

# **‘Making a living of their own’. Succession, inheritance and child careers in the Dutch rural economy in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>1</sup>**

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Preliminary version

## **Abstract**

Intergenerational mobility was relatively high in a very market-oriented 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century like rural Groningen with its many landless household; the chances for children to succeed their parents on farms and other positions (workshops, shops, houses) were rather limited. Succession and social chances were nearly not related to the number of brothers and sisters, nor to rank-number within the family. Although social background was of importance, the size of the inheritance played a minor role, taking into account the near equal prospects of children with many brothers and sisters and correspondingly smaller inheritances.

Most of the couples had to establish a new household shortly after marriage, because at that moment parents were often still alive and neolocality was preferred. Dowries did not play a large role, loans of parents to children seem to have been of more importance, and if dowries were given they were treated as a loan without rent at the moment of the equal division of the inheritance between the siblings. Presumably, the high mobility was a characteristic of a society in which personal virtues and skills were of larger importance than in more closed rural societies characterized by family succession. In this respect, the social system in capitalistic and specialised economies like the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century coastal Netherlands seems to be much more similar to the more open society of the Western world today.

## **1. Introduction**

The European countryside in the past is mostly presented as a fairly closed society, with little possibilities to change one's position. Farmsteads and other property are presumed to have been transferred from generation to generation within the family, mainly through the male lineage.<sup>2</sup> The claim of daughters on inheritance and on succession on parental positions were in general much weaker than of sons.<sup>3</sup> Few possibilities might have existed to improve one's position. Downward social mobility is usually associated with younger sons not able or allowed to succeed on the parental farm. Marriage decisions are

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is a revised and extended version of a part of a paper presented at COST Action Workshop A34, 'Gender and well-being' in Minho, April 2007. The other part has been published in Paping (2009).

<sup>2</sup> For instance: Thirsk (1976); Sabeau (1990); De Haan (1994); Zeitlhofer (2003); Dribe and Lundh (2005); Arrizabalaga (2009) 53-54.

<sup>3</sup> Goody (1976); Moring (2009).

supposed to be connected to the availability of a livelihood or niche.<sup>4</sup> Celibacy is suggested to have been used as a strategy to avoid a social fall and/or a division of the parental inheritance in only small parts.<sup>5</sup>

It can, however, be questioned if such a characterisation is valid for the entire pre-industrial European countryside. Pictured is a rather rigid society which seems to be mostly connected with a 'traditional' and not completely market-oriented rural economy where family continuity and stability was of more importance than personal chances and economic development. Interesting is to explore if we find the same ingredients in the more modern and prosperous parts of the Western European countryside, or are these regions characterized by a more flexible system of succession and social mobility? In this article I will use the case of the Groningen Ommelanden in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century to investigate if and how relative modernity might go together with a much more open rural society.

The Ommelanden, characterized by very fertile clay grounds and a well-developed money economy, was a – though peripheral – part of the very wealthy capitalistic coastal Dutch region,<sup>6</sup> comprising 51,101 inhabitants in 1795.<sup>7</sup> The economy depended on capitalistic farming (mostly medium scaled farms of 10 to 50 hectare) and showed a strong specialisation of non-agricultural activities, despite the vicinity of the large city of Groningen (23,770 inhabitants in 1795). It was a society with large economic differences within each village.<sup>8</sup> However, socio-cultural differences were far less, with only the small noble class standing out. Intragenerational occupational mobility after marriage was quite unusual. Trades and handicrafts were usually jobs for life, and not an ordinary stage in the family life cycle as in the German village of Neckarhausen.<sup>9</sup>

I will investigate if the transfer of property from the older generation was really a crucial factor for the establishment of the households of the next generation in the rural Groningen society. How many of the new couples were indeed succeeding on the property of one of their parents? What circumstances increased the chances to succeed? In what way was the problem solved that children usually married before the death of the last parent, and in that case had not yet received part of the inheritance. Were inter vivos transfers frequently used to ease the start of a new couple, and what form did they take? Did families opt for a three generation model during certain stages of the family life cycle or was retirement considered? How did families divide inheritances: were some heirs favoured? What were the consequences for the career chances of the children? How were these chances influenced by demographic circumstances (number of brother and sisters, moment of death of the parents)?

## 2. Social background and social position

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<sup>4</sup> Hajnal (1965); Hajnal (1983).

<sup>5</sup> Compare several contributions in : Devos and Kennedy (1999).

<sup>6</sup> See De Vos e.a. (2012); Karel e.a. (2012).

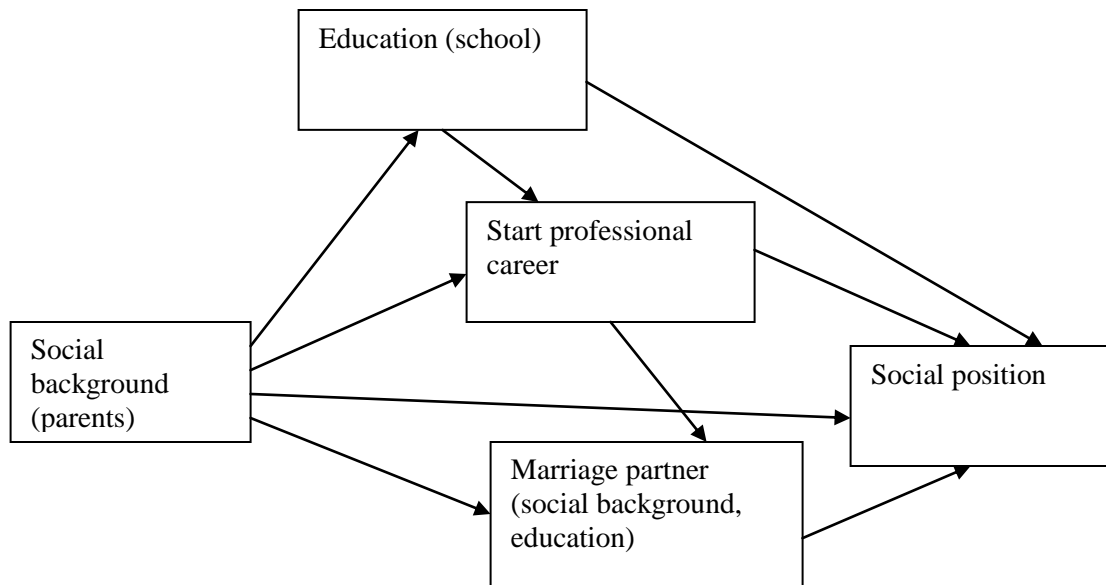
<sup>7</sup> Paping (1995).

<sup>8</sup> Paping and Collenteur (2004).

<sup>9</sup> Sabeian, *Property*, 316-20.

In every person's life there generally are a few crucial 'factors' which have a decisive impact on his or her fate in the future. These 'factors' comprise: 1. The social background one has; 2. The kind of education one receives. 3. The marriage partner one chooses. 4. The start of one's professional career. Clearly, all these factors are in some way or another interdependent, and all are highly influential for the social position to be obtained later in life (see Scheme 1).

*Scheme 1: Relations between social background and social position around 2000.*



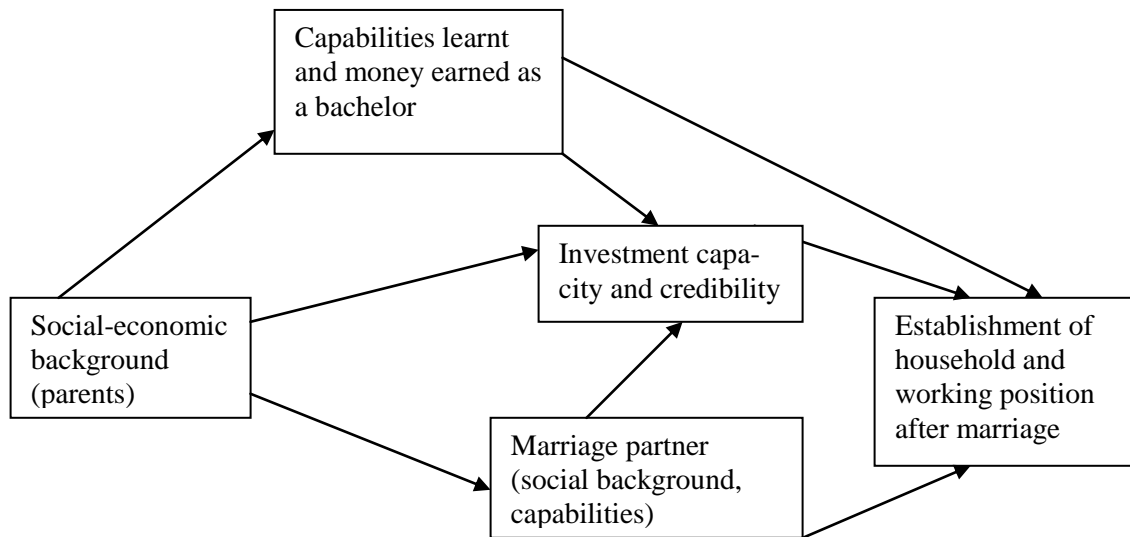
Before the 20<sup>th</sup> century the importance of education at schools was limited, the overwhelming majority of the people only received primary education or even none at all. Much more relevant were the capabilities juveniles developed during their teens and early twenties. The first real job is nowadays an important watershed in life; however, in the past the securing of a good position after marriage was of prime importance. Entering into marriage is still often the period to start a new household (a consumption unit); however, in the past it generally was also the moment that people started a business of their own (a production unit). In societies characterised by nuclear households mostly conducting small firms (including farms), marriage meant that a couple had to make an inventory of their resources and to decide in which house they wanted to live and how they were going to make a living. To remain working as live-in servants (in large parts of the countryside a very usual phase in life for the poorer half of the juveniles) wasn't an alternative,<sup>10</sup> while on the other hand the thought of settling down or staying in one of the parental homes seemed to be very unattractive for most of the newly-wed, considering the high number of nuclear households in Western Europe.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Schlumbohm (1994); Paping (2005).

