



Country Houses and Estates

in Dutch Urban and Rural History, 1600-1900

By Yme Kuiper

Introduction

Country houses, castles and estates are appreciated by a wide audience as important representations of Dutch cultural heritage. According to official heritage figures, the Netherlands currently has about 550 complex historical country houses (*complex historische buitenplaatsen*).¹ The term ‘complex’ refers to an existing unity between a monumental house and its designed gardens (or any outbuildings or park), while ‘historical’ is taken to mean houses constructed before 1900. This definition of country houses includes many castles or castle-like buildings, ranging from historic fortresses (*burchten*) to manor houses (*kasteeltjes*).

Only a small minority of these complexes are part of an estate which has an economic basis in agriculture and forestry, and is therefore usually of a considerable size.² Because many Dutch estates (with a monumental house, serving as the centre of a landed property) are small in size, it is not that easy to distinguish between estates (*landgoed*) and country houses (*buitenplaats*).³ Generally speaking, there is also terminological inflation of both words in everyday language and in real estate advertisements. A country house originally functioned as a summer residence for citizens. Many of the former urban owners were wealthy merchants or patricians who ruled the towns during the period 1600–1900; they also lived in monumental houses in the towns of the Dutch Republic and (after 1814) the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Nowadays the term no longer has this specific connotation and refers instead to the aesthetic qualities that arise from the embedding of a monumental house in a designed landscape. The classification also reveals the recent trend in heritage policy to merge aspects

The Frisian nobleman Ri-enck Cammingha by Adriaen van Cronenburgh 1552 (Collection Frisian Museum, Leeuwarden). In the background, his moated manor house with a former refuge tower at its heart, at his Camminghaburen estate near Leeuwarden; the fantasy Italian landscape alludes to his academic education.

7.1 | Map of the Dutch Republic, showing the country houses mentioned in this chapter. The Dutch Republic consisted of the United Provinces – to the north - and the Spanish Netherlands, to the south. The chapter focuses on the country houses, and two castles, of the seven United Provinces, most of which were located in Holland, Utrecht, Gelderland and Overijssel.



of monumental heritage and landscape heritage.⁴ It is the unity of the different elements of the country house setting in particular – also expressed by the recent popular term ‘ensemble’ among Dutch heritage researchers, managers and owners – which is crucial for official registration leading to tax relief.

About 300 of these registered complex historical country houses are still privately owned and occupied.⁵ The remainder are owned by organizations for nature conservation and healthcare, local administration, business, and so on, with others used as museums, education and cultural centres, offices, and hotels.⁶ The geographical distribution of these complexes reveals that, although country houses can be found all over the Netherlands, with clus-

ters in the western, central and eastern parts of the country, the estates are more concentrated in the eastern and southern regions.⁷

This chapter will attempt to clarify the historical background to this type of heritage and examine whether the historical development of the Netherlands as an urban and rural country can generate insight into this phenomenon.⁸ Since 1600, several thousand country houses (*buitenplaatsen*) and castles (*kastelen*) have been built in the Netherlands, and if the small complexes (farms used as summer residences by citizens for example) are included, there are many more – but to a certain extent this is still *terra incognita*. There is thus an urgent need for more comprehensive research into the country house and estate landscape throughout Dutch history, taking a long-term perspective and, if possible, making fruitful comparisons with other European countries in order to gain more insight into the typically Dutch aspects of their development.

The Image of an Urban Country

Since the sixteenth century, Dutch society and culture has been dominated by cities. This image is widespread and popular, not only in the Netherlands but perhaps even more among scholars in other European countries. In their seminal monograph *The First Modern Economy* (1997) – on the success, failure, and perseverance of the Dutch economy during the period 1500–1815 – the economic historians Jan de Vries and Ad van der Woude repeatedly stress this image.⁹ To support their view, they use their own published research and other studies on the early-modern rural economy of the Dutch provinces of Holland, Friesland, Groningen, Gelderland and Overijssel.¹⁰

Dutch historians who wrote integral, regional historical studies used a *longue durée* perspective, and were heavily inspired by research on French rural society by historians of the French *Annales* school. Topics such as landscape, demography, agriculture, patterns of inheritance, rural occupational structure and social stratification are pillars of this type of intensive, time-consuming and quantitative research. Urbanisation, the commercialization of agriculture, more intensive farming, occupational specialization, technological innovation and expansion in shipping, trade and industry went hand in hand in Dutch society, starting in the province of Holland. In the ‘Golden Age’ of the seventeenth century, agriculture was already integrated into the market economy throughout the Dutch Republic. Crucial



**7.2 | Petersburg on the river
Vecht near Nigtevecht**

It was built in 1709 by the Amsterdam merchant Christoffel Brants, who came from East Frisia and made a fortune from his trade with Russia. Tsar Peter the Great visited Brants' country house in the summer of 1717, and he offered his host a noble title for his services to Russia; engraving by Daniël Stopendael, 1719. (Collection Van der Wijck-de Kempnaer, Slochteren)

for this process of integration was the development of regional networks of canals into a single transportation system.¹¹ Even the most backward rural regions felt the pull of the powerful trade market in Holland. In this province, agricultural specialization, labour mobility and rural industry all facilitated urban and seaborne expansion. Their influence was not simply a response to urban growth. 'During the sixteenth century', De Vries and Van der Woude write, 'the nobles, and rural society more generally, could still nurture the illusion that they formed a counterweight of significance. But from the final decades of that century, the cities were in fact fully dominant: economically, politically, culturally.'¹²

However, De Vries and Van der Woude refer here only to the situation in the two maritime provinces, Holland and Zeeland, in 'the long seven-

teenth century', from 1580–1700. Remarkably, in the early-eighteenth century a process of de-urbanisation had already started in these provinces that would alter an imbalance in the Dutch Republic of the United Seven Provinces (1580–1795) between city and countryside in favour of a stronger orientation towards agriculture and rural society. For a long time in Dutch historiography, the eighteenth century has been considered as an age of decline (or, in more neutral terms, of stagnation), especially in economic and political terms. Economic historians certainly did not overlook the agricultural crisis that existed between 1680 and 1750, and stressed even more the decline in economic activity and the rise in unemployment and poverty in the towns of Holland during the second half of the eighteenth century. After periods of major political turmoil during the years 1780–1815, the country changed from a republic into a kingdom, with the heir to the House of Orange being inaugurated as the sovereign ruler William I in 1813. French influence had been strong since the Batavian Revolution of 1795, and resulted in the definitive liquidation of the Dutch Republic and the foundation of the Kingdom of Holland in 1806, ruled by Louis Napoleon, a younger brother of Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte; the latter annexed the Netherlands to France five years later.

Recent historical research on the period 1750–1850 points in a quite different direction from only regression and decline. Paul Brusse and Wijnand Mijnhardt argued for a new vision of Dutch society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, based on a model of de-urbanisation and economic reorientation in the (Northern) Netherlands.¹³ They highlighted wider economic, political and cultural implications for Dutch history, sketching a much more rural face for Dutch society in the formative decades around 1800.¹⁴ This new framework for Dutch historiography was notable for its abandonment of the discourse of exceptionalism: firstly, the miracle of the Dutch Golden Age and, secondly, the profound astonishment at the sharp decline of the Dutch nation in the eighteenth century (both of which were key features of previous frameworks). In his 1988 valedictory, J.A. Faber had already argued that there were virtually no complaints from the agricultural sector in the 1770s, while at the same time a storm of criticism started in the towns of Holland: 'There is evidence of the growing prosperity of land-owners in the renovation, extension and modernisation of country houses, castles, chateaux, mansions and manor houses. Many farmhouses were renovated, improved and enlarged.'¹⁵

As in other European countries, many noble landowners became active in agricultural innovation and founded agricultural societies in the late eighteenth century. Around 1800, Dutch urban politicians and intellectuals, referring to classical tradition, argued that people would be far happier if the economy was firmly based on agriculture.¹⁶ The poet and agriculturalist A. C. W. Staring (1767–1840), for example, was one of the most prominent spokesmen of the economic theory of physiocracy in the Netherlands. As an estate owner in the one of the eastern provinces (Gelderland), he was active in forestry, water management and land reclamation.¹⁷ Indeed, the Dutch rural economy, being strongly export-oriented, profited enormously from the growing population and prosperity of its neighbouring European countries (especially England) during the nineteenth century, at least until the 1880s. So, the new rural-urban balance within the Netherlands was probably linked to the emerging commercial-industrial balance in north-western Europe during the first three quarters of the nineteenth century.¹⁸

This economic development was accompanied by a cultural revival with renewed interest in old rural customs, folklore and rituals, although many of these were manifestations of invented traditions.¹⁹ In fact, nineteenth-century urban intellectuals were responsible for this new fashion of reinventing aspects of peasant culture and mentality.²⁰ In the late-nineteenth century, the tide turned again in Dutch society. A new wave of urbanisation and industrialisation introduced a new era of cultural dynamics from about 1900, which would lead to the nature conservation movement in the Netherlands and to the Estates Act of 1928, which had as its primary goal the protection of scenic landscapes, including many privately owned landed estates.²¹ Over the course of the twentieth century, and certainly after the Second World War, the problems of life in Dutch rural society and the transformations of agriculture became increasingly similar to the situation in other northwestern European countries.

