

Darkness on the edge of town

Life stories of proto-industrialists in sixteenth-century Holland*

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Abstract

This paper uses a unique set of interviews with 77 heads of households taken in 1541 to study proto-industrialists right outside the town of Leiden. Whereas these people are often depicted as a uniform group, the interviews show large differences among proto-industrialists. Some were property owners with firm roots in the outskirts, who had family members living nearby to whom they could turn for support. Another group consisted of tenants, who were highly mobile and ready to move away as soon as they encountered better prospects elsewhere. This latter group had already made the transition from smallholders to ‘rural proletarians’ – the former group was probably in transition, barely holding on to their property. The analysis of their life stories provides a view from below on the mechanisms behind the transformation of rural society shortly before the establishment of the Dutch Republic. It shows the emergence of an early ‘rural proletariat’ that used women’s and children’s labour in proto-industry. It also demonstrates that historians should refine the concept of ‘neolocality’, and rethink how this influenced the household economy.

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I. Introduction

In 1539 the government of Leiden, a town in the county of Holland, made an inquiry into the households just outside the town's defensive walls. They had invited members of the provincial government to come along, so they could see for themselves how people at the outskirts made a living. The group arrived at a small house just outside one of the town gates, which those of Leiden claimed to be an inn. Since no one answered the door, the sheriff's assistant climbed onto the window-sill to have a quick peek, and told the officials he could see 'one full barrel of beer and two empty barrels'. This was exactly what the government of Leiden wanted to point out to the provincial government's agents: they complained that 'people drank this beer without paying excise taxes, and also put it in jugs to smuggle it into town'.¹ The remainder of their walk they repeatedly complained that many people engaged in non-agricultural activities, such as textile production.

Two years later, in 1541, 77 householders were summoned to The Hague, where they were interviewed by the High Court. Minutes of these hearings shed light on the lives of those of the late-medieval poor that were caught up in what historians have called the transformation of the rural economy. This entailed the disappearance of the medieval peasants, who often combined agriculture with several other activities, and the rise of specialized farmers who leased large estates where they could employ scale enlargement and produce for markets. Jan de Vries, in his book *The Dutch rural economy in the golden age*, regards this development as crucial for the rapid development of the Northern Low Countries in the seventeenth century.² A relatively productive rural economy catered for the booming towns, and also provided export products the Dutch needed to be able to import grain. Large farms employed some of the 'losers' of the transition: the masses that had turned into

¹E.C.G. Brünner, *De order op de buitennering van 1531* (Utrecht 1923) 238. Inquiry held on March 22 1539 by Jasper van Hoogelande, *raad ordinaris van het Hof van Holland*. He walked the countryside in the presence of several members of the Leiden government, as well as representatives of the village of Leiderdorp.

²J. de Vries, *The Dutch rural economy in the Golden Age, 1500-1700* (New Haven and London, 1974) 119-120. H. Medick, 'The proto-industrial family economy. The structural function of household and family during the transition from peasant society to industrial capitalism', *Social history* 1 (1976) 291-315, pp. 296. Cf. an overview of the literature with respect to the transition of rural society: M. Gubbels, 'Boeren, bezit en bodemproblemen. Verklaringsmodellen voor de transitie van de Hollandse economie in de late middeleeuwen', *Historisch Tijdschrift Holland* 42 (2010) 65-84.

land-poor or landless rural inhabitants. Others engaged in proto-industrial activities, or moved to town.

De Vries speaks of a 'thoroughgoing transformation of the rural economy' between 1580 and 1670, although he also indicates that the foundations for this transition should be looked for in the late middle ages.³ The past decades historians have indeed found evidence for an earlier start of the transformation of Holland's countryside. They situate the rise of urban landownership in the first half of the sixteenth century: Bas van Bavel calculated that in the southern part of the county of Holland urbanites owned 41% of rural land in the mid-sixteenth century.⁴ This does not mean that the transformation of the countryside was finished by then: Peter Hoppenbrouwers indicated that smallholding continued to be important, and that large farms only emerged at a later stage.⁵ Considering this decline of smallholding, it comes as no surprise to see that by the sixteenth century an increasing number of households in the countryside had come to depend on wage labour. Jan Luiten van Zanden demonstrated that many rural inhabitants of the province of Holland combined rural activities with more market-oriented proto-industrial activities.⁶ According to his estimates, already in 1510/1514 only 41% of rural labour input went to agriculture; the rest went to other activities such as fisheries, peat digging and work on dykes, maritime shipping and textiles.⁷ It is important to point out that these are *labour input figures*: more than 41 per cent of the rural population was at some point in the year active in agriculture, but they combined this with the aforementioned non-agricultural activities – including proto-industries. In another study into proto-

³ De Vries, *The Dutch rural economy*, 24-41; J. de Vries and A. van der Woude, *The first modern economy. Success, failure and perseverance of the Dutch economy, 1515-1815* (Cambridge 1998) 159-164.

⁴ B.J.P. van Bavel, 'Rural development and landownership in Holland, c. 1400-1600' in: O. Gelderblom (ed.) *The political economy of the Dutch Republic* (London 2009) 167-196. Cf. slightly different estimates: P.C.M. Hoppenbrouwers, 'Town and country in Holland, 1300-1550' in: S.R. Epstein (ed.), *Town and country in Europe, 1300-1800* (Cambridge 2001) 54-79, pp. 68.

⁵ P.C.M. Hoppenbrouwers, 'Mapping an unexplored field. The Brenner debate and the case of Holland', in: P.C.M. Hoppenbrouwers and J.L. van Zanden (eds.), *Peasants into farmers? The transformation of rural economy and society in the Low Countries (middle ages-19th century) in the light of the Brenner debate* (Turnhout 2001) 41-66, pp. 49.

⁶ J.L. van Zanden, 'Op zoek naar de "missing link". Hypothesen over de opkomst van Holland in de late middeleeuwen en vroegmoderne tijd', *Tijdschrift voor sociale geschiedenis* 14 (1988) 359-386, pp. 374-375.

⁷ J.L. van Zanden, 'Taking the measure of the early modern economy: Historical national accounts for Holland in 1510-1514' in *European Review of Economic History* 6 (2002) 131-163, pp. 135-136 and 138 table 3.

industrialization in the countryside of Holland, Bas van Bavel arrived at an estimate of 60% of the labour input going to non-agricultural activities.⁸ His research concerned the South of Holland, which was more urbanized than the North, and may therefore have been more heavily proto-industrialized.

In Holland this transition occurred relatively early, perhaps even beginning in the fifteenth century.⁹ Elsewhere it took longer for proto-industrial and other non-agricultural activities in the countryside to reach a similar magnitude.¹⁰ There are a few reasons for this: first of all, conditions for subsistence farming in Holland deteriorated after the fourteenth century because the soil became too wet for growing bread grains.¹¹ The inhabitants of Holland came to rely on grain that was imported from the Baltic and the North of France. To pay for this, they switched to dairy production and market gardening, and other market-oriented export industries. Many of these were typical seasonal activities, which forced rural inhabitants to seek additional labour, such as in rural proto-industrial production. Finally, whereas towns elsewhere in Europe were quite successful in suppressing proto industry, for instance by establishing territorial jurisdictions, towns in Holland did not succeed in this.¹²

Already in 1974 Jan de Vries suggested that to understand the transformation of the rural economy, we have to dig into the household:

The sources of rural growth must be sought in the peasant household [because]

reorganization of the peasant household rather than their simple proliferation held the key

⁸ B.J.P. van Bavel, 'Early proto-industrialization in the Low Countries?' in *Revue Belge de philologie et d'histoire* 81 (2003) 1109-1165.

⁹ Van Bavel, 'Early proto-industrialization'.

¹⁰ In general, proto-industrialization is believed to have taken place in various regions in Europe from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries (J. Marfany, 'Is it still helpful to talk about proto-industrialization? Some suggestions from a Catalan case study', *The economic history review* 63 (2012) 942-973, 943.

¹¹ Van Zanden, 'Op zoek', 372. Poor quality of the soil has been identified as a factor contributing to proto-industrialization elsewhere as well, see: Marfany, 'Is it still useful?'.

¹² There is a large literature on the towns of Holland's failure to deal with rural industries: Hoppenbrouwers, 'Town and country'; M. 't Hart, 'Town and country in the Dutch Republic' in S.R. Epstein (red.) *Town and country in Europe, 1300-1800* (Cambridge 2001) 80-105; J. Dijkman, *Shaping medieval markets. The organisation of commodity markets in Holland, c. 1200-c. 1450* (Leiden and Boston 2011) 148-149; D. Aten, "Als het gewelt comt..." *Politiek en economie in Holland benoorden het IJ, 1500-1800* (1995) 193-274; Brünner, *De order op de buitennering*.

to a productive rural economy responsive to urban and international markets and capable of stimulating, by its own demand, output in these sources' ¹³

The idea that changes at the level of the household were crucial for processes contributing to growth, has since then been further explored by De Vries in his book *The industrious revolution* published in 2008.¹⁴ Even more recently, Tine de Moor and Jan Luiten van Zanden singled out the emergence of the 'European marriage pattern' as an element that paved the way for a greater labour market participation of women.¹⁵ This European marriage pattern, which will be further discussed in section VI, was characterized by a relatively high age at first marriage, a relatively large number of people who never married, and neo-locality: the practise where children left the parental household when they married, to establish their own household.

