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# Death and descendants

Property and care after passing away in different rural social classes in the North of the Netherlands in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century

**Richard Paping (University of Groningen)**

Very provisional version, Paris, 20 January 2017

## 1. Introduction

In the eighteenth century Northwest-European countryside (and earlier) one's socio-economic position (social status) was depending largely on one's occupation, and that depended usually on the possibility to acquire a specific niche. In this process, the social, economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu)<sup>1</sup> one had obtained plays a large role. Actually, it is the acquisition of these different kinds of capital during early years of life that mainly defined people's social chances. The family of origin is a very important source of all three types of capital. Children can often rely to some extent on the social and family network of the parents early in their career. These contacts can help them finding work or a marriage partner, borrowing money and so on. If we narrow cultural capital down to schooling and on-the-job training to get certain skills, but also include norms, values and ways to behave in society, than again parents and family play a large role in their acquisition. This was certainly the case in past societies where education was largely restricted to primary schools, which were not even attended by every child. Also initial economic capital came largely directly from the parents. During life they could lend it, or give security if children tried to get a loan from someone else. The most important transfer of economic capital, however, seem to have happened after the passing away of the parents, when children receive their possessions as inheritance.

In conclusion, the transfer of all kinds of capital from parents to children plays a crucial role in the prospects of children. It is precisely this transfer to one or more of the children that can secure the social status of a family over generations. In unequal societies the specific social class, of course, defines largely the amount and kind of capital which can be transferred. In theory, this transfer of capital appears quite simple, though in practice there were many hindrances in the past, that especially were related to demographic events.

If parents die before – at least a part of – their children had grown-up, the transfer of capital became rather complicated. The further transfer of cultural (capabilities) and social capital (network) would be seriously hindered as parents were not present anymore. The transfer of

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<sup>1</sup> P. Bourdieu, *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste* (Boston 1984).

economic capital was also not without problems, as young children will not have been yet able (or at least not thought to have been able) to administrate their inherited possessions.

If parents on the other hand live very long, a completely different problem could arise, as their children were not able to dispose of their inherited goods at the age they most seriously needed them. Availability of economic capital is mostly in need when children are in their twenties, marry and try to conquer a social position of their own. The transfer of cultural and social capital is in the case of surviving parents, on the other hand, less problematic; it might even be the case that children might take more profit of these as parents live longer. However, if parents survive their own children, inheritances directly go to adolescent grandchildren, which again will not be capable of administrate their property themselves.

In this paper, I want to research how a specific relatively capitalistic market-oriented early-modern rural society as a whole and the most important different rural social groups as such (farmers, labourers and other mainly middle class households – artisans, merchants etc. active in industry and services –, with a special focus on pauper families depending on poor relief) dealt with the problem of the transfer of assets (economic capital) after death, whether parents passed away early or lived extremely long, or even in the case of dying without any direct descendant at all.

*-What happened actually with the household, the assets and the reliabilities, when a head of household died without a directly evident grown-up successor, both on short term and in the long run?*

*-What institutional and legal framework was created to take care of the interests of adolescent off-spring in such situations, both concerning the administration of their property and their upbringing?*

*-Were there large differences in what happened with the family household and its property between different social groups?*

*-How were the chances of male and female descendants influenced by the moment when parents passed away, both in respect to social status and marriage?*

I will concentrate my paper on the North of the Netherlands and especially the northern and western part of the Groningen countryside in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century (the Groningen *Ommelanden*), comprising about half the province. Though before answer the aforementioned questions, I will first try to provide a general background by depicting the very long term development of this relatively modern and wealthy society since the medieval period, concentrating mainly on the development of ownership and property rights of land and on social structure. Next, I will discuss the legal and practical organisation of the transfer and management of property after someone deceased in the sixteenth to eighteenth century, a period without much change in the institutions concerned. At the end, I will among others use an eighteenth and early nineteenth century family reconstitution to investigate the family continuity of households (and ownership of houses) over generations, and to relate social and marriage chances to the moment of dying of the parents.

## **2. Context: landownership and social structure in rural Groningen from medieval times onwards**

In a pre-modern agricultural society the most important actual source of wealth is land, followed from a large distance by dwellings, livestock, equipment and (food) stocks. Of course, jewellery, silver, gold and coins, and even cloths and other durable consumer goods also could constitute a large value, partly as luxury durables, but also because of the purchasing power they embody. Nevertheless, ownership of land and other property rights on the land (think for instance of user rights and tithes) were of prime importance.

Unfortunately, medieval sources for the province Groningen studied are extremely poor. However, some rough lines on the history of the ownership of the land can be construed.<sup>2</sup> From the twelfth century till the early decades of the fourteenth century with a strong growth in the number of parishes, a very rapid increase of large stone churches took place in the Groningen countryside. Both local nobles, rich farmers and others must have bequeathed substantial amounts of land to new and older parishes in this period. First, liquid assets were needed to fund the expensive building of the numerous stone churches. By 1500 the Ommelanden with the Oldambt – together comprising a large majority most of the inhabited parts of the Groningen countryside – with by then 50,000 inhabitants at its maximum counted 150 large and medium-sized stone churches, nearly all being built in the twelfth and especially in the thirteenth century.

Not just the once-only cost of building, but also the continuous maintenance costs were a burden for the parish. However, every church administration (managed by the churchwardens) later on owned large stretches of land to cover these annual costs. These lands – in the sources called *van de Heiligen*: in translation “from the Holy-ones” or “from the Saints” – mainly seem to have come into the possession of the churches before the second half of the fourteenth century, presumably usually as private bequests. The same is surely the case with the lands mentioned to maintain the vicary and finance the expenses of the local priest or priests. Next to several small parcels, it can be argued taking into account the actual shape of the plots that the core of the vicary’s land was usually a former complete farm that was given to the parish upon its erection.

Even more important as a landowner were the at least 25 large and small monasteries founded in the Groningen countryside between 1175 and 1340. By 1594 they owned possibly more than 20% of all the cultivated land in the region, largely originating from bequests much earlier in time, compared to an estimated 15% owned by local religious institutions. For 1755 we have quite reliable data on the owners of more than 64,000 hectare in the most prosperous

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<sup>2</sup> This part is largely based on: R. Paping, ‘Sociaal-economische factoren bij het verdwijnen van middeleeuwse plattelandskerken’, *Groninger kerken*, 28 (2011), january, 16-24.

part of the province, and by that time some 41% of the cultivable land was owned by institutions.<sup>3</sup>

With the plague (1347-1352), the foundation of new monasteries and parishes, and the building of abbeys and churches came abruptly to an end. Although, the sources mention quite some small acquisitions of land either through sale or bequest by already existing monasteries and churches in the period from the end of the fourteenth to the early sixteenth century, by far the largest part of the institutional ownership of land dates back to before 1350. Unfortunately, not much systematic research is done on the medieval origin of this institutional ownership until now, making it hard to draw very rigorous conclusions. However, it seems that care for the saviour of one's soul by potential donors (usually later on by rich people without – legitimate – children) made way slowly in these centuries for a taste for personal and family luxury and power.

The one and a half century from 1350 onwards in this region was characterized by endless feuds between diverging alliances of more or less would-be noble families, just like elsewhere in the northern Low Countries. In the rural parts of Groningen (actually at that time a part of greater Friesland), these small wars stimulated the erection of numerous small stone castles, and later on also more and more of the larger farms were built in stone, this in sharp contrast with the earlier building of churches and abbeys. Like in the nearby province of Friesland, an effective sovereign having control of the government was missing for several centuries (the so-called 'Frisian freedom'). This made the conglomerate of inhabitants, in practice the noble and non-noble landowners with also an important role for the abbots, the actual sovereigns of the small districts in which the region was divided.