Being a highly urbanised and populous nation, the image of the Netherlands as a dense network of cities exerts a strong attraction for many historians today. Nevertheless, one of world's most urbanised societies is still known to most people in the world primarily for its windmills, cows, tulips and clogs.²²

The Dutch Republic as Urban and Rural Society

The cities in Holland and Zeeland were the most prominent in the rise of urban hegemony in the seventeenth century, but cities also dominated some of the other provinces in the Dutch Republic, as high rates of urbanisation and their provincial, constitutional organization clearly show. In the province of Groningen, one city (Groningen) strongly dominated large parts of the countryside with its hegemony over the rural economy.

However, the political dominance of the cities was less strong in the provinces of Gelderland, Overijssel and Friesland. Especially in the provinces Gelderland and Overijssel, on the eastern border of the Dutch Republic, noble families still had a relatively strong economic and social position in the local 'manorial world', manifested in their aristocratic housing (including castles) and estates, as well as their possession of lordships of the manor (*heerlijkheden*) and other rights connected with the administration of justice; they persisted as a political power to be reckoned with.

The province of Friesland is particularly interesting in this respect. Since the late Middle Ages, this region had a fiercely non-feudal reputation as a 'land of free farmers', but its cities grew and became more important after the revolt against the Spanish king in the second half of the sixteenth century. In 1583 the Frisian cities wrote to William of Orange, the leader of the Dutch Revolt, about landownership in their province: "There are no feudal goods in the countryside [...] for all lands are the freely owned lands to whom they belong."²³ This new political situation notwithstanding, the nobles managed to strengthen their political power in the rural districts of the province over the course of the seventeenth century. Since they represented three of the four chambers in the Frisian States, the nobles could resist any further expansion of urban political influence. The Frisian aristocratic elite did not act as typical feudal European nobility, but more as landed gentry, owning a widespread range of agricultural complexes that were managed by tenant farmers. A similar situation is evident in the province of Groningen.

Is it possible to characterize rural society in the Netherlands between 1500 and 1700 as a conventional example of the slow transition from feudalism to agricultural capitalism that is found so often in European historiography? Or were the manorial worlds, as found in many other European countries, lost sooner in the Netherlands than elsewhere? As we have al-

ready seen, the political and economic structures of the highly urbanised Dutch provinces showed striking differences from most of the other regions of western and northern Europe. As Jan de Vries once remarked: 'In a region where feudalism had never played a large role few obstacles stood in the way of establishing a capitalist land market and short-term leases payable in money.'²⁴ Twenty years later, he and his colleague Van der Woude repeated this vision, but now seen from the actor's point of view: 'The burdens upon the shoulders of the Republic's farmers were not seigneurial rights and feudal obligations but rather short-term leases, tithe payments and mortgages.'²⁵ But what about the rest of the Dutch Republic? Two answers can be given here: if one deals with Holland, and with the other sea provinces of Zeeland, Friesland and Groningen, which together formed the most economically advanced area of Dutch society, the old manorial world did not exist any more by 1600; but if we focus on the province of Utrecht, and especially on the eastern provinces of Gelderland and Overijssel, we encounter remnants of a rural society that more closely resembles the feudal rural economies of many other European societies. In the latter province, especially in the district of Twente, feudal obligations were not abolished until the end of the eighteenth century. To put it even more simply: the 'Dutch Republic of Merchants and Farmers' versus the 'Dutch Republic of Nobles and Peasants'. Of course, these are, to use Max Weber's terminology, ideal types.²⁶

Nobility in the Dutch Republic

The available literature shows that nobles were primarily landowners in all provinces around 1600, and that they still cherished this crucial aspect of their noble status at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Most nobles derived the major part of their income from land rents. In some regions, tithes still formed a substantial portion of their incomes.²⁷

It is more difficult to assess profits from manorial rights, such as tolls, bridge and ferry rights, or fishery, hunting and milling rights. De Vries and Van der Woude state categorically that incomes from seigneurial rights were only of marginal importance.²⁸ This may be true for the lesser nobility in Holland, Groningen and Friesland, but more research is needed to substantiate their claim for the other provinces. The higher nobility (*hoge adel*) represents a very small group of families with a feudal background and strong connections with the southern Netherlands. They used noble

titles like prince, duke and count (*prins, hertog, graaf*), and were considerably richer than the untitled country squires of the lesser nobility. Some grandees – especially from the House of Orange-Nassau – played a decisive role in the Dutch Revolt against the rule of the Spanish king in the 1560s, which led to the birth of the Dutch Republic (of the United Seven Provinces).²⁹ The southern Netherlands (nowadays mostly in Belgium), remained under Spanish rule. In the long run, a very important result of the Revolt was the confiscation of monastic land holdings by the protestant authorities of the Seven Provinces. Nobles, farmers and citizens bought these fertile farmlands and became the new landlords of the former tenants of the monasteries.

In Holland around 1650, nobles still owned nearly 60% of the hundreds of lordships of the manor (*heerlijkheden*). The possession of a lordship of the manor meant social status and local political power; these aspects seem to have been more important for the owner than monetary income. After 1600, merchants, urban regents (*regenten*, the political masters of the towns) and town governments became increasingly interested in buying these lordships of the manor, trying to enhance their social prestige (in the case of merchants and urban regents) and political grip on the countryside (in the case of town governments), respectively.³⁰ Acquisition of a lordship of the manor gave the new owner the right to use the title of lord of a specific manor, but did not itself confer noble status. It may seem strange to us, but contemporaries had few difficulties discerning who was of noble birth and who was not.³¹ Other important sources of noble income were revenues from office-holding, or interest earned from investments in personal loans or (more often) in government bonds and annuities.

Nobles and regents formed a dual oligarchy, and all the provinces of the Dutch Republic were ruled by these two groups of elites, with the rest of society having little say. The regents were very powerful in Holland, which was by far the dominant province of the Dutch Republic. Like the nobles, the regents were a privileged group, but were more open to newcomers than the nobility in the first half of the seventeenth century. The political and economic hegemony of the regents grew over the course of this century and remained unchallenged, apart from incidental political turmoil and tax revolts, until the late-eighteenth century. When the definitive attack on this oligarchy came with the Batavian Revolution of 1795, it was focused as much on the regents of the towns as on the nobles in the countryside.³²

Nobles became very eager to hold public offices during the period 1650–1750, when a long-lasting agricultural crisis caused a decline in incomes from their lands, manors and estates. Another crucial question here is to what extent nobles were reluctant to be involved in entrepreneurial and commercial activities. Research on this topic is still rather scarce, but there are enough indications to cast doubt again on De Vries and Van der Woude's claim that these activities were 'highly exceptional' among nobles.³³ Nobles in Gelderland invested in paper-milling and the growing of tobacco; Frisian and Groninger nobles were involved in peat-digging enterprises. After 1750, as the rural economy began to flourish again, after a seventy-five-year decline, nobles took an interest in reforestation projects and in timber harvesting.