For now, it suffices to say that linking developments at the level of the households to macro-economic processes is not an easy task, particularly for the relatively early transition Holland experienced. For a lack of sources, it is nearly impossible to get an impression of the late-medieval household economy. However, using the aforementioned interviews, this paper provides a view from below on the people caught up in the transition of the rural economy: the increasing group of land-poor¹⁶ and landless moving around in search of work. These are the people that fueled the processes of urbanization, scale enlargement in agriculture, and proto-industrialization that were crucial for the economic development Holland experienced in the early-modern period. It were their decisions, taken in the sparse interiors of many thousands of small houses, and aimed at survival in a turbulent era, that were behind the transformation of the rural economy. The paper gives their life stories. It starts off with a discussion of our source: a unique set of interviews from 1541, in which the histories of 77 householders are recorded (II). Next we look at household formation among our

¹³ De Vries, *The Dutch rural economy*, 120.

¹⁴ J. de Vries, *The industrious revolution. Consumer behavior and the household economy, 1650 to the present* (Cambridge 2008).

¹⁵ T. de Moor and J.L. van Zanden, 'Girl power. The European marriage pattern (EMP) and labour markets in the North-sea region in the late-medieval and early modern period', *The economic history review* 63 (2010) 1-33.

¹⁶ Cf. the participation of land-poor in proto-industry: Marfany, 'Is it still useful', 957-958.

population: how did smallholders and landless labourers structure their lives (III)? We then discuss how these households made use of their resources: real estate, capital and labour (IV). Finally, we discuss to what degree the life stories can contribute to two debates in social and economic history: the rise of proto-industry and the European marriage pattern (V). Conclusions follow.

II. Interviewing the poor

In 1541 the High Court of Holland held 77 interviews to inquire into proto-industrial activities in Leiden's immediate surroundings. Indeed, since the late middle Ages, some regions in the Low Countries had witnessed proto-industrialization of the countryside: rural inhabitants took on non-agrarian activities aimed at non-local markets.¹⁷ In doing so, they became competitors of urban textile producers and brewers. Since the income of towns depended in no small part on taxation of such proto-industrial products, town governments were quick to object to competition from the countryside, particularly since rural producers paid low taxes, and also because they did not have to meet quality standards, causing rural products to be relatively cheap.¹⁸

From the fourteenth century on, the towns of Holland pressed for firm measures against rural proto-industries.¹⁹ To stop what they portrayed as 'unjust competition', they called on the counts of Holland to prohibit 'urban activities' in the countryside. At the same time, they also took on urban religious institutions, such as convents, which enjoyed tax exemption, and could therefore cheaply produce textiles. Taking measures against religious and rural producers was complicated because urban producers often outsourced tasks to these cheap labourers.²⁰ Convents also took in

¹⁷ Cf. the emergence of proto-industries in Holland: Van Bavel, 'Early Proto-Industrialization', 1110-1111; Aten, *"Als het gewelt comt..."*, 193-274.

¹⁸ Aten, *'Als het gewelt comt...'*, 226-232.

¹⁹ Aten, *'Als het gewelt comt...'*, 275-286; Brünner, *De order*; N.W. Posthumus, 'Een zestiende-eeuwsche enquête naar de buitenneringen rondom de stad Leiden', *Bijdragen en mededeelingen van het historisch genootschap* 33 (1912) 1-95, pp. 1-8; N.W. Posthumus, *De geschiedenis van de Leidsche lakenindustrie. Dl. 1. De middeleeuwen (veertiende tot zestiende eeuw)* (The Hague 1908) 129-145.

²⁰ Posthumus, *Geschiedenis* 1, 145-152.

sick and elderly (who paid for institutionalized care) and provided lodging for travelers, and town governments also took great care to prevent these people from consuming tax-free beer and other foodstuffs.²¹ Although many of these convents were located within the town walls, where town governments could take measures, quite a few were located outside. In Leiden the Franciscan convent St. Hiëronymusdal, outside the Rijnsburgerpoort was one, as well as the Franciscan convent outside the Hogewoertpoort (map 1).

In 1531 it seemed the towns of Holland had won the battle, when emperor Charles V (1515-1555) issued a decree called *Order op de buitennering* which prohibited rural proto-industrial activities. However, this decree proved difficult to maintain in practice, not least because rural producers had influential allies among the nobility of Holland.²² As a result, the towns continued to press for measures, for instance when Leiden invited councilors of the High Court to Leiden in 1539, and took them into the countryside to see for themselves what villagers were up to. The aforementioned report tells of numerous visits to small houses and even sheds, where women and children were active in textile production. It also bears witness to the outrage among the magistrates of Leiden when they were confronted with these practices.

The interviews we draw on in this paper were held in 1540-1541, and aimed at monitoring a decree from the year before. In 1540 the High Court had stipulated that industries would be prohibited within a radius of 500 *roeden* (c. 1,9 km) outside of Leiden (see also image 1). Producers already active before 1514 were allowed to carry on for the rest of their lives; the industries of producers who had started between 1514 and 1531 were to be terminated, and the producers compensated; finally, the industries of producers who had started after the decree of 1531 would be terminated without any compensation. To determine which households were entitled to carry on, which would receive compensation, and which would receive nothing, the High Court summoned

²¹ For instance in Amsterdam, where convents were forced to pay taxes for the consumption of beer of *proveniers* (J. Breen, *Rechtsbronnen der stad Amsterdam* (The Hague 1902) 193).

²² Aten, *'Als het gewelt comt...'*, 277.

those households active in proto-industry.²³ The results of the investigation are mentioned in the report. No less than 54 households had to abandon proto-industrial activities; 19 had to stop immediately, 12 would receive compensation ranging from 1,8 to 120 guilders, the average being 31,15 guilders. Fourteen households were allowed to continue, but without the possibility for their heirs to continue the family business. For nine households it is unclear what was to happen.

It is important to stress that these interviews were taken with householders suspected of being active in proto-industries, not with households believed to have been strictly active in agriculture.²⁴ Also, the purpose of these interviews would have biased the response of at least some of the respondents. Some of the interviewed were clearly aware of what was at stake, such as Cornelis Aert zoon who explained that:

...his house, where he lived, was worth at least 600 guilders as long as industries were allowed, but in case industries would be prohibited, it would be worth less than 300 guilders...²⁵

Others did their best to convince the High Court of the value of their houses, telling they had developed the property. Aernt Jans zoon claimed 'to have made improvements worth 200 guilders' since he bought his house; this statement was clearly aimed at increasing the compensation Aernt hoped to receive.²⁶ The interviewed were also aware they could gain by demonstrating they were already active before 1514, so that they could proceed, or before 1531, so they would be eligible for compensation. Unsurprisingly, many claimed their houses had been used for proto-industrial activity well before 1514; perhaps the strongest claim came from Claes Reyers zoon, who showed the interviewers an official contract of title, explaining that his parents had been bakers outside the

²³ Posthumus, 'Een zestiende-eeuwsche enquête', 9-12. Additionally, the High Court determined how many inns and bakeries were allowed to continue to provide the rural population with basic foodstuffs.

²⁴ For instance, Aernt Jans zoon claimed to live 'in the first house outside the town gate engaged in proto-industry' (Nr. 6; all references to interviews follow the numbers Posthumus used in his edition). The interviewed were probably selected in the aftermath of the prior tour of the outskirts, taken in 1539.

²⁵ Nr. 71.

²⁶ Nr. 5.

Hogewoertspoort, just like his grandfather 'Claes Valcke zoon, who had also baked, which was 50 or 60 years ago, since he bought this house in 1458'.²⁷ In using the minutes of interviews, we have to keep these biases in mind.

The area investigated in 1541 is depicted on map 1, drawn by Pieter Sluyter, sworn land surveyor of the polder board (*Hoogheemraadschap van Rijnland*). It depicts the Leiden surroundings in 1550 – nine years after the interviews. The map shows several rural industries, particularly along the waterways. We can observe several mills, as well as brick industry (*steenplaatsen*) and lime industry (*kalkovens*) – these industries were not allowed within the town walls, for reasons of pollution and risk of fire. Our 77 households were located in this area: the majority lived outside the Hogewoertspoort at the Nieuwe Rijn (52) and outside the Zijlpoort at the Oude Rijn (17) – thus at the main waterways to the east of Leiden.

So what kind of information do these interviews provide us with? The first householder that was questioned was Aernt Janszoon, a 21-year old draper who had lived outside the town gate *Hogewoertspoort*, at a path called *Minderbroederspad* for five years. He said his (late?) father, Jans Aerntszoon, had bought this house from a woman named Neeltgen Jansdochter. This Neeltgen continued to live next door. She was the 41-year old widow of a man named Heynric Joostenzoon, whom she had married when she was 18, and she had remarried Claes Wouterszoon at the age of 39. This Claes was no stranger either: he had been the assistant to the aforementioned Jan Aerntszoon 'for twenty years' and probably moved to the *Minderbroederspad* when his master bought the

²⁷ Nr. 50. Many other householders also tried to convince the High Court of proto-industrial activity at their home before 1514: cf. Neeltgen Jansz., born c. 1500, claiming that the father of her first husband already produced textiles (nr. 7); Willem Jans zoon, claiming that his father in law, a blind man called Huych Huyge zoon Craen, born c. 1475, had woved linen for 40 years (nr. 10); Menex Bouwens dochter who had lived at Broederspad for c. 65 years and had always produced textile (nr. 19); Jan Claes zoon who claimed parchment making had been done at his house 'for more than fifty years' (nr. 28); Cornelis Luyte zoon stating that in his small house weaving and shipbuilding had been done for fourty years (nr. 39); Claertgen Jans dochter claimed that her house had been a pottery 'for 50 years' (nr. 64); Joost Thonis zoon, a shipbuilder aged 28, telling that his grandfather, who had inhabited the same house, had already had the same profession (nr. 68); Huych Huyge zoon claiming his wife's parents had had an inn 'for over sixty years'(nr. 80).

house. When his neighbour Neeltgen was widowed, he married her.²⁸ These two households already illustrate quite nicely the importance of a marriage policy in the outskirts of Leiden.