In the fifteenth century, the powerful nearby large city of Groningen (with about 10,000 inhabitants) tried to take the role of sovereign of its hinterland with some short-time and also some long run successes, the last especially in the eastern region Oldambt. However, the city did not manage to remain completely independent and in the first half of the sixteenth century after some wars between several "foreign" principals, the whole region came in 1536 under the Burgundian/Habsburgian empire, just like nearly the whole of the rest of the Low Countries.

Monasteries, previously cultivating large stretches of their land themselves, were by then all in serious decay, presumably as they were not attracting enough monks and nuns anymore. Consequently, they started to rent out small, but also often very large farms (of more than 50 hectare) to wealthy tenants. The not extremely rich Groningen noble families usually did not own a large estate, but many smaller and larger plots scattered over the region. This situation was actually a consequence of the division every generation of inheritances between sons and daughters, ordered by the law. Except for some land surrounding their noble house for their own farm, noble land was rented out. In 1755 local nobles owned only 12% of the land, signifying their limited importance, however, by that time 18% was owned by inhabitants of

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<sup>3</sup> R. Paping, *'Voor een handvol stuivers'; Werken, verdienen en besteden: de levensstandaard van boeren, arbeiders en middenstanders op de Groninger klei, 1770-1860* (Historia Agriculturae 27: NAHI/RegioProjekt: Groningen 1995) 184, also for the rest of the 1755 data.

the city of Groningen and 3% by people living elsewhere, which might also partly have been local noble land originally.

In 1755 only 11% of the land was used by the owner itself, largely by farmers, but also partly by artisans, nobles and those belonging to a local non-noble sub-elite. Proper freehold farmers were rather scarce in the north Groningen countryside in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. There might have been slightly more freeholders in the sixteenth century, as there is proof that many descendants of rich freehold farmers lost their land in the second half of the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth century to nobles and members of the urban aristocracy, while others moved to the city and some even joined the urban aristocracy.<sup>4</sup>

Despite their decay, monasteries remained the most important landowners in the sixteenth century. However, their share did not grow anymore as bequests had become rare. With the rise of Protestantism, resulting in a civil war from 1580 to 1594, and afterwards an actual take over by Protestant forces. Consequently, in 1594 the property of the monasteries (20% of the total!!!) was largely taken over by the provincial government, who only sold this land only in the second half of the eighteenth century. The belongings of the local institutions, on the other hand, were left intact, though all the churches became Protestant, and priests made way for reverends. After 1594, the large majority of the inhabitants also became Calvinist (before it was presumably just a minority), though in the eighteenth century some 7% of the rural population still was Roman-Catholic, getting in this century again some religious freedom.

For this sixteenth century more sources become available, which make it possible to give a quite detailed description of the rural society. Around 1550 at least the northern and western part of Groningen countryside (Hunsingo, Fivelingo and northern Westerkwartier) was characterized by a capitalistic agriculture. Medium-sized and large farms were dominant. Largely these farms were tenancies, although some farmer families also owned larger or smaller plots of land themselves. Freeholders formed a diminishing minority under the farmers. These farmers formed the upper layer of society, just behind the nobles, taking into account that the largest part of the rural population had no or only a limited amount land at disposal to cultivate. These land-poor households earned their income either with farm labour on the large farms or by doing specialized tasks in the service and industry. Numerous carpenters, shoemakers, blacksmiths, millers, shopkeepers, merchants, inn-keepers, shippers and so on were living in the larger villages.<sup>5</sup>

Although the shares of these occupational groups could change in the next centuries, the social structure in general remained intact. Population growth usually resulted in a rising share of land poor or land less households. The reason was that the number of farms rented

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<sup>4</sup> H. Feenstra en H.H. Oudman, *Een vergeten plattelandselite. Eigenerfden in het Groninger Westerkwartier van de vijftiende tot de zeventiende eeuw* (Fryske Akademy: Ljouwert 2004); H. Feenstra, *Spinnen in het web. Groningse regenten in relatie tot het omringende platteland tijdens de Republiek* (Gronings Historische Reeks 36: Van Gorcum: Assen 2007); R. Paping, G. Schansker en E. Knol, 'Een verarmde weduwe als sleutel tot een netwerk van zestiende-eeuwse eigenerfden en kloostermeiers', *Gruoninga*, 55 (2010) 84-139; R. Paping en G. Schansker, 'Verval van een eigenerfd Zuurdijks geslacht (Scheltens)', *Gruoninga*, 56 (2011) 115-143.

<sup>5</sup> R. Paping, 'Bevolking en beroep: Winsum van de zestiende tot het begin van de twintigste eeuw, in J. Tersteeg e.a. (red.) *Winsum 1057-2007* (Stichting Historische Uitgave Winsum-Obergum: Winsum 2007) 177-213.

out remained more or less stable, because the provincial government, but also the local institutions, the nobles and other well-to-do land-owners were not very much inclined to divide farms. And even if they wanted to do that, the increasing user rights of the tenant farmers in the seventeenth century and even more in the eighteenth century impeded division. It will be illuminating to go a little bit deeper into this crucial development.

The property rights on land in the province of Groningen developed in a rather peculiar way in the early-modern period. Already at the end of the sixteenth century, it was custom that the tenant owned the dwellings (the farmstead) on the rented land (for periods of six years). The clear economic advantage for owners was that in this way they did not have to maintain these dwellings, being the responsibility of the land user. However, if a farmer was expelled from a farm without his own consent, the landowner had to purchase the dwellings (and later on also all the other improvements of the land) from his former tenants. Of course, this made it difficult to raise rents, shifting part of the property rights on the land in practise to the tenants.

In the second half of the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth century, these consequences were less apparent due to the falling agricultural prices and the low rents. In this period, landowners were usually satisfied they could at least find someone who was prepared to pay the rent. Consequently, there was no problem if the present land user transferred the farm to someone who was prepared to pay that rent. In this period, some legal decision of law courts increased the rights of the users to keep the land at the expense of landowners. The effects, however, only became clear in the course of the eighteenth century, when user rights of land started to embody an increasing value, especially in the second half of the eighteenth century with its rising land prices. Land rents in practice became fixed, and to prevent any uncertainty about this, tenants and landowners concluded contracts. In these contracts the landowners accepted for a certain amount of money rental provisions stating that rents remained eternally fixed and that the right to use the land could be inherited or passed over to anybody by the land user in any way he or she wanted.

For the small plots on which the houses of the middle classes and labourers were situated, a similar development also had taken place in the seventeenth century. These yards were often from local institutions, noble or other well-to do families, and the rents were usually fixed from the moment the house had been built. The larger the yard, the larger the annual rent, but also usually the older the house, the lower the rent, because of this fixation. Consequently land poor house-owning families at least from the seventeenth century onwards could also dispose of their houses in the way they wanted. Data assembled from Groningen rural inventories for the period 1770/1810 show that house-ownership (nearly always on rented yards) was widespread among both non-agricultural households (85%: n=213) and labourer households (66%: n=232).<sup>6</sup>

In 1770 an estimated 32% of the households of the Groningen clay area consisted of farmers cultivating more than 5 hectare, nearly 26% were labourers or to a lesser extent small-holders,

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<sup>6</sup> Paping, *Voor een handvol stuivers*, 209. Data for 1806/14 from reconstructed household lists for seven municipalities, including a small town, suggest 69% house-owners for labourers (n=562) and 67% for non-agricultural households (n=893).

while some 43% of the heads of household had their main occupation outside agriculture.<sup>7</sup> Population in the region had increased in the first half of the seventeenth century, however in the first half of the eighteenth century a definite decrease started and the population diminished by approximately 20%, to recover only slowly until about 1790. After that year the number of inhabitants grew rapidly by about 1% annually. Taking this into account, the share of farmers might have been even lower in the seventeenth century and the share of labourer households higher. With the increasing population, however, only the non-agricultural households, especially the labourer households started to grow. By 1810, farmers formed only 24% of households, labourers 33%, while the others still comprised 43%. This proletarianisation process went on, so in the second half of the nineteenth century labourers, largely farm labourers, with no or nearly no land made up more than 40% of the households.