<sup>11</sup> Laslett (1972); Hajnal (1983).

The resources of the new couples comprise: 1. The savings of both bride and groom during their unmarried period; 2. The parental inheritances and dowries of both bride and groom (and possible other inheritances); 3. The working experiences of the groom and - to a lesser extent - the bride; 4. The financial credibility of the couple, necessary to borrow funds for any investment in house and firm. A newly-wed couple needed money to buy a house, workshop or farm, and the capabilities to perform their new business in an appropriate way.

*Scheme 2: Relations between social background and social position before approximately 1900.*



At first, we will concentrate on the social structure and the social institutions in the Groningen countryside, which furnished the context for intergenerational social mobility. Then we will pivot on the importance of succession on farms and other positions from father and/or mother upon son or daughter in the formation of new households directly after marriage. The small role of family succession will be related to the inheritance practices and the moment parental inheritances were at disposal. Taking into account this limited incidence of family succession, we further on study intergenerational social mobility and occupational mobility as indicators of both the success of children's careers and of the extent of the opportunities in this society. At the end of this article we will investigate the way newly-wed couples settled, when they did not succeed their parents.



### 3. Social and institutional context

Already in the 16<sup>th</sup> century households in the Groningen countryside were divided in three quite distinct occupational groups: 1. farmers occupying five to sixty hectares of cultivable land, 2. landless labourers, 3. artisans, shop-keepers, schoolmasters and preachers working mainly outside agriculture. The nobility (appended by a few non-nobles from the governing class) - although financially quite influential until the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century - was quantitatively negligible. Due to specialisation some 40% of the inhabitants had their main occupation outside agriculture. Within the farmers

and those with other occupations large differences existed, which mainly had to do with the amount of land used and the amount of capital being invested.

Using all kind of information households in the Groningen countryside in the 18<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century can be divided into five socio-economic groups, taking into account both possessions and the income related to specific occupations.<sup>12</sup> The richest group consists of large farmers using 30 hectare and over and nobles, but also of large merchants, large factory-owners and others controlling more than 5 hectare. The second group contains medium-ranged farmers (15 to 30 hectare) and medium-ranged merchants, inn-keepers, physicians, but also artisans and others controlling more than 3 hectare. The third group comprises small farmers (5 to 15 hectare), artisans with a workshop, small shopkeepers and merchants. In the fourth group crofters and labourers using 1 to 5 hectare, gardeners, artisans without a workshop, weavers and pedlars are being placed. The poorest group consists of landless labourers, soldiers and lower skilled subordinate workers in handicrafts and services.

In the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century population was slowly decreasing in the Groningen countryside, however, population growth resumed again after 1750, to accelerate around 1785, which resulted in a doubling of the number of inhabitants by 1850. The number of households increased accordingly. The growth was distributed rather unevenly over the different socio-economic groups. The number of farmer households remained constant, while the share of labourer households was rising quickly. The share of the non-agricultural part of the population did not change much.<sup>13</sup> As a result of the population growth villages, where most of the artisans, shopkeepers and labourers lived, considerably grew in size. An example is the development between 1730 and 1830 of Oldenklooster (“Old Abbey”), the main settlement of the parish of Kloosterburen. Numerous houses for labourer and middle class families were built along the main road or near the older houses of the small village, especially after 1780 (see picture).

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century some 90% of the land was rented out by the actual owners (nobles, patricians, government, institutions, and rich country-dwellers) mostly through a specific regional lease-system called “‘beklemming’”. The land was connected to a farmhouse, which building was usually owned by the farmers themselves, though the land underneath it belonged to the owner. In general, every six year the farmer renewed the rent, which could be raised or lowered according to the economic circumstances. However, due to legal verdicts, it became increasingly difficult for the landowner to remove the farmers from the land. The land owner had to buy the farmstead from the farmer for a good price and also had to pay a high compensation for investments. The nucleus of most farms was made up by one or more relatively large and indivisible pieces of rented land. As a result it was extremely difficult to split the territory of a farm.

During the unfavourable first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, land rents became fixed. When the agricultural prices rose again in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, owners mostly concluded land contracts with the users, which fixed the rent of the land forever, and gave the user in return for a considerable amount of money the eternal right to dispose of the right to use of the land, in every way he or she wanted. In this way, land users became the actual owners of the land in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, also due

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<sup>12</sup> For details and discussion see Paping (2010).

<sup>13</sup> Paping (1995) 66.

to the rising agricultural prices. The position of the land owners was reduced to holders of riskless eternal bonds. However, the division of a “beklemming” remained impossible without the approval of (and a large payment to) the land owners.

As a result farms, just like workshops, houses and other economic positions, were in practice nearly indivisible. This system of indivisibility of the most important properties however, was combined with an equal division of inheritances. The Groningen medieval law stated that sons receive twice as much of the immovable assets as daughters, but this law was normally overruled by the numerous marriage contracts concluded. Sons and daughters out of a marriage were granted completely equal rights, also of the inheritance. Even without marriage contract the inheritance was divided equally between sons and daughters (or more distant female and male relatives). Upon marriage the possessions of bride and groom were shared equally, unless stated otherwise in the marriage contract. As a result the legal position of married women and widows was relatively good compared to other societies.<sup>14</sup>

Children received their share of the inheritance of both parents usually after the death of the last one, because many marriage contracts stipulated some kind of usufruct for the surviving parent. However, if one of the parents remarried, the properties of the deceased - half of the value of the common estate - were in theory entrusted to three guards appointed over the children. An inventory was made and the precise value of all the possessions was established. Legal contracts stipulated that the surviving parent had to raise the children to the age of sixteen or eighteen, and had to take care that they received a proper education in accordance with their social class, including learning to read and write. Upon that age he or she had to hand over the inheritance of the deceased parent in cash. After the age of eighteen, the child was seen as an independent economic unit and from that moment onwards the surviving parent, if remarried, usually paid interest over the value of the inheritance of the deceased. If boys and girls lost both parents, they received permission to act independently around the age of twenty three and at that moment the inheritance was handed over to them.

In October 1792 the inheritance of the large and wealthy farmers Jacob Ariens (1730-1789) and Jantje Derks (1747-1788) was divided. Son Derk received the parental farmstead in Bedum with 51 hectare for 10,443 guilders, however his share was only 5,386 guilders, so he had to pay 5,057 guilders to his four younger brothers. Possibly the mother of his new wife borrowed him this sum. Three years before the oldest brother Arien received a farm of 9.775 guilders which his late father financed for him just before he died, and was still part of the joint inheritance. He also had to borrow some 5.000 guilders, because the parents of his wife were still alive. With their 5.000 guilders, some money of their wife and some loans, all younger brothers were able to buy large farms in the following years. For example, brother Jan and his wife Katherina (a rich farmers daughter with both parents still alive) married in May 1798 and bought a farm with 55 hectare in Bedum in March 1800 for 16,500 guilders, of which they borrowed at least 6,000 guilders from the sellers.

Frequently, however, impoverished parents (usually labourers and poor artisans) relied on poor relief when they were old, having not enough income capacity themselves. Often, the house was sold by the poor board (if it wasn't already sold before) and the aged spent their last years in a poorhouse. Approximately 10 to 25% of the couples ended

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<sup>14</sup> See also Paping (2009).

their life under poor relief. A considerable number of other elderly were not far away from this complete state of impoverishment. Of course in those cases there was no or only a negligible inheritance to divide under the children after their death.

If someone married usually at least one of the two parents was still alive (see graph 1 later on). This parent could give the bride or groom a dowry; however in Groningen this was quite unusual. At best parents offered the newly-wed sometimes a loan to finance their new household. In the seldom cases that parents gave a genuine dowry, this dowry was deducted from the share of the inheritance later on, and was actually not much more than a non interest bearing loan.

In nearly every village in the Ommelanden a school was available, and many children went to school most of the year, between the age of five and the age of twelve. As a result, a large majority of the people was capable of writing. However, despite this system of small schools, illiteracy was still quite widespread, especially under labourers. Education was important, because without the capability of reading and writing it was hard to drive a small business or trade, as about 40% of the population did in the Ommelanden. For farmers, the capability to read and write was also attractive, although in the 18<sup>th</sup> century not completely indispensable.

For children over the age of twelve a system of training on the job existed, especially for boys. During a long learning period, boys worked with a master in a specific trade. They could choose to learn the work from their father, but they also could start a career as a live-in apprentice for a different trade. In that case, they sometimes had to pay some money to their master for the first one or two years. However, the wage-earning capacity of the boys rose quickly with their age, so that they were capable to earn a small annual wage already around the age of fifteen. In agriculture essentially the same system existed.<sup>15</sup> The sons of farmers usually helped their father, while sons of labourers became live-in farm hands. Payments to live-in farm hands seem to have been better for juveniles, presumably because agricultural work of boys had less the character of a long-run investment in skills. Because of this, a farm hand could already earn a full wage around the age of twenty. The system for girls is quite similar to that of the farm hands. They usually performed activities which were easier to learn: housekeeping and agricultural work. Because of their lower physical strength, but presumably also because of cultural norms and traditions girls, received significantly lower money wages, usually about 60% of that of the boys.