Generally speaking many nobles, as Van der Woude and De Vries write themselves, became involved 'in drainage, peat digging and forestry almost entirely because of their status of great landowners'.³⁴ But they conclude that 'the nobles of the Republic cannot be included among its economically dynamic social group'.³⁵ This is a surprisingly harsh verdict, given that the Dutch nobility was a very small group and that their long-term economic interests were, at heart, motivated by the maintenance needs of their ancestral properties. When incomes from their land declined sharply during the period 1680–1750, nobles increasingly turned to public offices to compensate for their losses.³⁶

Nobles were prominent among the major landowners in all seven Dutch provinces in the period 1500–1800, but the nobility as a group was not in control of the majority of the land in any province. Farmers, burghers, and institutions held more land in total than the nobles did. Nowhere in the Republic did the nobility own more than 30% – and usually no more than 20% – of the land in a province or in any region of these provinces. In Holland, noblemen owned much less than 10%. Their lands were concentrated in villages where noble families had continued control over rural society.³⁷

Of course, individual nobles (or noble families) could be very wealthy: nobles were among the richest people in all of the Dutch provinces.³⁸ This was the case even in Holland, where the richest noble families always possessed more than one lordship of the manor (*heerlijkheid*), and profited most from the spectacular rise in land rents during a long period before 1650. Moreover, Dutch agriculture was a highly location-specific activity throughout this period of three centuries; differences in soil types and eco-

logical conditions were responsible for a wide variety of agricultural practices, even within a given province. De Vries and Van der Woude strongly emphasize the variety of landownership at the local level:

We find village after village where landownership was distributed across a wide assortment of landlords: several noble gentlemen and religious institutions, various burghers and urban institutions, and, last but by no means necessarily least, the farmers themselves. Nor should we think of farmers as owners only of the land they personally used. On the contrary, for a wide variety of reasons, they were likely to function as landlords to others at the same time that they were tenants on land they used themselves.³⁹

Like the nobility in other northwestern European countries in the early-modern period, it is possible to discern distinctions of power, wealth and status within the nobility of the northern Netherlands. The higher and titled nobility were very few in number, and even the lesser untitled nobility formed only a very tiny proportion of the total population.⁴⁰ The first category was wealthier than the second and also had much more political influence. Even among the gentry in the provinces of Friesland and Groningen, there were great differences in wealth in the early-sixteenth century, as well as in the eighteenth century. It was quite exceptional for an untitled nobleman to own more than 1,000 hectares of land; most of them had no more than a few hundred.⁴¹ Around 1500, these noble families still had their fortified, moated houses (called 'stone houses') on the maritime clay soils of both provinces. In 1622, a Frisian historian counted nearly 200 noble houses (*edele staten*) in his province. Many of them were renovated or rebuilt over the course of the sixteenth century, when the agricultural economy began to flourish and expand, and medieval private wars and feuds between nobles had finally ended.

Both the Dutch higher nobility and the lesser nobility strongly preferred noble marriage partners between 1500 and 1800. This preference for endogamy did not disappear, even though many noble families died out over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This demographic trend towards extinction was hastened by the Dutch Revolt between 1568 and 1648; in the absence of a sovereign who was able to create new nobles, the demographic erosion of the nobility became a permanent phenomenon. Even the nobles themselves did not take initiatives to end this demographic crisis between 1650 and 1800; they were probably afraid

to share their privileged position in provincial politics with newcomers. From about 1750, the trend towards extinction became alarming and was exacerbated by the closure of the provincial political elites to newcomers, both noble and non-noble.⁴² This formation of provincial oligarchies started in the seventeenth century and was achieved by restricting noble power to landed property or manors (called *havezaten* or *ridderhofsteden* in provinces such as Overijssel and Utrecht). It was William I, ruler of the Kingdom of the Netherlands between 1815 and 1840, who stopped this trend towards extinction by ennobling many rich and respectable burghers.⁴³ The overwhelming majority were recruited from former regent families, who dominated the town councils during the period of the Dutch Republic.

The Dutch nobility in the early-modern period was – as the British historian and expert on Anglo-Dutch history J. L. Price once noted – a provincial nobility, or more accurately, ‘a series of provincial nobilities’.⁴⁴ ‘Provincial’ is used here in the strict sense of the term: these nobles were deeply attached to their castles and country houses, estates and manors in their home provinces, where they lived, although they also usually owned houses in the main towns to guard their interests during the meetings of the various ‘States-Provincial’ (regional parliaments). In general, the Dutch nobility did not experience a deep political and economic decline during the period 1500–1800. Even the argument that this elite was declining in social prestige is not very persuasive. The spectacular rise of an urban mercantile elite and regents in Holland and Zeeland did not herald the end of the Dutch nobility. On the contrary, ‘the nobles benefited from a general political and social conservatism, but also from being part of a much larger and more powerful oligarchy’.⁴⁵ In the other provinces, nobles did not decline in prominence, retaining power in regional and local settings.

Jonathan Israel (1995) sketched a portrait of the nobility during the first century after the Dutch Revolt, in which he argued that the overall position of the nobility became stronger in some provinces, such as Gelderland, Overijssel and Friesland.⁴⁶ He refers to the favourable position of the nobility in the process of expropriation and subsequent purchase of church properties, including church lands, and the sometimes urgent need to select commanding officers for the Republic’s army.



Lifestyles of Regents and Nobles

As elsewhere in Europe, the Dutch nobility was strongly attached to the ethos of living as a noble family. Although many nobles may have moved seasonally into the city, their main residences were in the countryside, sometimes not that far from a province's major towns. Here they lived on their estates, among their tenants, in old fortified houses or castles which, from the seventeenth century, were renovated or rebuilt into more comfortable houses: less fortified structures, but always with typical 'noble' features of architecture, landscape and gardens.

It is important to consider how the lifestyle of the nobility differed from that of urban regents or patricians. The regents were the political masters of towns all over the Republic: in Holland and Zeeland, in Utrecht, Gelderland and Overijssel, but also in Friesland and Groningen. About 2,000 regents ruled the town councils as local oligarchies across the Republic. Together with the nobles in the countryside, they ruled the country. Nearly a third of the most powerful regents lived in the voting towns (*stemhebbende*

7.3 | Westwijck and the burgher family Pauw from Amsterdam

The house was built in the Purmer polder near Amsterdam in 1637 and designed by Philips Vingboons; painting by Cornelis Holsteyn, c. 1650. (Private collection)



7.4 | Elswout at Overveen, in the dunes near the town of Haarlem, designed by Jacob van Campen (who was inspired by the Italian architect Vincenzo Scamozzi) around 1633. The Amsterdam merchant Gabriel Marselis bought the complex in 1654; painting by Gerrit Berckheyde, ca. 1680. (Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem)

steden) of the States of Holland and Zeeland. However, despite closing their ranks to outsiders, marrying the daughters of other regent families, and buying and building country houses that became even more impressive after 1700, the regents did not create an urban aristocracy to the extent that might be expected. Although the regents also had servants, horses and carriages, and showed a rising interest in genealogy, their country houses were summer retreats and did not function as the centre of a wider estate. Earlier generations (from the first half of the seventeenth century) bought farms as investments and used the 'lord's room' within the farm as a summer retreat, while subsequent generations often built new country houses next to the farms on the same or an adjoining lot.

Some very wealthy regents or merchants began to buy castles from noble families in the last quarter of the seventeenth century. The lifestyle of the regents did not differ greatly from that of the wealthy upper classes in towns, and they never formed a totally closed political élite, always

bringing new members from outside into the town oligarchy through strategic marriage alliances.⁴⁷

The cultural historian Johan Huizinga famously argued that architecture represents the most characteristic aspect of Dutch culture in the seventeenth century.⁴⁸ Notwithstanding the strong Flemish influence in the South, and the rich German influence in the northeast, an architectural style developed that may be called typically Dutch. However, he added, the strength of Dutch architecture did not lie in the monumental. So, when Dutch architects were invited to design a host of buildings in royal dimensions for their princely patrons in Denmark, they used a style that was more typical of the burgher's house. 'No wonder that these Danish castles strike one as being somewhat hybrid in character, as being too obviously transplanted growths.'⁴⁹

In 1600, Huizinga continues, there were hardly any townhouses in the province of Holland with imposing interiors or staircases; even the manors of the nobility preserved the massive form of the late medieval castle, with small windows and thick walls. Housing within the still nascent towns had a burgher simplicity: narrow buildings with crow-stepped gables. As there was no demand for palaces or cathedrals, the most impressive new buildings in the Dutch style were 'town halls, orphanages, assembly halls for the Civic Guards, warehouses, exchanges, depots for the great overseas trading companies, and finally country houses for the rich merchants.'⁵⁰ But two generations later, Dutch patricians and their architects were attracted by Italian and French classicism, and this new fashion of Dutch classicism moved away from playful decoration in sandstone and brick, taking instead the French *hôtel* or the Italian *palazzo* as sources of inspiration. The crow-stepped gable fell out of fashion and was hidden behind rounded gable ends.

