high middle ages, with ecclesiastical estates and noble lords as the pioneers. From the tenth and eleventh centuries, abbeys across Europe turned their attention to wool production and commercial sheep breeding. In coastal Flanders, for example, abbeys, usually cooperating with the Count of Flanders, developed the dunes and salt marshes near the North Sea coast into sheep pastures. According to Erik Thoen this commercial production of wool fuelled the rise of cloth industries and simultaneously the rise of cities in the twelfth century.[4] The same pattern can be identified in northern and western Spain, the French Pyrenees and the Alps. After the fourteenth-century crisis, rural and urban elites also started to invest in commercial sheep breeding. Following the depopulation after the Black Death, agricultural wages rose significantly – making grain production less lucrative as it needed more labour input – as did the demand for wool, meat and dairy products. Mixed farming increasingly gave way to a more specialized animal husbandry and the famous transhumance flocks of thousands of sheep started being driven through the French, Spanish and Italian mountains.[5]

The scope and characteristics of these elite endeavours are well known. Esther Pascua has given us a detailed account of the Saragossan herds of sheep, belonging to urban collectives of burghers, roaming on the mountain slopes and river pastures in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[6] We have been introduced to Francesco Sugana, a Treviso clothier, who single-handedly dominated the transhumance trails and set the rules for their use.[7] Our knowledge of how rural elites managed their flocks is becoming fuller as is our knowledge of the elites themselves. The commercial flocks ranged in size between 100 and 1500 sheep, with a few

Note 2 *continued*
(1972); P.-Y. Laffont (ed.), *Transhumance et estivage en Occident. Des origines aux enjeux actuels* (2006).

[3] For example, J. Munro, 'Spanish Merino wools and the Nouvelles Draperies: An industrial transformation in the Late-Medieval Low Countries', *EcHR* 58 (2005), pp. 431–84.

[4] E. Thoen and T. Soens, 'Elévage, prés et paturage dans le Comté de Flandre au Moyen Âge et au début des temps modernes: Les liens avec l'économie rurale régionale', in F. Brumont (ed.), *Prés et* pâtures *en Europe Occidentale* (2008).

[5] Laffont (ed.), *Transhumance et estivage*; N. Carrier, 'L'estivage en Savoie du Nord à la fin du Moyen Âge. Essai de chronologie et de typologie'; E. Pascua, 'Communautés de propriétaires et ressources naturelles à Saragosse lors du passage du Moyen Âge à l'époque moderne'; M. Schermann, 'Un acteur de la transhumance: Le cas d'un drapier Trévisan à la fin du xve Siècle'; X. Soldevila I Temporal, 'L'élevage ovin et la transhumance en Catalogne Nord-Occidentale (xiiie–xive siècles)'; J.-M. Yante, 'Transhumance ovine et porcine En Ardenne-Eifel (xve–xviie siècles)', all in Laffont (ed.), *Transhumance et estivage*.

[6] Pascua, 'Communautés de propriétaires'.

[7] Schermann, 'Un acteur de la transhumance'.

touching 2500 animals, and were in the possession of the upper layers of urban and rural societies.[8] In the case of Northern Spain, Xavier Soldevila I Temporal has demonstrated that – even though peasant families did own some sheep – it was mostly noble lords, urban investors and rural elites who possessed immense numbers of sheep. Those animals were gathered in ever larger flocks and were herded by professional shepherds, in order to provide the famous merino wool.[9] Pascua found a similar situation: 'le panorama économique au début de l'époque moderne, était celui de quelques communautés d'éleveurs, seigneuriales ou urbaines, qui exerçaient un controle corporatif et collectif sur ses territoires'.[10] In England, both Cistercian and Benedictine abbeys can be labelled as the most important wool exporters. At first they held large sheep flocks thanks to direct demesne exploitation, but later on shifted towards leasehold. As Allison stated, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Norfolk sheep were almost entirely in the hands of manorial landlords and their demesne lessees or gentlemen families. Wool was produced by the Norwich cathedral priory and the L'Estrange, Southwell and Gawdy families, with flocks of up to 15,000 sheep.[11]

Commercialized sheep farming for large-scale wool production by large landowners seems a match made in heaven. But Romeo might have had more than one Juliet. Sheep farming, the ownership of flocks, and commercial activities were not limited to large landowners or their large commercial tenant farmers. Throughout medieval and early modern Europe, a second type of sheep breeding existed, which is less often addressed in the historiography, and is usually not particularly well documented. In the thirteenth-century English Brecklands peasants were the first and most important group within rural society to engage in commercial wool production. While lords had little interest in animal husbandry and focused on grain production, small tenants obtained the right of foldcourse to graze their sheep on the open fields. Philip Slavin has found that, of the taxed households (between 65 or 70 per cent of the total population) mentioned in the 1283 Blackbourn hundred tax assessment, peasant taxpayers owned on average 11.5 sheep each. Breckland peasants had even more sheep, averaging around 25 per owner.[12]

In these areas, peasant sheep-ownership dwindled after the late medieval crisis, as manorial lords started to displace their tenants' sheep with their own and seigneurial wool production came to dominate. The main wool production centres all evolved from a mixed farming system towards a highly specialized and market-dependent animal husbandry, which concentrated on sheep breeding.[13] By the early seventeenth century, only a quarter of households paid tithes on sheep at Great Cressingham, in the Brecklands. They were the

[8] Carrier, 'L'estivage en Savoie'; Pascua, 'Communautés de propriétaires'; Schermann, 'Un acteur de la Transhumance'; Soldevila I Temporal, "L'élevage ovin'; Yante, 'Transhumance ovine'; K. J. Allison, 'The sheep-corn husbandry of Norfolk in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries', *AgHR* 5 (1957), pp. 12–30; id., 'Flock management in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries', *EcHR* 11 (1958), pp. 12–30.

[9] Soldevila I Temporal, 'L'élevage ovin'.

[10] Pascua, 'Communautés de propriétaires', p. 150.

[11] J. Bond, *Monastic landscapes* (2004); Allison, 'Flock management', p. 100.

[12] P. Slavin, 'Peasant livestock husbandry in late thirteenth-century Suffolk: Economy, environment and society', in M. Kowaleski *et al.* (eds), *Peasants and lords in the medieval English economy. Essays in honour of Bruce M. S. Campbell* (2015), pp. 8–10.

[13] M. Bailey, 'Sand into gold. The evolution of the fold-course system in West Suffolk, 1200–1600', *AgHR* 38 (1990), pp. 43–55; Allison, 'Sheep-corn husbandry'; Allison, 'Flock management'.

absolute top layer of society, owning by far the most animals.[14] Alexandra Sapoznik presents similar findings for fourteenth-century Oakington in Cambridgeshire, where – according to the court rolls – smallholding peasants only owned a couple of sheep a piece.[15] In the historiography, which is strongly dominated by English cases, it is argued that after the fourteenth century only farmers with a considerable amount of land were capable of maintaining a decent flock of sheep. As Bruce Campbell said of the sixteenth century: 'sheep were now disproportionally a landlord animal'.[16]

Nevertheless, even within the late medieval transhumance herds in Spain, flocks of 30 or 40 animals are found in and amongst flocks of over 1000 sheep, indicating that the peasant sheep keeping never completely died out.[17] Furthermore, in some regions peasant households managed to keep both their flocks of sheep and their communal rights, and were thus able to maintain their mixed farming system, animal breeding and commercial strategies. Examples can be found in a number of regions within the Low Countries, such as 'het Gooi', Drenthe and the Campine.[18] Here flocks of 30 to 45 sheep were grazed on the common heathlands, so as to provide the peasants with an additional income from selling wool, meat, and dairy products to the local urban markets. The details of this peasant model of sheep breeding remain somewhat obscure, as research on this topic is lacking. In this article we want to fill this gap by arguing that sheep breeding did have an important function in a peasant economy.

In order to explain the success of peasant sheep breeding in the Campine in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the internal dynamics of the peasant society, the ecological constraints of the Campine ecosystem as well as the role of urban demand will be taken into account. Here a significant subgroup of peasant society was able to seize the opportunities presented by wool production to diversify their economic activities, but this did not lead to specialization, as mixed farming remained predominant. In a region of extensive, communally managed heathlands, sheep breeding offered interesting opportunities for the diversification of income, which is a major characteristic of peasant agro-systems. On the other hand, demand was secured thanks to the local and regional cloth guilds and sale of second quality textiles back to the rural hinterland and smaller urban centres.[19]

[14] Norfolk RO, PD 131/38, Vicar's book (tithe account), 1622–42.