#### **4. Household formation, parental background and succession**

The ideal model of a nuclear family in a society with (nearly) no population growth is that two people marry and have two children who survive till their age of marriage. Preferably around the time these two children want to marry, their parents (being around 60) have just died, so both children have the resources to start a household of their own. One (the son) takes over the paternal household; the other (the daughter) receives her inheritance in money, leaves, and marries someone who also takes over the parental household. The money she receives can be used to pay off the leaving sister of her new

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<sup>15</sup> Paping (2005).



partner. The problem with this ideal model is that nearly all the parameters in real world are differently. Table 1 shows that ideal families with two surviving children are a minority, and that the transfer of property usually had to go in a completely different way.

*Table 1. The number of children marrying, or surviving till the age of 30 (Roman catholic couples in the Groningen Ommelanden marrying between 1721 and 1800).*

| Sons ->     | 0   | 1   | 2   | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6 | 7 | Total |
|-------------|-----|-----|-----|----|----|----|---|---|-------|
| Daughters √ |     |     |     |    |    |    |   |   |       |
| 0           | X   | 121 | 47  | 16 | 6  | 3  | 2 | 1 | 196   |
| 1           | 100 | 94  | 49  | 10 | 13 | 3  | - | - | 269   |
| 2           | 43  | 72  | 37  | 18 | 4  | 2  | - | - | 176   |
| 3           | 31  | 34  | 18  | 10 | -  | 1  | - | - | 94    |
| 4           | 11  | 16  | 6   | -  | 2  | 2  | - | - | 37    |
| 5           | 5   | 4   | 2   | -  | -  | -  | - | - | 11    |
| 6           | 1   | 2   | -   | -  | -  | 1  | - | - | 4     |
| 7           | -   | -   | -   | -  | -  | -  | - | - | 0     |
| Total       | 191 | 343 | 159 | 54 | 25 | 12 | 2 | 1 | 787   |

Males n=1,002, females n=1,130. Source: Groningen Roman Catholic Dataset. NB: Couples without children surviving are not taken into account. Only children actually reported alive are counted, which causes a slight underestimation, due to unreported migration.

To interpret table 1, we first have to realize that there were also a lot of couples without remaining children (about 200). This group consisted of three categories: 1. ordinary childless couples (some 10%); 2. couples where the bride (mostly a widow) was older than 40 and not fertile anymore, or where the husband or wife died shortly after marriage; 3. couples with children which all died before their thirties (mostly as infants or juveniles). Of course the positions of these couples without children partly made up for the difference between 787 parental couples and 2,132 children. These last figures show that in theory only 37% of the children could possibly succeed their parents directly. Within a couple the parental position could come from both sides, so a maximum of 74% of the couples was capable of succeeding one of their parental couples, 26% was not. However, inasmuch as a lot of widows and widowers remarried and got children again; and also because single heirs married each other, this last percentage in reality was considerably higher.

From the perspective of the children, table 1 shows the fragmentation of the inheritances: 11% was the only surviving child, 17% had to divide the inheritance in two, 24% in three, 19% in four, 16% in five parts, and the remaining 13% in six or more parts. In these figures the frequent occurrence of half-brothers and half-sisters are not even taken into account. So, only 28% of the surviving children received a share of the parental inheritance that was appropriate to live on the same level as the parents. The rest of the children had to split the inheritance in at least three parts; for them the inheritance alone was often not large enough to reach the same level as their parents.

Table 2 shows that next to the division of the parental inheritance among too many siblings, there was another large problem facing newly-wed couples in need of financial resources to establish an economically sound household. Parents usually died when their children were quite old. Of course a lot of children lost one of their parents as a young boy or girl, but usually one parent survived. Because it was common to divide the inheritance after the death of the last parent, who usually had the usufruct of the inheritance of the deceased parent, two third of the children received their parental inheritance in their thirties or later, while it was not unusual to have a parent alive at the age of 40 and over. As a result dowries and parental loans became of prime importance to establish a good household.

*Table 2. Age of Roman Catholics (born 1721-1810 in the Groningen Ommelanden) losing their father and mother*

| Age          | Father died | Mother died | Fully orphan |
|--------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| 0-9          | 21%         | 17%         | 3%           |
| 10-19        | 22%         | 16%         | 12%          |
| 20-29        | 22%         | 19%         | 21%          |
| 30-39        | 20%         | 25%         | 31%          |
| 40-49        | 12%         | 16%         | 24%          |
| 50 and older | 3%          | 7%          | 9%           |
| N            | 1,714       | 1,687       | 1,705        |

Source: Groningen Roman Catholic Dataset. Only those children marrying or surviving till about the age of 30 are taken into account.

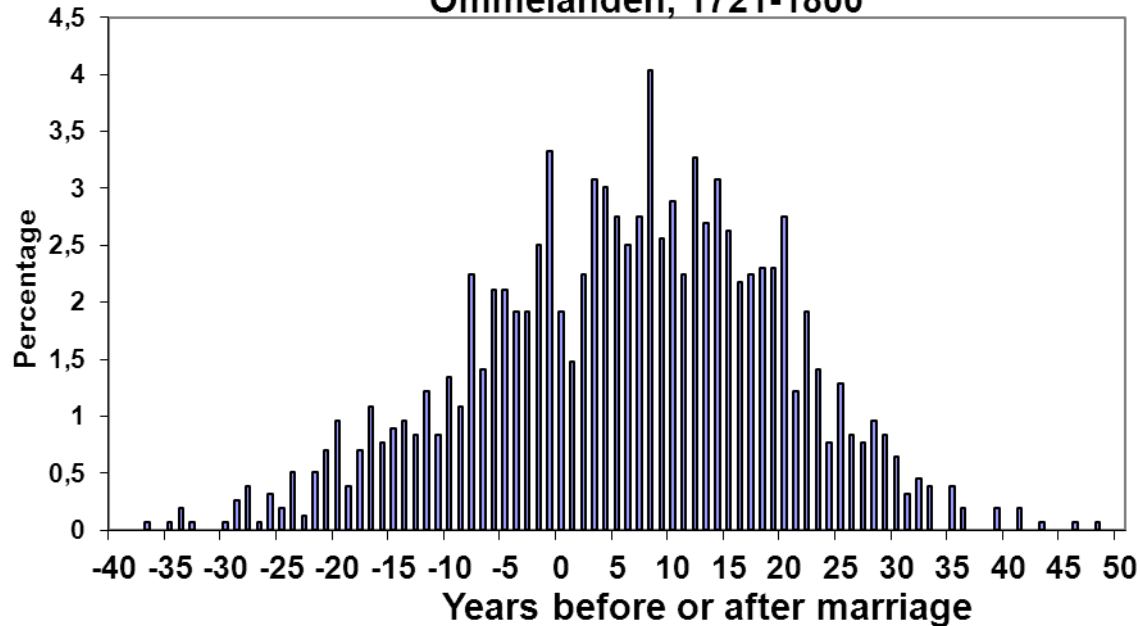
Considering that the age of marriage was about 30 for males and 27 for females, and the median a few years lower, most people marrying had still one or even both parents alive and presumably no inherited money at their disposal as graph 1 shows. This makes clear that the actual control of the inheritance - was it in money or in property - only played a limited role in the decision when to marry. Marriage dates were only to a very limited extent related to death of the last surviving parent. The comparison of the death date of the father or of the mother with the marriage data, also does not suggest any clear relation. These results do not confirm suggestion in literature that the high ages at marriage in Western Europe have something to do with people waiting for a position.<sup>16</sup> In general, it took far too long to wait with marrying until the death of both parents freed such a position, or made the cash available to obtain such a position elsewhere.

Males and females often had to marry in their thirties or even early forties if marriage was the usual moment to transfer a farm, shop, workshop or house to the next generation. I presume this result isn't typical for the Groningen clay area, which was in essence a rather unhealthy coastal area with high mortality rates in the 18<sup>th</sup> and first half of 19<sup>th</sup> century, hit by severe malaria epidemics every ten to fifteen year. As adult mortality is not much lower elsewhere, the same situation arouses there too, with most of the children marrying well before the death of their last parent. Surprisingly, in the two years after this death not more but less marriages were concluded in rural Groningen. So if there was any relation between economy (means of support) and demography

<sup>16</sup> Hajnal (1965); Engelen, and Wolf (2005).

(marriages), it at least was a very indirect one. This last finding also suggest that the opinion of the parents on the suitability of a marriage of their children did not form a great hindrance to marry. At least marriages considered to be unsuitable were not postponed until after the death of the parents.

**Graph 1: Death of last parent in years before (negative) or after (positive) marriage, Birth Cohort Groningen Ommelanden, 1721-1800**



In the Ommelanden, as in most of the more modern parts of Western Europe, there was a large preference for neolocality.<sup>17</sup> Three-generation households were unusual, although not completely non-existent. Sometimes the first years after marriage couples lived with one of the parents, not so much with the object to take over the parental household, but in search of a household of their own. Other three-generation households had mostly to do with disabled old-aged spending the last years and month of their life in the household of one of their children.

In theory, most of the parental positions (nieces) can be handed over to children, as is the case for farms, land, shops, workshop, ships, though it is perhaps more difficult for regular subordinate positions. Nevertheless, even a position of a regular farm labourer could be handed over from father to son, and though this was presumably unusual, at least the labourers house can be transferred. However, as table 3 shows parents in Groningen were not prepared to give up their positions, if they were able to keep them, and until their seventies most of them were. Even if physically incapable to work, unmarried servants could be hired to do the job, so retirement was unnecessary and economically unattractive. On the other hand, most married children were not inclined to stay for a long period in the parental household, waiting for an event (the death of the last

<sup>17</sup> Paping (2008).

parent) which still could take a long time. Parents were reluctant to split their property when still alive, and the legal system of “beklemmingen” prevented these kind of divisions too. However, despite this seemingly independence of the parental inheritance, the population of the Groningen Ommelanden still clung to the Western European Marriage pattern with high ages at marriage and a high celibacy-rate (at least 10%). The prevailing marriage system implied a great personal freedom in the determination of the age at marriage, resulting in a wide spread in ages at marriage, males marrying usually between 22 and 36, and females between 19 and 31.