III. Family life

When taking the interviews, the High court focused on the history of households: how did the householder and other members make a living, did this involve proto-industrial activity, and how long had this been going on? Before we discuss the image of the household in the outskirts that emerges from the interviews, it is important to point out that our source was not created to record such data: it was inevitable that householders, when discussing their household as an economic unit, revealed many details about family life. However, the data they provided are biased – at least to the degree that some householders chose to give many details about their lives, and others did not.

What all the interviewed disclose, is their age, probably because this was required by the High Court.²⁹ Their average age was 42,6 years. The majority was in the age groups 30-39 and 40-49 (table 1). No householders were younger than 20 years; the youngest were Adriaen Willemsz. and Aernt Jansz, who were both 21. Of the householders, 61 were male, with an average age of 41,2. Sixteen females averaged 47,9 years. The difference between the sexes can be easily explained by the fact that only one woman younger than 29 was a head of a household, causing the average age of females to be relatively high. We know the age of eight 'other' members of households (that is:

²⁸ Nrs. 6 and 7. Claes was not the only servant who went on to marry his master's daughter: Symon Hercx zoon did the same thing (nr. 63).

²⁹ In general, people in Holland were perfectly able to accurately report their age. See: T. de Moor and J.L. van Zanden, 'Van fouten kan je leren. Eenkritische benadering van de mogelijkheden van "leeftijdstapelen" voor sociaal-economisch onderzoek naar gecijferdheid in het pre-industriële Vlaanderen en Nederland', *Tijdschrift voor sociale en economische geschiedenis* 5 (2008), 55-86 and J. Zuijderduijn and T. de Moor, 'Tel uit je winst. Markteconomie en gecijferdheid in de late middeleeuwen', *Madoc* 24 (2010) 130-139.

people who were no head of a household), all female, and averaging 44,3 years; seven were the wife of the householder, one the 70-year-old mother.³⁰

The majority of householders had married in their early twenties. Although the interviewed did not mention the age at first marriage, many did say for how long they had been married in 1541. When we subtract this number from the reported age, we get an indication of age at first marriage of sixteen householders. This ranged from 18 to 30; the average of fifteen males was 22,6 years, while that of the only female householder was 20. When we include the age at first marriage reported by three wives (who were not householders) the average rises slightly to 20,3.³¹ We know much less about the age at second marriage at the outskirts of Leiden: the woman Fijtgen Heinricx dochter reported to have remarried at 29, and Neeltgen Jans dochter at 39. Remarriage was very common, and was often a strict necessity: in this respect the interview with Bartholomeus Heynricx zoon is instructive. He:

...married his wife circa fourteen or fifteen weeks after her father passed away, while she was still living in her father's house, and has since continued his [late] father-in-law's business [of shipbuilding].³²

When one householder passed away, another moved in within months, continuing the family business. This marriage may have entailed upward social mobility for Bartholomeus: the assistant of a shipbuilder who lived with his master, became a master shipbuilder and householder. Additionally,

³⁰ These findings are in line with what one would expect in a society characterized by the European marriage pattern: households were formed when couples married, and wives only became a head of household when husbands passed away, i.e. at an advanced age, or, in the event they stayed single, when their parents passed away. See for the European marriage pattern: section VI.

³¹ Jan Luiten van Zanden, who used the same source to calculate age at marriage, arrived at slightly different figures (Van Zanden, 'Op zoek', 370 table 5). The data reported here are lower than those observed in the early modern period, when the age at first marriage was higher. In the first half of the 17th century age at first marriage for males in Amsterdam was 27,7, and in the village of Maasland 29,7. For females in Amsterdam this was 26,5, and in Maasland 32,8 (Van Zanden, 'Op zoek', 368-371; D.J. Noordam, *Leven in Maasland. Een hoogontwikkelde plattelandssamenleving in de achttiende en het begin van de negentiende eeuw* (Hilversum 1986) 106-107).

³² Nr. 24.

the marriage brought him in the possession of a house and shipyard: as we will see further on, acquiring by marriage – *behylicken* – was a common way to gain property in the outskirts.

Our sources also provide some insight into neolocality: the practice where newlyweds moved out of the parental home when they married, and established their own household. Many of the interviewed indicated when they moved into their present home: nine already lived there since childhood – they must have inherited the parental home. Table 2 shows that 41 only first occupied their 1541 home during adulthood, and of these 21 moved there in their twenties. Although we cannot exclude the possibility that a few of them had moved in together with their parents, the majority probably occupied the house upon marriage. Table 2 also reveals that many people moved at a later stage in life – further on we will come across some of the reasons to do so.

Of the 77 householders, only twelve reported having children – the average number being 5,1. When we exclude the rather dubious claim by Beatris Cuypers, a 68-year-old midwife who claimed to have had 22 children, of whom only one was still alive,³³ we arrive at 3,6 children per householder that reporting having children. Although this average seems credible, the number of householders not reporting children is not. Considering the age distribution of our population – 67 householders between 20 and 59 – one would expect the majority of these people would have had children still living at home. Furthermore, since 38 householders also reported a husband or wife, it is hard to imagine only twelve of them would have had children. Clearly the High court did not specifically ask those interviewed about their children, causing underreporting in this respect.

The householders reported living in a nuclear household: they were either solitary, lived together with a spouse, or also with their children. None reported more remote relatives or servants as members of their household. The interview taken with Trijn Outgers dochter, a 36-year-old woman, suggests that ideas about who belonged to a household could be quite rigid. She explained

³³ Nr. 56. This would be Joost Claes zoon, nr. 53.

that when her father remarried after her mother passed away, 'she came to live on her own'.³⁴ What she meant is revealed by the 1539 inquiry: Trijn was in fact forced to leave, and to build a house on a piece of land that was given to her by her father.³⁵ In this case it seems remarriage created a new nuclear family where there was no longer place for an adult (step-)daughter. Not all parents were so harsh though: Gerijt Gerijtszoon van Strymen explained that when he married his wife, they first continued to live with his father for five or six years.³⁶ Furthermore, a few of the interviewed indicated to have spent their youth as in-living servants: the woman Ijffken Augustijns dochter told she had worked in the village of Warmond before she married,³⁷ and Claes Wouters zoon, of whom we have already heard, had been an in-living servant in the outskirts since childhood.³⁸ Even in the outskirts households sometimes decided to hire additional labour.

Although most householders lived in a nuclear family household, family ties were far from unimportant: Luyt Roeloffs zoon stated he had worked as a servant for his father until a year after he got married and when he quit, it was only to start a workshop next door to his parental home.³⁹ Another householder, Augusteijn Gertis zoon told he had a house of his own, but used his parental home to carry out his profession of glassmaking.⁴⁰ Furthermore, several sick people were nursed by relatives, such as the blind man Huych Huyge zoon Craen, who lived with his son, and was probably also taken care of by his daughter Maritgen, who lived next door.⁴¹ There are several other examples of relatives living next-door or in the same neighbourhood: in the outskirts the aforementioned neolocality did not necessarily weaken family ties.⁴² One also gets the impression that many of the interviewed had close ties to their neighbours. Their importance was already apparent in the case of the aforementioned Neeltgen Jans dochter, who married her neighbour's servant. Another

³⁴ Nr. 69.

³⁵ Brünner, *De order*, 237.

³⁶ Nr. 15.

³⁷ Nr. 15.

³⁸ Nr. 7. Cf. nr. 10, 51.

³⁹ Nr. 38.

⁴⁰ Nr. 57.

⁴¹ Nr. 10, 52. Cf. nr. 36 and 83.

⁴² Cf. examples nrs. 36, 38. We will discuss neolocality and family ties in greater detail in section VI.

householder, Cornelis Jans zoon is quite explicit about the importance of neighbours: he 'told that in the event his neighbours had to leave he would not dare to continue bleaching for the risk of thieves'.⁴³

The examples given above, suggesting the importance of ties with family and neighbours, usually pertain to the land-poor. The landless had less strong ties with the outskirts community and were highly mobile.⁴⁴ Several householders reporting spouses living someplace else: Symon Gerijts dochter, a woman with two children, told that her husband, Cornelis Bruynsz., was at sea – 'sails East and West' – and usually stayed in Amsterdam, although 'he sometimes visited her'.⁴⁵ Another woman, Griete Willems dochter, stated to be married to Luyt Roelofs, who was presently living in Delft, a town at c. 25 km to the southwest.⁴⁶ To survive, some of these labour migrants relied on 'commercial care', such as provisions for single men working in seasonal labour. Thus, one Aeffgen Jans dochter provided services to seasonal labourers employed in brick yards, selling them bread and beer, and to 'do laundry, cook and go to the market'.⁴⁷ Although the people at the outskirts of Leiden are unlikely to have had access to urban poor relief, we may suspect they profited from the proximity of many convents outside Leiden. Indeed, our sources indicate some ties between households and convents, for instance because the latter were active in proto-industry as well: when officials from Leiden investigated the extent of textile production between Leiden and Leiderdorp, in 1538, they discovered 'a lot of wool' with Jan Pietersz., which was his own property, as well as the property of the Franciscan convent.⁴⁸ Also, during the investigation held in 1539, the Leiden magistrates claimed that 'some living outside the Hoogewoerdspoort, upon hearing there would be an investigation, had brought their wool into the Roodenburg convent'. When asked about this, Maryken Claes Jacobsz widow confirmed she had brought 600 lbs. of wool to Roodenburg.⁴⁹ Assistance probably went even

⁴³ Nr. 70.

⁴⁴ Mobility will be discussed in section V.

⁴⁵ Nr. 18.

⁴⁶ Nr. 36.

⁴⁷ Nr. 27.

⁴⁸ Posthumus, *Bronnen* II, 405-406.

