

## Active Manorial Lords and Peasant Farmers in the Economic Life of the Late Middle Ages: Results from New Swiss and German Research

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In German medieval historiography, the model idea that there had been a gradual change from the manorial system, from the high to late medieval period, is widespread.<sup>1</sup> It is understood mainly as the process in which manorial demesne farming was replaced by the lease of land in exchange for duties as well as that of the manorial lords' gradual pulling back from agricultural production. The manorial system of the late medieval period is characterized as *Rentengrundherrschaft*.<sup>2</sup> Newer empirical studies of the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries, however, point in a different direction: regional studies analysing pragmatic written sources, such as interest ledgers and account books, show that many manorial lords were now more than ever taking an interest in their farmers' agricultural business, without completely giving up

demesne farming (*Eigenwirtschaft*). It seems, then, as if two oppositional interpretations of late medieval manorialism were in place. How is this to be explained?

The aim of the present article is to show how many late medieval manorial lords were highly engaged and were able to adapt to ever-changing situations.<sup>3</sup> For this reason, everyday relations have been studied, mainly of an economic nature between peasant farmers and their lords, and thus, the still-widespread idea of a solidified<sup>4</sup> manorial system in the later Middle Ages has been put into perspective. To do this, an open approach has been used: the late medieval manorial system is seen as sphere of action, in which the interests of landlord and peasant farmer were repeatedly negotiated.<sup>5</sup>

Manorial lords and peasant farmers of the late Middle Ages and the early modern period came into contact mainly over economic resources. In this, many forms of cooperation between the two parties existed. This article looks at the collaboration in agricultural practice and the associated rural manual labour, as well as the exchange of goods; it shall be shown that special forms of exchange existed alongside the official markets, organized by the lords.

The results presented here are based on studies of German-speaking Switzerland<sup>6</sup> and the neighbouring regions of southern Germany and Austria. This

- 1 One basic difficulty in describing the Swiss and German circumstances in English is the translation of the key terms. In the present text the following terms are used: the German word '*Grundherrschaft*' is described as 'manorial system' or 'manorial lordship', '*Grundherr*' as 'manorial lord' or 'landlord'. 'Manorial demesne' in this paper is used to refer to such land as the manorial lord farmed for himself instead of parcelling out the land in leasehold in return for payment in duties; this is equivalent to the German term '*grundherrliche Eigenwirtschaft*'. To avoid misunderstandings, it is also necessary to define what is meant here by 'lease/leasehold'. The literal translation into German as '*verpachten/Pacht*' is not applicable, as a modern lease is free of manorial ties, which is not the case for the late medieval circumstances in the region of northwestern Switzerland and southeastern Germany described in this section. In these circumstances, 'lease' is translated as '*belehnen*' or '*verleihen*' in return for duties and other obligations. The land leased to farmers by manorial lords (*Grundherren*) to be tilled are 'peasant fiefs' ('*Bauernlehen*') within the manorial system. This means that land was leased out in tenure to tenant farmers, who paid the manorial lord (*Grundherr*) various duties, at times connected to personal obligations.
- 2 In older scholarship, notably Friedrich Lütge, *Geschichte der deutschen Agrarverfassung vom frühen Mittelalter bis zum 19. Jahrhundert*, 2nd edn, Deutsche Agrargeschichte, 3 (Stuttgart: E. Ulmer, 1967), 56. In the late Middle Ages, feudal lords had detached themselves more and more from agricultural production, producing a *reine (absolute) Renten-Grundherrschaft*. Newer scholarship is more differentiated, seeing a tendency to disengage from the peasant economy. Werner Rösener, *Grundherrschaft im Wandel. Untersuchungen zur Entwicklung geistlicher Grundherrschaften im südwestdeutschen Raum vom 9. bis 14. Jahrhundert*, Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte, 102 (Göttingen, 1991), 563.