Country Houses around Cities in Holland

The country house Elswout at Overveen near Haarlem is a good example of the introduction of the new architectural fashion.⁵¹ The first owner and builder of this house was Carl du Moulin, a Lutheran merchant from the southern Netherlands, who had made a huge fortune trading with Russia in grain, fish, Swedish iron, caviar, Persian silk and jewels. Along with some other Dutch merchants, he lent 100,000 guilders to the Russian tsar, who urgently needed money to acquire Amsterdam weaponry and German mercenaries.

7.5 | Portrait of Gabriel Marselis, by Bartholmeus van der Helst, 1655. His country house, Elswout, can be seen in the middle distance amongst trees, situated in the dunes near Haarlem, which can be glimpsed in the far distance. (Private collection)



Another moneylender was Gabriel Marselis (1609–1673), a major Amsterdam merchant, born in Hamburg, who built up trade relations with Scandinavia. He owned iron and copper works in Norway and later a number of estates in Denmark, near Aarhus. Marselis bought the whole Elswout complex when du Moulin went bankrupt in 1654. In the early 1630s, Du Moulin had moved from Amsterdam to Haarlem. He soon started to buy land in the sandy dune area near Haarlem as an investment in the business of sand extraction. Sand from the dunes was used for the foundations of new houses being built along the canals in Amsterdam, and was transported along the newly constructed canals. This new network of waterways around Amsterdam stimulated the construction of country houses (*hofsteden* or, as they were later called, *buitenplaatsen*) during the second quarter of the seventeenth century.

Elswout was a symmetrically designed, moated and walled country house, built on high sandy soil. It functioned as a hunting lodge and had a gatehouse through which the visitor entered a symmetrical walled forecourt. The front façade had Ionic pilasters, with a pediment; the total architecture of the house with its decorative sobriety is reminiscent of a very early Dutch classicist country house, called the House in the Wood (built around 1630), on the river Vecht near Maarssen, in the province of Utrecht. The mathematical and geometrical plans of both country houses are reminiscent of the work of the Amsterdam architect Jacob van Campen (1596–1657), who was born in Haarlem. This master builder of the 1650s, who was responsible for the new Amsterdam Town Hall (the jewel in the crown of Dutch classicism), travelled as a young man to Italy, stayed there for many years and came back to the Republic as a great admirer of Palladio and Scamozzi. Another Amsterdam architect, Philips Vingboons, designed classicist country houses for noble clients in Overijssel, Gelderland, and even Groningen in the 1650s and 1660s.⁵²

Along with the diplomat Constantijn Huygens (1596–1687), who saw Palladian houses during his diplomatic journey with the Dutch ambassador to the Republic of Venice, and who would become secretary to three consecutive stadtholders and Princes of Orange, Van Campen and Vingboons were very influential promoters of Dutch classicism. In the 1640s, Huygens, who lived in The Hague, built a small, but elegant, classicist country house (his *villa suburbana*) with help of his friend Van Campen: Hofwijck (literally meaning: ‘avoiding court’) in Voorburg, with gardens alongside the Vliet canal that connected The Hague to Leiden. The design of the house and gardens was inspired by books by Vitruvius. Huygens was also one of the greatest Dutch poets of his time; he wrote many court poems, including a very long one on his own Hofwijck.⁵³

In addition to spatial (location, soil conditions, transport by water or road, distance from the town), economic (availability of land and money, agricultural investment) and social (leisure time, prestige, distinction, imitation) factors, there are also cultural conditions that contributed to the rise of country house culture in Holland. Networks of expertise developed after journeys abroad, knowledge about architecture of houses and gardens was exchanged between influential men and women in different social circles, such as the court society of The Hague or the commercial elite of Amsterdam. Of all the cities in seventeenth-century Holland and Zeeland, the influence of Amsterdam – which soon reached the status of a world trade

metropolis – on the country house landscape around it, and its impact on the rise of country house culture in the whole Dutch Republic, can hardly be underestimated.⁵⁴

Metropolis Amsterdam

The dominant economic centre *par excellence* in the Dutch Republic was the city of Amsterdam, with its ruling elite of regents, most of whom came from ship-owning and merchant families. In the high and international politics of the Dutch Republic, powerful burghers and nobles had to cooperate with each other. Lacking a real political centre, the court of Orange-Nassau in The Hague – a town which also housed the States-General – assumed the role of the primary political and diplomatic stage. The stadtholders were recruited from this family, and since the days of William of Orange it was their primary responsibility to defend the frontiers of the Republic. As the highest-ranking military commanders, they could influence the careers of the many Dutch and German nobles who wished to reach high ranks in the Dutch armies. By owning and renovating old castles and palaces, building new summer residences and hunting lodges, and following international trends in garden design, members of the House of Orange-Nassau contributed to the rise of country house culture in the Dutch Republic from the second quarter of the seventeenth century onwards. Their influence began in The Hague and its surroundings, but for political reasons and for leisure, the family of the stadtholders also bought and built hunting grounds and residences in the provinces of Gelderland (in the Veluwe) and Utrecht.

As early as 1600, Baltic shipping and trade was particularly important for the economy of Amsterdam. The grain trade strongly influenced other economic activities in the Republic, such as shipbuilding, but also the production of floor and wall tiles, roof tiles and bricks, which were carried as ballast by Dutch ships to the Baltic. Even the Dutch trade to southern and western Europe profited significantly from the re-exportation of Baltic grain from Amsterdam to those regions. It was a global economy, based on the interdependence of the rural East Elbian states, which produced grain, and the much more urbanised Dutch Republic, which consumed and traded this grain imported from the Baltic. The trade route for Dutch ships ran through Danish waters and because of the so-called Sound Dues (in Danish, Øresundstolden) the Dutch Republic was deeply involved into the Danish politics for a long time.⁵⁵



Contemporaries called the Baltic trade ‘the Mother Commerce’ or ‘Soul of All Trade’.⁵⁶ When Amsterdam traders presented a petition against the undesirably high level of import duties on grain from the Baltic in 1681, one of their key arguments was that ‘the warehouses of this city are four-fifths filled with grain’.⁵⁷ Even in 1720, Amsterdam had about 400 official grain brokers and several thousand inhabitants of Amsterdam were involved in the whole complex of grain trade.⁵⁸ By the first quarter of the seventeenth century, Amsterdam had developed into the centre of a commercial empire, comprising the north and western European coastal areas, the Mediterranean and the East and West Indies. The city also functioned as a cultural centre of information, printing and knowledge.

Like Venice and Antwerp before it in the sixteenth century, Amsterdam became a cultural metropolis in the seventeenth, co-ordinating and distributing, in the words of the cultural historian Peter Burke, ‘the three Ps’: painting, performance and printing.⁵⁹ Noble merchants of Venice in the sixteenth century bought land and farms on *terraferma*, the hinterland

7.6 | Map of the Baltic region, showing some of the cities that Dutch merchants traded with along the coast of the Baltic and North Seas, from Hamburg to Saint Petersburg. Amsterdam was a centre for the Baltic grain trade from the seventeenth century, and for the distribution of prints to Northern Europe. Merchants such as Carl du Moulin, for example, lent money to the Russian tsar and traded in Swedish caviar.