### 3. The legal procedures around and the settlement of inheritances

Medieval Frisian laws formed the basis for the way arrangements were made concerning the passing of property to next generations in early-modern rural Groningen. The original aim of these laws was to keep property (read land) within the family. In general sons received double as much land as daughters, and in case there were no descendants, those kin most near in blood ('*sibbe*') were to inherit. Originally, this could mean that grandchildren of the deceased could be disinherited because their uncles or aunts – as sons and daughters nearer related to the deceased – were still alive. This also meant that the marriage partner (being no blood-relative) did not have any right on part of the inheritance, because everything had to remain within the kinship. However, if one of the children died without off-spring before the surviving marriage partner, she/he was as a blood-relative for half the heir of his/her own child, and through this indirectly of his/her partner.

With its extreme stress on family relations and kinship, the inheritance system on first sight gave individuals and couples only very limited opportunities to diverge from general rules. For instance, it was not allowed to disinherit your own children. At best arrangements could be made to favour grandchildren at the expense of their parents. For instance, farmer Pieter Harms in Niekerk told in his will in 1783 that he already had given daughter Itjen with her husband 1,100 guilders to pay off their debts, an amount to be deducted from her share of the inheritance. If the share of one child would be larger than 1,100 guilders, the money would go directly to the children of Itjen because of her ill-behaviour, and if these children died, their siblings would inherit everything, only if all Itjen's children died before her, she would at last get the inheritance. Nevertheless, daughter Itjen was to get all the revenues of her father's inheritance during her whole life.<sup>8</sup> This limited room for couples with children to dispose of their inheritance had the effect they rarely made up a will. Consequently, the majority of the

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<sup>7</sup> Paping, *Voor een handvol stuivers*, 66: figures for the Groningen clay region include one small-town Appingedam with about 1,500 inhabitants, and also a rather similar part named Oldambt in the east. The rare households with a head without an occupation were not taken into account.

<sup>8</sup> Groninger Archives, inv.nr. 734-612, 27-6-1783.



Groningen wills were concluded by persons without any off-spring, who had more room to decide what should happen with their possessions.

The rare seventeenth and especially eighteenth century wills often did not give many details on who was to inherit what, but usually stipulated that the surviving partner was allowed the control of the inheritance. Nearly always a tiny sum of money was promised to the local poor relief board. After the passing away of the surviving partner, the inheritance was frequently to be split into two equal parts for both the husband's and wife's side of the family. Ownership of land usually returned to the side of the family from which it originated. However, as became clear in chapter 2, only a very small part of the rural Groningen households actually owned land. The important user rights on land and ownership of buildings were treated just like all the other possessions.

At least from the sixteenth century onward, marriage contracts were the most usual way to make arrangements concerning inheritances diverging from common law in Groningen. These contracts were usually subscribed by a substantial number of relatives of the bride and groom, including their parents, if still alive. In such a contract also marriage portions given by the parents or other family members to the bride and groom could be stipulated. Other elements of such contract could be the division of the joint inheritance in the case there was no off-spring, the (standard) decision to give sons and daughters exactly equal portions (make them equally *sibbe* or family) and the provision that children could step legally into the position of their parents ('right of representation'), when it came to inheriting. The last two were very widely used ways to circumvent implications of the medieval law that were considered increasingly unfair from the sixteenth century onward.<sup>9</sup>

It has to be remarked, that although the old medieval law was stressing family ties to a considerable extent, in early-modern Groningen property was in practise always seen first and foremost as owned by individuals or couples. That means that there was no family property, however there were some remnants of such a family property. People sold land and other immovables for themselves and for their heirs according to the phrase often used in contracts. Also when the ownership of land was sold, blood relatives had a specific right of 'naarkoop' or in English literally "near purchase". Relatives were allowed to purchase back land for the same price from the new unrelated owner, and could keep the land within the family. This right was by the way also given to neighbouring land owners, to prevent fragmentation of land ownership. However, this right of "near purchase" was only relevant for the actual ownership of land, and not for the for eighteenth century households much more important houses and user rights of land.

Within couples, the husband was seen as the first responsible for taking all kind of decisions, however, only if the wife had also agreed upon a contract, she had to accept the consequences of the contract after her husband's death. Consequently, especially in the eighteenth century husband and wife usually acted together in legal affairs. Legally, gender differences were

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<sup>9</sup> Only the Groningen nobles kept adhering to the favouring of sons, to prevent the division of their landed property.

actually relatively small, although it were always males who performed official positions and were often said to act on behalf of their wives (and rarely the other way around).

If someone died without off-spring, the heirs seem to have taken immediate control of the inheritance. When there was no legal dispute about who were the heirs this did not create any problems, and mediation of the local judge was not needed. Taking into account the records of the judges this must have been the case in the very large majority of the inheritances.

However, if there was disagreement the judge became involved. For instance, 8 November 1777 an old widow Grietje Freerks claimed she was partly heir of small farmer Harmannus Luidens (1699-1777) as a relative of his mother, and also Gaije Hindriks wife (a daughter of Grietje Luidens) together with the children of Johanna Luidens mentioned their interest as relatives of his father.<sup>10</sup> However, 10 January 1778 Willem Luidens and the children of Jantje Luidens as claimed heirs (unsuccessfully) started a legal procedure against Gaije Hindriks and relatives, suggesting Gaije had confiscated goods belonging to Harmannus Luidens. This inheritance was quite complicated as Harmannus Luidens was the only surviving son of a couple, and owned large stretches of land, so the judge had to sentence. In cases of disagreement, there was also the possibility to appeal to the provincial court of justice.

Next to disagreement, the local judge also played a role in inheritances, when minor children were among the heirs involved. Actually this was the most frequent reason for turning to court, as every important decision of the guardians of juveniles (see later on) had to be affirmed by the local judge. Receiving an inheritance directly from a grandfather, grandmother or other relative by children who lost either father or mother could actually be a reason to appoint guardians.

A third reason for a judge to involve was the case when heirs were not present in the neighbourhood. For instance in January 1780 the deceased unmarried blacksmith Otto Hendrix living in Kloosterburen (Groningen) was coming from Lathen in Germany. His heir was his sister married with Hendrik Huisman living in Ahlen in Germany, according to his uncle Otte Jans, blacksmith living in Usquert in Groningen.<sup>11</sup> Comparable is the death of the German farmhand Jan Berends in 1735 in Usquert. A large local farmer got permission to bury him and to save the chest with his belongings till his heirs (two sisters) arrive from Munster to collect it.<sup>12</sup>

Most inheritances were settled between the heirs without involvement of the local judge, so there are often not much direct traces of the division to be found in the archives. Only rich inheritances usually show up, because the heirs made up an official deed before the judge explaining how they wanted to split up the legacy. The sale of immovables (usually the house) by heirs of mediocre inheritances also was often registered officially, even in cases when the house was sold to one of the heirs. Poor or negative inheritances can show up in the

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<sup>10</sup> Groninger Archives, inv.nr. 734-303, 8-11-1777, 10-1-1778, 14-3-1778.

<sup>11</sup> Groninger Archives, inv.nr. 734-303, 20-1-1780.

<sup>12</sup> Groninger Archives, inv.nr. 734-625, 8-5-1735.

records of the poor relief, who administered the belongings of those receiving poor relief. Using these sources it can be reconstructed what happened in normal cases after an inheritance became available when someone died.