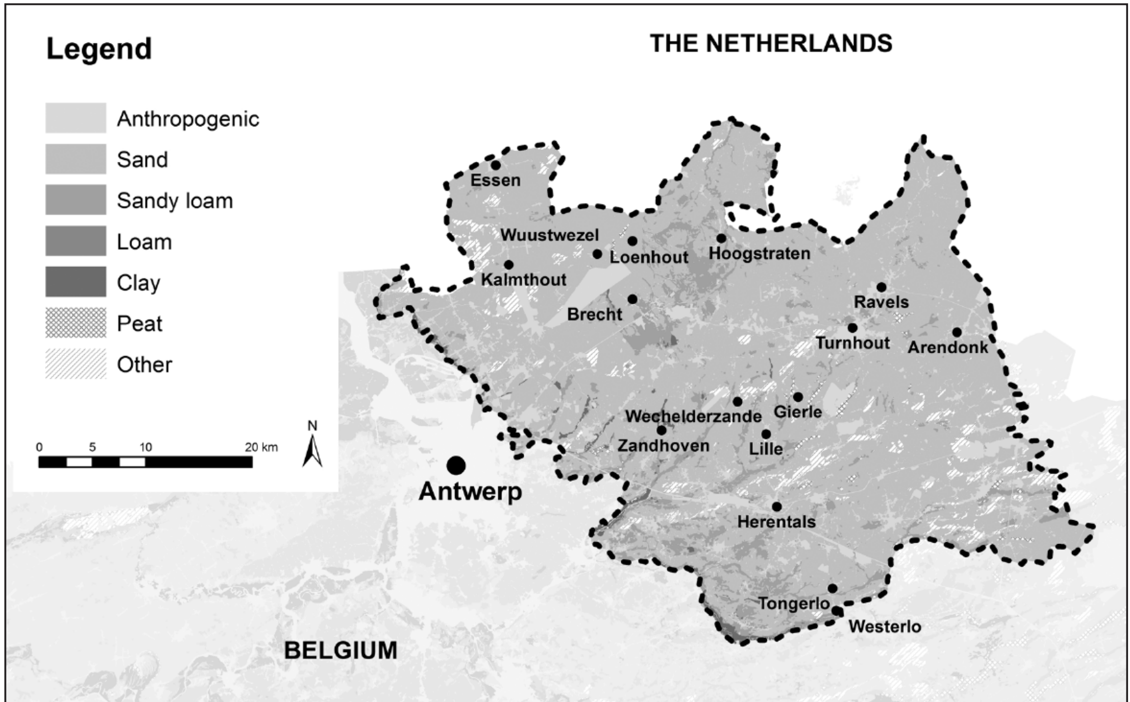
[15] A. Sapoznik, 'Resource allocation and peasant decision making: Oakington, Cambridgeshire, 1360–99', *AgHR* 61 (2013), pp. 187–205.

[16] B. M. S. Campbell and M. Overton, 'A new perspective on medieval and early modern agriculture: Six centuries of Norfolk farming, *c.*1250–*c.*1850', *Past and Present* 141 (1993), pp. 77–8.

[17] Soldevila I Temporal, 'L'élevage ovin'.

[18] A. Kos, *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)* (2010); T. Spek, *Het Drentse esdorpenlandschap. Een historisch-geografische Studie* (2004); E. Van Onacker, 'Leaders of the pack? Village elites and social structures in the fifteenth and sixteenth-century Campine Area' (Ph.D thesis, University of Antwerp, 2014); M. De Keyzer, 'The common denominator. The survival of the commons in the late medieval Campine area' (Ph.D thesis, University of Antwerp, 2014).

[19] C. Dyer, 'L'industrie rurale en Angleterre des années 1200 à 1550: Géographie, sociologie et organisation de la production et des marchés' and A. Barlucci, 'L'industrie de la laine dans le territoire Florentin (xiie–xve Siècles)', both in J.-M. Minovez *et al.* (eds), *Les industries rurales dans l'Europe médievale et moderne* (2013).



MAP 1: The Campine.

By using a wide array of sources – censuses of animals, accounts, rent and tax registers and cloth guild records – from the fifteenth- and especially sixteenth-century Campine, we will address the following questions: what were the characteristics of a society in which peasants held flocks of sheep? Who were the Campine sheep breeders, what was their social position, and what were their strategies and interests? And in which markets was Campine wool sold? In answering these questions, we offer a comprehensive account of an 'alternative' way of sheep breeding: small-scale, dominated by a peasant elite, and focused on supplying domestic markets.

I

The Campine was situated in the Duchy of Brabant, to the north east of the sixteenth-century metropolis of Antwerp (Map 1). It was an area of small towns and innumerable villages.[20] Its soils were mostly sandy, with areas of peat bog. It was also extensively wooded. Due to its infertile and challenging nature, medieval colonization started rather late. During the high middle ages, only a few isolated farmsteads were established in the most accessible and fertile spots. The defining era in the shaping of Campine socio-institutional structures was the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, especially the period around 1350. The structures created then remained more or less intact until the beginning of the nineteenth century. They arose

[20] Based on De Keyzer, 'Common denominator'; Van Onacker, 'Leaders of the pack'.

TABLE 1: Property distribution in the villages of Gierle (1554) and Alphen (1559)

	Gierle		*Alphen*	
	Relative number per property group (%)	*% of total village surface per property group*	*Relative number per property group (%)*	*% of total village surface per property group*
< 1 ha	31.3	6.2	20.9	3.2
1 – 3 ha	28.3	18.8	27.4	18.4
3 – 5 ha	13.9	18.2	23.7	27.1
5 – 10 ha	12.7	27.3	24.7	44.0
≥ 10 ha	6.6	26.8	2.3	7.3
unknown	7.2	2.7	0.9	0.0
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: RAA, OGA Gierle, 344, Taks register, 1554.

out of a power struggle between different types of lords (the duke of Brabant, local lords and ecclesiastical lords) all of whom needed to attract migrants to cultivate the land. As a result this period was characterized by an increase in population, many of whom were migrants from the heavily populated County of Flanders and the south of the Duchy of Brabant. The rising population drastically altered the Campine landscape. The village centres shifted from the fertile higher grounds to the lower river valleys and larger blocks of land were exploited as arable. The total area of enclosed arable and pastures increased 4.5 times between 1210 and 1340 and the woodland was slowly transformed into common heathland.[21] A mixed farming economy emerged, combining arable production and animal breeding.

The feudal structure was and remained divided between rival lords. The Campine village communities were able to profit from the power struggles between them. The lords tried to outdo one another in developing their estates by attracting new inhabitants. They competed for peasants by granting the members of rural communities extensive powers of self-government and usage rights on the common lands. By the fourteenth century village communities had become an important political force in their own right, with elaborate powers to control their resources. Due to this institutional arrangement, lords and communities limited each other's power.

During the same period a particular social structure and power structure came into being within these communities. They were dominated by peasants: smallholders with strong property rights over their plots of land. However, different types of peasants can be distinguished. Farm sizes serve as an excellent tool to illustrate these differences (Table 1). Within Gierle – an archetypical Campine village – several property groups can be discerned. First of all, there is a significant majority of nearly landless inhabitants. A large part of them lived in, or on the verges of, poverty and were dependent on casual wage labour, poor relief and the use of the commons for survival. Furthermore, there was a significant group of cottagers, owning

[21] D. Vangheluwe and T. Spek, 'De laatmiddeleeuwse transitie van landbouw en landschap in de Noord-Brabantse Kempen', *Historisch geografisch tijdschrift* 26 (2008).

TABLE 2: Ratio of private and common land per village during the sixteenth century

Village	*Total surface area in ha*	*Total surface area of private land (ha)*	*Area of common waste land (ha)*	*% common*
Lichtaart	2518.20	325.0	2193.2	87.0
s-Gravenwezel	1498.8	312.0	1186.8	79.2
Gierle	1775.0	400.0	1375.00	77.5
Kalmthout	11586.2	4292.6	7293.7	58.3
Wommelgem	1273.7	474.5	799.2	63.0
Tongerlo	2044.6	498.3	1546.3	75.6

Source: SAA, 5 Condition, 1593; RAA, OGA Gierle, 344, 1554; RAA, OGA, Tongerlo 896, 1569; AAT, Section II, 373–400, Rent register, Kalmthout, 1518. The surface area of the villages is based on the historical database of www.hisgis.be/nl/start_nl.htm.

between one and three hectares, who struggled for subsistence. They probably had to look for additional income to make a living. The group owning over three 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. Those owning over five hectares probably were relatively well off. They were also able to dominate village office holding, as over 80 per cent of village aldermen (the de facto village government), tax officials, poor master, etc. belonged to this category.