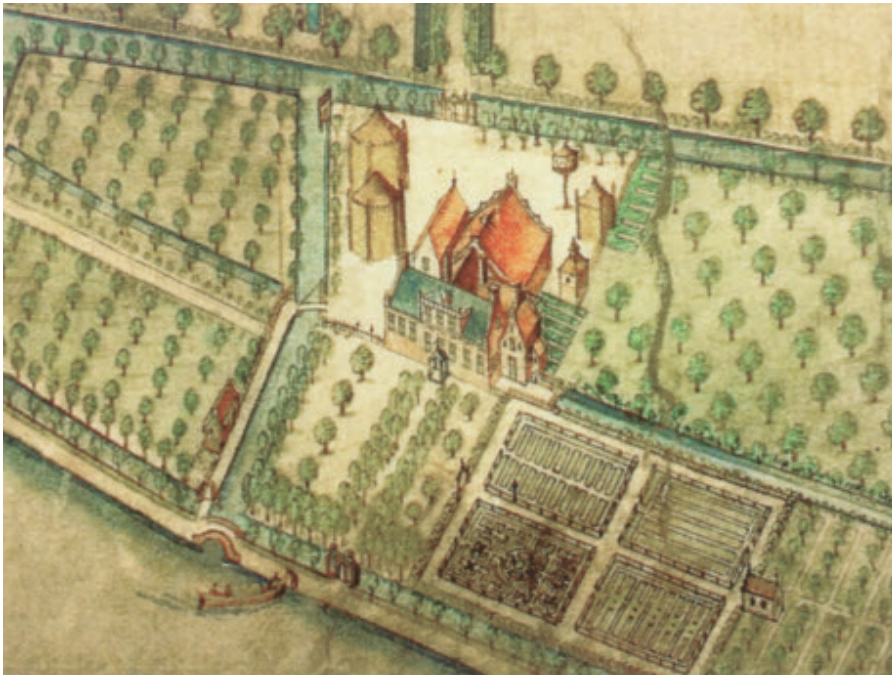


7.7 | Goudestein on the river Vecht near Maarssen (Utrecht)

The house was sold in 1955 by the family who had owned it since the early-seventeenth century. It subsequently became the town hall; painting by Jan van der Heyden, 1674. (The Wellington Collection, London)

of the city, and built their Palladian villas there; the rich merchants of Antwerp did more or less the same by transforming castles and farms in the countryside into ‘residences of pleasure’ (in Flemish: *hoven van plaisantie*).

In 1565, Amsterdam had 26,000 inhabitants, and by 1600 this had risen to 105,000; in 1675, when country house culture had already begun to take off, about 200,000 people lived in Amsterdam. This spectacular demographic growth deeply influenced the rural infrastructure and economy in the area serving the city.⁶⁰ New mills, farms and inns were built; many land reclamation projects were initiated by rich burghers from Amsterdam, and more and more farmers devoted themselves to butter and cheese-making



7.8 | The earlier house at Goudestein The country house was owned by the Huydecoper family from Amsterdam on the River Vecht; map by the famous cartographer Balthasar Florisz van Berckenrode from Delft, 1629. (Collection University Library Utrecht)

and rearing cattle. In this region feudalism never played a major role: there were no obstacles to creating an early-modern (with the stress on ‘modern’) capitalist land market, with short-term leases paid in cash. The rich merchants and regents of Amsterdam started to colonize the surroundings of their city by buying farms and building new country houses over the course of the seventeenth century.

The most popular locations among the Amsterdam elite for building their country houses were the banks of major rivers – the Amstel and the Vecht – or of smaller waterways. Canals could also transport the prominent families within a day from their summer residence to their townhouse. So, in a radius of about 50 kilometres around the city, there were country houses ranging from farms with a lord’s chamber (*herenkamer*) to newly built country houses, with or without a farm. The rich burghers of Amsterdam also invested their money in land reclamation projects. One of the biggest projects was the Beemster Polder (1612), which tamed the wild lake by pumping out water with 43 windmills and transforming the new land into fertile, arable land, using a geometric template to plan canals, roads and farms. Not far from the city, dairy farming and horticulture were the most popular agricultural practices but it took some time before the investors, who owned most of the farms in these polders, started to build

new country houses here.⁶¹ Therefore the true Arcadian character of several regions around Amsterdam did not start to emerge before 1700.⁶²

Travel journals and impressive engravings of distinguished houses and gardens, written and published in the first decades of the eighteenth century, capture this process. The gardens of country houses in the early-seventeenth century were only characterized by the presence of orchards and large-girth trees, and it was not until the last quarter of the century that country house gardens with greenhouses, fountains, aviaries, gardeners' cottages, statues, shell grottoes, domes and wooded parks were built in earnest.

This last phenomenon has a striking parallel in the perception of newly-built country houses in the drawings, etchings and paintings of those artists who began to appreciate the beauty of the Dutch landscape in the Golden Age. As art historians have shown, it was in around 1600 that painters like Hendrick Goltzius of Haarlem and Claes Janszoon Visscher of Amsterdam left their studios to sketch landscape views from the dunes near their home towns, or made drawings in situ of the flat countryside near Haarlem and Amsterdam.⁶³ This 'discovery' of the countryside as a popular genre first materialized in series of landscape prints, which entered the market between 1610 and 1620, and over the following decades landscape gradually came to be considered a respectable subject for paintings. In 1604 Karel van Mander, the 'Dutch Vasari', who wrote biographies of Dutch painters, recommended walks in the countryside to young artists – perhaps the most popular of which were the walk southwards along the river Amstel to the village of Ouderkerk, or the walk westwards to the dunes near Haarlem.⁶⁴

Rembrandt, for example, took such long walks in the 1640s and even more frequently in the 1650s. But neither he, nor other landscape painters (such as Philip Koninck, Roelant Roghman, and Jacob van Ruisdael) had any interest in drawing or painting the new classical-style country houses in the 1640s and 1650s. Instead, farms, cottages and old castles, especially their ruins, were favoured subjects.⁶⁵ It is conceivable that the artists identified the classicist country houses as representations of urban culture, at odds with their own imagining of country life. It was not until the 1660s when painters like Jan van der Heijden and Gerrit Berckheyde, who specialized in town architecture and town scenes, began to produce work, that a new subgenre emerged in which the country house itself was the main subject of the painting, and not the family or the owner of the house.



Dutch Arcadian Landscapes around 1700

By the end of the seventeenth century, aspects of conspicuous consumption and the representation of social status had become important in the Dutch country house culture. There is a rough estimate that the number of country houses (not including farms used as summer residences) around Amsterdam was approximately 500 at the beginning of the eighteenth century.⁶⁶ Even more remarkable is the high density of country houses on the island of Walcheren in Zeeland: there were around 130 in 1750, varying in size and architectural style, but none of them great estates.⁶⁷ The cities of Middelburg and Flushing still owned a large number of manors in the seventeenth century. In 1679 Middelburg sold nearly all of its lordships of the manor, which were eagerly bought by rich merchants and regents. Walcheren became Zeeland's Arcadia. Foreign travellers praised especially the gardens of the Amsterdam country house landscapes found in the dunes near Haarlem and along the Amstel and Vecht rivers.⁶⁸ Rivers and canals were the most important forms of transport to these country house zones, and both water and water management played an important role in the design of country houses and their gardens, as the presence of moats, ponds and ditches indicates.

Perhaps the most famous garden in the region of the river Vecht was that of the country house Petersburg (referring to the Russian town Saint Petersburg) owned by the Amsterdam Lutheran merchant Christoffel

7.9 | Saxenburg near Bloemendaal, in the dunes near the town of Haarlem

The painter Rembrandt visited the owner of Saxenburg, from whom he had bought his own house in Amsterdam; etching by Rembrandt, 1651. (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam)

Brants. He was a trade agent for the Russian tsar Peter the Great, had special contacts with the harbour city of Archangelsk, and also owned a large house in Moscow. The tsar visited the Dutch Republic for two extended periods between 1697–1698 and 1716–1717, and was impressed by the country's prosperity, infrastructure and ship technology. During his first stay in Holland, Tsar Peter initiated a network of contacts with Dutch intellectuals and Amsterdam merchants. In December 1716 the tsar and his wife Catherine stayed at Brants' house on the Keizersgracht (Emperor's Canal) in Amsterdam; in August 1717, they attended a spectacular garden party at Brants' superb pleasure grounds on the Vecht river, near the village of Nigtevegt. The feast cost 65,000 guilders, twice or three times the cost of buying a large country house at that time.⁶⁹

The *Dutch Spectator* noted in 1754 that the image of the country house (*de buitenplaats*) had changed enormously over the previous fifty years. The summer residences with farms or breweries had gone and the owner of a country house now drew no income at all from his rural properties. Instead he planted ornamental schemes, but without the intention of profit. Only country houses with this non-profit character attracted the new fashionable name *buitenplaats* (i.e. a country house), whilst the others remained as *hofstede*, which referred explicitly to the original agricultural function of a house alongside that of the farmer, 'who rented the land and guarded the orchard', as *The Dutch Spectator* observed. In the early 1740s, about 600 inhabitants of Amsterdam paid taxes for their country house: that is, only 1% of the whole tax population. Half of them were merchants, 22% were rentiers, and 17% were involved in the administration of the city (including regents). Their close relationship notwithstanding, wealth is here even more important than status and power. The rich Mennonite families, who had no access to the town council, were heavily represented; they made up only 2% of the population, but more than 10% of the owners of country houses. A big difference between country houses and the castles and manor houses of the Dutch nobility was the constant transfer of country houses among the rich burghers of Amsterdam. Holding on to a family country house for many generations was rather exceptional along the Amstel and Vecht rivers.⁷⁰ Even the process of aristocratization among the rich burghers of Amsterdam in the period 1650–1750 did not totally erase the old mentality of the merchant: always keep a close eye on budget and costs.