The heirs immediately tried to take control of the belongings of the deceased, sometimes this was done by a surviving partner, or else by children or other more distant heirs. Sometimes this was not a heir, but for instance an employer or lodging-house keeper who acted as the holder of the house of deceased. As fast as possible an inventory of all the belongings, credits and debts was made at the moment of passing away, though this was not deemed necessary with a surviving partner with which the deceased had off-spring, and there was no other off-spring. Of course this was also not necessary in the rare cases when there was only one heir. The costs of the funeral was to be paid fully out of the inheritance, and this could be very expensive depending on the social class, but at least included a coffin, payments for the funeral mass and drinks and food at the funeral meeting. From 1750 onward all possessions were valued in money one by one by independent persons if the judge was involved, before that year this was not immediately necessary, though in the course of the process of dividing the inheritance the actual value of the belongings played a large role, as every heir should receive their lawful share in money (or in ownership right of land).

In the case of a surviving partner, the cloths and other near personal possessions (jewels, church book) of the deceased, the so-called '*lijfstoebehoren*' (literally "body belongings") were going directly to the children. However, the personal possessions of the surviving marriage partner were also not a part of the inheritance. Usually a couple had the joint ownership of the whole legacy (except those "body belonging" just mentioned), unless otherwise was decided in a marriage contract or a will. One of the regulations of a marriage contract was usually, even if there were large difference in economic status between the marriage partners, that the whole legacy (except again for the ownership rights of land) would be joint when there was off-spring.

The surviving parent was legally either legitima tutrix (mother) or legitimus tutor (father) over the children and kept complete control over her or his children's inheritance, unless marrying again (see later on). In practise this gave enormous power to the surviving marriage partner. Though legally children were entitled to the inheritance of their deceased parent when becoming adult, they had very little possibilities to enforce this right. In that case they should have started a lawsuit against their own parents, which presumably was impossible to win legally, so I did not find any examples of such quarrels. So it was depending completely on the surviving parent (mother or father!), when he or she passed the inheritance of the deceased parent over to the next generation.

When legal children were the heirs, it could happen that the inheritance remained undivided for some time, depending on the actual situation and the decisions being made. Sometimes unmarried siblings could even be in charge of the parental household together for decades after the passing away of the last child. However, if one of the siblings left the household, it received his or her equal share of the inheritance in money. Sometimes the house or the

farmstead with its user rights (often together with a lot of furniture, cloths and equipment) was sold to one or more inheriting siblings.

Basic idea of the division of an inheritance was always that the money value of the whole legacy (after deducting the debts) was fixed, and every heir received its share in money or in other goods of the same value. The married child or unmarried children that were willing to take over the parental household might have had some benefit, as they could buy the estate of the parents with all its goods for a relatively smaller price. However, even in these cases the prices of at least houses and farmsteads were very near to the market value. The consequence of such a succession often was that the succeeding child ended up with huge debts to his or her siblings as a compensation for acquiring the parental household. Those possessions that were not interesting for one of the heirs, were sold to strangers. For instance, often an auction was organised to sell all the furniture and other goods from the house of the deceased parent, while the house and other immovables were sold separately. Such auctions were very attractive to change goods into money in a society in which products were used and reused over and over again. Some of the doubtful receivables and other risky possessions often remained joint possession of the heirs to spread the risk. For shop-keepers and artisans these doubtful debts could amount to substantial sums.

If the heirs were more distant relatives, the procedures were in general quite similar to the situation with inheriting children. Fixing the money-value of the inheritance, finding out what credits and debts existed and selling everything was the normal procedure. Afterwards the resulting net sum of money was divided among the heirs in correspondence to their legal share. However, even in such cases sometimes one of the heirs could take over the immovables, through paying off the other heirs. Only the ownership right of land nearly always remained within the family, frequently even undivided as collective ownership.

Until now, we assumed that the inheritance of a deceased was a positive thing for the potential heirs, but this was not really always the case. We have seen in chapter 2 that a large part of the Groningen rural population in the eighteenth century was relatively poor, consisting of landless labourers, petty artisans and small shop-keepers. Next, even people (especially widowed women) who were a little bit more well-to-do could come into financial problems when getting older and were not able to maintain their daily livelihood themselves. Any possessions could in such circumstances easily smelt away. In chapter 4 it will be shown that many children lost their last parent when they were already in their thirties or forties and their parents were already usually in their financially uncomfortable sixties, seventies or eighties.

When it was unsure if a legacy would really result in a positive balance because of the many debts, heirs could accept the inheritance *sub beneficium inventarium*. This meant that first an inventory was made of the value of the inheritance; if possible the debts were paid out of the purchase. If there was a financial surplus than this accrued to the heirs, though if there was a deficit, they did not have to pay off all the debts. When the heirs denied the inheritance completely, than the creditors took over control, and tried to sell everything belonging to the legacy, to at least earn back part of their loans. Usually the actual sale was organised by a village official called ‘*wedman*’ under the responsibility of the local judge.

Smaller legacies of poor people usually came under control of the poor relief board, who in that case also accepted it *sub beneficium inventarium*. An example were the administrators (deacons or ‘*diakenen*’) of the poor relief board of the Roman-Catholic parish of Bedum who in September 1756 pleaded to the local judge that Pieter Julles and his wife both recently died, while receiving support from their board, leaving behind three minor children. Pieter also had an adult son from his first marriage who denied his paternal legacy. The poor relief board was prepared to accept the inheritance *sub beneficium inventarium* taking responsibility for minor children. Potential creditors received two months to state their claims; afterwards the board wanted to sell all goods, and pay off as much of the debts as possible.<sup>13</sup>

In many of the legacies of paupers supported by the poor relief board, however, the judge was not involved at all. In the eighteenth century about 5-10% of the rural Groningen population was on the dole, though for a much larger part of the inhabitants receiving support was a potential part of the lifecycle. Paupers were mainly widows with young children, orphans, disabled and sick people, and old-aged. Especially at the end of their life relatively many people were supported by the poor relief board. For some unsupported poor, the poor relief board had to pay for the funeral (including the chest) when they died, they literally were buried “from the poor” (in Dutch ‘*van de armen*’).

Usually paupers first had lost nearly all their property, and the remnants were given to the board in return for support. So furniture and cloths used by the paupers were actually the property of the board. And if they had owned a house before, paupers had to hand it over. The poor relief board also received all the inheritances of supported persons. When paupers died, the administrators redistributed their things to other paupers, or sold part of it. Sometimes, deacons found unexpected possessions after the death of a pauper. In Uithuizermeeden deacons discovered the considerable amount of 16 guilders and 1 penny after the death of the old widow Geeske Tonnijs in 1797, though only a scanty 6 pennies after the death of Wilmke in 1801.<sup>14</sup> It has to be realized that the support of poor was not primarily seen as the responsibility of the family in the Groningen countryside, but of the local poor relief board. Many aging persons of the lower class origin, despite having children able to maintain their own household, were actually on the dole.

#### **4. The organisation of infant property protection**

As mentioned in chapter 3, local and provincial courts were especially heavily involved in the settlement of inheritances if under aged children were involved. A lot of surviving protocols of the civil jurisdiction of local judges are for a large extent dealing with such cases. Already around 1400 the government of the nearby city of Groningen appointed male guardians in the case children had lost their father and/or mother, to safeguard their inheritance and other

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<sup>13</sup> Groninger Archives, inv.nr. 734-100, 7-9-1756.