*Table 3: Married sons and daughters taking control over the parental household within 10 years after their marriage (married Roman Catholics born in the Groningen Ommelanden 1721-1800).*

|                           | Yes | No  | N     |
|---------------------------|-----|-----|-------|
| Farmers and land owners   | 14% | 86% | 715   |
| Tailors and weavers       | 19% | 81% | 350   |
| Other artisans (industry) | 10% | 90% | 222   |
| Self-employed in services | 8%  | 92% | 238   |
| Labourers and cottagers   | 11% | 89% | 360   |
| Total                     | 13% | 87% | 1,889 |

Source: Groningen Roman Catholic Dataset.

In complete correspondence with the previous findings, table 3 shows that succession was indeed not the prime solution for the problem of newly-wed couples in finding a household in any of the occupational groups. Family succession from parents to children happened the most in the category of weavers and tailors. Especially the house of a weaver which usually contained two to four weaving-ooms - partly operated by juvenile hands - was often handed over to a son or daughter. There were in most cases only one to three weavers in every village. So, when a child wanted to remain in his or her birth village of birth as a weaver, it was attractive to take over the parental home. The chance of children of farmers to succeed on the parental holding was with 14% rather limited;<sup>18</sup> for children of labourers, shopkeepers, shippers and other artisans those chances were even lower with about 10%.

In general, 18% of the sons and only 9% of the daughters were able to take over the parental household within ten years after their marriage.<sup>19</sup> Because grown-up children often already had established a household of their own at the time the last parent died, the parental household, be it a farm, shop, workshop or labourer house, was frequently sold to unrelated people. The children were not inclined to wait for the moment that the parental household came vacant, and parents were not prepared to give it up early. The widower Jan Lammerts (1728-1807) a well-to do shoemaker in Kloosterburen using also 7 hectare had a son and a daughter. Both spent about five years in his house after their marriage in 1798 and 1792 respectively, waiting for the opportunity to buy a medium-ranged farm. When Jan Lammerts died at age 78 his house and land were sold by his heirs.

<sup>18</sup> Paping and Karel (2011) also show that in the somewhat less market-oriented Dutch province of Drenthe the chances for children to succeed on the parental farm were about as limited.

<sup>19</sup> Paping (2009).

Concentrating on the successors only, not surprisingly was their marriage date more related with death of the parents than for non-succeeding children. The death of the last parent around the marriage date, of course meant that the taking-over of the parental household was an easy way for children to establish themselves. However, again the relation proved to be not very strong, with 73% of the successors marrying between 5 years before and 14 years after the death of the last parent, against 48% of the non-successors. Not surprisingly, the nearly 10% children who became orphan before the age of 15 hardly ever succeeded on the parental household, which usually already was broken up by the time they wanted to marry.

*Table 4: Married sons and daughters taking control over the parental household within 10 years after their marriage, related to their sex-specific birth number (married Roman Catholics born in the Ommelanden 1721-1800).*

|                          | Yes | No  | N   |
|--------------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| First sons               | 18% | 82% | 492 |
| Second sons              | 17% | 83% | 212 |
| Third tot fifth sons     | 16% | 84% | 114 |
|                          |     |     |     |
| First daughters          | 10% | 90% | 522 |
| Second daughters         | 6%  | 94% | 273 |
| Third to sixth daughters | 7%  | 93% | 155 |

Source: Groningen Roman Catholic Dataset. In the birth number all the children of the same sex reaching the age of 30 were taken into account.

The chances to succeed on the parental position did not differ much for first, second or third sons as becomes clear from table 4. Only the chances of the first daughter were slightly higher than of her younger sisters. The result for the eldest son is rather surprising, inasmuch as more than half of them were single sons and did not have to compete with other brothers, as was always the case for younger brothers. In that respect, a much higher chance on family succession for the eldest sons could be expected. However, it is this last effect that largely explains the higher incidence of succeeding oldest daughters, being partly only daughters.

The Groningen situation is in sharp contrast with for instance the findings for some rural villages in Finland and Sweden, where the eldest sons were nearly always succeeding as head of the household, while younger sons seldom did. For Houtskär (Finland) succession-rates of about 90% for the eldest sons compared to a meagre 4% for younger sons in about the same period.<sup>20</sup>

The figures again suggest that within all social groups family succession was not extremely important in rural Groningen, and also it has to be concluded that there was no clear preference for the succession of oldest sons. The birth position of siblings was unrelated to their chances to succeed their parents. Clearly, the majority of the children, whatever their birth order, had to acquire a position independently of the parents in this market-oriented society. As the direct ties between parental position and child position were so weak, we will in the following part compare the parental occupational and social

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<sup>20</sup> Moring (2009).

position with that of the children to investigate what the indirect effects of the parental background on the career of their children could have been.

## 5. Occupational mobility

Important for children's later position in life are the working skills acquired during the youth. In the countryside before 1900, this mostly happened through on-the-job-training as live-in hands or maids, or by helping the parents with their economic activities. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century in rural Groningen, the large majority of children of farmers remained at home and in this way learnt to do farm-work, whereas children of farm labourers usually became live-in servants.<sup>21</sup> For children of artisans and others working outside agriculture the picture is rather mixed, with about half of them becoming live-in servants. The wives' capabilities were definitely of large importance for economic position and success of household. However, the working capabilities of the husband were more frequently decisive for determining what the main source of income of the household would be. This must especially have been the case in the handicraft sector in which a lot of occupations only were performed by men, for instance smith, copper-smith, silversmith, shoemaker, carpenter, painter, cooper, baker and so on. Tailoring (as seamstresses),<sup>22</sup> weaving, inn-keeping and trading (as a merchant or a shopkeeper) on the other hand were activities also sometimes done by women.

Juvenile girls active in the agricultural sector, whether as a maid or as a farmers' daughter, usually learnt to do both farm work and housekeeping. The activities of the boys were mainly concentrated on agricultural work. Housekeeping was also important for girls living as daughters or servants in households where income mainly came from industry and services. However a lot of them also must have learnt much about the specific trade performed within the households they worked for on average for over a decade before their marriage. For boys aspiring to become a specialised artisan, the period between about 13 and 20 was crucial. During this long period, they had to learn the necessary skills, which later in life was nearly impossible. The same is by the way the case for occupations like physician, schoolmaster or priest. The capacities for occupations like shop-keeper, inn-keeper, merchant, commission-agent, miller, butcher (which was mostly a seasonal job in Groningen) and (farm) labourer seem to have been easier to learn later in life, and when males changed occupation after marriage, they often moved to these kind of occupations. There were also a few households who managed to acquire a farm later on life, which was usually a sign of upward social mobility.

Of course, the simplest way for children to learn working skills was at home. However, there could be several hindrances for juveniles and unmarried youngsters to stay with their parents. First, as nearly 10% of the children became orphan before the age of 15, there were no parents available anymore to learn from (although sometimes this role was taken over by relatives). Second, the parental household has to be able to supply enough work for the growing-up children in this specialized market economy. For large

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<sup>21</sup> Paping (2004).

<sup>22</sup> Seamstresses were often children of tailors, and sometimes a woman did this activity independently from the work of the husbands, who for instance could be a farm labourer.

farmers this was of course much more easy than for small ones. In the households of the landless labourers there was no work, so most of them left the parental household by the age of 15.<sup>23</sup> The problem of lack of work also pops up in industry and services, as an artisan or merchant needs enough customers in the neighbourhood to find not only work for himself, but also for grown-up children remaining at home. Third, and strongly related to the second, a lot of poor households needed the salaries of their growing-up sons and daughters. As live-in servants they could in a few years earn a fairly reasonable annual wage, while at the same time being provided with board and lodging by their employees.

Unfortunately we do not have much information on decision-making processes within the household on crucial topics like if and when growing-up children would leave the parental household, and what occupation (especially for the sons) should be learnt. Who decided that the only son Poppe (1778-1852) of the wealthy shippers Berent Doorn (1753-1800) and Anna Popkes (1748-1786) was to become an indigent tailor, while nevertheless staying in his birth-place Farmsum? What caused Willem (1777-1824) one of the sons of the very wealthy farmers Freerk Renjes and Gebke Harms (1752-1828) to learn for a less-rewarding job as carpenter, while most of his numerous (half) brothers and (half) sisters became large farmers after marriage? What made it possible that the two sons of the farm labourers Freerk Rozing (1767-1831) and Hilje Berents (1765-1843) were able to learn for carpenter and shoemaker, and nevertheless remained unmarried?

Perhaps illuminating, although possibly not completely representative, is the example of what happened with the children of Jan Gerrits and Trijnje Cornelis. In 1774 the widow of this indigent cobbler and seasonal butcher died leaving behind four children in the age 7 to 18. Several uncles decided to take care of the children, although they did not want to accept the inheritance covered as it was by large debts. As guardians were appointed Uge Gerrits, ship's carpenter in the city of Groningen, Jan Cornelis, tailor in Kloosterburen, and Francois LeCler, physician in Wehe (a cousin of the children). In the end the three daughters all married tailors, while the only son became a well-established physician, suggesting that the daughters lived in the house of Jan Cornelis, while the extremely rich Francois LeCler - who himself had four daughters - paid for the very expensive academic education of the son.

Table 5 shows that the intergenerational mobility of children was high in the Groningen Ommelanden. More than one third of the sons had a completely different job after marriage, while half the daughters married someone with a different occupation. The sons of farmers and labourers - the two largest occupational groups in rural Groningen - mostly ended up in the same kind of positions as their parents. Not surprising is that the sons of parents having "other occupations" were the most mobile, as for these occupations in services learnt manual dexterity was usually less important than other skills.