⁴⁹ Brünner, *De order*, nr. 59.

further than this: according to Jan van Hout, the sixteenth-century town secretary of Leiden, poor relief by 'wealthy abbeys' in- and outside Leiden attracted crowds of poor people.⁵⁰

IV. Real estate, capital and labour

Proto-industrial production was characterized by the 'putting out system': proto-industrialists provided labour, entrepreneurs provided instruments, raw materials and possibly even production space. The householder Claes Wouters zoon told the High court about one of these entrepreneurs: Jan Aerntsz., a citizen 'who has always lived in Leiden and yet has always produced textile outside the town, in several houses'. He probably leased these houses to families willing to produce textiles.⁵¹ Such entrepreneurs provided householders with raw materials: the widow Neeltgen Mathijs dochter told she had produced textiles for the past 37 years 'which was brought to her from Leiden' to make a living.⁵² In the same way, Hase, the wife of Aelbrecht Rommers zoon, produced textiles for entrepreneurs (*drapeniers*) from The Hague.⁵³ The underlying reason for this business model was a lack of investment opportunities among the householders of the outskirts, as is indicated by several of them: Beer Meynertsz. usually worked as a day labourer in service of shipbuilders and complained he did not have the business capital (*verschot*) to make large repairs – and thus to set up shop himself.⁵⁴ Quirijn Claes zoon remarked that 'if he would be able to buy one or two cows, he would quit selling beer'.⁵⁵

The householders had to make do with what they had: apart from the labour available in the households, the land-poor owned a house and yard, and sometimes additional land, whereas the landless rented a place to stay. We will first of all discuss land and housing in the outskirts, and then

⁵⁰ J. Prinsen JLz., 'Armenzorg te Leiden in 1577', *Bijdragen en mededeelingen van het Historisch Genootschap* 26 (1905) 113-160, pp. 137.

⁵¹ Nr. 7.

⁵² Nr. 14.

⁵³ Nr. 78.

⁵⁴ Nr. 65.

⁵⁵ Nr. 16.

shift our focus to what is said about labour. A first question that comes up is about the value of houses and land in the surroundings of Leiden; we study this using the tenth penny tax of 1543 (*tiende penning kohieren*). To distribute these taxes, local governments used the rental value of real estate to assess contributions to taxation. For real estate that was used by owners, assessors estimated what the rental value would be if the real estate would be leased out. This source confirms that quite a few people outside the towns walls of Leiden (including proto-industrialists) did own real estate – something that is also indicated by our interviews. However, when we compare the rental value of the houses the interviewed inhabited (3,9-6,2 guilders) to average sums paid in Leiden in 1584 (13,2 guilders), we immediately see a big difference: rental values outside of town were very low.⁵⁶ Moreover, table 3 demonstrates that even when compared to nearby villages, such as Leiderdorp and Zoeterwoude, it seems that our population lived in a low-rent area. Outside the Zijlpoort the average rental value was still a reasonable 6,2 guilders, slightly lower than the average for the village of Leiderdorp, which was 6,8 guilders. Outside the Hogewoertpoort the average was much lower though, at 3,9 guilders. Apart from home owners the ledgers also mention a few entrepreneurs who owned or leased land or a place of business, such as a brickyard or a limekiln. In the ledgers of the tenth penny tax they were assessed at relatively large sums: the average for Hogewoerdsport was 81,1 guilders, which was more than the average for Leiderdorp (75,1 guilders). Such properties were not exploited by inhabitants of the outskirts, but by well-to-do townsmen. In contrast, the majority of landowners and tenants was assessed at comparatively low sums though: 49,7 guilders on average outside Zijlpoort.

In general, real estate at the outskirts of Leiden was inexpensive. Does this mean that it was within reach of newlyweds who, due to neolocality, had to establish a household of their own? Several householders indicate that they came in possession of a house when they married: Neeltgen

⁵⁶ Part of this difference is due to inflation between 1543 and 1584, but even when we take this into account, it is clear that living outside the town walls was very inexpensive.

Zymons dochter told she and her late husband had ‘married into’ a small house.⁵⁷ The term she used – *behylickt* – means acquired by means of marriage. The term *behylicken* was frequently used: Jan Pieterszoon had also ‘married into’ his house with his first wife, and the same goes for Jacop van Dam.⁵⁸ It suggests that marriage was a logical occasion for the purchase of a house, and also hints at marriage being helpful in purchasing a house, perhaps because the wife received a dowry, or because both partners contributed in other ways to the purchase. We also encounter people who were assisted by their parents, such as Aert Claesz., who declared to live in a house owned by his father, who was a citizen of Leiden. The latter had bought this house five to six years before from the widow of Heynrick Joestenz.⁵⁹ However, others had bought their house on credit, paying in several annual terms. Aernt Jans zoon stated to live in a house originally bought by his late father, for 200 guilders, to be paid in ten annual terms, five or six of which had been made.⁶⁰ For this sum of money he also acquired the instruments used for textile production (*neringe*). Table 4 shows the annual terms other householders reported to have been paying: these were in the range of 10-75 guilders – c. 33-250 day wages of a skilled labourer.⁶¹ Other people purchased real estate by means of the capital market: Jacob Cornelis zoon was a homeowner who paid an annuity of 22 guilders, and presumably this was the ‘mortgage interest’ on his house.⁶² Claes Wouters zoon had taken a mortgage on the yard he had recently bought, and paid an annuity of eight guilders (the principal would probably have been in the range of 120-140 guilders).⁶³ However, not everyone managed to finance such purchases: Huych Pouwelsz. told that ‘because he could not finance the house, he sold it again’.⁶⁴

These smallholders lived outside Leiden’s defensive wall, so they were vulnerable to attacks.

When hostile troops from the duchy of Guelders sacked The Hague in 1528, and returned via Leiden,

⁵⁷ Nr. 20.

⁵⁸ Nr. 12. Cf. nr. 33, 50, 73, 80.

⁵⁹ Nr. 1.

⁶⁰ Nr. 6.

⁶¹ De Vries and van der Woude, *The first modern economy*, 610-611.

⁶² Brünner, *De order*, nr. 16. An alternative was financing by means of *erfpacht* (Brünner, *De order*, nr. 42).

⁶³ Nr. 2.

⁶⁴ Nr. 32.

they also burned down many houses in the surroundings. Several of the people interviewed in 1541 referred to this event.⁶⁵ Jan Dammasz even declared that his house had been burnt down twice. The first time may have been in 1517, when a band of mercenaries called *Zwarte hoop* pillaged towns and villages in Holland, the second time was in 1528.⁶⁶ Furthermore, when under attack, town governments could also decide to demolish properties in the immediate surroundings, to prevent enemies from using buildings as shelter. For this reason, another town in Holland, Enkhuizen was recorded having ‘demolished houses outside the town moat’ at the beginning of the century.⁶⁷ Also, people in the Leiden surroundings sometimes had to cope with floods, such as the *Allerzielenvloed* (1532), which caused damage in the nearby village of Warmond.⁶⁸ Another risk the people outside Leiden ran, was being confronted with measures against proto-industrial activities. A few of the interviewed indicated to have moved because of these: Herper Huyge zoon responded to the 1540 decree by abandoning his house just outside Leiden, and continuing his business somewhat further away, in Leiderdorp.⁶⁹ Jacob Cornelisz. even complained that his house had been demolished by those of Leiden because his wife had sold beer.⁷⁰ The same had happened to Luytaert Doessoens widow, who had received a fine of 3000 bricks for selling bread in town (at the time, fines were either expressed in a monetary value or a number of bricks to be used for the town walls). When she did not pay the fine, it seems that those of Leiden simply took the bricks from her house.⁷¹ That not all threats came from outside becomes clear from the statement of the widow Aeffgen Jans dochter, who used to sell beer from her small house. However, ‘since her [late] husband drank so much she

⁶⁵ Cf. nr. 6, 7.

⁶⁶ Nr. 49; P. J. Blok, *Geschiedenis eener Hollandsche stad. Eene Hollandsche stad onder de Bourgondisch-Oostenrijksche heerschappij II* (The Hague 1912) 50-51.

⁶⁷ R. Fruin (ed.), *Enqueste ende informatie upt stuck van der reductie ende reformatie van den schiltaelen, voertijts getaxeert ende gestelt geweest over de landen van Hollant ende Vrieslant: gedaen in den jaere 1494* (Leiden 1876) 23.

⁶⁸ Nr. 8.

⁶⁹ Nr. 8.

⁷⁰ Nr. 35..

⁷¹ The fine is mentioned in the 1539 report (Brünner, *De order op de buitennering van 1531*, nr. 41).

could not make a profit' she decided to call it quits. She leased the house to others and moved to a brick yard.⁷²

This example brings us to a second, and sometimes somewhat ignored mechanism: the rental market. For most people leasing was probably the only way to get housing, as rents around town gates were relatively low.⁷³ This is also visible in the outskirts, where the widow Trijnke Jans dochter rented a house from Adriaen Willemsz for three groats a week, and Meyns Lambrechts widow paid the same to Trijn Aernts dochter. These sums amounted to 3,9 guilders a year – c. 13 day wages of a skilled labourer.⁷⁴ Trijn Aernts dochter even let Barber Jans dochter stay in another house 'for naught'.⁷⁵

Whether such tenants got much more than a shed is a question open for debate: compared to home owners many may have lived in dire conditions. However, their mobility rendered them relatively invulnerable to the aforementioned risks homeowners ran. In fact, among this group we encounter people who leased houses and abandoned these, apparently without giving this much thought, such as Thijs Zymons zoon, who stated to be 'happy to move away'.⁷⁶ Symon Hercx zoon was also quite casual about moving to Leiden saying 'he would exchange or abandon his house and yard'.⁷⁷ Leasing a house provided considerable mobility: several of the interviewed admitted to having left previous homes. For instance, Aeltgen Bouwens dochter had rented a house in Leiden where she had sold beer.⁷⁸ She had given notice of the lease, perhaps because a bylaw from 1540 banned rural inhabitants from renting urban houses.⁷⁹ Others were quick to adapt to changing circumstances as well, abandoning houses and moving elsewhere. This does not mean, however, that

⁷² Nr. 27. Cornelis Meynerts zoon (nr. 30) leased his house and shipyard to another man when he moved to live in Leiden.