Even though Campine villages were relatively egalitarian economically, with GINI indexes generally between 0.50 and 0.56, we can also observe the presence of relatively large tenant farms, measuring 20 to 80 ha, in certain villages. These farmers leased their farms mainly from ecclesiastical lords, such as the abbey of Tongerlo. They were however not able to dominate either their fellow villagers or the village economy as their counterparts were able to do in the traditional sheep-breeding regions. The most intriguing aspect of Campine social stratification is therefore its lack of a true 'one per cent', of an elite that was able to distinguish itself economically, politically, socially and culturally. No social group was powerful enough to remove the privileges of other social groups – as such, the specific power balance of this region resulted in a 'common denominator'. This equilibrium went hand-in-hand with a lot of quarrelling, small frictions and an elaborate array of formal and informal conflict regulation mechanisms, but the essential structure was never shaken.[22]

This can clearly be seen when the village commons are considered. The Campine was characterized by vast stretches of common waste used as common pasture during parts of the year. The scale of the commons is shown in Table 2. At least half, and in some cases three quarters of the land area of villages was used as common in the sixteenth century. Whereas in other regions such as the East Anglian Brecklands or the German Geest region,[23] usage of

22 De Keyzer, 'Common denominator'.

23 M. De Keyzer, 'The impact of different distributions of power on access rights to the common waste lands: The Campine, Brecklands and Geest compared', *J. Institutional Economics* 9 (2013), pp. 517–42.

the commons was increasingly limited to richer villagers or the descendants of original users, exclusion processes of this sort were absent in the Campine. Here, all community members – from tenant farmers to poor cottagers – were allowed to use the commons and exercise rights to graze animals and cut peat and turves. However, the Campine commons were not open to all. Outsiders, neighbouring communities as well as new settlers were excluded from using the commons. The privileges were therefore only shared within the peasant community of one particular village or hamlet.[24]

II

The historiographical lacuna concerning peasant sheep breeding stands in stark contrast with the general image of the Campine in the Belgian collective memory, strongly influenced by the depictions of the region by nineteenth-century romantic painters, who portrayed its heather in a silvery light, studded with little white, fluffy dots: the Campine sheep. The late medieval Campine communities placed a similar emphasis on the relevance of sheep farming to their communities, especially in sources drawn up in the wake of the Dutch Revolt, when the Campine peasants were eager to illustrate the havoc the Revolt wreaked upon their villages. The villagers of Olen for example, stated in 1593 that '*elke ingesetene*', every inhabitant, was a sheep owner.[25]

Sheep were, however, not a constant throughout Campine history. While sheep were grazed on mountain ridges, river pastures and sea dikes throughout Europe from the tenth century onwards, the Campine was virtually devoid of sheep in this early period. Specialized or commercial sheep breeding, even animal husbandry in general, was limited before 1300, as the region was sparsely populated and still characterized by woodland. Even though Frans Theuws stated that the Dukes of Brabant introduced commercial sheep breeding onto their demesnes from the thirteenth century onwards, Karel Leenders has convincingly shown that only a few flocks, belonging to ecclesiastical institutions, could be found in the Campine during the thirteenth century.[26] The abbey of Tongerlo and other Premonstratensian abbeys were indeed the first to develop large flocks of sheep on their demesnes from around this time. Ecclesiastical sheep breeding remained a feature of the region. From 1400 onwards the archives of the abbey give us of the numbers of sheep carried by the abbey's tenant farms (Figure 1).

Peasant sheep breeding took off somewhat later, after 1350, when, as we saw, the agricultural system was fundamentally transformed.[27] Vangheluwe and Spek link the appearance of sheep breeding to an intensification of the agricultural system, after the period of colonization had

[24] De Keyzer, 'Common denominator'.

[25] City Archive of Antwerp (SAA), Ancien Regime archives of the city of Antwerp, other governments, Local governments and seigniories, Belgium, Duchy of Brabant, 5, Condition of the villages in the margraviate of Antwerp in 1593.

[26] F. Theuws, 'Middeleeuwse parochiecentra in de Kempen, 1000–1350', in A. Verhoeven and F. Theuws, *Het Kempenproject 3. De middeleeuwen centraal* (1989).

[27] K. A. H. W. Leenders, *Van Turnhoutervoorde tot Strienemonde. Ontginnings- en nederzettingsgeschiedenis van het noordwesten van het Maas–Schelde–Demergebied (400–1350)* (1996).

[28] Vangheluwe and Spek, 'De Laatmiddeleeuwse Transitie'.

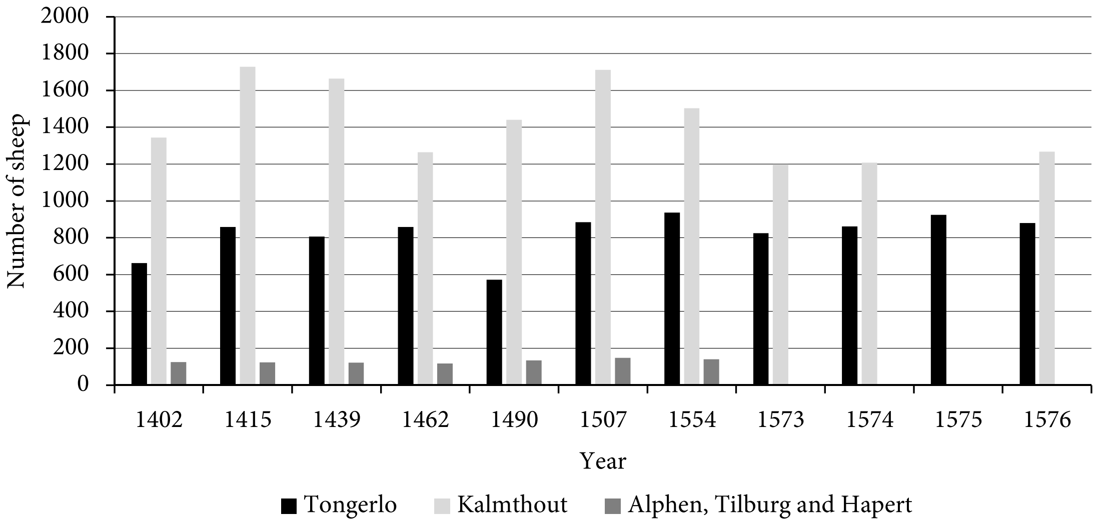


FIGURE 1: The size of the Tongerlo sheep flocks in the three most important *seignieuries* belonging to the abbey.

Source: C. Heerman, '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* (2006).

come to an end.[28] The area changed from a rural society predominantly focused on subsistence grain production into a fully mixed, yet still subsistence, economy, combining intensive arable production on small arable fields, cattle breeding on the common meadows and extensive sheep breeding on the vast common waste lands. The introduction of sheep was an immediate success and their numbers rose significantly. The golden age of peasant sheep farming in the Campine can be located in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. As in neighbouring peasant-dominated inland Flanders,[29] the late medieval crisis had hardly any impact on the Campine region, so sheep breeding remained a constant factor of importance.

IV

So far, we have established that the rise of peasant farming in the Campine was associated with the appearance of a mixed farming regime. This leads us to ask a number of questions: exactly how large were the peasant flocks grazing the Campine heathlands? How widespread was sheep ownership in Campine peasant communities? And what was the profile of peasants owning flocks of sheep? Until now, research has primarily focused on the flocks of ecclesiastical tenant farmers for whom detailed accounts have been preserved.[30] Sources allowing us

[29] E. Thoen and T. Soens, 'The family or the farm: A Sophie's choice? The late medieval crisis in Flanders', in J. Drendel (ed.), *Crisis in the later Middle Ages: Beyond the Postan–Duby Paradigm* (2015).

[30] Some examples: H. Van Der Wee, *The growth of the Antwerp market and the European economy (14th–16th centuries)* (1963); A. Verhulst, 'De inlandse wol in de textielnijverheid van de Nederlanden van de

TABLE 3: Possession of lambs by quartile, Alphen, 1514 and Essen and Nispen, 1553

	Alphen	*Essen and Nispen*
Minimum	1	1
Quartile 1	7	8
Median	10	11
Quartile 3	14	15
Maximum	34	31
Total lambs	2619	1597

Source: Sources: AAT, II, 688. Lamb tithes in Alphen and the surroundings, 1514 and AAT, II, 806. Lamb tithes, Nispen and Essen, sixteenth and seventeenth century.

to reconstruct peasant sheep ownership are much rarer, since probate inventories, accounts and estate papers are largely missing and those which survive do not provide information on animal ownership. But by combining different types of sources (*enquêtes*, tithe accounts, tax returns) we will attempt to shed light on these questions. These sources mainly stem from the sixteenth century, with some additional early seventeenth-century material.