- 3 Hans-Jörg Gilomen, *Die Grundherrschaft des Basler Cluniazenser-Priorates St. Alban im Mittelalter: Ein Beitrag zur Wirtschaftsgeschichte am Oberrhein*, Quellen und Forschungen zur Basler Geschichte, 9 (Basel: F. Reinhardt, 1977), 194–95.
- 4 Lütge, *Geschichte der deutschen Agrarverfassung*, 193, even mentions, in relation to the southwestern part of the territory, a *Versteinerung (petrification)* of manorialism.
- 5 The scholarship and discussion of manorialism are lengthy and not easy to digest at a glance. The approach used here orientates itself mainly through the regional studies on rural society in Switzerland that are mentioned. See also Heide Wunder, *Die bäuerliche Gemeinde in Deutschland*, Kleine Vandenhoeck-Reihe 1483 (Göttingen 1986), who coined the phrase 'Herrschaft mit Bauern' (rule with peasants) for the late Middle Ages. Furthermore, the detailed study of the monastery of Salem by Katherine Brun, *The Abbot and His Peasants: Territorial Formation in Salem from the Later Middle Ages to the Thirty Years War*, Quellen und Forschungen zur Agrargeschichte, 56 (Stuttgart: Lucius & Lucius, 2013), which summarizes the relationship between abbey and vassals in the following terms on p. 415: 'It was a multidirectional bargaining process that involved shifting alliances, unequal partnerships, reciprocity, compromise, and even cooperation among various groups'. From the perspective of legal history, see Sigrud Hirbodan, 'Recht und Ordnung im Dorf. Zur Bedeutung von Weistümern und Dorfordnungen in Spätmittelalter und Frühneuzeit', in Kurt Andermann and Oliver Auge (eds), *Dorf und Gemeinde. Grundstrukturen der ländlichen Gesellschaft in Spätmittelalter und Frühneuzeit*, Kraichtaler Kolloquien, 8 (Epfendorf, 2012), 45–63, at p. 63.
- 6 In Switzerland, manorialism and rural society has been studied mainly by the Zurich professors Roger Sablonier and Hans-Jörg Gilomen, and their students. An overview of the work produced under Sablonier is given by Thomas Meier and Roger Sablonier (eds), *Wirtschaft und Herrschaft: Beiträge zur ländlichen Gesellschaft in der östlichen Schweiz (1200–1800)* (Zurich: Chronos, 1999). Taking as a starting point a single secular or ecclesiastical manor, these

region is ideal for a research paper for a variety of reasons. Here, ever since the High Middle Ages, one can find significant manorial lords of various types – ecclesiastical and aristocratic, as well as lay-urban.<sup>7</sup> The main ecclesiastical lord was the Abbey of St Gall, which was founded in the eighth century and was an important imperial monastery with extended property on both sides of Lake Constance. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the abbey expanded its manorial lordship into a territorial lordship in eastern Switzerland. Until the abolition of the monastery in 1803, the prince-abbot of St Gall owned one of the largest territories in the Swiss confederation. Newer studies have been conducted on this ancient Benedictine monastery, situated in the town of St Gallen,<sup>8</sup> and on the Fraumünster in Zurich.<sup>9</sup> More recent studies have also examined the newer institutions of the High and late Middle Ages, such as the Dominican priory St Katharinental in Diessenhofen in the Thurgau,<sup>10</sup> the

studies examined not only the organization of lordships but especially the relations between representatives of the manorial lord and the peasant farmers. Thus, the relevant findings for the study of the history of rural society in pre-modern times were formulated. Cf. Julien Demade, 'The Medieval Countryside in German-language Historiography since the 1930s', in Isabel Alfonso Antón (ed.), *The Rural History of Medieval European Societies: Trends and Perspectives*, The Medieval Countryside, 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 173–252, at pp. 233–36. A bibliography of the newer literature about rural society in German-speaking Switzerland can be found in Katja Hürlimann and Stefan Sonderegger, 'Ländliche Gesellschaft im Mittelalter', *Traverse*, 18/1 (2011), 48–76.