Extraordinary is the relatively high continuity of weavers and tailors over the generations, suggesting that their sons very often learnt the trade from their parents, which seems to have been less the case for other types of artisans. The German born tailor Jan Kuilman (1740-1812) lived in Uithuizen and had six surviving children. By the year 1812 they were spread all over the province, one was married to a weaver in Kloosterburen, two were married to tailors in Leens and Eenrum, and one was a tailor in

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<sup>23</sup> Paping (2005).

the city of Groningen. His youngest son married in 1816 to become tailor in Kloosterburen. Only his oldest son Lubbert lived as a tailor in Uithuizen. Marrying in 1805, he took over the house of his father. However, this succession was not very attractive, inasmuch as his father still had huge debts from his failure as a pedlar in the period 1768-1773.

The patterns for daughters are quite similar of that of sons, although their (or better their husbands) occupational mobility compared to that of their parents was considerably higher, which is in correspondence with the earlier observation that the influence on what the main source of income of the household will be is larger of males than of females. The difference between sons and daughters is especially very large for the groups “other artisans” and “other occupations”; however, it also exist to a limited extent for farmers, labourers, tailors and weaver. The figures in this respect show clearly that the skills of tailoring and weaving indeed also must have been transferred to the daughters, resulting in a relative high continuity.

*Table 5: Occupational mobility of married Roman Catholics born between 1721 and 1800 in the Groningen Ommelanden and living in the Groningen countryside after marriage.*

|                          | PARENTS |                       |                           |                   |                           |          |
|--------------------------|---------|-----------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|----------|
|                          | Farmers | Labour.<br>/cottagers | Tailors<br>and<br>weavers | Other<br>Artisans | Other<br>occu-<br>pations | Total    |
| <b>SONS</b>              |         |                       |                           |                   |                           |          |
| Same occup. or farm size | 41%     | 45%                   | 53%                       | 40%               | 28%                       | 42%      |
| Related occupations      | 26%     | 22%                   | 9%                        | 17%               | 20%                       | 21%      |
| unrelated occupations    | 33%     | 33%                   | 38%                       | 42%               | 52%                       | 37%      |
| <b>DAUGHTERS</b>         |         |                       |                           |                   |                           |          |
| Same occup. or farm size | 31%     | 38%                   | 32%                       | 3%                | 11%                       | 27%      |
| Related occupations      | 26%     | 23%                   | 24%                       | 6%                | 15%                       | 22%      |
| unrelated occupations    | 43%     | 39%                   | 44%                       | 91%               | 74%                       | 51%      |
| <b>ALL CHILDREN</b>      |         |                       |                           |                   |                           | <b>N</b> |
| Farmers                  | 60%     | 9%                    | 2%                        | 11%               | 12%                       | 499      |
| Labourers and cottagers  | 17%     | 61%                   | 19%                       | 18%               | 24%                       | 468      |
| Tailors and weavers      | 4%      | 10%                   | 54%                       | 15%               | 10%                       | 275      |
| Other artisans           | 9%      | 13%                   | 14%                       | 44%               | 20%                       | 276      |
| Other occupations        | 10%     | 7%                    | 11%                       | 12%               | 34%                       | 218      |
| Total (N)                | 692     | 341                   | 307                       | 186               | 210                       | 1,736    |
| (migrated/unknown)       | 23      | 19                    | 36                        | 43                | 28                        | 153      |

Source: Groningen Roman Catholic Dataset. Those known to have migrated outside the countryside of Groningen and not returning and a few (5) for which no indication of the occupation is known were not taken into account. Related occupations comprise for instance tailor/weaver, painter/carpenter, merchant/shopkeeper, farms in a different size-category, labourers and other occupations with and without other economic activities. The group labourers also comprises a few working man active outside agriculture, for instance as sailor, soldier, smith’s hand or miller’s man.



If we take both sexes together and only look to the broad occupational categories, than again the large intergeneration mobility between the main groups becomes visible. Married farmers children had a very great risk of 40% not to become farmers themselves, while 39% of the married labourer's children managed to escape from an existence as a labourer. From the children of households active in industry and services some 28% ended up as labourers after marriage. One of the drivers behind this occupational mobility was the rising share of labourer households, against 360 children from labourer households (migrants included) stood 468 children becoming labourer after marriage. There were on the other hand 715 children descending from farmer households, while only 499 children were able to become farmer.

Table 5 also indicates that at least nearly 10% of the Roman Catholic children born in the Groningen Ommelanden left Groningen countryside. As far as we know most went to the nearby city of Groningen, where they showed up in widely diverging occupations like brewer, merchant, artisan, wagoner and porter. Children of farmers and labourers rooted in agriculture moved considerably less to elsewhere than children of artisans, shopkeepers and the like. The last children often had the skills to give them good prospects in the city. Children of labourers were less inclined to leave the clay area, having no capabilities and no funds to improve themselves elsewhere. However, long distance migrations of this group can have been easily missed in the sources. In this respect, a very rare account is the report at the burial of a labourer's daughter of 22 in Eenrum in 1785 that she had as relatives a father, a sister and two brothers who both sailed to the East-Indies. Later on, we never hear from those two again. It is possible that more members from lower classes went to Holland and afterwards to the Indies without leaving any trace.

In the begin of this part we have given attention to the fact that for the performance of many occupations a certain amount of learnt skills are necessary. However, it were not only skills that made it possible to fill in a certain occupation. For the most economically-rewarding positions in the countryside considerable investments had to be done. Farmers formed a large part of the top of the social pyramid in the Groningen Ommelanden, but to become a farmer you needed a farm, and it has already become clear that a majority of the farmers did not inherit his or her farm; and if they did, they often had to pay large sums to other heirs for compensation. The others farmers often bought a farm which again involved large investment funds. Table 6 gives an indication of the enormous amount of capital invested in farms, money needed to finance the farm building, the fixed tenancy or "beklemming" of the land (the right to use it for a never changing rent and to sell this right), the livestock, agricultural implements and the unsold harvest. Where around 1775 the median value of a farmers possessions was about 3,500 guilders, this sum quadrupled to more than 14,000 guilders around 1810.

Most of the farmers couples did not command such huge sums, and certainly not at the beginning of their career, as they often did not even could dispose of their own inheritance still being in the possessions of their parents. So the first step to obtaining a farm was borrowing money, where the farm buildings and land were seen as a kind of securities for these loans. Farmers borrowed money from family members, for instance their parents if they had the reserves, their brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts, wealthy villagers in the neighbourhood, noblemen, rich city-dwellers and so on. Next to this,

small amounts of money were covered by the non-interest bearing supplier-credit given by the local middle class. The would-be farmers gave all their belongings as a guarantee for the loans needed, and sometimes a family member acted as a guarantor. The rent paid on these loans was very low, being on average slightly less than 4% until 1795, afterwards it rose until 4,5-4,8% from 1810 tot 1840. Taking into account the low rent, lenders only did lent money if the loan was completely risk-free. So, it was only possible to convince lenders if the borrowers were very credible, and the lenders were sure that their money was returned. This credibility had two aspects, on the one hand the net value of the possessions of the borrower were of importance as a back-up, on the other hand the lenders had to believe in the capacities of the borrowers to pursue an economically viable farm business. At the moment that lenders did not trust the borrowers anymore, they tried to get their money back, forcing farmers to sell the farm or to find alternative financial resources.

*Table 6: Median gross and net capital of families in the Groningen Ommelanden, 1770/1811 (guilders).*

|                   |           | Gross capital | Net capital | N  |
|-------------------|-----------|---------------|-------------|----|
| Farmers           | 1770-1776 | 3,563         | 2,176       | 27 |
|                   | 1777-1783 | 4,259         | 2,277       | 56 |
|                   | 1784-1790 | 5,054         | 1,942       | 44 |
|                   | 1791-1797 | 6,510         | 3,455       | 32 |
|                   | 1798-1804 | 9,670         | 4,678       | 29 |
|                   | 1805-1811 | 14,438        | 8,908       | 48 |
| Labourers         | 1770-1776 | 245           | 155         | 28 |
|                   | 1777-1783 | 262           | 131         | 46 |
|                   | 1784-1790 | 183           | 99          | 34 |
|                   | 1791-1797 | 232           | 96          | 33 |
|                   | 1798-1804 | 331           | 97          | 39 |
|                   | 1805-1811 | 369           | 63          | 38 |
| Other occupations | 1770-1776 | 1,573         | 419         | 40 |
|                   | 1777-1783 | 1,135         | 425         | 40 |
|                   | 1784-1790 | 1,338         | 317         | 40 |
|                   | 1791-1797 | 1,136         | 452         | 40 |
|                   | 1798-1804 | 2,043         | 468         | 40 |
|                   | 1805-1811 | 2,232         | 606         | 37 |

NB: These inventories were nearly always made in case a widow or widower remarried, to protect the paternal/maternal inheritance of children of an earlier marriage and to calculate their share in joint possessions. All valuables were specified and calculated with the exception cloths. All available inventories in the later municipalities of Hoogkerk, Zuidhorn, Bedum, Uithuizen, Leens, Appingedam and Stedum were used. See also Paping (1995) 199.