The most elaborate, but unreliable, source is the '*generale enquête*' of 1593, drawn up to assess the damage done during the Dutch Revolt of the last quarter of the sixteenth century.[31] Here the Campine inhabitants gave an assessment of their pre-revolt sheep numbers. The people from Geel, a small town, claimed that 221 flocks had grazed on their territory. Loenhout, with over 1500 inhabitants, claimed that 3200 sheep had once been grazed there and in Wortel, a tiny village of some 300 people, 877 sheep. The *enquête* is not an entirely trustworthy source, since the Campine inhabitants used it to record the damage done to their property and their economy by the revolt, hoping to be compensated. Other sources confirm the image of a sheep-ridden society in the sixteenth century. In the archives of the abbey of Tongerlo, two accounts of the collection of lamb tithes have been preserved, one for the village of Alphen in 1514 and one for Essen and Nispen from 1556–57 (Table 3). Alphen was located in the north of the Campine, and was, with its extremely sandy soils, excellent for sheep breeding. The account shows that 243 households out of a total of 340 (71.5 per cent) owned up to dozen lambs. The total number of lambs liable to tithe was to 2619.[32] In the villages of Essen and Nispen 133 people made a contribution to the lamb tithes in 1553, for a total of 1597 lambs.[33] The distribution of lamb owning is strikingly similar in both villages in both periods. Their flocks were not as large as those of the Campine tenant farmers, however, they were by no means negligible. Some early seventeenth-century animal censuses – in all likelihood serving taxation

Note 30 *continued*
12e tot de 17e eeuw: Produktie, handel en verwerking', *Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 85 (1970), pp. 6–18; C. Heerman, '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* (2006).

31 SAA, 5, Condition, 1593.

32 AAT, II, 688. Lamb tithes in Alphen and the surroundings, 1514.

33 AAT, II, 806. Lamb tithes, Nispen and Essen, 16de en 17de centuries.

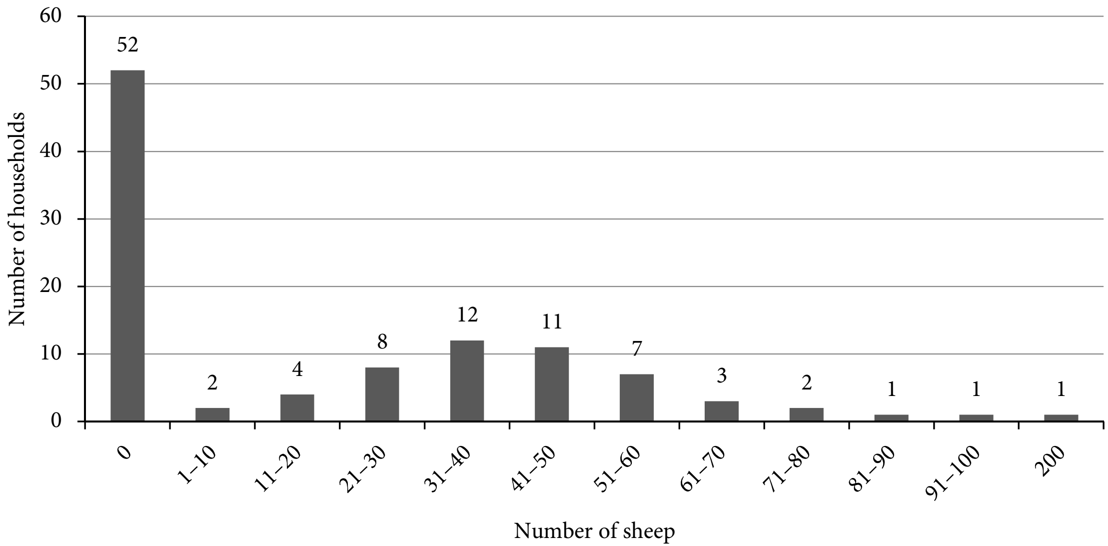


FIGURE 2: Size of the Rijkevorsel sheep flocks in 1608.

Source: RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 3141–3149, Animal counts, 1608.

purposes – confirm the sixteenth-century image. In early seventeenth-century Brecht 1573 and 2145 sheep were found in censuses of 1602 and 1605, and 2352 in the village of Rijkevorsel.[34]

Campine peasant flocks were larger than often supposed. Several scholars have stated that pre-industrial peasant households were unable to own significant flocks and that medium-to-large flocks of sheep, bred for commercial wool, meat or leather production, invariably belonged to rural elites, lords or ecclesiastical institutions.[35] As Jean-Marc Moriceau has written: 'Dans les sociétés agraires préindustrielles, on connaît bien la valeur de bétail comme critère de différenciation économique et sociale'. In his opinion, only farms with at least four ploughs were able to maintain a 'true' flock of sheep. Moreover, previous writers have linked the quality of the animals to the size of the farm. Whilst it is agreed that peasants owned cows, pigs or sheep, only the wealthiest peasants were able to produce high-quality milk or beef, or breed sheep with high-quality wool.[36]

We find that Campine peasants, owning no more than ten hectares of land at the most, possessed more than just a couple of sheep. In Rijkevorsel only six of the households that registered sheep possessed fewer than 20, while the large majority of the sheep-owning households held flocks of between 20 and 60 animals (Figure 2). This picture is confirmed by the flock sizes in the village of Brecht where the median is 40 in 1602. (It was only 25 in 1605 however, and the average also fell.) At Rijkevorsel in 1608, the median flock size was

[34] RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 3141–49. animal counts, 1608; OGA Brecht, 2540A, animal count, 1605 & 2541, animal count, 1602.

[35] Carrier, 'L'estivage en Savoe di nord', Pascua, 'Communautés de propriétaires'; Schermann, 'Un acteur de la transhumance'; Soldevila I Temporal, "L'élevage ovin'; Allison, 'The sheep-corn husbandry of Norfolk'; id., 'Flock management'; Campbell and Overton, 'New perspective'.

[36] J.-M. Moriceau, *Histoire et géographie de l'élevage Français. Du Moyen Âge à la Révolution* (2005), pp. 19–23.

TABLE 4: Peasant flock sizes in Campine villages, early seventeenth century

	Brecht, 1602	*Brecht, 1605*	*Rijkevorsel, 1608*
Minimum number of sheep	2	5	6
Maximum number of sheep	92	90	200
Average number of sheep	42.1	28.6	45.2
Median number of sheep	40	25	40.5

Source: RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 3141–3149, animal counts, 1608; Ancien Regime archives (OGA) Brecht, 2540A, animal counts, 1605.

40.5 and the average 45.3 (Table 4).[37] During the sixteenth century, some rural households were even able to sustain flocks up to 100 or even 200 sheep, approaching even the biggest tenant flocks.[38]

Nevertheless, we can perceive significant social differences in the possession of sheep in the Campine. Even though Campine sheep breeding was by no means limited to the 'one per cent', sheep owners were not found equally in all layers of society. This should perhaps not occasion any surprise: Philip Slavin has suggested that even during the thirteenth century a strong correlation between wealth and the ownership of sheep can be found, a trend that increased towards the pre-modern period.[39] In the 1593 *Enquête* for the village of Wortel, it was noted that those not owning any sheep had one thing in common: they were all cottagers, leasing their houses and possessing almost no land, something which was found throughout pre-modern Europe.[40] Sheep owning thus seems limited to 'true peasants': peasants who 'owned' their land (or at least had it for a customary rent) and were mostly able to guarantee the survival of their family. We can then of course wonder about the socio-economic profile of the peasants who were the true sheep owners. It is extremely difficult to get a clear view of this aspect of sheep ownership. Based on a general cattle unit count in Zandhoven in the mid-sixteenth century, it seems more than probable that only the upper 30 per cent of society were the owners of sheep, possessing the largest flocks. As indicated in Figure 3, 31 per cent of the total population possessed at least one sheep.[41]

[37] Based on the lamb tithes of the Abbey of Tongerlo for the villages of Alphen (1514) and Essen and Nispen (1553). Source: AAT, II, 688, 1514 & AAT, II, 806, 16de en 17de century; Rijksarchief Antwerpen (hereafter RAA), OGA Brecht, 2540A, animal count, 1605.

[38] Van Onacker, 'Leaders of the pack?', p. 192.

[39] Slavin, 'Peasant livestock'; Campbell and Overton, 'New perspective'.

[40] Slavin, 'Peasant livestock'; Sapoznik, 'Resource allocation'.