⁷³ Ingrid van der Vlis described how in Delft, in the 17th century, cheap housing was available around town gates (I. van der Vlis, *Leven in armoede. Delftse bedeelden in de zeventiende eeuw* (Amsterdam 2001) 89-90).

⁷⁴ Nr. 61; Brünner, *De order op de buitennering van 1531*, nr. 10.

⁷⁵ Brünner, *De order*, nr. 11.

⁷⁶ Nr. 17.

⁷⁷ Nr. 63.

⁷⁸ Nr. 21.

⁷⁹ Posthumus, 'Een zestiende-eeuwsche enquête', 8.

people did not aspire to become homeowners: Willem Roeloffs zoon had leased a house for ten to eleven years before he finally built his own house.⁸⁰ This example makes clear that individuals could move on, from being tenants to homeowners; the transformation of rural society was not an irreversible process.

It is important to point out that even tenants had to conform to certain rules. At the Leiden rental market leases were continued in May, and apparently, this reduced some of the mobility of tenants: Thijs Zymons zoon feared that the 1540 decree would mean he had to move away and 'said that he cannot get a house before May'.⁸¹ Also, abandoning a house may have been a bit expensive because homeowners may have demanded compensation for the lease – although it is unclear how they would have managed to do so exactly.⁸² Overseeing the statements made in the interviews, it is clear that the proto-industrialists were not at all a homogenous group: many of the landless profited from flexibility, whereas the land-poor may have derived some social status and credit from their real estate. Unable to move away, the latter required a great endurance in the face of repeated disasters that threatened their livelihood; for many, giving up real estate and joining the ranks of the landless may well have been a blessing in disguise.

V. Labour

When N.W. Posthumus described the population in the surroundings of Leiden, he was amazed about the 'peculiar occupational structure'.⁸³ Indeed, many of the households were active in one or more 'industries'. Later research confirmed this image for the largest part of rural Holland: many households were not specialized, but combined several types of seasonal labour. This was no

⁸⁰ Nr. 59. Herper Huyge zoon rented a house for four-and-half years after his home was demolished in 1528 (Nr. 8).

⁸¹ Nr. 17. Cf. nr. 22.

⁸² Landlords were protected against non payment since they were allowed to recover rent by taking property from the tenant (H. G. Hamaker, *De middeneeuwsche keurboeken van de stad Leiden* (Leiden 1873) 133-134).

⁸³ Posthumus, 'Een zestiende-eeuwsche enquête', 12.

different in the surroundings of Leiden: a typical ‘summer industry’, brick production, was relatively important in the villages to the east, such as Leiderdorp. When interviewed in 1514, the village priest estimated that c. twenty per cent of the adults moved away during winter – i.e. when the brick production season had come to an end.⁸⁴ Cornelis Ulricx zoon, who lived on a brickyard outside Leiden was one of them, stating when interviewed ‘he has not lived there for [more than] a year and will leave again on the first of November, as he is used to do’. It is interesting to note that Cornelis was a citizen of Leiden who moved to the outskirts in summer, to live and work in a brick yard, and relocated in winter.⁸⁵ Meynert Beers zoon, a thatcher, explained he usually worked in summer, and ‘when he did not have much work, he sometimes dug for peat’. He had stopped doing so since he turned 50 ‘because of his slowness due to old age’.⁸⁶

When we follow Posthumus’ classification of the occupations mentioned in our source, 13 people declared to be active in agriculture, 99 in industries such as textiles, seven in building, six in food production, 45 in trade and transport, and six in other occupations.⁸⁷ Many of these activities were carried out by women: except for the wife of Beer Meynerts zoon, who ‘did not do anything else but look after her children’,⁸⁸ all women worked. Furthermore, child labour was very common. Thus, Claes Reyers zoon told that ‘his wife usually produced textiles for money, together with his five little daughters [*dochterkens*]’.⁸⁹ It seems that small children were already put to work: Neeltgen Jans dochter told in 1541 that her son Jan was too young to participate in weaving. She calls him, quite tellingly, a *spolertgen* (litt. ‘playing child’) – a term apparently used to distinguish him from a working child.⁹⁰ The fact that his mother Neeltgen could use a word to describe this

⁸⁴ Fruin, *Informacie*, 286-288. Cf. nr. 16.

⁸⁵ Nr. 29. We encounter more citizens living in the outskirts, such as Geerloff Pieters zoon, a potter, who explained that he had acquired citizenship so that he would be allowed to sell pots in Leiden (nr. 40).

⁸⁶ Nr. 66. Cornelis Jans zoon, a bleacher, also told that he would sail his ship ‘when there is no work’ (nr. 70).

⁸⁷ Posthumus, *‘Een zestiende-eeuwsche enquête’*, 13-16. In many households the members had several occupations.

⁸⁸ Nr. 65.

⁸⁹ Nr. 50.

⁹⁰ Nr. 7. Jan is referred to as *die nu een spolertgen es ende noch te jonck omme te weven*. The word *spolertgen* probably refers to ‘to play’ (*spelen*), which would then accord with early infancy. This distinction recalls Philippe

specific phase of childhood is quite revealing, and testimony to the common practice of putting children to work: there can be little doubt little Jan would be labouring in a few years' time. Unfortunately, our sources do not indicate at what age child labour became an option – in later centuries this was at the age of six.⁹¹ There are, however, in the interviews many references to this practice. The mother Neeltgen Mathijs weduwe 'taught her children how to spin',⁹² and as a result many adults could look back on a lifetime of textile production. Thus, Machtelt Jans dochter said she had been 'active in textile production since she was a child'.⁹³ To give a few other examples: the woman Adriaen Lambrechts dochter, age c. 30, claimed that she and her mother had produced textiles 'all their lives'.⁹⁴ Lijsbeth Dircx dochter 'told, she had produced textiles since she was a child'.⁹⁵ And child labour was not restricted to women: Herper Huyge zoon had produced textiles since his youth, and before he married at age 20.⁹⁶ Willem Jans zoon had produced textiles 'his whole lifetime', first as an apprentice (*knecht*) later as a master.⁹⁷ The situation in the late-medieval outskirts thus resembles that of Leiden in the seventeenth century, when 'thousands of children were put at work either by parents or by orphanages in the textile industry'.⁹⁸

Our population was not only flexible with respect to occupation, but also with respect to residence. Many of the interviewed indicated they had moved several times. Luyt Roeloffsz was born in the village of Bodegraven, moved to another village, Leiderdorp in 1500, then went to Noordwijk 'and elsewhere labouring'. He could move around as some sort of apprentice 'because he was unmarried' – *eenlopen* (litt. 'walking alone') is the term he uses: when he married in 1510, he set up

Ariès' claims of childhood as a social construction (P. Ariès, *Centuries of childhood. A social history of family life* (Harmondsworth 1979).

⁹¹ E. van Nederveen meerkerk and A. Schmidt, 'Between wage labour and vocation. Child labor in Dutch urban industry, 1600-1800, *Journal of social history* 41 (2008) 717-736, pp. 721.

⁹² Nr. 14. ... *ende heeft zy altijts lijst gesponnen ende tselve haer kinderen geleert...*

⁹³ Nr. 44. Cf. nrs. 34, 50, 55.

⁹⁴ Nr. 19... *Seyt, dat zy ende haer moeder alle haer leven lijst ofte wolle geckaert ende oick gesponnen hebben...*

⁹⁵ Nr. 55 ... *zeyde, dat zy van jongs up altijts lijst gesponnen ende geckaert hadde...*

⁹⁶ Nr. 8.

⁹⁷ Nr. 10. ...*heeft hy, Willem Jans zoon, tambocht van lindeweaven gedaen ende oick somtijts thierenteit gemaect alle zijn leeffdagen als knecht ende zedert die naeste twaelff jairen herwaerts heeft hy dieselve neeringe gedaen als meester...*

⁹⁸ Van Nederveen Meerkerk and Schmidt, 'Between wage labour and vocation', 719-720.

shop in his own, first in Leiderdorp, where he lived together with his brother for a while before he ended up right outside Leiden.⁹⁹ Gerijt Gerijts zoon van Strymen moved from Braasemermeer to Roelofarentsveen, then to Waddinxveen (near Gouda) and finally to the outskirts of Leiden.¹⁰⁰ Cornelis Aerts zoon moved from the Leiden outskirts to Alphen, then to Woubrugge, and next to Zoeterwoude where he married.¹⁰¹ Dammas Jans zoon told that he had lived in the outskirts for twenty years, but ‘sometimes lived in Warmond, Delft and elsewhere’.¹⁰² Dirck Dircx zoon had lived in Schoonhoven near Gouda, and Symon Hercx zoon ‘had also worked in Zeeland’.¹⁰³

Before we discuss the practical implications of all this moving around, it is instructive to show that moving was a usual response to hardship. Quite a few people responded to the burning of houses by troops from Guelders, in 1528, by moving, such as Neeltgen Jans dochter, who went from the village of Zoeterwoude, where her house was burnt down, to the outskirts of Leiden where she built another house.¹⁰⁴ Herper Huyge zoon’s account is perhaps most instructive: after the pillage of 1528 he first went from Zoeterwoude to Leiden, for half a year, and then to Warmond, where he fell victim to a flood, the disastrous *Allerzielenvloed* of 1532. Herper responded by moving to the Minderbroederspad at the outskirts of Leiden, where he lived until he received notice of the new legislation with respect to proto-industry, which caused him to move further away, ‘beyond the church of Leiderdorp’.¹⁰⁵ Also, a few of the interviewed indicate that after their homes were destroyed, they first stayed elsewhere for a couple of years, and then returned to rebuild.¹⁰⁶ As an alternative to moving, some of the interviewed ‘commuted’: Joost Claes zoon worked as a

⁹⁹ Nr. 38.