- 7 For the characterization of different types of manorial lords in the region, see Dorothee Rippmann, 'Wirtschaft und Sozialstruktur auf dem Land im Spätmittelalter', in Kanton Basel-Land (ed.) *Nah dran, weit weg: Geschichte des Kantons Basel-Landschaft 2* (Liestal, 2001), 139–64, at pp. 140–46.
- 8 Johannes Duft, Anton Gössi and Werner Vogler, *Die Abtei St. Gallen: Abriss der Geschichte, Kurzbiographien der Äbte, das stift-sanktgallische Offizialat* (St Gallen, 1986). Philip Robinson, *Die Fürstabtei St. Gallen und ihr Territorium 1463–1529: Eine Studie zur Entwicklung territorialer Staatlichkeit*, Sankt Galler Kultur und Geschichte, 24 (St Gallen, 1995). Philipp Lenz, *Reichsabtei und Klosterreform: Das Kloster St. Gallen unter dem Pfleger und Abt Ulrich Rösch (1457–1491)*, *Monasterium Sancti Galli*, 6 (St Gallen: Verlag am Klosterhof, 2014).
- 9 Christa Köppel, 'Von der Äbtissin zu den gnädigen Herren: Untersuchungen zu Wirtschaft und Verwaltung der Fraumünsterabtei und des späteren Fraumünsteramts in Zürich, 1418–1549' (Zurich: Chronos, 1991).
- 10 Erwin Eugster and Verena Baumer-Müller, 'St. Katharinental', in *Helvetia Sacra. Abteilung IV, Die Orden mit Augustinerregel*, v, no. 2: *Die Dominikaner und Dominikanerinnen in der Schweiz* (Basel, 1999), 780–840; Albert Knöpfli, *Das Kloster Sankt Katharinental*, die Kunstdenkmäler des Kantons Thurgau, 4 (Basel: Wiese, 1989). Peter Erni, 'Geschriebene Landschaft. Der Wandel von Kulturlandschaft und Güterstruktur in Basadingen nach dem Schriftgut des Klosters St. Katharinental (14.–18. Jh.)', *Thurgauer Beiträge zur Geschichte*, 137 (2000), 1–231.

Cistercian Abbey Magdenau<sup>11</sup> to the west of St Gallen, the Dominican women's priory St Catherine in the town of St Gallen,<sup>12</sup> and the Premonstratensian abbey Rüti in Zurich,<sup>13</sup> which I shall make use of here, as well as those of the Cistercian abbey of Salem<sup>14</sup> and the Benedictine monasteries of Reichenau,<sup>15</sup> Ellwangen, and Scheyern in southern Germany.<sup>16</sup>

The current state of research is fruitful in relation to the urban institutions that act as manorial lords. Here, one can mention the Heiliggeist hospital in St Gallen,<sup>17</sup> which was founded in 1228, as well as St Gallen's leprosarium, which