<sup>14</sup> Groninger Archives, NH parish Uithuizermeeden, inv.nr. 29, 22-3-1797, 20-7-1801.

interests. At first five guardians under the relatives had to be sworn in-to-office, though after 1584 it was allowed to reduce this number to three.<sup>15</sup>

This system of three appointed guardians also existed in the Ommelanden (Hunsingo, Fivelingo and Westerkwartier) at least from the sixteenth century onwards, but presumably already earlier. From the side of the deceased parent came the primary guardian, the *voormond*, from the side of the surviving parent came the second guardian, the *sibbevoogd*. The third guardian did not have to be related and usually was a neighbour, but could also be a relative or even the father. If nobody was available, also non-related males could act as primary or second guardian. These guardians had to be officially confirmed (or better appointed) by the local judge, or in some case a higher provincial court (*Hoofdmannenkamer*). It seems that in case inhabitants of different rural districts were involved confirmation of the higher jurisdiction was needed. For the sixteenth and most of the seventeenth century, nearly no records of local rural judges have been saved, but only the records of this higher provincial court.

Guardians were, however, only appointed over (half) orphans if there was a specific need for it. The most important reason was the remarriage of a surviving parent. The guardians main task was to safeguard the inheritance from the deceased parent. Usually, a standard agreement was concluded in which the surviving parent promised to raise the children in board and lodging until the age of 16 or 18, and to let them learn to read and write and also sometimes a proper trade in agreement with the social status of the family. The surviving parent also promised to pay out the inheritance at the age of 18 in money; until that time he or she could keep the capital without paying interest. In practice the inheritance usually also was not immediately paid when children reached the age of 18, but from that moment onwards the surviving parent had to pay interest on the total sum. If the inheritance of the deceased parent involved land, however, it usually was brought under the control of the guardians immediately.

From some of the surviving local administrations of judges dating from about 1660 onwards, it becomes clear that it was often the remarrying partner, whether male or female, who took the initiative for the appointment of this a few weeks before the new marriage. There are also examples that the new husband was asking for guardians. Replacement of guardians, because of death or sometimes also for other reasons, was instigated by the remaining guardians.

If both parents had died, the situation was more complicated. For instance, on 12 June 1683 three guardians were sworn in over the children of the deceased Kloosterburen farmers Marten Jans and Anje, who got the authorisation to sell all possessions together with the creditors.<sup>16</sup> In general, guardians did not have the right to sell land or other possessions without explicit approval of the local judge. However, the numerous times they asked to do so, this was nearly always accepted by the judge.

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<sup>15</sup> H.J.E. Hartog, *Voogdijaanstellingen in de stad Groningen 1639-1672* (Groninger Bronnen en Toegangen 8:

<sup>16</sup> Groninger Archives, inv.nr. 734-95, 12-6-1683.

Quite similar is the case of farmer Hindrik Heeres and his wife in Kloosterburen, both dying shortly before 13 April 1722.<sup>17</sup> An uncle of the wife with his consorts received permission to make an inventory of all their belongings, and was allowed to use the seed in the house to sow the land, and if it was not enough to buy more seed. Also he had to bury the dead child (who seemed to have died shortly after the parents), to organise an auction to sell goods to pay for the taxes and to sell the farm for at least 150 guilders. Two weeks later more creditors turned up, and also a relative claiming to be the owner of three cows on the farm. Another two months later the local official sold the products on the field for the benefit of the creditors. No guardians seemed to have been appointed over the surviving child, presumably because the net value of the possessions of Hindrik Heeres and wife was very negative.

This last example shows one important rule, if there was no money involved, than no guardians were needed. Guardians were only to a limited extent responsible for children if they still had a parent (the majority of the cases), although they were fully responsible for the raising of orphaned children. Their main task was to administer the finances of children in tutelage independently. If there was a negative balance of the deceased parent, than the remarrying parent had to promise to the local judge to take care of the minor children and raise them in a proper way. If both parents had died, and there was not enough money to raise the off-spring, than these children fell under the responsibility of the poor relief board. Again no guardians were appointed.

It seems that some of the older lower class children completely escaped from the system of guardianships. On the one hand they did not inherit anything from their parents so no guardians were appointed. However, from the age of 16-18 onward they were perfectly able to earn enough wage to pay for their expenses, so they did not become dependent from the poor relief board either. The poor relief boards themselves also dismissed these juveniles usually around the age of 17 to 19, because they could stand on their own feet financially. And if they did not dismiss them, some of the juveniles ran away as they were perfectly aware of their own earning power. This treatment of lower class children again makes perfectly clear, that the system of guardians was primarily meant to protect inheritances of minor children, and not to secure the upbringing of all young children.

Nevertheless, if both parents had died and there was an inheritance, the guardians had to supervise this upbringing. Usually, if orphans were very young they often lived in the house of the primary guardian, or else some other relative, usually an aunt or uncle. Expenses and even annual board and lodging were to be paid out of the inheritance. This was of course quite costly. The parental inheritance – unless very large – would rapidly disappear because of these large annual costs. However, orphans were rarely very young as in that case parents would both have died coincidentally shortly after birth. From the age of 13 to 15 orphans could become live-in servant and earn an increasing annual wage, together with board and lodging, a strategy perfectly in accordance with the lifecycle servant system that was very widespread in rural Groningen. Even if an older orphan remained in a family household, he or

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<sup>17</sup> Groninger Archives, inv.nr. 734-299 and 300, 16-2-1722, 13-4-1722, 27-4-1722, 29-6-1722.

she was expected to work and earn a proper income. Consequently benefits and costs of older orphans were more or less in balance, and there was even a good chance to create a surplus.

Good examples are two of the orphaned children of shipper Jacob Iwes and Anje Jacobs in January 1767 in Zoutkamp.<sup>18</sup> The son Jacob received when officially declared adult, 280 guilders (with the interest) as his paternal inheritance, 7 guilders paternal “body belongings”, four years of servants wage in 1763-1766 rising from 22, to 40, 50 and 68 guilders (but with a deduction of 80 guilders spent on him by the guardians), and 386 guilders as his maternal inheritance. His sister Anje (born 1749) was entitled to 280, 7 and 386 guilders. Still younger than her brother, her stepfather had hired to someone for board, lodging and cloths without any wage until May 1767.

We do not know the exact age of son Jacob, however, most of the orphans were declared by the local judge to be adult and responsible for their own financial affairs between age 21 and 24. The initiative was taken either by the child or by the guardians. The guardians at that moment gave insight in their revenues and costs, and the balance was calculated and handed over to the now grown-up child. Afterwards they were thanked for their administration and dismissed from their responsibilities by the judge. This was not necessarily the only time that the guardians made up accounts, because if the inheritance of the orphans was very large, annual accounts were presented to the local judge, who took close control of the of costs and revenues. Actually, the system had quite some checks and balances to prevent misuse of the money and assets of juveniles. For instance, if a guardian went broke, he was immediately dismissed, and if an investment proved to be insecure the guardians were held responsible for returning the money.

## 5. Parental death and infant chances

In chapter 3 the regulations around inheritances in rural Groningen were discussed, while chapter 4 described the provisions made to safeguard those inheritances in case heirs were still minor and seen as unable to administer their own financial affairs. In this chapter we will take a more quantitative approach, by analysing a database of the life course of Roman-Catholic children born in the Groningen Ommelanden between 1721 and 1810, based on a complete family reconstruction with in total about 5,293 children involved. Unfortunately, infant mortality was very high, mortality data of parents were not always complete and also a few children disappeared without a trace, leaving usually about 2,000 married children available for analysis.