Profits in international trade and industry declined in Holland and Zeeland over the course of the eighteenth century, and quite dramatically

in the last quarter. So after 1750, country houses in the polders around Amsterdam (including some impressive ones) were gradually demolished, and only new farms were constructed in their place, often using the demolition material from these country houses. The same trend of an overall decline in country houses, with their Dutch formal, geometric gardens, can be seen in the regions around the cities of Holland, in the dunes near Haarlem, and – albeit at a much slower pace – along the river Vecht, especially in the decades around 1800. In Zeeland, only a third of all the country houses around the city of Flushing, and a half around Middelburg, remained between 1750 and 1820.⁷¹

This brings the narrative back to the beginning of the new template for Dutch history of *Brusse and Mijnhardt*: the slow progress of the Dutch rural economy from 1750 onwards, its spectacular nineteenth-century growth in agricultural productivity on the sandy soils in the eastern provinces (including the expansion in size of many noble and notable estates), and of the international export of dairy products from the northern provinces (to the benefit of the great landowners and tenant farmers).

The Long Nineteenth Century (1780–1914): Frisian nobles and Dutch notables

The regional case of the nobility in the province of Friesland between 1780 and 1880 shows how this landed elite profited from the rise of heavily specialized and commercialized livestock farming by renting very fertile land to relatively big farmers.⁷² The small demographic size of this endogamous landed elite (small due to extinction and marriage preference) made some families extremely wealthy; these families owned many farms and lands spread throughout the whole province. Even without the inheritance practice of primogeniture, the Frisian landed elite remained very rich in the nineteenth century. This elite was comprised of rich nobles and wealthy burgher families. It contributed as many major landowners to the top one hundred Dutch landed magnates in 1850 as did the provinces of Gelderland, Overijssel and Utrecht put together. Most of them were nobles who owned estates with areas of more than 1,000 hectares.

Even before the great agricultural depression in Europe during the 1880s and 1890s, many Frisian noble families had migrated to other regions of the Netherlands. They preferred to live as rentiers and absentee landlords in their newly built country houses or villas in Utrecht or Gelderland,



7.10 | Middachten, De Steeg (Gelderland) The house sits at the centre of one of the oldest and largest privately owned estates in the Netherlands. It has a rich, noble history that began in the Middle Ages. (Photo: Albert Speelman)

enjoying their newly designed gardens and parks in the landscape style, with a greater variety in views and more varied opportunities for hunting.

Between 1815 and 1860, this group of Frisian notables was involved in an ‘Indian summer’ of Dutch country house culture that persisted longer in other regions – even until the First World War. Improvements to road and canal infrastructure, latterly strongly stimulated by railway construction and a spurt of urbanisation after the 1880s, created new zones with country houses and concentrations of estates. On the sandy soils of Utrecht and

Gelderland and common lands in Overijssel (Twente) in particular, there was an increase in building and garden design activities. After a slow start in the early-nineteenth century, textile industrialists in Twente drove the creation of an impressive new country house and estate landscape in their region. Here, the balance between profit and leisure was very strongly in favour of the latter.⁷³

In these three provinces, there were a few dozen relatively large estates of several thousand hectares, owned by old noble families, who started to experiment with new styles of gardening around 1900. Since the 1830s, the major landowners in the eastern provinces had profited from the dissolution of former common lands (the *marke*). Hundreds, sometimes even thousands, of hectares came into the hands of established noble landowners over the course of the nineteenth century.⁷⁴ The counterpart of this development was the splitting up of former noble and patrician estates in the urban, western provinces (including the dune areas) into villa parks in the decades around 1900.

It is important to stress that the cultural and geographical distance between the western, eastern and northern parts of the Netherlands became smaller in the nineteenth century. There had been supra-regional contacts between powerful and wealthy families in the different Dutch provinces since the Golden Age, but in the nineteenth century, moneyed capital and families with country houses flowed from west to east and vice versa. There was a new national elite of 'notables' (*notabelen*) at the top of Dutch society, who had the greatest influence in parliament, in banking, in provincial and local politics, in military service, in the higher courts, at the royal court, in the diplomatic service and, last but not least, in managing estates and living according to the seasons: in the long summertime at the country house (or at the castle) and for the rest of the year (excluding the hunting seasons), in a city.⁷⁵

Only after the First World War did the heyday of this class of notables come to an end. Many of their houses still exist, as well as a considerable part of their estates; the heritage landscape of the Dutch country houses and estates that is seen and experienced today is even more the landscape of the nineteenth-century notables than of the regents and the nobles who lived in the Golden Age.

Conclusion

More than forty years ago, Peter Burke published his experiment in comparative urban history: *Venice and Amsterdam. A Study of Seventeenth-Century Elites*.⁷⁶ In his chapter on the lifestyle of the Amsterdam elite, he wrote that the rise of the country houses with their impressive gardens deserved much more attention. Today, much more is known about this Amsterdam Arcadia.

This chapter has sketched a broader context than just the rise of Amsterdam as a world trade centre. The Dutch Republic of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries also had an agricultural economy, one which is often overlooked. By portraying this rural facet, it is hoped that a much more balanced vision on the ‘manorial’ aspects of the history of Dutch society will come into view.⁷⁷ To strengthen this vision, it is necessary to explore the position of the nobility in all seven united Dutch provinces. The nobility have never been paid much attention in Dutch historiography; things have changed in recent decades, but we still need more studies of their position in Dutch society and culture in the past and the present.

Many historians remain overly convinced by Johan Huizinga’s dictum that Dutch culture is in essence a bourgeois culture – more country house than castle, perhaps, and more garden than estate. It is time to adjust Huizinga’s picture in order to throw much more light on the role of landed elites in Dutch history, for example. However, we have to keep in mind that, although powerful nobles were above all great landowners, by no means were all great landowners noblemen.⁷⁸ It is important to acknowledge a broader view of the changing landscape of Dutch rural society, and its impact on the problems of hierarchy, ownership, labour conditions and solidarity in this type of society. A start has already been made on this topic for the nineteenth century, concerning the prominent position of the country house in the culture of the Dutch notables.⁷⁹ The advantage is that alongside house and family archives, the available sources permit reliable reconstructions of the composition of the landed elites in local, regional and national settings. But there is still much work to be done.

In 1873 the Irish historian W. E. H. Lecky visited the Netherlands and as his widow, a Dutch baroness from Overijssel, later wrote: ‘The houses struck him as more human institutions, much better both for the owners and for the Country than most English ones, being a smaller scale, without the vast lawns and parks.’⁸⁰ Let this be a stimulus for research on the Dutch heritage landscape of country houses and estates in the twentieth century.