¹⁰⁰ Nr. 15.

¹⁰¹ Nr. 71.

¹⁰² Nr. 47.

¹⁰³ Nr. 63, 75.

¹⁰⁴ Nr. 7.

¹⁰⁵ Nr. 8.

¹⁰⁶ Brünner, *De order op de buitennering van 1531*, nr. 41; Posthumus, ‘Een enquête’, nr. 6

shipbuilder and sawyer, in Leiden and Delft and ‘anywhere he can make a living as a daylabourer’.¹⁰⁷ We already encountered husbands temporarily working and living in Amsterdam and Delft.

In spite of this mobility, there were also some people who had always lived outside Leiden ‘within a radius of 500 *roeden*’, such as Lijsbeth Dircx dochter.¹⁰⁸ We have already seen that this area had its attractions, while it is also possible that these people experienced problems renting or buying houses in Leiden. Jan Pieters zoon had lived in Leiden ‘and since he was removed from his house, he went to live outside, since he could not find another house in Leiden’.¹⁰⁹ In 1539 Jan Pietersz stated that ‘since the lease of his house in Leiden was terminated, he had to buy this house out of poverty’. Finally some of the interviewed remarked that they were not allowed to engage in industries such as pottery and shipbuilding in Leiden, and that in order to carry out their profession, they had to live outside.¹¹⁰ Again, differences between land-poor and landless, moving around the countryside of Holland, settling wherever there was work, and leaving again in the face of hardship, is striking.

VI. Discussion: proletarians, family systems and survival strategies

The life stories of proto-industrial producers sheds light on two debates in social and economic history. The first concerns the transformation of rural society, a theme that links up with debates on the rise of capitalism in the sixteenth century. Economic historians have taken quite an interest in emerging groups of land-poor and landless that provided labour for proto-industries – thereby following the pioneering work by Franklin Mendels in the 1970’s, who claimed this was the ‘first phase of the industrializing process’.¹¹¹ Land-poor and landless families participated in market-

¹⁰⁷ Nr. 53.

¹⁰⁸ Nr. 55.

¹⁰⁹ Nr. 43.

¹¹⁰ Nr. 64, 65.

¹¹¹ F.F. Mendels, ‘Proto-industrialization: the first phase of the industrialization process’, *The Journal of Economic History* (32 (1972) 241-261. Cf. P. Kriedte, H. Medick and J. Schlumbohm, *Industrialization before industrialization. Rural industry in the genesis of capitalism* (Cambridge 1981). Cf. recent overviews: S.R. Epstein

oriented craft production, via the putting-out system organized by urban entrepreneurs who were either in demand of cheap labourers to produce textiles for international markets, or were looking for ways to work around crafts guilds and urban regulations.¹¹² In the words of Robert Duplessis, ‘the underlying dynamic was the search for cheap and docile labour’.¹¹³ Why were rural families willing to supply this type of labour? This question is usually answered by referring to macro-developments such as population growth and social polarization of the countryside, which brought about a ‘landless or land-poor “rural sub-stratum”’ unable to live from agriculture alone’.¹¹⁴ One element that contributed to this was the scattering of peasant holdings due to the inheritance system,¹¹⁵ which made agrarian production less viable, and left peasants with sufficient time to participate in proto-industry. If proto-industrial production proved to be a good alternative to toiling on scattered pieces of land peasants may even have decided to give up land.¹¹⁶ Another explanation stresses the decline of smallholding due to peasant indebtedness: in order to survive, peasants borrowed from urban creditors and when they were unable to repay, lost their land.¹¹⁷ Peasants caught up in these processes could either supplement their income by participating in proto-industries, or earn a living as tenants or wage labourers in service of farmers. Thus, the misery of agrarian families contributed both to the rise of proto-industries and to scale enlargement in agriculture.

Since when can we speak of rural proto-industries? Most historians situate this in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. An exception is Bas van Bavel, who argued that in Holland and Flanders, rural proto-industry was to be found already in the late middle ages. He was able to demonstrate the existence of several large ‘non-agricultural’ rural industries in Flanders and, to a

(ed.) *Town and country in Europe 1300-1800* (Cambridge 2001); S.C. Ogilvie and M. Cerman (eds.), *European proto-industrialization. An introductory handbook* (Cambridge 1996).

¹¹² Epstein, *Freedom and growth*, 106-107; S.C. Ogilvie and M. Cerman, ‘The theories of proto-industrialization’, in: S.C. Ogilvie and M. Cerman (eds.), *European proto-industrialization. An introductory handbook* (Cambridge 1996) 1-11, pp. 4.

¹¹³ Duplessis, *Transitions to capitalism in early modern Europe*, 207.

¹¹⁴ Ogilvie and Cerman, ‘The theories of proto-industrialization’, 3-4.

¹¹⁵ Epstein, *Freedom*, 47.

¹¹⁶ Duplessis, *Transitions to capitalism in early modern Europe*, 206-207, 214.

¹¹⁷ Cf. an overview of literature making these suggestions: S. Ogilvie, M. K pker and J. Maegraith, ‘Household debt in seventeenth-century W rttemberg. Evidence from personal inventories’ *CWPE 1148* (2011) 1.

greater extend, in Holland.¹¹⁸ The other side of the story, the rise of the groups of land-poor and landless, or what some would call a rural ‘proletariat’, can be derived from the interviews taken in 1541. Those accused of proto-industrial activities show various typical characteristics: they were landless and land-poor, who worked for wages, something that was done by all household members: men, women and children. The landless also showed a great flexibility (one might even say: a flexible spirit), moving around looking for work, and supplying the aforementioned ‘cheap and docile labour’.¹¹⁹ These are characteristics of the proletarianized, or proletarianizing: of the social group historians have linked up with the rise of wage labour and proto-industry. Our micro-analysis based on 77 interviews thus uncovers a group of ‘proletarians’, many of whom were able to convince the provincial government they descended from earlier generations of land-poor and landless labourers who had been active in proto-industrial production around 1500. By doing so, it supports Van Bavel’s claim of ‘early proto-industrialization’ before 1500, by uncovering people caught up in what may well be one of the earliest large-scale processes of proletarianization, and their organization on the household-level. This view is not uncontested, of course: since Karl Marx, the first steps in the direction of a capitalist mode of production have been situated in the sixteenth century, and not before.¹²⁰ However, the presence of rural ‘proletarians’ around 1500, and proto-industries already before, rather suggests a continuum.

A distinction should be made between the land-poor and landless. Our interviews suggest that both groups had to deal with completely different conditions that affected their behaviour. The households that combined smallholding with proto-industrial activities were less mobile: occasionally they moved, particularly when they met hardship, but always returned to their place of residence. Their radius of activity did not exceed the villages around Leiden. Apart from property ownership,

¹¹⁸ Van Bavel, ‘Early proto-industrialization’.

¹¹⁹ Duplessis, *Transitions to capitalism in early modern Europe*, 207.

¹²⁰ Cf. Le Goff’s recent survey of the use of money in the middle ages, which he does not discuss in terms of a capitalist mentality, but rather in terms of a gift-giving economy (J. Le Goff, *Money and the middle ages. An essay in historical anthropology* (Cambridge 2012) and Martha Howell’s study of medieval commerce (M.C. Howell, *Commerce before capitalism in Europe, 1300-1600* (Cambridge 2010).

ties with family and neighbours are likely to have kept them from moving away from the outskirts. In this respect it is also worthwhile to point out that neolocality did not keep children from working in the family business or starting their own workshop on the parental premises. In contrast for the landless the family appears to have been of minor importance. In fact, among this group of proto-industrialists we encounter divided households, 'commuters' and people who were accustomed to moving on short notice. Reading the interviews one gets the impression this flexibility may well have been of benefit to the landless. As tenants they could quickly move away in the wake of any kind of hardship, whereas the land-poor eventually had to return to their property. The latter may have profited from a certain creditworthiness though, which they derived from real property.

Did these land-poor and landless also employ strategies that distinguish them from the rest of the population? Historians have suggested that decision making of 'proto-industrial household' differed in several respects from that of smallholding peasants. Whereas the latter had to take care not to scatter their holdings among many heirs, and could therefore opt for postponing marriage, and thus restricting their number of children, for the land-poor and landless this would have made no sense. For survival they depended more on labour than on land – if they had any. According to Hans Medick, they therefore married relatively early, and so they could have many children who they could put to work.¹²¹ As we have demonstrated, early age at first marriage and child labour are evident in the interviews taken in 1541.¹²²

This observation of a proto-industrial marriage pattern immediately links up with recent discussions about the connection between households and economy. On the one hand there is a group of historians claiming that fundamental changes in the way people thought about marriage and the household enabled economic growth. This line of reasoning was for instance explored by Avner Greif, in a paper that argued that household formation in Europe developed relatively

¹²¹ Medick, 'The proto-industrial family economy', 301-302. This proto-industrial marriage pattern has been criticized since Medick published his study. Cf. the recent survey by Marfany (Marfany, 'Is it still useful', 962-963).