[41] The curve shows the general distribution of cattle units in Zandhoven, while the horizontal lines indicate the estimated limit of the different types of animals. 65 of the 76 registered households listed at least 0.5 head of cattle. Therefore 85 per cent of the village owned at least one animal. Thanks to the animal counts of different villages, such as Wortel and Rijkevorsel, we know that the large majority of peasant households owning even the tiniest parcel of land possessed at least one cow, but almost never listed a horse or sheep (see light grey line). We therefore estimate that 0.5 cattle units equalled one head of bovine cattle. By looking at the example of Rijkevorsel, we can deduce that households owning sheep possessed 5 times as many sheep as head of livestock. Therefore, five sheep equalled one head of livestock that could either be a horse or bovine cattle. These findings, together with our knowledge of average sheep and horse ownership derived from Wortel and

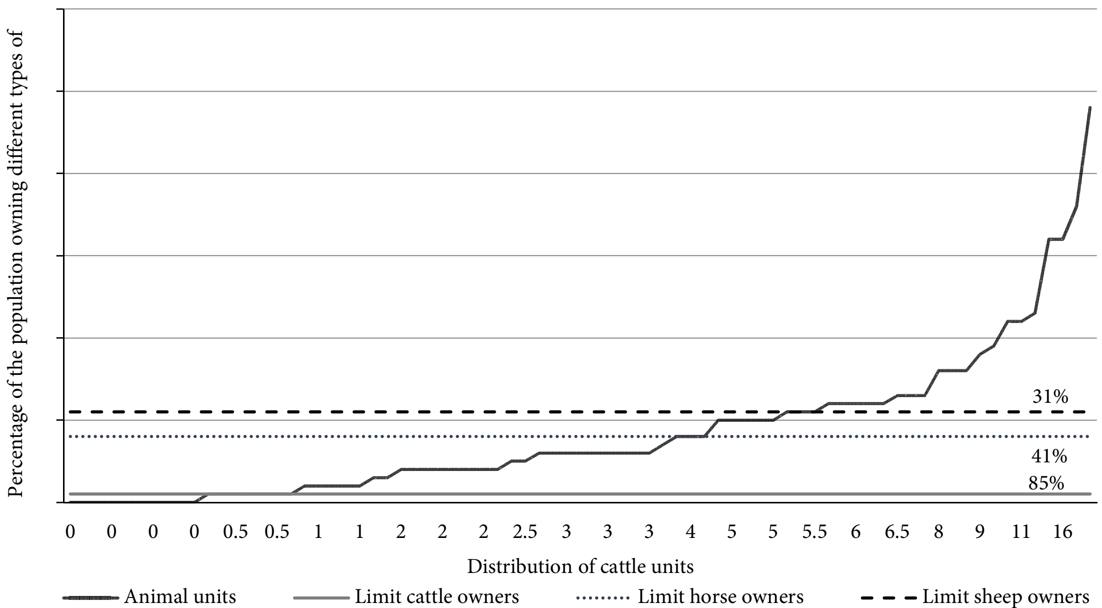


FIGURE 3: Cattle, horse and sheep possession in Zandhoven in 1559.

Source: RAA, OGA, Zandhoven, 148.

A detailed assessment of the profile of sheep owners cannot be made before the beginning of the seventeenth century because it requires the combination of animal counts and tax registers, both of which are very rare for the Campine. Even then we can only attempt to sketch the socio-economic position of sheep owners for two villages, Brecht and Rijkevorsel.[42]

In Brecht, in 1602, 50 per cent of all sheep owners were part of the highest three tax deciles (corresponding to the 30 per cent highest taxed, and wealthiest, individuals),[43] while in 1605 this amounted to 58.3 per cent (see Table 5). In Rijkevorsel, in 1608, as many as 53.6 per cent of all sheep owners belonged to the highest three tax deciles. Not surprisingly the majority of sheep owners possessing flocks larger than the median came from the highest deciles. In 1602 Brecht, this amounted to 57.1 per cent. Three years later, in 1605 this number even rose to 81.8 per cent. In Rijkevorsel, in 1608, 72.2 per cent of owners with flocks larger than the median, came from the highest three deciles. And, strikingly, sheep owners also tended to possess quite substantial numbers of cows (higher than or equal to the median value) (see Table 6). This implies that the Campine sheep owners predominantly came from the social group of the 'independent peasants', those owning above-average farms (3 to 5 hectares) and

Note 41 *continued*
Rijkevorsel, has led us to calculate that the top 41 per cent of Zandhoven's livestock owners who listed four cattle units owned at least one horse (see dotted line) and 31 per cent owned a flock of sheep (see dashed line), which consisted of a minimum of five animals. Sources: RAA, OGA, Zandhoven, 148, 'Heideboek', 1559–1581; SAA, 5 condition, 1593; RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 3141–3149, animal counts, 1608.

[42] Based on the following tax registers: RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 3262, 1607 and OGA Brecht, 2529. Tax register early seventeenth century.

[43] RAA, OGA Brecht, 2541. Animal count, 1602.

TABLE 5: Stratification of sheep ownership in Brecht and Rijkevorsel, early seventeenth century

	Percentage of sheep owned in		
	Highest 3 deciles	*Middle 3 deciles*	*Lowest four deciles*
Brecht, 1602	50.0	35.7	14.3
Brecht, 1605	58.3	20.8	20.1
Rijkevorsel, 1608	53.6	39.3	7.1

Source: RAA, OGA Rijkevorsel, 3262, Tax register, 1607; OGA Brecht, 2529, Tax register, early seventeenth century.

TABLE 6: Link between sheep and cow ownership

Brecht 1602	100 % own at least 1 cow	78.57 % own ≥ median
Brecht 1605	100 % own at least 1 cow	100 % own ≥ median
Rijkevorsel 1608	96.96 % own at least 1 cow	78.78 % own ≥ median

Source: RAA, OGA Brecht, 2541, animal count, 1602; OGA Brecht, 2540A, animal count, 1605; OGA Rijkevorsel, 3141–3149, animal count, 1608.

able to dominate their communities. Peasants owning less than three hectares, and especially those tilling a farm of less than one hectare, possessed significantly fewer or even no sheep at all. This was in all likelihood linked to the fact that the breeding of sheep required an investment poorer peasants were unable to make. Sheep required winter fodder, something this group was less able to grow or buy. These less well-to-do peasants were more inclined to invest in one or two cows, which could graze on the common hay meadows.[44] As Neeson stated, cows were the most important assets for a peasant household to protect themselves from becoming fully dependent on wage labour.[45] Sheep ownership thus functioned as a social marker, not one separating the one per cent from a large mass of villagers, but one distinguishing a broad peasant elite (consisting of about 25 to 30 per cent of the village community) from their less well-off fellow-villagers. The question then of course remains why these independent Campine peasants were able to engage so firmly in what has often been labelled a landlord or tenant-farmer form of farming. Two factors will be discussed in the following sections: one focusing on the 'supply side', namely the institutional organization of the Campine commons and one on the 'demand side', namely the demand for wool by the Low Countries' cloth industry.

44 De Keyzer, 'Common Denominator'; Van Onacker, 'Leaders of the pack'.

45 J. M. Neeson, *Commoners: Common right, enclosure and social change in England, 1700–1820* (1993).

TABLE 7: Features of meadows, Gierle, 1554

	Percentage of holding used as meadow	*Average hay yield (kg per ha)*	*Number of cattle units that could be fed*
< 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
≥ 10 ha	25.5%	4557.8	7.3

Source: RAA, OGA Gierle, 344. Tax register, 1554.
Note: Hay yield (1411 kg per ha): based on Dahlström, 'Pastures, livestock numbers and grazing pressure'. The amount of fodder needed per animal: based on Moriceau, *Histoire et géographie,* p. 209. He claims that one horse needs 2500 kg of hay, a cow needs 625 kg and a sheep 208 kg. Cattle units: 1 horse = 4 cows = 12 sheep.

IV

The independent peasants of the Campine, alongside the tenant farmers of the ecclesiastical estates, were thus the most important sheep breeders of their communities but, as we already mentioned, their farms were only of moderate size and by no means big enough to sustain flocks of about 30 up to 100 animals by themselves. In Alphen in 1559, the average farm size was 3.3 hectares.[46] In Gierle in 1554, farms were even slightly smaller on average, at 2.8 hectares.[47] Sheep farming on the scale we have discovered was only possible because the peasants had access to suitable village waste lands. In the case of the late medieval Campine, all residents were considered to be part of the village community and were allowed to use its commons. Outsiders and neighbouring community members were strictly excluded. Even though some communities did demand a small entrance fee, this sum was low enough not to be a burden on the poorest community members, since during the sixteenth century 98 per cent of all households made some use of the common waste.[48]

This dependence on the common waste lands followed immediately from the peasants' inability to feed their animals on their private land alone. Based on the calculations of Anna Dahlström, we have reconstructed the average amount of fodder peasants of different property groups in the villages of Gierle and Alphen were able to produce on their private meadows around the middle of the sixteenth century (Table 7).[49] It immediately becomes clear that even the peasants with the largest meadows were unable to support flocks of over 30 animals from their private land alone. Flocks of the size we have discovered could only be maintained

[46] AAT, II, 689. Tax register, 1559–78.