Notes

- 1 Dessing, René W. Chr. and Jan Holwerda (eds.): *Nationale gids Historische buitenplaatsen*. Wormer. 2012. It is not always clear which criteria are used for this list (produced by the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands); it could be easily expanded with several hundred other country houses and castles.
- 2 There are about 35 estates of this category with more than 400 hectares in the Netherlands today. About a third have more than 1,000 hectares. The number of estates with 300 to 400 hectares is about 50 to 60. I thank Age Fennema (Estate Middachten) for his friendly shared information and estimates.
- 3 Around 1900 a great number of the large Dutch estates, including parks and forests, were threatened by urban expansion and real estate development, resulting into the splitting up of these estates. Dutch government introduced the so-called Nature Scenery Act (NSA) in 1928. Most of these estates were owned by 'old elite' (noble and patrician) families. The NSA greatly reduced inheritance taxes for estate owners, and even further reduced taxes if owners opened their land up to the public. Inheritance taxes were doubled between 1911 and 1917. The main goal of this law was the preservation of forests on landed estates. Between 1928 and 1956 about 800 estates (with in total more than 100,000 hectares or 247,000 acres of land) were protected by the NSA. At the end of the 20th century many new, relatively small, estates were registered, but the big ones were removed from the list. After the Second World War, the average area of a protected estate declined from about 200 to 100 hectares. See Verstegen, Wybren, "The Nature Scenery Act of 1928 in the Netherlands", in: *Forest History Today* 2015/12, 4-12. One of the oldest Dutch noble estates is House Middachten (De Steeg, province of Gelderland; now about 1000 hectares); it has been passed down by inheritance for twenty-five generations and is first mentioned in a document dated 1190.
- 4 See Kuiper, Yme, *De hofstede. 'Tot vermaeck en voordeel aengeleyt' & Afscheid van Arcadië? Wegen naar een nieuwe historische antropologie van buitenplaats en landgoed*. Groningen. 2017.
- 5 Tromp, Heimerick, *Private Country Houses in the Netherlands*. Zwolle. 1997. The initiative for this richly illustrated book was taken by the Dutch Castellum Nostrum Foundation. In 1997, about 300 private owners were members of this organization, also associated with the Union of European Historic Houses Association. The book deals with the history of the architecture of country houses and castles and the development of the park layouts.
- 6 See Vogelsang, Fred, *Nieuwe functies voor kastelen en buitenplaatsen. Een eeuw herbestemming*. Wijk bij Duurstede. 2016. From the late nineteenth cen-

tury onwards, many castles in the Roman Catholic southern provinces of North-Brabant and Limburg were acquired by religious orders. Some of these castles were heavily damaged during the Second World War and many others lost their religious function after the 1960s; *ibid.*, pp. 28-31.

- 7 Castles in the strict architectural and social sense of the term (historic, monumental and, moated houses once owned by noble families with landed property) also show a specific pattern of geographical distribution during the early modern period: we find more castles in the central, eastern and southern parts of the Netherlands than in the western and northern regions; see: Price, J. L.: "The Dutch Nobility in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries", in: H. M. Scott (ed.): *The European Nobilities in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries. Volume One. Western Europe*. London. 1995, pp. 88-95; Marshall, Sherrin: *The Dutch Gentry, 1500–1650. Family, Faith, and Fortune*. New York. 1987, pp. 3-4. Marshall uses the term 'manor' for the Dutch equivalent *ridderhofstad* (that is, the castle of a nobleman in the province of Utrecht; ownership gave the privilege of sitting as a representative of the nobility in the provincial estates).
- 8 See, for the *longue durée* before 1600: Bavel, Bas van: *Manors and Markets. Economy and Society in the Low Countries, 500–1600*. Oxford. 2010. This impressive book also deals with 'manors' (*demesnes*) as one of the two basic structures of medieval society (the other one is 'market'). There has been much debate about one of the key arguments of Van Bavel's study: does his reconstruction of medieval society and economy really show the transition to a Dutch Golden Age of the seventeenth century?
- 9 Vries, Jan de and Ad van der Woude (eds.): *The First Modern Economy. Success, Failure, and Perseverance of the Dutch Economy, 1500–1815*. Cambridge. 1997.
- 10 See the bibliography in de Vries and Van der Woude 1997, *The First Modern Economy*. We will mention just two of their publications here: Vries, Jan de: *Barges and Capitalism. Passenger Transportation in the Dutch Economy (1632–1839)*. Wageningen. 1978; Woude, Ad van der: *Het Noorderkwartier. Een regionaal-historisch onderzoek in de demografische en economische geschiedenis van westelijk Nederland van de late middeleeuwen tot het begin van de negentiende eeuw*. Wageningen. 1972. Other authors of these regional studies were B. H. Slicher van Bath (Overijssel), J. A. Faber (Friesland), H. K. Roessingh (Gelderland; region the Veluwe), J. A. Bieleman (Drenthe) and P. Priester (Groningen). This whole group of agrarian historians has been labelled as the Wageningen School in Dutch historiography.
- 11 De Vries 1978, *Barges and Capitalism*, pp. 317-19.
- 12 De Vries and Van der Woude 1997, *The First Modern Economy*, p. 507.

- 13 Brusse, Paul and Wijnand Mijnhardt (eds.): *Towards a new template for Dutch history. De-urbanization and the balance between city and countryside*. Zwolle. 2011.
- 14 'De-urbanization' is a broader, regional process of structural change, and covers the relationship between town and countryside; 'urban decline' refers to an internal, more individual process of decline within a particular city.
- 15 Faber, J. A.: "The economic decline of the Dutch Republic", in: W. G. Heeres et al (eds.): *From Dunkirk to Danzig. Shipping and Trade in the North Sea and the Baltic, 1350–1850*. Hilversum. 1988, pp. 107-15, citation on p. 114.
- 16 *Ibid.*, pp. 93-94.
- 17 Righini, Bert Scova: *A. C. W. Staring 1767–1840. Landheerlijk leven van een doener en denker van statuur*. Zutphen. 2009.
- 18 Vries, Jan de: "De-urbanization in a Modern Economy. Reflections on Towards a New Template for Dutch History", in: *Virtus. Yearbook of the History of the Nobility* 2012: 19, pp. 160-66.
- 19 Compare Hobsbawm, Eric and Terence Ranger (eds.): *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge. 1983.
- 20 Burke, Peter: *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*. Aldershot. 2009 [orig. New York/London 1978]; especially Part One: 'In search of Popular Culture'.
- 21 Verstegen 2015, "The Nature Scenery Act", pp. 4-12. Until well into the twentieth century, privately owned estates formed the backbone of forest ownership in the Netherlands. Thirty percent of the area of such an NSA estate should be covered by trees.
- 22 De Vries 2012, 'De-urbanization', p. 162.
- 23 Cited in Vries, Jan de: *The Dutch Rural Economy in the Golden Age 1500–1700*. New Haven and London. 1974, p. 34.
- 24 Vries, Jan de: *The Economy of Europe in an Age of Crisis, 1600–1750*. Cambridge. 1976, p. 71.
- 25 De Vries and Van der Woude 1997, *The First Modern Economy*, p. 547.
- 26 Price mentions three zones: Holland and Zeeland as totally de-feudalized provinces; Utrecht, Gelderland and Overijssel as regions with the strongest feudal traditions; and in between, Friesland and Groningen, where feudalism had hardly taken a hold, but where oligarchies of (noble and non-noble) landowners had become important; Price 1995, *The Dutch nobility*, pp. 86-87.
- 27 See for a good reconstruction of the incomes of the nobility in Holland: Nierop, H. F. K. van: *The Nobility of Holland. From Knights to Regents, 1500–1650*. Cambridge. 2009, Chapter 5.
- 28 De Vries and Van der Woude 1997, *The First Modern Economy*, p. 541.

- 29 Rowen, H. H.: *The Princes of Orange: The Stadholders in the Dutch Republic*. Cambridge. 1988.
- 30 Van Nierop 2009, *The Nobility of Holland*. The key argument of this 1984 dissertation (in Dutch) is quite surprising: this noble group, notwithstanding its demographic downturn, was quite successful in maintaining its position at the top of the new urban bourgeois society.
- 31 Price 1995, *The Dutch Nobility*, p. 84. An exception here is the lowest level of the nobility, which sees a blurring of parish gentry and traditional families of big farmers.
- 32 Price 1995, *The Dutch Nobility*, p. 107. Price argues that there was no discernible cultural gap between the nobles and the regents, or indeed the wealthy in general. The regents developed a semi-aristocratic lifestyle, while the nobles demonstrated bourgeois attitudes, for example, by ridiculing the strict manners of the English court in the early-eighteenth century; a leading member of the Knighthood of Holland described an official reception in London as 'a real monkey house'; *ibid.*, p. 105.
- 33 De Vries and Van der Woude 1997, *The First Modern Economy*, p. 541.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 541.
- 35 *Ibid.*, pp. 542-43.
- 36 Faber, J. A.: *Drie eeuwen Friesland. Economische en sociale ontwikkeling van 1500 tot 1800*. Wageningen. 1972, pp. 359-60.
- 37 De Vries 1974, *The Dutch Rural Economy*, pp. 36-37.
- 38 Zandvliet, Kees: *De 250 rijksten van de Gouden Eeuw*. Amsterdam. 2006. Of the total capital of the 250 richest men and women in the seventeenth century (the Golden Age) the proportion of Holland is 88%. At the top of this economic elite we find four nobles (three representing the higher nobility) among the ten richest; the proportion of nobles on the whole list of rich people is about 10%.
- 39 De Vries and Van der Woude 1997, *The First Modern Economy*, pp. 546-47.
- 40 The total number of noble families in the Dutch Republic was probably 400 to 500 around 1600. The higher nobility accounts for no more than 5% of this total number. The number of noble families in Holland declined from 25 to 12 between 1600 and 1700. In Friesland it went down from 58 in 1600 to 34 in 1700; and in Groningen from 45 to 18. The other provinces did not escape this general trend of numerical decline; Price 1995, *The Dutch Nobility*, p. 85; Versteegen, S. W.: *Gegoede ingezetenen. Jonkers en geërfden op de Veluwe 1650-1830*. Zutphen. 1990, p. 71.