¹²² As said, the low number of households reporting children must be ascribed to the questionnaire not asking about children.

autonomous from the economy. According to this author, religious and cultural elements were behind the shift from strong kinship structures, which are usually linked to the extended family household, and which had allegedly been strong in the early middle ages, to the nuclear family household. The policies of the church, and especially the stress it put on marriage, and its discouraging of 'adoptions, polygamy, concubinage, divorce and remarriage', limited possibilities to create and maintain kinship groups. The same goes for the restrictions the church put on 'marriages among individuals of the same blood' and arranged marriages. Although Greif acknowledges that this did not lead directly to societies characterized by nuclear families, and admits that geographical and social diversity existed, he believes that 'by the late medieval period the nuclear family was dominant'.¹²³ The reason why this shift could occur is, once again according to Greif, that functions the kinship had performed in case of 'problems of conflict and cooperation', could be taken over by corporations. These were created by ordinary people looking for socio-economic security at a time when worldly authority was weakened: 'corporations provided safety nets, secured property rights... provided public goods, supported markets, and fostered innovation and training'.¹²⁴ Public bodies such as emerging cities, but also craft guilds, universities, monastic orders etc. all thus provided alternatives to kinship structures. Greif thus places the gradual emergence of the nuclear family, after 1000 AD, before the 'take-off' of the European economy in the later Middle Ages.

The link between the rise of the nuclear family household and economy was further established by Tine de Moor and Jan Luiten van Zanden. They use the concept of the European marriage pattern (EMP) – or North-west European marriage pattern – to explain the economic success these regions enjoyed since the late Middle Ages. They see the second half of the fourteenth century, which was characterized by extremely high mortality, and also by increasing wages, as a

¹²³ A. Greif, 'Family structure, institutions and growth: the origins and implications of Western corporations' in *The American Economic Review* 96 (2006) 308-312, pp. 308-309.

¹²⁴ Greif, 'Family structure, institutions and growth', 310. Tine de Moor, in a more recent paper, follows Greif's line of reasoning (T. de Moor, 'The silent revolution. A new perspective on the emergence of commons, guilds, and other forms of corporate collective action in Western Europe' *International review of social history* 53 supplement (2008) 179-212).

time when working women became more valuable.¹²⁵ Instead of marrying them off as soon as possible, and turning them into homemakers, it became more prudent to allow them to enter the labour market. This caused a rise in the average age at first marriage – perhaps the most important characteristic of the European marriage pattern. Although these authors ascribe a crucial role to the demographic and economic situation in the fourteenth century, and use the rather unique demographic situation after the first Plague outbreaks to explain the rise of ages at first marriage, they too adhere to the idea of cultural changes paving the way for the rise of the West-European marriage pattern.

Others see a different causality: the characteristics of the EMP were not the result of cultural changes that helped to bring about a marriage pattern unique to North-west Europe, but the result of demographic and economic developments that happened in these areas, in particular the decline of agriculture and rise of urbanization.¹²⁶ This point has repeatedly been made by Steven Ruggles, who called attention to the reduced influence of agriculture in this rapidly commercializing region: under such circumstances it became unnecessary to tie children to the parental household. Looking at the number of elderly coresiding with their children, he was able to demonstrate that family ties in Northwest Europe, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, were not weaker than elsewhere.¹²⁷ To put it another way: there was no specific Northwest European attitude that dictated relations between family members. Although Ruggles is critical of the idea of a European marriage pattern, he does subscribe to some of its characteristics: high ages at first marriage and a tendency not to cohabit in Northwest Europe. However, these were responses to socioeconomic circumstances –

¹²⁵ De Moor and Van Zanden, 'Girl power', 3.

¹²⁶ This line of reasoning, where it was the economy that influenced the emergence of more 'modern' types of household formation, is to be found in the article by Alderson and Sanderson (A.S. Alderson and S.K. Sanderson, 'Historical European household structures and the capitalist world-economy', *Journal of family history* 16 (1991) 419-432). Earlier, Edward Shorter also suggested that the rise of capitalism had preceded, and even enabled the coming-to-being of more 'modern' types of household formation (E. Shorter, *The making of the modern family* (New York 1975).

¹²⁷ S. Ruggles, 'Reconsidering the Northwest European family system. Living arrangements of the aged in comparative historical perspective', *Population and development review* 35 (2009) 249-273, pp. 259, 264. We might add the fragmentation of landed property, meaning that smallholders' demand for labour decreased.

commercialization, decline of agriculture, urbanization – and not a cultural trait.¹²⁸ Recent contributions have added further doubts to the idea of a European marriage pattern. Richard Wall found a far greater variation in household patterns in Northwest Europe than was initially assumed,¹²⁹ Mikolaj Szoltysek nuanced the idea of marked differences in household formation in the East of Europe,¹³⁰ and Tracy Dennison and Sheilagh Ogilvie also pointed out that the three main elements of the EMP – late marriage age, high female celibacy and nuclear families – did not always coincide. These authors also doubt whether the ‘extreme manifestations’ of these elements contributed to economic growth.¹³¹

Considering the evidence presented in this paper, what came first: marriage pattern or economic development? The low average age at first marriage – much lower than observed under the EMP – suggests that in the first half of the sixteenth century pragmatism could prevail over the perhaps idealized late marriage. We already pointed to the importance of marrying early and having children as soon as possible to put them to work in proto-industry. The suggestion that ‘initially, the EMP was the marriage pattern of the poor, the wage-earners who did not own or rent a farm or any other substantial property’ of De Moor and Van Zanden, is therefore not reflected in the statements of the interviewed.¹³² It is probably true that the wealthy did not comply with the EMP, but it seems equally true that the poor did not either. What these authors fail to see is that postponing a marriage was a strategy that only made sense for people with a prospect of inheriting, and who thus had an incentive to plan ahead in order to protect the property they would inherit, and in their turn would pass on to their children. People without this prospect, either because they would not inherit

¹²⁸ Richard Wall also argued that the economy, and in particular economic expansion and contraction, influenced the number of marriages: R. Wall, ‘Beyond the household. Marriage, household formation and the role of kin and neighbours’, *International review of social history* 44 (1999) 55-67, pp. 58.

¹²⁹ R. Wall, ‘Transformation of the European family across the centuries’, in R. Wall, T.K. Hareven, J. Ehmer and M. Cerman (eds.), *Family history revisited. Comparative perspectives* (Newark 2001) 217-241.

¹³⁰ M. Szoltysek, ‘Spatial construction of European family and household systems: a promising path or a blind alley? An Eastern European perspective’ *Continuity & change* 27 (2012) 11-52.

¹³¹ T. Dennison and S. Ogilvie, ‘Does the European marriage pattern explain economic growth?’ *CESifo working paper* no. 4244 (2013).

¹³² De Moor and Van Zanden, ‘Girlpower’, 11. These authors regard the average ages at first marriage observed in 1541 as illustrative of the situation before Holland adapted to the EMP, which then happened in the second half of the century.

property, or because they would only inherit a small parcel, did not have to bother about this. Their problems were more pressing: how to survive as proto-industrialists and wage labourers. With bad economic prospects marrying early, renting a house, having many children, and putting them to work was the best they could do.¹³³

Then there is the issue of neolocality: did this contribute to a further decline of family ties, increasing the distance between parents and children and thus making it impossible to help each other out? This created a potential problem in EMP societies: as Peter Laslett explained, neolocality could result in 'nuclear hardship': 'difficulties imposed upon individuals when social rules require them to live in nuclear families'. In case of 'illness, incapacity, or disappearance of parents or spouse', household members might have faced serious problems, for instance due to reduced income. In the absence of nearby family members, these problems could be solved by relying on 'the collectivity': 'friends and neighbours, the church, charitable institutions, authorities'.¹³⁴ In the event neolocality did indeed create a prohibitive distance between parents and children, one might expect there were consequences with respect to investments of parents in their children.¹³⁵ However, this distance is often not measured. A historian who did this, Richard Wall, was able to demonstrate, on basis of evidence from the eighteenth to twentieth century, that the majority of children lived within a five-mile radius of their parents.¹³⁶ If we were to extrapolate these figures to the sixteenth century, with its limited means of transportation, it would make sense to assume back then the majority of children would also have lived in close proximity. Just how close is indicated by some of the

¹³³ The relation between age at first marriage and property could be quite strong: Pfister and Schlumbohm found that proto-industry affected ages at first marriage most heavily where proto-industrialists had fewer possibilities to participate in agriculture (U. Pfister, 'Proto-industrialization and demographic change: the canton of Zürich revisited', *Journal of European economic history* 18 (1989) 629-626; J. Schlumbohm 'From peasant society to class society: some aspects of family and class in a Northwest German proto-industrial parish, 17th-19th centuries', *Journal of family history* 17 (1992) 183-199).

¹³⁴ P. Laslett, 'Family, kinship and collectivity as systems of support in pre-industrial Europe. A consideration of the "nuclear hardship" hypothesis', *Continuity & change* 3 (1988) 153-175, pp. 153-154. It is important to point out that Laslett discussed 'nuclear hardship' more as an analytical tool, that allowed historians to better understand the implications of marriage systems. He certainly did not regard 'nuclear hardship' as the inevitable outcome of living in a nuclear household.

¹³⁵ De Moor and Van Zanden, 'Girlpower', 21.

¹³⁶ Wall, 'Beyond the household', 61-62.

interviewed: neolocality could mean moving to another location in the outskirts, or even occupying a house next door, which was quite common. This does not exclude the possibility that some children really moved away – our sources bear witness to long-distance migration – but it does underline that we should be careful not to equate neolocality with outmigration. What neolocality meant for households varied depending on the distances involved.