Table 6 shows that the Groningen Ommelanden really was a credit society, the average farm was for more than half financed with strange money. This dependency on external funds was relatively even larger for those households active in industry and services. The

normal artisans and shop-keepers controlled a net capital of 400 to 600 guilders, which was hardly more than a quarter of the value of their belongings. For this group the situation was quite similar with that of the farmers, if they could not find people prepared to lend them the money, it was impossible to buy a smithy or other workshop, a shop, a mill or an inn or to finance the merchandise, stock and supplier-credit. The house (often also the working-place) was usually the most expensive item in the inventory of artisans and tradesmen. This was even more the case for the belongings of the labourers, which mainly existed of a small house and some furniture and a little bit of equipment. These houses became increasingly higher mortgaged between 1770 and 1810, which resulted in a shift of labourers to hiring instead of owning houses in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In a society so heavily dependent on money and credit, notwithstanding all securities and guarantees, couples could go bankrupt, or were forced to sell all belonging to just avoid bankruptcy. The result is that the prospects of children seriously diminished, as on the one hand the bad reputation of their parents might have been extended to them, while the chances on a reasonable inheritances disappeared. In such situation it will have been very difficult for children to attain the same kind of position as the parents. A part of the intergenerational occupational mobility has to be attributed to this phenomenon. For Groningen around 1800 it has been shown that a lot of farmer's children who became labourer had parents who lost their farm later in life, due to money problems.<sup>24</sup> Eltje Smit (1768-1847) was blacksmith in Usquert, however somewhere between 1819 and 1831 he had to sell his smithy and to start to live as a labourer in Uithuizen. His oldest son Willem (1804-1856) was still raised as smith, but remained a smiths' hand all his life, missing the money to buy a smithy himself. His youngest son Jan (born 1806) had to work as a farm hand and after his marriage as a farm labourer and in 1868 left for North-America.

## 6. Social mobility

We have seen that the occupational mobility was very large in the Groningen Ommelanden. Partly this might be due to heterogamous marriages between men and women descending from different occupational groups. Nevertheless, high occupational mobility can still go together with low social mobility, especially if (future) inheritances were very important for the acquisition (buying) of a socio-economic position (niece). Such a result could be in accordance with the large necessary investments for the high-income social positions (table 6). However, in rural Groningen this absolutely was not the case, inasmuch as for the Roman Catholics born between 1721 and 1800 high occupational mobility was also accompanied by a very high social mobility.

Using information of all 1,737 cases (not taking into account the about 10% individuals moving permanently outside the Groningen countryside) and the already mentioned five-level social stratification from an enormous 55% of the children the social position differed from that of their parents, measured a few years after their marriage. Again the situation for rural Groningen contrasts strongly with findings elsewhere for less market-oriented regions outside the Netherlands. For instance, Schlumbohm finds for the village of Belm in Westfalia using a four level division, that about 80% of those

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<sup>24</sup> Paping and Karel (2011).

marrying between 1771 and 1860 remained in the same class.<sup>25</sup> Without doubt, the Groningen Ommelanden was a much more open society in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> and first half of 19<sup>th</sup> century.

As stated before, there was a clear trend towards downward social mobility. From the 1,737 cases 35% experienced downward social mobility, while 20% managed to secure a higher position than its parents. This result is not surprising, regarding the proletarianization taking place from the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards. As mentioned before, especially the share of higher positions connected with controlling large plots of land was falling. On the other hand the share of subordinate workers was increasing. This effect was reinforced by the higher number of surviving children of the higher classes compared to the lower classes.<sup>26</sup>

Large jumps on the social ladder were very often related to marriages of pregnant brides and second marriages. Gebke Harms for example was a daughter of a cottager with 2 hectare of land, born in 1752 in Kloosterburen. After the premature death of her parents she fell under the poor-relief board. Being four months pregnant, she married at the age of 19 a widower with 41 hectare. Afterwards she increased her holdings even more, partly due to a good second marriage with a younger man. She ended her life in 1828 as a land owner and was one of the richest farmers of the village, possessing or else financing a large number of the local labourer houses. On the other hand children of for instance the medium-ranged farms were seemingly pushed from these farms by the more well-to-do children of the rich farmers. Some sons took prerequisites and learned a trade or started a business, but a lot of them came into serious problems. Several farmer daughters married artisans or merchants for whom they were a financially attractive partner, due to high value of the parental farms (see also table 6), a part of which would accrue to them somewhere in life.

Derk Harkes, farmer on 22 hectare in Holwinde married in 1729 having only one daughter from this marriage, who bought a medium-ranged farm herself after marrying a medium-ranged farmer son, however, she later went broke. Derk Harkes remarried in 1733 Geertje Jans and they had three children who respectively became cottager with 1 hectare, farm labourer and wife of a shepherd. Geertje Jans again remarried Mindelt Jacobs in 1747. One daughter of this couple in the end bought the Holwinde farm in 1783 from her stepmother (who married a labourer elsewhere), after living with her husband on a small farm elsewhere for a decade. The other daughter became farm labourer with her husband. Mindelt Jacobs remarried again in 1754. One son made a rich farmer widow pregnant, the other married a medium-ranged farmers' widow. There was also a daughter who after marriage bought a small ship with her husband. A majority of the children from the Holwinde farm came into serious problems and experienced downward social mobility, apparently while they did not have the money to buy a decent farm and the parental farm remained in the hands of stepfathers and stepmothers for a long time. Some children managed to solve these problems, the majority did not.

The position of the lower middle class was also not very secure. Many of these children of artisans and shop keepers with small financial reserves moved into occupations like labourer, tailor and weaver, for which nearly no financial resources were needed. Alje Everts, a son of a large farmer married a cottager's daughter and bought a

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<sup>25</sup> Schluhmbohm (1994) 370-376.

<sup>26</sup> Paping (2009).

ship. In the end he had to sell the ship and worked as a farm labourer. Four of his children became labourer, while one married a weaver. A cousin of Alje Everts still belonged to the group of very rich farmers. A considerable part of the children of the mostly indigent weavers and tailors also ended up as unskilled farm labourers, while it proved very difficult for this group to acquire the funds to start a better trade as smith, shoemaker or shopkeeper, or to buy a small farm. They were seriously hampered by a combination of lack of money and lack of availability of better positions. Jan Cornelis was a tailor in Kloosterburen, his only surviving daughter became pregnant and had to marry a protestant farm labourer in 1797.

Differences in social chances between the skilled group of weavers, tailors and carpenters without much financial resources and the unskilled group of farm labourers were low. The chances of labourers and indigent artisans to rise to positions characterized by at least some structural financial resources were about the same. Both groups had the same problems, lack of cash and lack of credibility to make the investments necessary to obtain better occupations. The labourer Jelte Renjes (a son of a medium-ranger farmer) had three children surviving, one died aged 31 in Holland, where she worked as a maid, and the other daughter became labourer, while the son was active as a carpenter. Although his family had a lot of fortunate relatives under whom some very rich farmers, the children didn't succeed to rise again to prosperity.

*Table 7. Intergenerational social mobility and the moment of losing his/her last parent, married individuals born 1721-1800 in the Groningen Ommelanden.*

|  | upward | equal | Down-ward 1 level | Down-ward 2-4 levels | Emi-grated | N     |
|--|--------|-------|-------------------|----------------------|------------|-------|
| Last parent died more than 10 year before marriage | 22%    | 35%   | 18%               | 16%                  | 8%         | 190   |
| Last parent died within 10 years before marriage   | 15%    | 45%   | 18%               | 13%                  | 10%        | 312   |
| Last parent died within 10 years after marriage    | 19%    | 47%   | 17%               | 10%                  | 6%         | 411   |
| Last parent died more than 10 years after marriage | 17%    | 42%   | 24%               | 10%                  | 8%         | 648   |
| Total  | 18%    | 43%   | 20%               | 11%                  | 8%         | 1,561 |

Source: Groningen Roman Catholic Dataset.

First we will investigate if there was a relation between social chances and the availability of the inheritance. It is not surprising that children who lost their last parent when still quite young (in table 7 longer than 10 years before their first marriage) were socially the most mobile. Not under the control of the parents, but in the meantime also missing their support, and with an inheritance in money (as the parental household had long been broken u) at their disposal, they had both a higher chance on upward social mobility as on down ward social mobility.

For the other groups differences are small, though remarkable is that children who received their inheritance in the years just before marriage, which seems like the perfect

moment in the lifecycle, were not at all better off. Actually, having their inheritance at their disposal, went together with a slightly lower upward social mobility and slightly higher downward social mobility. The children whose last parents lived until after the age of their marriage did not seem to have much hindrance of not having received the whole of their inheritance, yet. Even those who had to wait for more than 10 years after their marriage did not really fare socially less than others, despite the fact that they had a bigger chance that large parts or even the whole of the inheritance melted away during the presumably relatively unproductive last years of their aging parents. Perhaps this effect, was compensated by the advantage of the possibility to use the social network of the parents (for instance for loans) in the process of obtaining a good position after marriage. The general conclusion should be that there was not much relation between the moment that children could completely dispose of the inheritance and their social success.

*Table 8. Intergenerational social mobility and the number of surviving siblings, married individuals born 1721-1800 in the Groningen Ommelanden.*

|                                 | upward | equal | Downward 1 level | Downward 2-4 levels | Emigrated | N     |
|---------------------------------|--------|-------|------------------|---------------------|-----------|-------|
| Only child                      | 24%    | 50%   | 12%              | 7%                  | 8%        | 196   |
| One brother or sister           | 17%    | 44%   | 20%              | 12%                 | 7%        | 312   |
| Two brothers or sisters         | 18%    | 43%   | 18%              | 12%                 | 9%        | 434   |
| Three brothers or sisters       | 19%    | 38%   | 25%              | 10%                 | 8%        | 325   |
| Four brothers or sisters        | 15%    | 40%   | 24%              | 15%                 | 7%        | 299   |
| Five to ten brothers or sisters | 18%    | 48%   | 14%              | 16%                 | 4%        | 225   |
| Total                           | 18%    | 43%   | 19%              | 12%                 | 7%        | 1,791 |

Source: Groningen Roman Catholic Dataset. NB: Only full brothers and sisters marrying or known to reach the age of 30 are taken into account.