- 41 Among the noble landowners of the province of Groningen, 60% (of 68 persons in total) had landholdings smaller than 500 hectares in the eighteenth century; 28% had landholdings of between 500 and 1,000 hectares, and 12% owned 1,000 hectares or more; Feenstra, Hidde: *De bloeitijd en het verval van de Ommelander adel (1600–1800)*. Groningen. 1981, p. 358 (table 4).
- 42 Price 1995, *The Dutch Nobility*, pp. 85-86.
- 43 Kuiper, Yme: “Eine rein bürgerliche Nation? Adel und Politik in den Niederlanden im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert”, in: Jörn Leonhard and Christian Wieland (eds.): *What makes the Nobility Noble? Comparative Perspectives from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century*. Göttingen. 2011, pp. 201-17.
- 44 Price 1995, *The Dutch Nobility*, pp. 82-113.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 103.
- 46 Israel, Jonathan: *The Dutch Republic. Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477–1806*. Cambridge. 1995, Chapter 15.
- 47 Price 1995, *The Dutch Nobility*, p. 111.
- 48 Huizinga, Johan: *Dutch Civilisation in the Seventeenth Century and Other Essays*. London. 1968 [orig. Dutch 1941], p. 92.
- 49 *Ibid.*, pp. 94-95.
- 50 *Ibid.*, p. 93.
- 51 Groeneveld, Inger: “What’s in a name? Nieuw licht op Moulins hofstede, de vroegste aanleg van buitenplaats Elswout te Overveen”, in: *KNOB 2012/2*, pp. 111-25. Much information in this section comes from this impressive article.
- 52 Ottenheim, Koen: *Philips Vingboons. 1607–1678. Architect*. Zutphen. 1989, pp. 47-73.
- 53 The whole world of Dutch geometrical gardens of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, including transnational influences, is very inspiringly reconstructed in: Jong, Erik de: *Natuur en Kunst. Nederlandse tuin- en landschapsarchitectuur 1650–1740*. Bussum. 1993.
- 54 See Kuiper, Yme and Ben Olde Meierink (eds.): *Buitenplaatsen in de Gouden Eeuw. De rijkdom van het buitenleven in de Republiek*. Hilversum. 2015.
- 55 Jespersen, Knud J. V.: *A History of Denmark*. Copenhagen. 2004, p. 116. The author even argues that for an extended period in the seventeenth century Denmark was – in the ongoing conflicts with Sweden – ‘an economic vassal of the mighty Netherlands’.
- 56 Faber, J. A.: ‘The decline of the Baltic grain-trade in the second half of the seventeenth century’, in: W. G. Heeres et al (eds.): *From Dunkirk to Danzig. Shipping and Trade in the North Sea and the Baltic, 1350–1850*. Hilversum. 1988, p. 31.
- 57 De Vries and Van der Woude 1997, *The First Modern Economy*, p. 414.

- 58 Ibid., p. 415.
- 59 Burke, Peter: *Antwerp, a Metropolis in Comparative Perspective*. Antwerp. 1993, p. 11.
- 60 Abrahamse, Jaap Evert: “The grand extension of Amsterdam: city development and urbanism in the seventeenth century”, in: Jaap Evert Abrahamsen (ed.): *De grote uitleg van Amsterdam. Stadsontwikkeling in de zeventiende eeuw*. Bussum. 2010, pp. 350-54.
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- 64 Runia, Epcó: *The Glory of the Golden Age*. Amsterdam. 2000, p. 11.
- 65 Bakker, Boudewijn et al (eds.): *Het landschap van Rembrandt. Wandelingen in en om Amsterdam*. Bussum. 1998; Bakker, Boudewijn: “Schilderachtig: Discussions of a Seventeenth-Century Term and Concept”, in: *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 1995/23, pp. 147-62.
- 66 Glaudemans 2000, *Amsterdams Arcadia*, pp. 184-85.
- 67 Broeke, Martin van den: ‘Het pryel van Zeeland’. *Buitenplaatsen op Walcheren 1600–1820*. Hilversum. 2016, p. 34.
- 68 De Jong 1993, *Natuur en Kunst*, p. 34; Kuiper, Yme, “The rise of the country house in the Dutch Republic. Beyond Johan Huizinga’s narrative of Dutch civilisation in the 17th century”, in: Jon Stobart and Andrew Hann (eds.), *The Country House. Material Culture and Consumption*. Swindon. 2016, pp. 11-23.
- 69 Vogelsang, Fred et al (eds.): *Petersburg, Roem der hoven. De verdwenen luthof van Peter de Grottes agent Christoffel Brants*. Amsterdam/Wijk bij Duurstede. 2017, p. 39.
- 70 Information in this section comes from: Mulder, Roel: *Op afbraak. De sloop van buitenplaatsen in de period 1780–1830*. Utrecht. 2006.
- 71 Van de Broeke 2016, ‘Het pryel van Zeeland’, p. 488.
- 72 Kuiper 1993, *Adel in Friesland*.
- 73 Smeets, E. A. C.: *Landscape and society in Twente and Utrecht. A geography of Dutch country estates, circa 1800–1950*. Leeds. 2005, pp. 112-43.
- 74 See for this expansion of estates in Gelderland and the importance of hunting grounds: Sleebe, Vincent: “Tussen regeringsmacht en dorpscultuur; de adel in de negentiende en twintigste eeuw”, in: Coen O. A. Schimmelpenninck van der Oije et al (eds.): *Adel en ridderschap in Gelderland*. Zwolle. 2013, pp.

- 271-97, especially 282-88. For an impressive reconstruction of the profits and expenses of noble estates and changes in a specific region with many estates, and the transformation of the nineteenth and twentieth-century rural landscape, see: Cruyningen, Piet van: *Landgoederen en landschap in de Graafschap*. Utrecht. 2005.
- 75 For more about notables and their lifestyle and mentality see: Kuiper 1993, *Adel in Friesland*, pp. 399-412; and for a good reconstruction of the national geographic distribution of Dutch aristocratic (noble and patrician) and other notables, who paid the highest taxes on landed property and conspicuous lifestyle see: Moes, Jaap: *Onder aristocraten. Over hegemonie, welstand en aanzien van adel, patriciaat en andere notabelen in Nederland, 1848-1914*. Hilversum. 2012, pp. 231-38. Noble families still had higher costs of representation than other notable families in 1900.
- 76 Burke, Peter: *Venice and Amsterdam: A Study of Seventeenth-Century Élites*. Cambridge. 1974.
- 77 A comparison with seventeenth-century Denmark would be a promising approach in this context. See Jespersen 2004, *A History of Denmark*, p. 120: "This feudal system in Denmark did not really lead to the large-scale operation of estates on villeinage like those in, for example, the areas east of the Elbe and in Eastern Europe [...] The structure of the Danish landed estates followed a basic pattern of tenancy, where the manors were relatively small [...] Around 1650, for example, only 5-6 per cent of agricultural land was run as manorial estates."
- 78 Compare Thompson, F. L. M.: *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century*. London. 1963, p. 14.
- 79 Laarse, Rob van der and Yme Kuiper (eds.): *Beelden van de buitenplaats. Elitevorming en notabelencultuur in Nederland in de negentiende eeuw*. Hilversum. 2005.
- 80 Citation in: Tromp, Heimerick and Adriaan W. Vliegthart (eds.): "Introduction. The Dutch Country House. A Bird's-Eye View", in: Jorge Guillermo (ed.): *Dutch Houses and Castles*. New York. 1990, pp. 8-11.

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