Finally, did neolocality pose a challenge in terms of how to finance a new household? For the interviewed it was not much of an issue: our study suggests that a large rental market provided cut-to-fit housing at low cost. Furthermore, this also provided flexibility in terms of adjusting housing to the size of the household, new proto-industrial activities, and urban legislation. Indeed, for many people at the outskirts of Leiden moving was very common, as was building, or rebuilding a house or shed.¹³⁷ This option was also open to starters lacking the funds to buy their own house. This can for instance be illustrated by the statement of Cornelis Aerts zoon, aged 28:

...the interviewed married in Zoeterwoude, and first lived for two years in a rented house, where he set up shop [as a shipbuilder] and then he bought the house he presently lives in ...¹³⁸

Cornelis and his wife started out as tenants, and only moved to buy a house in the outskirts of Leiden once Cornelis had established himself as a shipbuilder. Neolocality did thus not necessarily require big investments that forced couples to postpone marriage: the rental market provided an inexpensive an often cut-to-fit alternative.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Boulton, in his analysis of the suburb Southwark, outside London, also demonstrates a considerable mobility. Of a sample of 257 households present in 1608, only 197 (76,7%) were still present a year later. After eight years this figure was 34%, and after ten years 25% - his samples for other years give roughly the same turnover rates. Boulton's study also informs us of wealth-differences between stayers and movers. Unsurprisingly, the poor showed greater mobility than the (slightly) better-off: 14% of householders not assessed in taxation persisted between 1618-1628, against 29% of those that were assessed (J. Boulton, *Neighbourhood and society. A London suburb in the seventeenth century* (Cambridge 1987) 210-214; cf. Wall, 'Beyond the household', 63).

¹³⁸ Nr. 71.

¹³⁹ An analysis of a tax levied on 1933 houses in Leiden, in 1543, makes clear that there were 117 rooms and 1802 houses. Fourteen properties were not identified in the tax ledger. Of these, 88 rooms and 571 houses

VII. Conclusion

We began this paper with the account of the sheriff's assistant, reporting what he could see peeking into one of the houses at the outskirts of Leiden. What do we learn from the interviews taken a short while later? Generally speaking those interviewed in 1541 fit into the image historians have sketched of proto-industrial producers: a mobile and flexible group of wage earners, quickly responding to the possibilities provided by labour markets, and ready to move on when conditions took a turn for the worse. With respect to social structures, age at first marriage was relatively low, which fits in with the demographic regime of proto-industrialists, and so does the practice of child labour. Furthermore, neolocality was very common, although this did not necessarily dissolved ties between parents and children.

Based on the interviews, it turns out that the institutional structure of the rental market was quite crucial for the landless. It was the rental market that allowed them to be mobile, renting a house or room whenever and wherever a job opportunity arose. This rental market has been largely ignored in studies on proto-industry and the EMP, but may well have been a crucial element in the functioning of poor households. Future research should illuminate such issues as access to the rental market and the supply of not only residential, but also commercial buildings. For now, it seems that the effects of neolocality has been exaggerated in some of the literature: children often moved in right next door to their parents, and occupying a house on marriages did not necessarily require big investments, but could also be realized via a large rental market.

were inhabited by tenants, 34% of all properties. Rooms were taxed on average at 4,4 guilders, houses at 9,5 guilders. Whereas the assessments for rooms were the same for tenants and owners, for houses tenants were taxed on average at 8,6 guilders and homeowners at 10,1 guilders. This suggests that there were plenty of opportunities for newlyweds looking for an inexpensive room or house to rent. Calculations based on *Tiende penning kohieren 1543*. We intend to provide a more in-depth analysis of late-medieval rental markets in a future publication.

Finally, what would have happened with the interviewed? There are reasons to believe the land-poor were the precursors of the landless, struggling to hold on to small plots of land and houses. This struggle is very much apparent in our sources: property owners had to pick up their lives after demolition by enemy troops in 1528. They show great resilience, time and again rebuilding their houses, not willing to let go of their property. Still, after the interviews of 1541, when restrictions to proto-industrial activities in the countryside became more severe, many of the land-poor surely moved. And even though many received some compensation for their property, it is hard to imagine this would have prevented them from eventually joining the ranks of the landless.

Table 1. Age distribution of householders

| Ages | Male householders | Female householders | Other females |
|-------|-------------------|---------------------|---------------|
| 20-29 | 13 | 1 | 1 |
| 30-39 | 15 | 4 | 2 |
| 40-49 | 15 | 4 | 2 |
| 50-59 | 12 | 3 | 2 |
| 60-69 | 3 | 3 | - |
| 70-79 | 3 | 1 | 1 |

Source: Posthumus, 'Een zestiende-eeuwsche enquête'.

Table 2. Time householders had lived in their present house

| Age | Male | Female |
|-------|------|--------|
| <10 | 3 | 3 |
| 10-19 | 3 | - |
| 20-29 | 16 | 5 |
| 30-39 | 9 | 2 |
| 40-49 | 2 | 3 |
| 50-59 | 3 | 1 |

Source: Posthumus, 'Een zestiende-eeuwsche enquête'.

Table 3. Lease prices/rental value houses and land in 1543 (guilders)

| | Houses | | Land/business | |
|----------------|--------|---------|---------------|---------|
| | N | Average | N | Average |
| Leiden (1584) | 2686 | 13,2 | - | - |
| Leiderdorp | 35 | 6,8 | 56 | 75,1 |
| Zijlpoort | 4 | 6,2 | 8 | 49,7 |
| Zoeterwoude | 99 | 6,2 | | |
| Hogewoertpoort | 17 | 3,9 | 2 | 81,1 |

Sources: Daelemans, 'Leiden 1581', 189-190; A. van der Tuijn, '1543: kohier 10^{de} penning Leiderdorp;

A. van der Tuijn, '1543: kohier 10^{de} penning Zoeterwoude'

(<http://home.planet.nl/~vorm/1544leiden10e%20penning.pdf>;

<http://home.planet.nl/~vorm/statenvanholland425.pdf>)

Table 4. Purchase price/lease price of houses (guilders)**Purchase**

| Principal | Nr of terms | Annual terms |
|-----------|-------------|--------------|
| 200 | 10 | 20 g. |
| 64 | 6 | 10,7 g. |
| 601 | 8 | 75,1 g. |

Lease

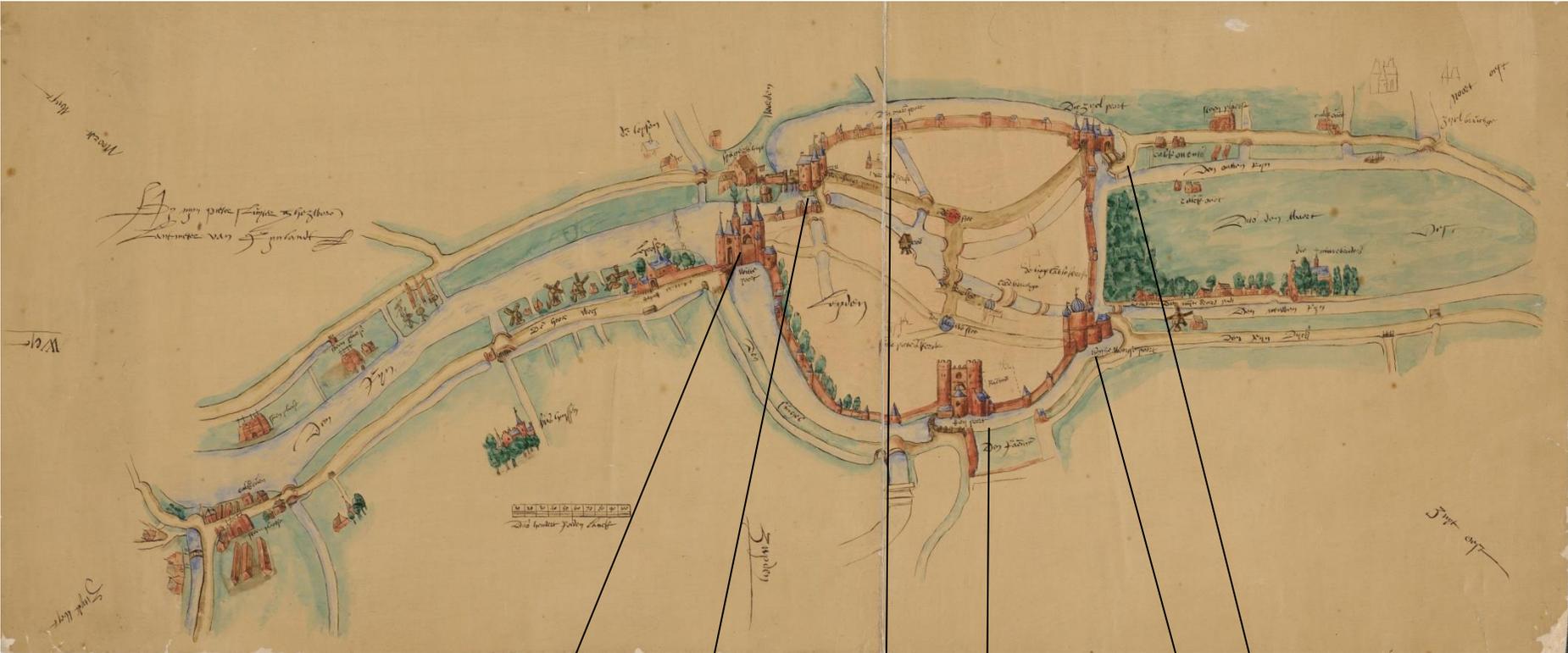
12 g.

3,9 g.

3,9 g.

Sources: Posthumus, 'Een zestiende-eeuwsche enquete'; Brunner, *De order op de buitennering van 1531*, 218-241.

Map 1. Leiden in 1550 (map by Pieter Sluyter). Number of households reported in 1541



Witte poort (2)

Marepoort

Zijlpoort (17)

Rijnsburgerpoort (4)

Koepoort (2)

Hogewoerdpoort (52)