Taking into account the late date that people usually received their parental inheritance, and the many cases where there was no inheritance, it is not surprising that the actual size of an inheritance was not that important for the establishment of a social position. Table 8 makes clear that only the chances of single children without surviving brothers and sisters were significantly better. They received the whole inheritance and in this way seemed to have had more possibilities to improve their position. Still even single children experienced high social mobility, which is in accordance with the observation that an only child of a farmer did not always succeed on the parental household.<sup>27</sup>

In a lot of cases the heirs were already married and established. However, even the prospect of an inheritance cannot have been conclusive in the obtaining of a position. It is clear that when someone had five brothers and sisters, everyone knew that the future inheritance would have to be split into six parts. Nevertheless, these children did not fare much less than someone with only one brother or sister. There are three possible influences which might help explain these effects. First, having more surviving brothers and sisters might have been economically attractive because this created a wider network

<sup>27</sup> Paping and Karel (2011).

of help and assistance, which might have compensated the negative effect of the smaller inheritance. Second, parental households with many grown-up children were relatively wealthy, because they had a lot of cheap labour at their disposal. Third, the importance of the size of the (expected) inheritance was in general of limited importance in acquiring apposition, with other factors (as for instance personal capacities) being more influential.

## 7. Starting a household of their own

It has become clear that couples marrying in generally were not able to take over one of their parental homes, because these parents were still alive and not inclined to give up their own position upon their marriage date. Nevertheless, the first years after marriage were extremely important to secure a good position. In table 9 a closer look is taken at the newly-wed couples settling at first in the Roman Catholic stronghold Kloosterburen. Striking is the number of couples who did not seem to have a clear view of where to live after marriage, which absolutely contrasts with the idea of Hajnal that people postponed marriage until they “could establish an independent livelihood adequate to support a family”.<sup>28</sup> However, these findings are more or less in accordance with high rates of geographical mobility from one municipality to another in the first five years after marriage found in previous research for the same region during the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>29</sup> The actual changes of house will have been bigger taking into account that municipalities consist of several villages, and there were also a lot of removals within a village.

Despite the high ages of bride and groom, stepping into marriage does not seem to have been a very well-prepared decision economically. Most couples had not taken precautions to ensure a structural place to live. Although most of the houses were still owned by the inhabitants around 1810,<sup>30</sup> a lot of couples had to rent a house and quite a few had to resort to the house of one of the parents. This lack of preparation did not have anything to do with sudden marriages forced by premarital pregnancies, inasmuch as nearly all the other couples were in quite the same situation. There are also no signs that marriage was the way to escape the control of the parents (who in that case were able to use the labour resources of the unmarried),<sup>31</sup> because in Groningen parents usually had to pay for the work of their children aged 18 and over. Notable exceptions in the search for houses were the remarrying widows and widowers, who most of the time stayed in their old home. The rest of the couples started a rather successful quest for houses and farms in the first years after marriage. Only a minority remained at the parental home, to take it over in due time, so it is not appropriate to speak of a stem-family system as in the highlands of South-East Norway or the Pyrenean valleys.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Hajnal (1965). See also Engelen, and Wolf (2005) and Fertig (2005) who calls this the “niche-hypothesis”.

<sup>29</sup> Paping (1994).

<sup>30</sup> Paping (1995) 209: 71% of the households owned a house: 96% of the farmers, 69% of the labourers, 74% of those active in industry (mainly artisans) and 60% of those active in services and only 39% of those without occupations (mainly widows and poor).

<sup>31</sup> Engelen and Wolf (2005); Klep (2005).

<sup>32</sup> Fauve-Chamoux (2006).

*Table 9: Life after marriage (1791-1800) of Roman Catholic couples, settling at first in Kloosterburen (Groningen).*

| <i>Labourers</i>     | <i>Birth male</i> | <i>Birth female</i> | <i>Marriage</i> | <i>Place where they settled during the ten years after marriage</i>  |
|----------------------|-------------------|---------------------|-----------------|--|
| <i>Name husband</i>  |                   |                     |                 |  |
| Jan P. de Haan       | 1769              | 1770                | 1791            | Pregnant before marriage; bought house after two months  |
| Renje J. Bot         | 1765              | 1765                | 1792            | Pregnant before marriage, bought house after 14 days   |
| Renje R. Kamer       | 1756              | 1766                | 1793            | Rented a house or lived in a poorhouse   |
| Klaas Berents        | 1763              | 1766                | 1793            | Pregnant before marriage, possibly quickly bought newly-build house  |
| Jelis J. Bot         | 1754              | 1766                | 1794            | Widower with house sold; 1797 bought new house, where they presumably already lived  |
| Luurt S. Halsema     | 1770              | 1757                | 1794            | Quickly build a house on land of his childless uncle (a farmer)  |
| Albert J. Scholtens  | 1750              | 1769                | 1795            | Widower in his house   |
| Berent L. Bot        | 1765              | 1768                | 1795            | Rented a house or lived with his brother or parents; 1798 bought house.  |
| Derk L. Mug          | 1762              | 1765                | 1795            | Possibly quickly bought newly-build house  |
| Jan J. Bottema       | 1770              | 1774                | 1796            | Pregnant before marriage; presumably lived with his parents; 1798 bought newly-build house   |
| Martinus J. Durmer   | 1766              | 1775                | 1796            | Lived with his father; 1803 inherited the house  |
| Sikke J. Bloem       | 1769              | 1772                | 1797            | Pregnant before marriage; lived in a poorhouse; 1805 bought this poorhouse   |
| Jan D. van der Leege | 1762              | 1772                | 1797            | Possibly lived with her mother; 1805 bought her house (condition mother could stay); 1808 (after mothers death) rented a house                       |
| Willem J. Bot        | 1769              | 1774                | 1798            | Pregnant before marriage, presumably lived with his mother, c1800 bought house; 1809 bought tiny farm with 4 hectare elsewhere                       |
| Hindrik A. Scholtens | 1779              | 1777                | 1799            | Pregnant before marriage; lived with his father (Hindrik died soon)  |
| Jan Berents          | 1770              | 1775                | 1799            | Possibly lived with his brother (Jan and his wife died soon)   |
| Tjaard H. Duninga    | 1755              | 1773                | 1799            | Widower in his house, 1804 moved to other house  |
| Tjaard J. Bottema    | 1774              | 1778                | 1799            | Possibly lived with his mother or other family; 1807 bought house  |
| <i>Farmers</i>       |                   |                     |                 |  |
| Hindrik M. Wijnema   | 1763              | 1768                | 1792            | Widower, farm already sold; lived with her father (small farm and shoemaking); 1796 bought large farm  |
| Willem J. Iema       | 1761              | 1766                | 1792            | Lived on small farm with her father, inherited this farm in 1806   |
| Ubbe Reinders        | 1770              | 1773                | 1793            | He (orphan in 1792) bought large farm 3 months before marriage from brother  |
| Eisse J. Halsema     | 1770              | 1771                | 1794            | Pregnant before marriage; labourer rented tiny farm of his sister; 1800 bought large farm elsewhere; 1803 bought fathers large farm from inheritance |
| Harm. J. Boerema     | 1765              | 1770                | 1798            | Lived with his father (small farm and shoemaking); 1804 bought farm elsewhere  |
| Geert F. Eikens      | 1770              | 1737                | 1799            | Widow on her small farm  |
| Remt S. Halsema      | 1773              | 1780                | 1800            | On his parents farm; parents retired in other house  |



|                          |      |      |      |  |
|--------------------------|------|------|------|--|
| Artisans and shopkeepers |      |      |      |  |
| Harm H. Timmer           | 1758 | 1771 | 1795 | Widower, in his house (carpenter); c1798 newly-build house and some land; 1809 moved to her parents large farm (inheritance) elsewhere               |
| Jan Berents              | 1770 | 1752 | 1797 | Owned or bought house; 1798 bought house; 1799 returned to first house; 1801 bought expensive house; 1803 bought cheap house; 1805 broke (shoemaker) |
| Joh. Scheifferling       | ?    | ?    | 1797 | Unknown, moved elsewhere in 1800 (presumably an artisan)   |
| Hindrik G. Abels         | 1771 | 1770 | 1798 | Widow in her house (tailor)  |
| Hijbel J. Pel            | 1775 | 1773 | 1798 | Bought house 1799; 1801 bought house; 1804 bought house (small shopkeeper)   |
| Renje J. de Boer         | 1763 | 1776 | 1798 | Pregnant before marriage, rented a house, 1800 moved elsewhere (carpenter)   |
| Willem J. Stok           | 1770 | 1761 | 1799 | Unclear, possibly lived with one of his or her brothers (tailor, after his death in 1805 pauper)   |
| Jan J. Jansen            | 1754 | 1777 | 1799 | Widower in his house (rich shopkeeper-salesman)  |
| Cornelis C. Huizinga     | 1776 | 1775 | 1799 | Pregnant before marriage, lived presumably with her father, 1805 bought house (carpenter)  |

Succession directly after marriage was clearly of minor importance, and then only for farmers. There were some cases of postponed succession. Illuminating is the life of the rich farmers' son Eisse Halsema, who married a pregnant daughter of a well-to-do blacksmith. The first six years he had to spend as a labourer, then at last he managed to buy a considerable farm in a neighbouring village. Three years later he profited of his father's death at the age of 72 to buy the large Halsema-farm from his numerous brothers and sisters. In 1812 Eisse had become, despite his difficult start, one of the 500 richest persons of the Groningen countryside.

