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*“To avoid all further lawsuits and difficulties”: Conflict, dialogue and pragmatic strategies in seigneuries of Burgundian and Habsburg Flanders*

In the late medieval Flemish countryside, lords at the head of a seigneurie possessed judicial and fiscal rights over the inhabitants of their estate. The exploitation and misuse of such power and surplus-extraction by lords and their officers is extensively and deservedly highlighted by historians. The agency of peasants has also been investigated, though mostly from a top-down perspective, by investigating ordinances and/or lawsuits. One of the well-known strategies for Flemish country-dwellers was buying citizenship from neighbouring towns (outburghership or buitenpoorterschap). Not all peasants could afford citizen rights however, nor was it always a watertight status, as the abundance of conflict between lords and citizens shows. While the focus on (juridical) conflict between lords and peasants is a relevant perspective, it is not the only possible scope for historical research. Not all disputes were settled in court. In addition, the procedure and/or aftermath of court rulings could be the starting point of further dialogue between parties to negotiate more agreeable terms. Furthermore, inhabitants of the late medieval and early modern seigneurie used a wide range of strategies to evade their fiscal obligations. Ironically, we only have knowledge of tax evasion practices when the tax-payer failed such endeavours. Keeping quiet about property transactions for example was, if discovered, three times as expensive as simply paying the due tax. In such cases, the tax was imposed, as well as a fine worth double the owed sum.

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*This text is an abstract of the paper to be presented by the author at the Posthumus Conference 2023. Please do not cite without prior permission by the author.*