Graph 1 (N=2,202) shows that becoming a full orphan was actually quite rare, and happened only to about 8% of all children before the age of 15, while 16% was orphan before the age of 20.<sup>19</sup> Most of the surviving children lost their last parent when they were between the age of 25 and 50, and even 10% above the age of 50. So, the big problem in this early-modern

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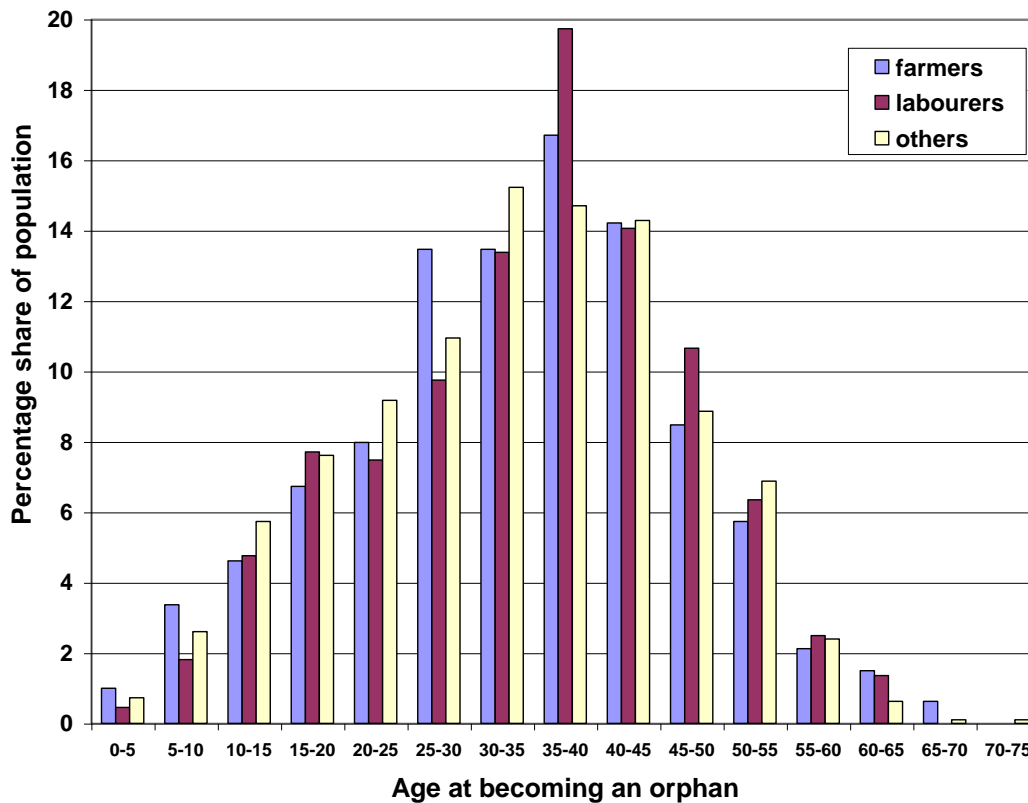
<sup>18</sup> Groninger Archives, inv.nr. 734-605, 2-1-1767. See also 17-1-1766.

<sup>19</sup> Figures relate to children marrying and to those remaining unmarried and at least reaching the age of 30.



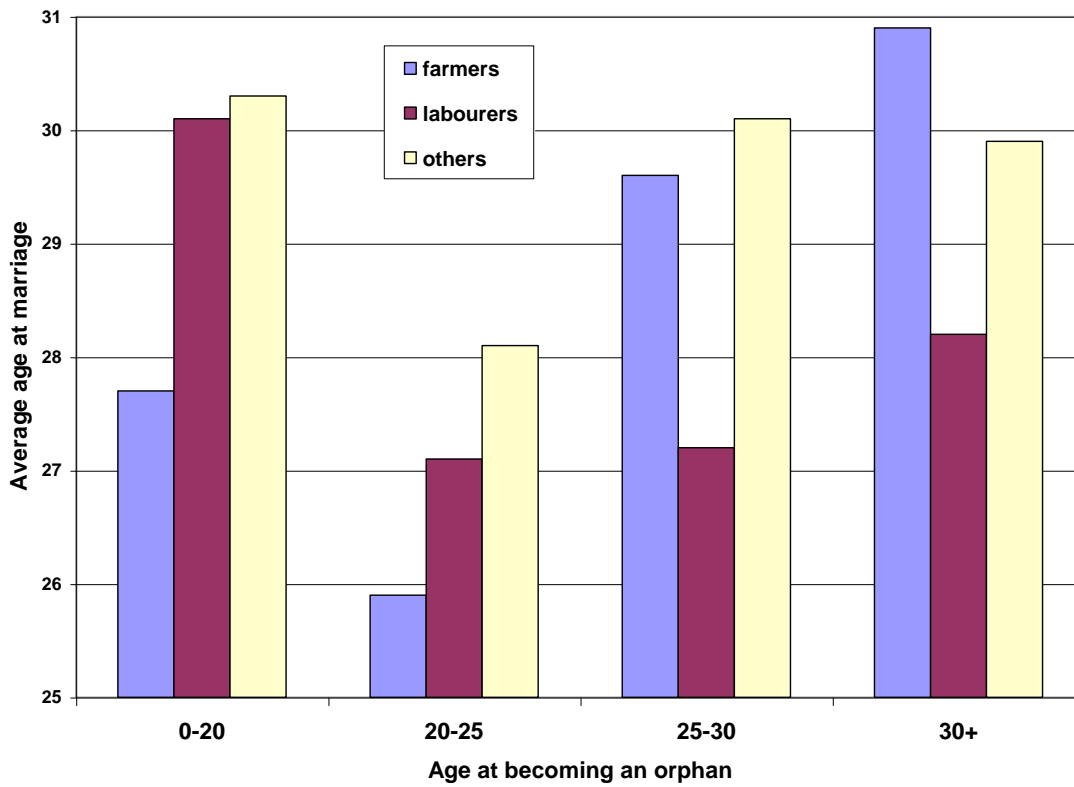
society was not losing one's parents and the administration of infant inheritances, but the very late acquisition of inheritances, many years after children already must have obtained a social position of their own.

**Graph 1: Ages at which children of several social groups become an orphan (Groningen births 1721/1810)**



Next, we look at the effect of the moment of availability of the parental inheritance on the marriage chances of sons and daughters. Graph 2 (N=913) shows that for all three social groups considered, there was a clear effect on the marriage opportunities of sons receiving their inheritance between the age of 20 and 25. The reception of money, or possibly the removal of surviving parents as an obstacle for marriage in this crucial period resulted in much earlier marriages than of those becoming orphan before the age of 20, or for those losing their last parent after the age of 25. The effect was especially large for sons of farmers (on average 3.8 year), smaller for artisans and others active industry and services (on average 1.8 year), and the least for labourers (on average 1.2 year).