It happened very regularly that newly-wed couples first stayed a few years in a parental house or in a small house in a village, to buy a medium-ranged or large farm afterwards. Other couples first bought a smaller farm to move after some years to a bigger farm. One can think of several rational reasons for this kind of behaviour: firstly, some time was needed to find an appropriate (large) farm; secondly, the newly-wed couple did not yet have enough credibility to get the loans to buy a farm; thirdly, one could wait till one inherited more money (which was quite risky) or get the chance to succeed. Living in an ordinary house without a decent income-earning occupation was a dangerous situation if it lasted too long. The only available work was farm labour, which paid only 150-200 guilders a year; farm work did not bring a farm nearer, even more so after 1780 when farm prices started to ricochet.<sup>33</sup> If would-be farmer couples waited too long with the purchase of a farm, they could in the end fall back to the status of farm labourers.

Non-agrarian couples were in a similar position as farmers, but they had the advantage to possess their skills and were capable to earn income right away. Especially the less well-to do artisans could settle and start a business of their own right after marriage, tailors and carpenters did not even really need a house of their own. Most of them bought a house in due time, mainly using borrowed money. The largest problem was to find enough customers. Other artisans had to invest in shops and workshops,

<sup>33</sup> Compare table 6 for the huge investments necessary to finance a farm.

which were sometimes taken over (there was a lot of continuity in establishments as bakeries, smithies, mills, inns and shops), but they also often started the trade freshly in a bought house.

Scheme 2 in the introduction did not prove to be completely correct. At least for the Groningen Ommelanden, the moment of marriage was not as decisive for the social future as stated, however, the few years directly after marriage were. In these years social background, available capital and capital prospects, personal skills and personal and financial credibility had to be transformed in a good position, which couples in most instances held till the end of their life.

## **8. Conclusion**

For the majority of the families in a very market-oriented 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century rural society like coastal Groningen with many landless households the transfer of family holdings (farm, workshop, house) to the next generation was of limited importance; even for the group of farmers intergenerational mobility was very high, with nearly half the individuals changing social class using a five-class division. Inasmuch as children in most cases tended to marry well before they received their inheritance, individual capacities seemed to have played a major role. Chances for upward and downward mobility proved to be nearly unrelated to sibling seniority in the family, nor to the number of brothers and sisters despite equal inheritance practices. The position of the oldest son does not seem to have been particularly advantageous. Direct succession was of minor importance and inheritances were usually divided only after the death of the last parent, when great effort was placed on giving every heir an equal valued share of the inheritance.

Consequently, most couples had to establish a new household shortly after marriage, even more so because neolocality was preferred. However, taking into account the situation in the first months and years after the marriage date an independent household was usually not yet arranged for at the marriage-date. Cohabitation with one of the parents could be a temporary solution as most newly-wed couples obtained a house or farm within a few years. Although the social background was of some importance during this process of securing a good position after marriage (think of parental loans and sometimes dowries), the size of the prospected inheritance did not played a decisive role, as the limited influence of the number of siblings on social success shows. In this very modern money economy with relatively high occupational mobility, personal skills, virtues and strategies also must have been of great importance for one's opportunities. The necessary investments for a more or less agreeable livelihood were financed by the couples own usually very limited resources (saved money, possible inheritance, dowries and money borrowed from parents and other relatives) supplemented by large loans. The size of these loans were presumably a function of the financial credibility of the couple, based on social capital (social background), personal capabilities and only partly on future inheritance claims.

A very high intergenerational social and occupational mobility was the result of this dynamic system. Due to the stability in the number of farms, population growth and

accompanying proletarianisation the chance to experience downward social mobility, however, was in the meantime a lot larger than to rise on the social ladder. Later on, the partition among heirs of land and other holdings used and owned by the parents was uncommon. Rarely, one of the couples returned to take over the parental household at a later stage in life. Farms and of other professional properties (workshops, inns, shops) were often not transferred from parents to children but sold, or were handed over to partners of remarried widows and widowers.

Possibly, the clay area of Groningen possibly can be seen as an example of the few 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century modern capitalistic rural European regions, which will be characterized by a much more open society with large opportunities and risks. Social positions were less secure and only to a limited extent related to the position of the parents; a situation presumably quite comparable with that found in much Western societies in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The findings for Groningen do not seem to be in correspondence with those in other rural regions in continental Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century and earlier, where family succession was much more important and mobility seem to have been far more limited. However, a more systematic comparison of the results with what is known for more traditional regions is still necessary. Also the question of the resulting high social and occupational mobility, by directing people to appropriate social positions, might have partly explained the economic success of the Western society in the last centuries still need to be addressed in a more thorough way.

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## **Appendix: The database of Roman Catholics in the Groningen Ommelanden**

In the period 1986-1988 a family reconstruction was made for the five Roman Catholic parishes in the so-called ‘Ommelanden’ (literally ‘the surroundings’) of Groningen.<sup>34</sup> Roman Catholics constituted some 5% of the total population of about 50,000 around 1800. In the last two decennia this database was improved continuously using information from all kinds of sources, especially taxation records, civil proceedings, and legal acts.<sup>35</sup>

In first instance there were only three Roman Catholic parishes in this region: Bedum (registration of baptisms starts in 1680, marriages in 1728), Den Hoorn (starts in 1727) and Uithuizen (starts in 1730). All these parishes comprise a large number of villages. New parishes were split off in 1751 (Appingedam) and 1763 (Aduard). Preserved Roman Catholic death registration (only persons older than about 12-16 year) was starting in Uithuizen in 1730, in Appingedam and Aduard from the start in 1751 and 1763, but only in 1802 in Den Hoorn. In the parish of Bedum only burial registers survive from 1797 onwards. However, more general death records (including child deaths) for instance for the village of Bedum (from about 1775 onwards), the village of Eenrum (from 1755 onwards) and the village of Uithuizen (from 1715 onwards) exist too. From 1806 onwards general death records exist for every village. Marriages were also obliged to be concluded in the Dutch reformed church. Because of this double registration nearly every marriage can be found. Children were mostly baptised the day of birth or a day later, so most children born alive are indeed in the Roman Catholic baptism records. From 1811 onwards the registration office offers a complete civil registration of births, deaths and marriages of the province of Groningen, which have been made available on internet in the last years, just as most of the older registrations ([allegroningen.nl](http://allegroningen.nl)). Dutch databases on internet ([genlias.nl](http://genlias.nl)) also cover large parts of the rest of the Netherlands. The older forms of registration seem nearly complete, with only few events missing.

In conclusion: baptisms are nearly complete from 1731 onwards, for the period 1721-1730 about half of the them are missing and some dates have to be estimated quite roughly, registration of marriages was also nearly complete, only the death records are incomplete before 1806. However, with the help of additional sources the year of decease can be estimated roughly for a lot of people. At the moment for the parents of about 80% of the cohort members (Roman Catholics born between 1721 and 1800) relatively secure information on the date of death is available.

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<sup>34</sup> Paping 1988.

<sup>35</sup> This database was used before in: Paping and Collenteur (2004); Paping (2009).

*Table A.1 The quality of the database of married Roman Catholics born in the Groningen Ommelanden, 1721-1800*

|  | Males | Females | Total |
|--|-------|---------|-------|
| Total  | 872   | 1,022   | 1,894 |
| Marriage dates                                 | 864   | 1,016   | 1,880 |
| Age when mother died                           | 721   | 826     | 1,549 |
| Age when father died                           | 735   | 835     | 1,570 |
| Age when becoming fully orphan                 | 736   | 837     | 1,573 |
| Number of surviving brothers and sisters known | 819   | 964     | 1,783 |

The database comprises at the moment information on 1,894 married Roman Catholics born between 1721 and 1800 in the Groningen Ommelanden.<sup>36</sup> Next to this there are another 256 individuals who are reported to have reached the age of 30, remaining largely unmarried, although some of them might have left the province and married elsewhere. From the majority of the other registrations in the baptism register it is sure that they died before the age of 30. However, the database is not perfect, possibly another 50 to 100 Roman Catholics will have reached the age of 30, but until now we did not trace them in the sources. This group consists presumably partly of people remaining unmarried (which are relatively hard to trace), emigrants moving out of the Ommelanden, and a few marrying non-Catholics.

The database on Roman Catholics has definitive advantages, inasmuch as a region of 1.000 square kilometres comprising some 150 small and larger villages is considered using only a few parish registers. People had to move large distances to leave the region, and fortunately, most of them show up in the parish registers of the nearby large city of Groningen. For 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century standards the quality of the data in the database is very good. Another advantage is that nearly all the occupations are known, and by using additional sources information on the amount of property (mainly land) is nearly always available, which makes it relatively easy to place them in a specific social class.<sup>37</sup>

In the text we only use the cases with complete knowledge on the specific topic. For some families we do know how many children married and/or reached the age of 30, while we do not know the year of decease of the parents, and sometimes it is the other way around. This is the reason that the number of cases involved changes with every question.

Something has to be said about how representative the Roman Catholics were for the total population of the Groningen Clay area. Considering occupations they definitely were not completely representative. Farmers and especially larger farmers were somewhat overrepresented, inasmuch as these groups could afford to stick to the old faith. On the other hand because of the same reason the share of farm labourers was relatively low. However, indigent artisans were well represented under the Roman Catholics, for which a simple explanation exists. Many of the weavers, tailors and carpenters were poor immigrants from Germany or their descendants, and on the other

<sup>36</sup> At the moment the database is being extended to cover also 1801-1810; a birth cohort for which most information already has been collected.

<sup>37</sup> See also Paping 2010.

side of the Dutch-German frontier (Westfalia) mainly Roman Catholics were living. A relatively large group within the Roman Catholics were first, second or third generation immigrants, which, however, seemed to have been quite well integrated considering the number of mixed marriages. Surprisingly few labourers were coming from Germany.