- 11 Christian Schäfli, 'Herrschaft und Wirtschaft des Klosters Magdenau im ausgehenden Mittelalter: Edition und Analyse des Lehenbuches des Zisterzienserinnenklosters Magdenau', Master's thesis, University of Zurich, Zurich, 2008.
- 12 Rezia Krauer, Stefan Sonderegger, Claudia Sutter and Monika Michel-Rüegg, 'Klosterfrauen wirtschaften', in Katrin Eberhard and Ursula Hasler (eds), *St. Katharinen. Frauenkloster, Bibliothek, Bildungsstätte – Gestern und Heute* (Herisau: Appenzeller Verlag, 2013), 112–76; Simone Mengis, *Schreibende Frauen um 1500. Scriptorium und Bibliothek des Dominikanerinnenklosters St. Katharina St. Gallen*, *Scrinium Friburgense*, 28 (Berlin, 2013).
- 13 Alfred Zangger, *Grundherrschaft und Bauern: Eine wirtschafts- und sozialgeschichtliche Untersuchung der Grundherrschaft der Prämonstratenserabtei Rüti (ZH) im Spätmittelalter* (Zurich, 1991).
- 14 Brun, *The Abbot and His Peasants*.
- 15 Harald Derschka (ed.), *Die Reichenauer Lehenbücher der Äbte Friedrich von Zollern (1402–1427) und Friedrich von Wartenberg (1428–1453)*, Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für geschichtliche Landeskunde in Baden-Württemberg, Reihe A/Quellen, 61 (Stuttgart, 2018).
- 16 Shami Ghosh, 'The Imperial Abbey of Ellwangen and Its Tenants: A Study of the Polypptych of 1337', *Agricultural History Review*, 62/2 (2014), 187–209. The author is of the opinion that – in opposition to the general opinion of current scholarship – the strong commercialization of English agriculture was not an exception. Similarly, strong tendencies to commercialism are visible in the region of southern Germany-eastern Switzerland-Austria at the same time. For this in greater detail, and a comprehensive knowledge of the literature, see Shami Ghosh, 'Rural Commercialisation in Fourteenth-century Bavaria: The Evidence from Scheyern Abbey', *Vierteljahresschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 2017/1 (2017), 52–77. From my own research and knowledge of the literature, I must agree with Ghosh. That England is seen as an exception by scholars has to do with the fact that much of the pertinent literature dealing with Germany, Austria, and Switzerland is in German and comprises regional studies that have not been received widely enough outside the German-speaking regions. See also Govind P. Sreenivasan, 'Beyond the Village: Recent Approaches to the Social History of the Early German Peasantry', *History Compass*, 11/1 (2013), 47–64.
- 17 Stefan Sonderegger, *Landwirtschaftliche Entwicklung in der spätmittelalterlichen Nordostschweiz: Eine Untersuchung ausgehend von den wirtschaftlichen Aktivitäten des Heiliggeist-Spitals St. Gallen*, *St. Galler Kultur und Geschichte*, 22, published dissertations, University of Zurich (St Gallen: Buchhandlung am Rössli, 1994); Stefan Sonderegger, 'The Financing Strategy of a Major Urban Hospital in the Late Middle Ages (St Gallen fifteenth

is first mentioned in 1225.<sup>18</sup> Additional information comes from the studies of hospitals in Lucerne<sup>19</sup> and Zurich,<sup>20</sup> as well as of the monastery of St Albans,<sup>21</sup> of the hospital in Basel,<sup>22</sup> and of hospitals in the regions north of Lake Constance.<sup>23</sup> There are also some very interesting studies concerning the region

century), in Francesco Ammannati (ed.), *Assistenza e solidarietà in Europa, secc. XIII–XVIII, atti della 'Quarantaquattresima Settimana di Studi', 22–26 aprile 2012* (Social Assistance and Solidarity in Europe from the Thirteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries), Istituto internazionale di storia economica F. Datini, 2 (Florence: Florence University Press, 2013), 209–26.