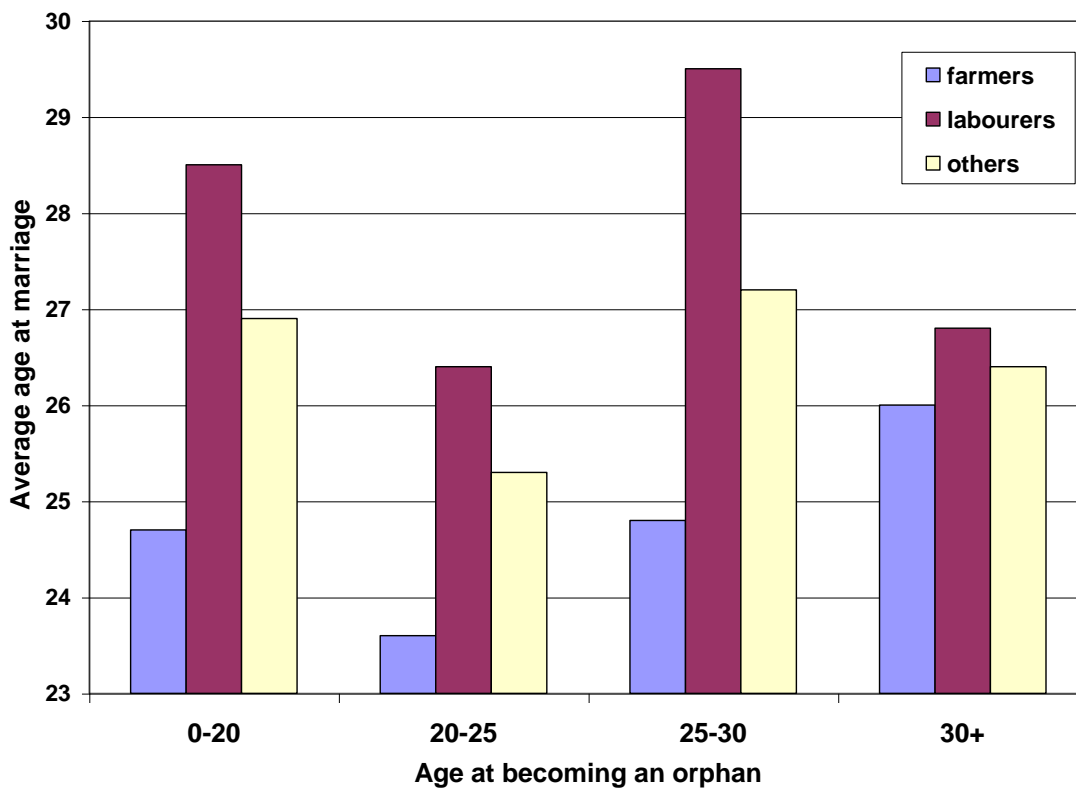
**Graph 2: relation between age at marriage of sons and moment of receiving the paternal inheritance (Groningen births 1721-1810)**



For daughters there was also only an effect for those losing their last parent between the age of 20 and 25 as shown in graph 3 (N=1,029). Again this group was marrying earlier, although the effect was smaller for all social groups. Daughters of farmers married 1.9 year earlier than average, daughters of artisans and shop-keepers and so on married 1.2 year earlier, and daughters of labourers married 0.9 years earlier. Again, just like for sons, the larger (presumably) the inheritance, the greater the effect on the age at marriage.

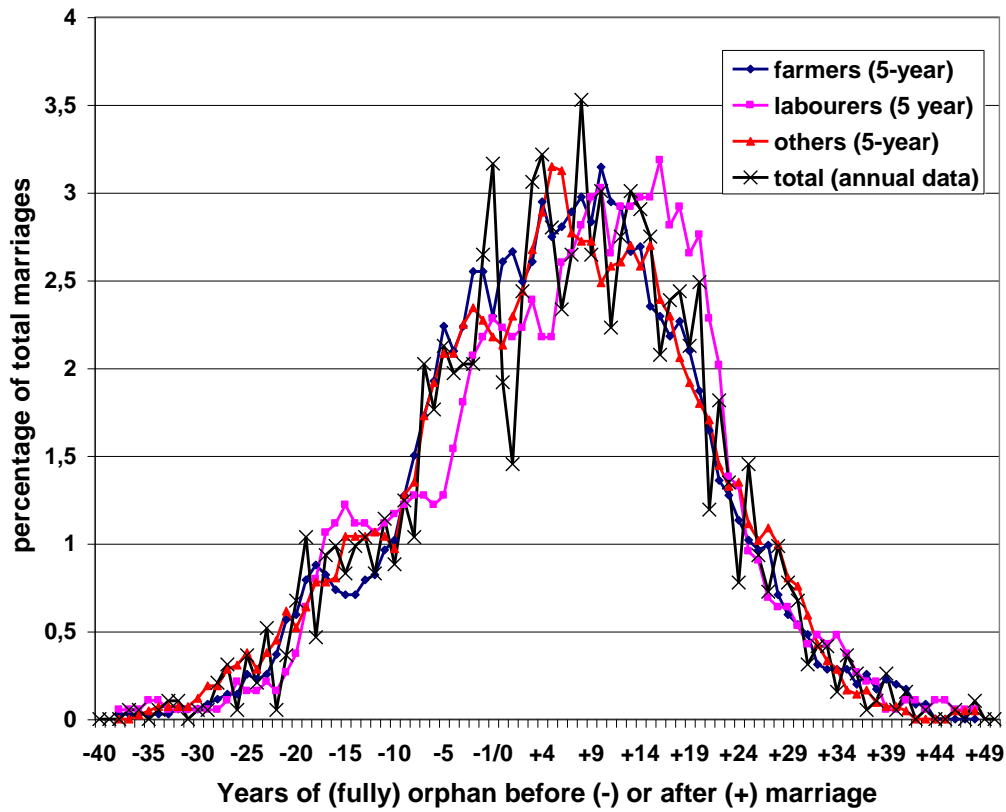
It is difficult to explain why the early death of parents did not have much effect on the marriage chances of orphans. Actually, for children of farmers there was an effect for early orphans, but considerably less than for those losing the last parent between 20 and 25. Early orphaned farmers' sons married 2.0 year earlier than average and daughters 0.8 years earlier. For the two other groups it was actually a hindrance to lose your parents quickly. The lack of parents in the late teenage years and early twenties might have reduced the social network and the possibilities to acquire skills for these social groups, for which actual inheritances will have been often small or even non-existent, because of the poverty of the parents.

**Graph 3: relation between age at marriage of daughters and moment of receiving the paternal inheritance (Groningen births 1721-1810)**



The former analysis of average ages at marriage for social groups suggest that there might have been a close relation between the moment children received their inheritance in the early twenties and the moment they married. If that is the case, one would expect a correlation between marriage date and the date that the last parent passed away. A comparison between these two dates has been made in graph 4 (N=1928). Because the numbers were small, the graph presents five-year moving averages for the three social groups, which actually obscure annual developments around 0, the cases where death of the last parent and marriage date were very near to each other. If we take all the three social groups together, a small effect can be seen. Directly in the two years after the death of the last parent more marriages were concluded by children. However, the graph suggests that this might not have been marriages made possible because of the death of the last parent. In the two years before the death of the last parent significantly fewer marriages of children were concluded, indicating that the peak after death might have been mainly the effect of a small part of the children postponing their marriage in the last years of life of the parents.

**Graph 4: relation between moment of becoming an orphan and marriage date (Groningen births 1721-1810)**



How interesting the small effects discussed above might be, when analysing the results of graph 4 it has to be realised that some 99% of the marriages do not show any relation at all with the death of the last parent. Actually, it is quite safe to conclude that the moment children married was in general irrespective of the situation of the parents, with a majority of 67% of the children marrying before the last parent had died, and only 33% afterwards.

The absent relation between marriage dates and death of the last parent can be explained by the kind of society the Groningen countryside is. Extended and complicated household structures with for instance three generations in one household were rare, and marrying couples usually started a household of their own after marriage. Nuclear family households formed the large majority of society.

Unfortunately, we do not have household lists dating from the eighteenth century, but there are some census lists of several municipalities in the Groningen Ommelanden in 1829 and 1849 showing the following figures for different social groups.<sup>20</sup> Farmer households contained in 13% of the cases other kin than parents and children, unskilled labourers in 9%, household heads having an enterprise in industry and economic services 11%, households active in other services 5% and those (elderly) without occupation 9%. Taking all households

<sup>20</sup> R. Paping, 'The dynamics of household structure and household size in the Northern Dutch countryside: The importance of complex households'. Paper presented at the ESSHC in Lisbon, March 2008.

together, only 10% of the houses contained extended or multiple households, of these one third were not proper three-generation households, but contained only a brother, sister, cousin or illegitimate grandchild (without parents present). A detailed enquiry of some of these three-generation households shows that usually such a household structure was not a first step in the next generation taking over the parental household. In most cases an old parent had moved in with a child in the last years of its life, or a newly-wed couple lived in the parental household shortly, to move to somewhere else shortly afterwards.