[47] RAA, OGA Gierle, 344. Tax register, 1554.

[48] After all, on average a family household had to pay eight *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*. Source: RAA, OGA Zandhoven, 148.

[49] A. Dahlström, 'Pastures, livestock numbers and grazing pressure, 1620–1850. Ecological aspects of grazing history in south-central Sweden' (Ph.D thesis, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, 2006).

TABLE 8: Sheep, lamb and wool ownership in Great Cressingham, first half of the seventeenth century

Year	*Number of lamb owners*	*Number of wool owners*	*Average number of lambs*	*Estimated total population*	*% sheep owners of estimated total population*
1624	8	9	123.8	44	18.2
1625	9	8	125.6	46	19.6
1626	10	7	188.1	46	21.8
1628	9	9	160.8	52	17.3
1634	14	15	91.9	40	35.0
1635	16	18	84.7	40	40.0
1636	11	14	79.3	46	23.9
1640	20	20	63.3	53	37.7
1641	22	13	63.3	49	44.9

Source: Norfolk RO, PD 131/ 38.

because of the extensive commons available to the peasants. The scale of these commons has already been shown in Table 2.

This reliance on a common property regime can be found in all the peasant sheep-breeding societies we identified earlier. Without access to common waste lands, peasant sheep breeding seems unviable. Common-pool institutions similar to those found in the Campine also developed in both Drenthe and het Gooi, and here too peasants had the possibility to grazing flocks of sheep in extensive wastes. Access to the commons was more restricted in Drenthe and het Gooi than in the Campine. Only peasants owning a particular plot of land, farmstead or holding a licence could graze animals on the commons. As a consequence a much smaller proportion of the community, but practically all sheep owners, were granted access.[50] Peasants' reliance on commons becomes clear when we look at areas where access to the commons disappeared because the balance of local power shifted to landlords and their farmers. This brought peasant sheep farming to an end. In the East Anglian Brecklands, peasants were engaged in sheep breeding and wool production from the twelfth century onwards via the foldcourse system, at a time when their lords were mostly interested in grain production. On average 60 per cent of Blackbourn hundred taxpayers and 62 per cent of those in Breckland had sheep in 1283 (Table 8).[51] In addition, Slavin has shown that stocking densities of sheep and cattle were 2.2 times higher on tenant holdings than on demesne land in 1283.[52] The sheep had to be folded in strictly defined grazing tracts marked by temporary fences, which were

[50] J. Bieleman, *Boeren op het Drentse zand 1600–1910: Een nieuwe visie op de 'oude landbouw'* (1987); T. Spek, *Het Drentse Esdorpenlandschap*; Kos, *Van Meenten Tot Marken*; H. Vera, '... Dat men het goed van den ongeboornen niet mag verkoopen. Gemene gronden in De Meierij van Den Bosch, tussen Hertog en hertgang 1000–2000' (Ph.D thesis, Radboud University, Nijmegen, 2011).

[51] E. Powell, *A Suffolk hundred in the year 1283* (1910).

[52] Slavin, 'Peasant livestock'.

regularly moved on the open fields and wastelands of the manor. The manorial lord controlled this system and could determine who could have access to the communal flock and where the sheep should be placed to fertilize the land.[53] After the Black Death, small independent peasants largely disappeared and grain prices plummeted. This enabled lords to monopolize the foldcourse rights and exclude the remaining peasants from the commons. The abolition of the communal rights led to the disappearance of peasant sheep breeding in this particular area from the sixteenth century onwards.[54] In the Breckland village of Great Cressingham only 13 individuals were registered as paying lamb tithes during the second quarter of the seventeenth century, almost half of whom could not be linked to property or land in the village itself. They probably possessed the right of foldcourse in the village without actually residing there.[55] As Allison and Bailey have both noted, sheep breeding had become an activity of specialized, commercial sheep breeders and landlords rather than peasants.

There is therefore an association to be made between peasant sheep farming and the emergence (and survival) of robust peasant rights over commons and wastes. The Campine was not exceptional, but the rights here were remarkably inclusive: all social groups had the use of the commons. The independent peasants, or upper 30 per cent of society, had access as well, as did tenant farmers living within the village communities. So too did smallholders and cottagers. Other pre-industrial communities increasingly tried to limit the grazing pressure on common pastures and wastelands by reducing the number of animals individuals could graze. Densely populated areas would be the first to introduce such restrictions: an unstinted system presupposes a sufficiency of common land.[56] Angus Winchester, who has discussed the regulations introduced by common-pool institutions, has described stinting as a common practice that became increasingly dominant after the middle ages, even though as many as 46 per cent of the communities of England and Wales remained stint-free.[57] This view of stinting as a response to population growth and the over-use of the wastes which it produced has been confirmed time and again for multiple regions.[58] Nevertheless, not one Campine village introduced a quota for any type of animal.[59] Sheep flocks could therefore be as large

[53] Bailey, 'Sand into gold'.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Norfolk RO, PD 131/ 38.

[56] A. J. L. Winchester and E. A. Straughton, 'Stints and sustainability: Managing stock levels on common land in England, *c*.1600–2006', *AgHR* 58 (2010); J. Thirsk, *The agrarian history of England and Wales, IV, 1500–1640* (1967), pp. 30–48.

[57] Winchester and Straughton, 'Stints and sustainability'; J. R. Birrell, 'Common right in the medieval forest: Disputes and conflicts in the thirteenth century', *Past and Present* 117 (1987).

[58] M. De Moor, L. Shaw-Taylor and P. Warde (eds), *The management of common land in north-west Europe, c.1500–1850* (2002); B. M. S. Campbell, *English seigniorial agriculture, 1250–1450* (2000).

[59] Byelaws (keuren) consulted for this statement: RAA, Oud Gemeente-Archief (OGA) Tielen, 28; OGA Gierle, 44, Byelaw; OGA Herenthout, 3; OGA Hoogstraten 638; OGA Rijkevorsel, 8; AAT, Bundel Tongerlo I: Rules for the village of Tongerlo; AAT, Bundel Byelaws, Veerle and Oevel; G. De Longé, *Coutumes d'Herentals, de Casterlé, de Moll, Balen et Desschel, de Gheel, de Hoogstraten, de Befferen et de Putte et féodales du Pays de Malines* (1878), Th. De Molder, 'Keuren van Oostmalle', *Oudheid en Kunst* 26 (1935); J. Ernalsteen, 'Brecht: De keuren van 1601', *Oudheid en Kunst* 16 (1925); J. Ernalsteen, 'Keuren van Gheel', *Oudheid en Kunst* 26 (1935); A. Gielens, 'Keuren van Ekeren', *Oudheid en Kunst* 30 (1939); I. Helsen, 'Het dorpskeurboek van Retie', *Bijdragen tot de geschiedenis* 1 (1949); M. Koyen, 'Keuren van Ravels', *Oudheid en Kunst* 41 (1958); J. Lauwerys, 'Keuren van Westerloo', *Oudheid en Kunst* 28 (1937); G. Meeusen, 'Keuren van Esschen, Calmpthout en Huybergen', *Oudheid en Kunst* 23 (1932); J. Michielsen, 'Keuren van Brecht', *Oudheid en Kunst* (1907);

as the owners wished. This explains why peasant flocks could be as large as 200 animals, as opposed to the Gooi region where limits of 33 sheep were introduced.[60] Inclusiveness and lack of stinting did not lead to a free-for-all or a 'tragedy of the commons'. The commons were closely monitored and regulations were strict. Over-exploitation was prevented by introducing strict herding practices, strong social control and collective maintenance works, rather than by excluding community members.[61] The absence of stinting and the reliance on other methods of control is closely linked to the specific social constellation of the Campine, the above-mentioned 'common denominator', implying that no social group was able to limit the access rights of others. So, on the production side of the picture, the specific configuration of the Campine common-pool institution was a decisive factor. But let us not forget the role of consumption and demand, which will be dealt with in the next section.

V

For the Low Countries – and especially the duchy of Brabant – the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were a period of significant economic change. From the fifteenth century onwards, the annual Brabantine fairs in Antwerp and Bergen op Zoom prospered. In the sixteenth century Antwerp became a true commercial metropolis, a vibrant centre of trade and art, buzzing with possibilities; markets flourished. But to what extent was Campine sheep breeding linked to these local and regional markets? Did the independent peasants of the Campine operate within the same commercial circuits as the regional elites and ecclesiastical producers of wool? Was there a role for Campine wool in the famous cloth production centres of the Low Countries?