- 18 Pascale Sutter, 'Arme Siechen': *Das St. Galler Siechenhaus Linsebühl im Spätmittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit*, St Galler Kultur und Geschichte, 26 (St Gallen, 1996).
- 19 Stefan Jäggi, 'Die Rechnung des Heilig-Geist-Spitals von Luzern für die Jahre 1502–1507', *Der Geschichtsfreund. Mitteilungen des Historischen Vereins der Zentralschweiz*, 143 (1990), 5–69.
- 20 Daniela Schwab, 'Das Urbar des Zürcher Heiliggeistspitals aus dem 15. Jahrhundert: Edition und Kommentar', Master's thesis, University of Zurich, Zurich, 2013.
- 21 Gilomen, *Die Grundherrschaft des Basler Cluniazenser-Priorates*.
- 22 Michaela von Tscharnher-Aue, *Die Wirtschaftsführung des Basler Spitals bis zum Jahre 1500: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Löhne und Preise*, Quellen und Forschungen zur Basler Geschichte, 12 (Basel, 1983).
- 23 Christian Heimpel, *Die Entwicklung der Einnahmen und Ausgaben des Heiliggeistspitals zu Biberach an der Riss von 1500 bis 1630*, Quellen und Forschungen zur Agrargeschichte, 15 (Stuttgart, 1966); Bernhard Zeller, *Das Heilig-Geist-Spital zu Lindau im Bodensee, von seinen Anfängen bis zum Ausgang des 16. Jahrhunderts*, Schwäbische Geschichtsquellen und Forschungen, 4 (Lindau, 1952); Alfons Semler, *Geschichte des Heilig-Geist-Spitals in Überlingen am Bodensee* (Überlingen, 1957); Klaus Militzer, *Das Markgröninger Heilig-Geist-Spital im Mittelalter: Ein Beitrag zur Wirtschaftsgeschichte des 15. Jahrhunderts*, VuF Sonderband, 19 (Sigmaringen, 1975). Ulrich Knefelkamp, *Das Heilig-Geist-Spital in Nürnberg vom 14.–17. Jahrhundert. Geschichte, Struktur, Alltag*, Nürnberger Forschungen, 26 (Nuremberg: Verein für Geschichte der Stadt Nürnberg, 1989). Cf. general research for the hospitals from an economic perspective: Holger R. Stunz, 'Hospitäler im deutschsprachigen Raum im Spätmittelalter als Unternehmen für die "caritas": Typen und Phasen der Finanzierung', in Michael Matheus (ed.), *Funktions- und Strukturwandel spätmittelalterlicher Hospitäler im europäischen Vergleich*, Geschichtliche Landeskunde, 56 (Stuttgart, 2005), 129–59; see further Michel Pauly, 'Von der Fremdenherberge zum Seniorenheim: Funktionswandel in mittelalterlichen Hospitälern an ausgewählten Beispielen aus dem Maas-Mosel-Rhein-Raum', in Michael Matheus (ed.), *Funktions- und Strukturwandel spätmittelalterlicher Hospitäler im europäischen Vergleich*, Geschichtliche Landeskunde, 56 (Stuttgart, 2005), 101–16. Cf. Oliver Landolt, 'Finanzielle und wirtschaftliche Aspekte der Sozialpolitik spätmittelalterlicher Spitäler', in Neithard Bulst and Karl-Heinz Spiess (eds), *Sozialgeschichte mittelalterlicher Hospitäler*, VuF, 65 (Ostfildern: Jan Thorbecke, 2007), 273–99; Martin Scheutz, Andrea Sommerlechner, Herwig Weigl, and Alfred Stefan Weiss (eds), *Quellen zur europäischen Spitalgeschichte in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, Quelleneditionen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung, 5 (Vienna, 2010). Lies Vervae, 'Goederenbeheer in een veranderende samenleving Het Sint-Janshospitaal van Brugge ca. 1275–ca. 1575', PhD thesis, University of Ghent, Ghent, 2014. Lies Vervae, 'Het

around Basel that have been undertaken from an economic and socio-historical viewpoint.<sup>24</sup>

This research indicates that there are various types of manorial lords represented in a relatively small region. Amongst these, we find one very old, very large monastery, and new ones that were only founded at the beginning of the late medieval period; besides these ecclesiastical institutions, there are also secular ones. Due to these differences, we must pose the question of whether there were specific forms of relationships between the different lords and their peasant farmers. For example, it is probable that great differences existed between an old Benedictine monastery like that of St Gall and a secular institution like a communal hospital which was only founded in the transition to the late medieval period, differences in the way they were organized, managed their economy, and interacted with their peasant farmers.

## 1 De facto Manorial Lords

Economic relations between lords and peasant farmers in the late medieval and early modern period were largely bound to the land, the management of which was essential in order to safeguard the livelihood of both lords and peasant farmers. The lords gave their land to the peasant in return for duties; the tenure was based on a *quid pro quo* contract. The contribution of the lord was his giving the land in tenure to those willing to work it, theirs was to pay duties in the form of interest, paid in natural produce and money, tithes, and possibly manual labour. These economic, legal, and manorial bonds created the relationship between lord and peasant farmer that governed their daily life.