Actually the preponderance of nuclear households in combination with the absence of a relation between death of the last parent and marriage dates proves that the continuity of the parental household did not play a very large role in marriage decisions of couples. Individual demographic events make it very hard to continue family households, especially if married couples were not prepared to live together, and if married couples rather did not want to live with one of their old parents or other kin. The problem was that some of the parents died too early, so the parental household came available too soon for the children, while more often parents lived far too long for children to wait with marrying until they passed away to take over the parental household. Next to this, a lot of lower class families lost their house during the last years of the life of the elderly parents, when they became depending on the dole. Strategies of the family as a whole of especially the rural lower classes were not directed towards preserving the old house within the family by continuing the parental family household. Rather the aim was creating a livelihood for young couples, without taking much responsibility for what happened with the older generation. The attachment to the family house was consequently fairly limited in rural Groningen.

In previous research, it was shown that in the period 1750-1860 slightly more than 50% of the farmsteads in the Groningen eastern Marne remained within the family (including remarrying widows), while the rest was sold to strangers (more than 40%), was broken up and changed into a labourer household or disappeared. Even nearly 40% of the largest farmer households (using more than 30 hectare) in the Groningen Eastern Marne ended with a sale, and only in 60% of the farms a family member (including a remarrying widow) became the new inhabitant.<sup>21</sup> These results were completely different from an analysis of what happened with farmstead in two German villages Löhne and Borgeln were respectively only 16% and 7% of the farms were not transferred to a family member or to the new husband of a widow.

In the two villages in German Westphalia the attachment of the other – mostly relatively less wealthy – households to the family house was somewhat less than of the farmers (or better to call them peasants as the farms were usually smaller and directed partly to self-provision). Still in Löhne 64% of their houses were transferred to family members, and even 80% in Borgeln. In the Groningen village of Kloosterburen a meagre 29% of the houses of labourers remained within the family after a transfer, and even a very low 23% of the houses of the others (employers and self-employed in industry and services) was continued within the family.

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<sup>21</sup> C. Fertig and R. Paping, 'House and family: two different Western-European rural models. Westphalia (North-western Germany) and Groningen (North-Netherlands), 1780-1850', Paper presented at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Rural History Conference, Girona (Spain), September 10, 2015.

Actually, in contrast with the Westphalian countryside, houses and farmsteads were in Groningen mainly seen as a form of economic capital, necessary to have shelter and to earn a living. There might have been some emotional attachment to the house and the parental household, but strategies were not mainly directed towards preserving this household and filling it with a new generation of relatives, as was the case in Westphalia. If it fitted better – what was often the situation – the heirs of the next generation sold the house or farm and turned these assets into liquid money. With the revenues they could for instance buy a new house later in time, or – more often, as the parental inheritance usually came available only after the marriage of the off-spring (graph 1) – pay off the debts they had made when buying a house or farmstead of their own.

Of course, the very limited continuity between the generations created a very flexible rural society in which social mobility was very high. More than half the children ended up in a different social position than their parents, using a five level social stratification taking into account both the occupations of the head of the household (for daughters the position of the husband was used) and the necessary investments needed for the occupation (table 1). We know for every Roman Catholic household in the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century the amount of land used. In general in this (and most other) rural societies the rule was, the more land a household used, the wealthier it was. As we discussed extensively in chapter 2 freehold land ownership in Groningen was rare, however, the user rights of land also had turned into economic property in the eighteenth century. Because of the sharp rises in the price of land in the last decades of the eighteenth century, the value of this user right had become even higher than actual ownership without user right.

*Table 1. Upward and downward social mobility related to the moment the last parent died, Roman-Catholics, born in the Groningen Ommelanden 1721-1810 and marrying in rural Groningen.*

Age at passing away of the last parent	Fall %	Equal %	Rise %	N	Average pos. parents	Average pos. children
0-15 year	41	39	20	137	3.1	2.8
15-20 year	33	43	24	127	3.0	2.8
20-25 year	33	55	12	147	3.1	2.8
25-30 year	40	49	11	196	3.2	2.7
30-35 year	33	46	21	233	3.1	2.9
35 year or older	35	45	20	873	3.1	2.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>1,713</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>2.8</b>

NB: The Average pos. indicates the average social position, using a 5-level social stratification. The highest classification is rated 5, and the lowest classification is 1.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> See for social classification R. Paping, 'Taxes, property size, occupations and social structure, the case of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Northern Dutch countryside' *Revue Belge d'histoire contemporaine RBHC / BTNG Belgisch Tijdschrift voor nieuwste geschiedenis*, 40 (2010), 215-248. table published in Dutch: R. Paping and M. Meints, 'Sociale mobiliteit, aantal broers en zusters en erfdeel op het Groningse platteland, 1750-1850',

In table 1 we look at the relation between the date someone lost his or her last parent and the chances on upward and downward social mobility. Not surprisingly, in general this society was characterized by more downward mobility than upward mobility, as we have already described that the share of the lower classes in Groningen rural society was rising from the middle of the eighteenth century onward. It were early orphans (before the age of 15) that had the largest chance on downward mobility. This shows that although there was an extensive structure to protect their interests and keep them at the same social level as their parents, this was not completely successful. Not only the downward mobility of these early orphans was large, but their upward mobility was in line with the others, making them in general the group which was most mobile compared to their parents. Nevertheless, the figures make clear that the system succeeded in protecting the social chances of the vulnerable early orphans to quite some extent.

Those losing their last parent in their late teens were actually relatively the most successful group of children, with the highest upward social mobility. They lost their parents in a life period that they were already able to earn a decent living, and may be even had the advantage of keeping their earned wages themselves. Children who lost their last parent between 20 and 30 – and so received their inheritance exactly in the period when trying to establish an independent social position – were as expected the least mobile. Especially those becoming an orphan between 20 and 25 often stepped into the social footsteps of the parents. This also had a disadvantage, as it were especially those losing their parents in their twenties who – possibly because they were more depending on their parent's inheritance for getting a position themselves – were the least successful group in acquiring a higher social position.

The large majority of children lost their last parent after the age of 30. Their social mobility pattern doesn't show much surprises. Only upward social mobility chances were slightly higher than average, downward social mobility and immobility were about the same as the average. These results do not suggest that receiving your inheritance very late in life really was a big problem for one's social chances. Parents who were still alive later on could be beneficial as children could easier use their network and contacts (social capital) for their own future. Also, the inheritance might not have been available yet, but parents – at least if they were wealthy – could still support their children with given money or loans, or act as a guarantee when children wanted to borrow funds. Next, the expected future parental inheritance in itself could already be seen as a safeguard by lenders.

Although there were some effects of the moment when people received their inheritance, in general the conclusion has to be that the effects were rather limited according to table 1. Positive and negative effects of early availability of economic capital in the form of the parental inheritance were largely balanced with the mostly positive effects of the prolonged availability of the parental social capital, and perhaps even their cultural capital.

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*Historisch-demografisch onderzoek in Vlaanderen en Nederland. Jaarboek Historische Demografie 2015* [P. Puschmann, R. Paping en K. Matthijs eds., *Familie en levenskansen in het verleden* (Acco: Leuven/Den Haag)] 83-109, p. 104.

## 6. Concluding points

- Houses/farmstead were seen as economic capital
- Money-value of inheritances was of prime importance not specific assets
- Previous movement from a kin-oriented to a couple/individually oriented (equal) system
- Very strong (and quite succesful) system of protection of legacies of minor children
- Family continuity of households happened, but relatively infrequent, and was certainly not the rule (even under farmers) \_> did not fit into the family lifecycle of a nuclear household system
- A very limited relation between moment inheriting and social chances and marriages - > moment of receiving the inheritance was less important than the (expectation of) economic, social and cultural capital from the parents
- Consequence -> Flexible, market-oriented rural society with hig social mobility and a lot of individual agency (and very secure property rights)