Although research does indicate that all those living on the countryside used markets – whether large farmers or smallholders, from the Scandinavian peasants living under the sun division[62] to Eastern European peasants confronted with a renewed wave of feudalization[63] –, the exact relationship between peasants and markets has, however, proven to be a distinctly more complicated matter and the subject of intense discussion. In the neo-Marxist and neo-Malthusian theories dominant in the 1970s, peasants and markets belonged to two

Note 59 *continued*
K. C. Peeters, 'De Wuustwezelsche dorpskeuren (xv^{e}–xvii^{e} Eeuw)', *Wesalia, Tijdschrift voor plaatselijke Geschiedenis en Folklore* 8 (1933); K. C. Peeters, 'De Wuustwezelsche Dorpskeuren (xv^{e}– xvii^{e} Eeuw)', *Verslagen en mededelingen van de koninklijke Vlaamsche academie voor taal en letterkunde* (1932); R. Peeters, 'De keuren van Turnhout (1550)', *Taxandria* 29 (1957); id., 'De keuren van Turnhout' *Taxandria* 29; F. Prims, 'Keuren der Vreyheyt van Arendonk', in H. Draye (ed.), *Feestbundel H. J. Van De Wijer, den jubilaris aangeboden ter gelegenheid van zijn vijfentwintigjarig hoogleeraarschap aan de R. K. Universiteit te Leuven 1919–1943* (1944); J. Van Gorp, 'Het keurboek van Casterlee', *Bijdragen tot de geschiedenis* 18 (1927); id., 'De Aartbrief van Terloo', *Bijdragen tot de geschiedenis* 18 (1927); E. H. A. Van Olmen, 'De keuren van Vorselaar', *Taxandria* 7 (1910); F. Verbist, *Costuymen van de hoofdrechtbank Van Zandhoven, Uitgave 1664 . Keuren En Breuken, Uitgave 1665* (2007); J. R. Verellen, 'De keuren van Herentals (1410–1567)', *Taxandria* 16 (1950); P. J. Verhoeven, 'Keuren Van Calmpthout', *Oudheid en Kunst* (1907).

[60] Kos, *Van meenten tot marken*.

[61] M. De Keyzer, 'All we are is dust in the wind. The social causes of a "subculture of coping" in the late medieval Coversand Belt', *J. History of Environment and Society* 1 (2016).

[62] For example J. Myrdal, 'Women and cows: ownership and work in medieval Sweden', *Ethnologia Scandinavica* 38 (2008), pp. 61–80.

[63] P. Guzowski, 'A changing economy: Models of peasant budgets in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Poland', *Continuity and Change* 20 (2005), pp. 9–25.

different worlds. Neo-Marxist views drew on the godfather of peasant studies, the Russian agronomist Alexander Chayanov who propounded a distinctly negative view of peasants and markets, suggesting that peasants were market-averse and inclined to shun risks.[64] This theory was adopted by Robert Brenner in his influential work on the transition to capitalism on the English countryside.[65] More recently, thinking on this point has become more nuanced. Market activities are increasingly considered as being part of a mixed portfolio of activities, portraying peasants as the ultimate 'anti-specialists'.[66] Recent historians have stressed the importance of subsistence farming, but also 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.[67]

Campine peasants were eager participants in the market, but only within the boundaries of a traditional and non-specialized peasant society. Commodities could be marketed to generate a surplus income, but that cash income was not the main source of sustenance for the peasant household. Nor were peasants primarily focused on maximizing profit.[68] Late medieval communities themselves did not object to commercial practices. Even though several scholars have stated that the marketing of products derived from the commons was prohibited, this applies only to exhaustible resources. Almost all Campine by-laws prohibited the selling of peat, loam or heather from the commons. Similar rules did not apply to animal products. Hides from cattle and sheep, wool, milk, cheese, beeswax and meat were products that were directly linked with the common wastelands or meadows, but which could be sold on local and regional markets without any restrictions.[69] As such, there were no objections to marketing the by-products of sheep breeding on an institutional level. Was there also a demand for them?

The urban centres of the Low Countries were of course very well known for cloth production, but did inland wool – and more specifically Campine wool – play a part in this? Adriaan Verhulst claimed that the onset of the Flemish (and later on Brabantine) cloth industries was supported by inland wool, but that, once established, they switched to higher-quality wool, most notably from England.[70] In the centres of the luxurious 'Old Draperies' – the traditional medieval industrial centres such as Bruges, Ghent and Ypres – inland wool was certainly of no importance, as only high-quality English wool was used. The industries of the 'New Draperies', on the other hand, which produced good-quality imitations of the old luxury products, mainly used somewhat cheaper Spanish merino wool. However, the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century novelty of the light drapery (or *sayetterie*), in which cheap fabrics were produced in rural

[64] D. Thurner *et al.*, *A. V. Chayanov on the theory of peasant economy* (1986).

[65] R. Brenner, 'Agrarian class structure and economic development in pre-industrial Europe', *Past and Present* 70 (1976).

[66] See, for example: J. D. Van der Ploeg, *The new peasantries: Struggles for autonomy and sustainability in an era of empire and globalization* (2009).

[67] As formulated in P. Warde, 'Subsistence and sales: The peasant economy of Württemberg in the early seventeenth century', *EcHR* 59 (2006), pp. 289–319.

[68] E. Van Onacker, 'Bedrijvige boeren? Peasants en de land- en kredietmarkt in de vijftiende- en zestiende-eeuwse Kempen', *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis* 10 (2013).

[69] See n. 59 above.

[70] Verhulst, 'De inlandse wol'.

[71] Munro, 'Origins'.

TABLE 9: Guild regulations of Brabantine cities mentioning Campine wool

City	*Stipulation*
's Hertogenbosch	Anyone who wants to produce broadcloth, must make it from English wool and of good Campine wool
Antwerp	Cloth from Retie and Duffel (two villages in the Campine)
Brussels, Mechelen and Lier	We do not process Zeeuwsche wool, lambswool, Brabantine wool or 'blootwool', but only the finest and most exquisite Campine wool
Leuven	This inland wool came from the immediate surroundings, where some drapers, such as Ard Vinke, possessed flocks, but 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

Sources: N. Van Den Heuvel, *De ambachtsgilden van 's-Hertogenbosch voor 1629. Rechtsbronnen van het bedrijf sleven En Het gildewezen* (Utrecht, 1946), p. 74 (1403 & 1471); F. Prims, 'De statuten van de Antwerpsche lakengilde in het begin der 16de eeuw', *Koninklijke Vlaamsche academie voor taal- en letterkunde,* 1939 (1939), p. 37 (1532); A. Thijs, *Van "Werkwinkel" Tot "Fabriek". De Textielnijverheid Te Antwerpen Van Het Einde DerP Vijftiende Tot Het Begin Der Negentiende Eeuw* (1978), p. 504 (1567); R. Van Uytven, *Stadsfinanciën en stadsekonomie te Leuven* (1967), p. 504.

centres such as Hondschoote, might have had more use for the Campine wool, which was of lesser quality than its English or Spanish alternatives.[71] Furthermore, the importance of even average-quality wool for the domestic market should not be underestimated as these luxury draperies were not omnipresent and were mostly aimed at international markets. The domestic market for non-luxury products was, after all, much larger than that for high-quality cloth. A quick scan of the cloth guild regulations of some Brabantine cities such as Antwerp, Brussels, Leuven, Lier and 's Hertogenbosch shed more light on this enigma (Table 9). Several of these regulations mention the use of Campine wool.

It is likely that the Campine peasants sold wool to traders from urban centres. The records of the steward of Turnhout suggest that Campine sheep breeders conducted business with traders from Herentals, Hoogstraten, as well as Sint Truiden.[72]

Demand for wool remained quite constant for the Campine peasants and tenants. While the traditional cloth centres started to dwindle during the fifteenth century, the Campine peasants were able to shift towards more northern urban centres such as Oisterwijk, 's Hertogenbosch and, later, Tilburg, or to more rural production centres such as Weert.[73] Marlous Craane found that a significant part of the wool produced in the area around 's Hertogenbosch was used in rural textile production and not in the town itself.[74] A detailed reconstruction of proto-industrial textile activities in the Campine countryside is impossible as there are scarcely any probate inventories preserved from before 1650, so we have very limited evidence for the presence of looms and other means of production. Other sources however give no indication of the presence of this type of activity during the sixteenth century. This is obviously an

[72] ARAB, Chambre des Comptes, 5213/1–8, Accounts of the domain of Turnhout, 1550–57.

[73] L. Adriaensen, 'De plaats van Oisterwijk in het Kempense lakenlandschap', *THB* 41 (2001).

[74] M. Craane, 'Spatial patterns; the late-medieval and early-modern economy in 'S Hertogenbosch from an interregional, regional and local spatial perspective' (Ph.D thesis, Tilburg University, 2013), p. 94.

important lacuna when assessing the demand for Campine wool, but the possibility remains that the local wool found an outlet in the villages in which it was produced.

It is only during the seventeenth century that commercial peasant sheep farming began to decline. The Dutch Revolt had led to chaos and ultimately cut the Campine off from northern production centres. Jan Bieleman suggested for the Veluwe, a sandy region in the Netherlands not dissimilar to the Campine, that it was from around then that commercial sheep breeding and wool production ceased to be a profitable business. Due to the growing popularity of linen, woollen textiles became less attractive. The breeding of sheep shifted to more peripheral regions, such as Drenthe.[75] If we look at some eighteenth-century figures, made available by Eric Vanhaute, then we find striking differences with the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Whereas in the earlier period a broad layer of society, the 'true' peasants who owned their own farms and were able to live above subsistence level, owned sheep, by the late eighteenth century only 9 per cent of the villagers were still maintaining far smaller flocks.[76] The Campine peasants therefore were able to adapt their commercial strategies to the changes in demand – perhaps turning more towards proto-industrial activities, for which we have evidence during the eighteenth century – as their mixed farming businesses gave them a stable basis for living.[77]

Lastly it remains to show how 'profitable' Campine sheep farming was in the sixteenth century. How much could a peasant gain by selling animal by-products? Sheep produced a wide range of saleable products: wool, dairy products, hides and meat. While wool has received the most attention, the importance of sheep for dairy products, hides and meat in particular was of equal importance to these peasants. Let us start with the possible gains to be made from the sale of lambs (for meat). Antwerp market prices are easily accessible. Scholliers has produced series of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Antwerp animal prices, predominantly based on the accounts of the Saint Elisabeth Hospital.[78] However, it is important to remember that these prices are probably not entirely representative for the Campine markets, where products were usually somewhat cheaper. The lamb numbers are based on the sixteenth-century lamb tithes accounts for Alphen and Essen-Nispen. Given that the median sheep-owning villager owned around 10 or 11 lambs, they might have a reasonable income from the sale of some of these animals; taking into account that the price of a lamb was around 3.75 (Essen and Nispen) to 4 (Alphen) days' wages of a rural labourer (see Table 10).

Wool did, however, leave more paper trails than the sale of animals. We have information on wool sales from the accounts of a sheep-breeding enterprise set up by Mary of Hungary, governor of the Low Countries, on her demesne in Turnhout. Based on the records of Willem Wils, the manager of this estate, we have been able to assess how much a peasant could potentially earn from the wool of his flock (see Table 11). A household owning a flock of sheep

[75] J. Bieleman, *Boeren in Nederland: Geschiedenis van de landbouw, 1500–2000* (2008), pp. 112–19.

[76] E. Vanhaute, *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)* (1990) and E. Vanhaute, *Heiboeren. Bevolking, arbeid en inkomen in de 19de–Eeuwse Kempen* (1992).

[77] On how peasants were able to seize market opportunities and adapt their strategies, see also B. Dodds, 'Demesne and tithe: Peasant agriculture in the late Middle Ages', *AgHR* 56 (2008).

[78] E. Scholliers, 'Prijzen en lonen te Antwerpen (15e en 16e eeuw)', in C. Verlinden (ed.), *Dokumenten voor de geschiedenis van prijzen en lonen in Vlaanderen en Brabant* (1959).

TABLE 10: Lamb prices and possible profits in the sixteenth century

	Alphen, 1514			*Essen-Nispen, 1553*		
	Number of animals	*In Brabant pence*	*In working days of unschooled labourer*	*Number of animals*	*In Brabant pence*	*In working days of unschooled labourer*
Price for one 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	30.0
Median number of lambs (Q2)	10	578.0	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	45.0

Sources: Animal numbers come from AAT, II, 688. Lamb tithes in Alphen, 1514 & AAT, II, 806. Lamb tithes, Nispen and Essen sixteenth and seventeenth century; prices are derived from E. Scholliers, 'Prijzen en lonen te Antwerpen (15e en 16e eeuw)', in C. Verlinden (ed.), Dokumenten voor de geschiedenis van prijzen en lonen in Vlaanderen en Brabant (1959); wages from Van der Wee, *The growth of the Antwerp market* (database Jord Hanus).

TABLE 11: Estimates of wool yields, based on prices and quantities of wool sales in Turnhout by Willem Wils between 1553–56

Wool yields and profits	
Average quantity of wool per sheep in 'steen'	0.16
Price of wool per steen in schelling	33.13
Average flock size	45.0
Wool yields in steen per average flock in schelling	7.2
Cash earnings per average flock in schelling	238.54
Amount of days' wages a skilled mason could receive from the earnings	29.81

Source: Information on flock sizes and number of sheep that were shorn derived from: AAT, II, 206, Lease accounts of the abbey of Tongerlo, 1504–1513. Estimates of the price and quantities based on the accounts of Willem Wils, ARAB, Chambre des Comptes, 5213/1–8, Accounts of the domain of Turnhout, 1550–57.

could potentially earn an income equal to 30 days of wages as a skilled urban mason.[79] We must obviously take into account the fact that these peasants had to re-invest a portion of these earnings in order to purchase animals, fodder and supplies, while probably up to a third of the flock had to be replaced each year.[80] However, the fact that the commons could be used and the

[79] ARAB, Chambre des Comptes, 5213/1–8. Wages based on the series of Robert Allen, derived from Van Der Wee, *Growth of the Antwerp market*.

[80] ARAB, Chambre des Comptes, 5213/1–8. Campbell, *English seigniorial agriculture*.

fact that family labour (often child labour) could be used to shepherd sheep cut costs significantly. The difference between cottagers and smallholders, owning a limited number of sheep, and independent peasants, owning sizeable flocks, seems to be sharply drawn. Independent peasants were in all likelihood much more able to profit from the commercial opportunities of sheep breeding than their less well-off neighbours, whose more limited number of sheep did not allow for such endeavours.

The peasants in particular were therefore able to supplement their household income by engaging in the market. They did not, however, blindly follow the ups and downs of those urban markets. When, during the fifteenth century, imports of English wool were banned, Campine peasants would have been able to transform their farm structure and agricultural strategies to specialize in sheep breeding and wool exporting. After all, this important shift had occurred in the Brecklands in East Anglia during the later medieval period once English wool had gained importance as an export product.[81] Nevertheless, the peasants did not change their agricultural strategies, and maintained similar flock sizes throughout the period, apart from a short downfall of sheep numbers during the late fifteenth-century economic crisis. They supplied the inland wool that was constantly needed to produce second-rate cloth for internal demand without trying to follow the fluctuations of the luxury trade.

VI

Where peasants continued to have access to commons – where common-pool institutions protected their rights – they continued to maintain sizeable sheep flocks. Where the institutions which defended commons were overturned by lords, peasant sheep keeping disappeared. Whilst lords, ecclesiastical institutions and their tenants might have been able to produce better-quality wool, and dominate the high-end market, peasants could almost certainly find an outlet for their wool if only for the production of lower-grade cloth manufactured and sold locally. Peasant wool might therefore find a ready market.

The late medieval Campine is a particularly good example of this. A significant proportion of the Campine villagers owned flocks of sheep, of which the largest were in the hands of the richest 30 per cent, the independent peasants. The larger peasants owned flocks averaging around 45 animals, a few as many as 100 animals. As such some of these peasants could match the flock sizes of the tenant farmers of the abbey of Tongerlo. These sheep owners were however true peasants. They never owned more than 10 hectares of land, including both arable land and pasture. Specialization was absent, and they combined intensive arable production on small plots of land with animal husbandry. Taking full advantage of both their own as well as common land, these households were able to maintain a couple of heads of cattle and run flocks of sheep on the heathlands. These peasant households had therefore diversified to avoid complete market dependency and to outride the shocks and economic fluctuations of the pre-industrial urban markets. Sheep breeding provided an additional income with which to secure self-sufficiency.

[81] Bailey, 'Sand into gold'.

However, even in a peasant society with commons, significant internal differences could be encountered. The ownership of a large enough farm and a flock of sheep could make the difference between struggling for survival and relatively adequate standard of living. When it came to sheep owning, the Campine's most significant dichotomy was not one between commercial tenants and small peasants, but between those able to keep flocks of sheep of above average size and reap the commercial benefits, and those only able to breed a more limited number of animals, essential for their own survival.

Not all peasant societies were able to opt for commercial sheep breeding. Limited by their tiny plots of private land, smallholders heavily relied on access to common pasture. In the Campine, peasants were only able to feed up to four or five cattle units from their own lands, which was far from sufficient to support their flocks of around 45 animals. It was only when peasants were able to obtain and maintain access to wastelands that sheep breeding became practicable. Thanks to the extensive and inclusive communal rights to the common wastelands, the Campine peasants, and especially the upper layer of independent peasants, were able to develop a diversified economic portfolio. Consequently the Campine peasant flocks not only survived throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but reached their peak at that time.