But the relationship between them was not simply a dual one. In reality, there were various participants, as a look at the situation in the eastern part of Switzerland in the late Middle Ages shows. During my editorial work for the

Brugse Sint-Janshospitaal en zijn grote hoevepachters in de 15e en 16e eeuw: wederkerigheid en continuïteit in functie van voedselzekerheid', *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire / Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Filologie en Geschiedenis* 90/4 (2012), 1121–54.

- 24 Mireille Othenin-Girard, *Ländliche Lebensweise und Lebensformen im Spätmittelalter: Eine wirtschafts- und sozialgeschichtliche Untersuchung der Herrschaft Farnsburg*, Quellen und Forschungen zur Geschichte und Landeskunde des Kantons Basel-Landschaft, 48 (Liestal, 1994). Dorothee Rippmann, *Bauern und Städter. Stadt-Land-Beziehungen im 15. Jahrhundert: das Beispiel Basel, unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Nahmarktbeziehungen und der sozialen Verhältnisse im Umland*, Basler Beiträge zur Geschichtswissenschaft, 159 (Basel, 1990).

Chartularium Sangallense,<sup>25</sup> I was able to view the entire inventory of documents of northeastern Switzerland up to 1411. In this new edition, many previously unknown documents which provide information about legal and economic history have been included. It is noticeable that alongside the monastery of St Gall, there were many other actors who could be considered manorial lords, according to the role they played with regard to the peasant farmers. This makes it vital to first clarify the legal position of the lords who came into contact with peasant farmers. It is my opinion that until now studies of rural society have not sufficiently taken the actual ownership and lordship situation into account. By looking at the now fully edited and extensive archival material of the imperial monastery and town of St Gallen, it is possible to show what I mean by this and what conclusions can be drawn from it.<sup>26</sup>

In the east of Switzerland, the Benedictine abbey of St Gall held the overlordship (*dominium directum* / *Obereigentum*) over most of the land. The abbey rarely cultivated the land itself, but leased it to, among others, townspeople and urban institutions such as the communal hospital, the leprosarium, or new urban monasteries. The old abbey of St Gall thus continued to hold the overlordship, *the dominium directum*, over the land. Citizens and communal institutions were the abbey's tenants with all the associated rights, that is, the holders of the *dominium indirectum* / *Untereigentum*.<sup>27</sup> However, these urban actors rarely worked the land themselves; instead, they subleased it to peasant farmers in the region in return for duties in natural produce and money, as well

25 This is a new edition of the deed books of the abbey of St Gall in the project Chartularium Sangallense by Otto P. Clavadetscher (vols iii-vii) and Stefan Sonderegger (vols viii-xiii). The new edition contains around 40 percent more documents than the old deed book. Cf. Stefan Sonderegger, 'Vom Nutzen der Neubearbeitung einer regionalen Urkundenedition. Dargestellt am Chartularium Sangallense', in Theo Kölzer, Willibald Rosner, and Roman Zehetmayer (eds), *Regionale Urkundenbücher: Die Vorträge der 12. Tagung der Commission Internationale de Diplomatique*, Nöla, 14 (St Pölten: Niederösterreichisches Institut für Landeskunde, 2010), 86–116.

26 The graphic models used here in the discussion are based on the studies of subleasing / subtenures carried out in the dissertation completed under my supervision by Rezia Krauer, 'Die Beteiligung städtischer Akteure am ländlichen Bodenmarkt: Die Region St. Gallen im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert', PhD thesis, University of Zurich, Zurich, 2018 (currently in press). For sub-leasehold in Switzerland, see also Gilomen, *Die Grundherrschaft des Basler Cluniazenser-Priorates*, 209. Subtenure is a subject that has not yet been studied thoroughly enough in German research.

27 The amount first tenants (the holders of the *dominium indirectum* / *Untereigentum*) had to pay in rent to the holder of the overlordship (*Rekognitionszins*) is not recorded, when the act of paying rent is recorded at all, but, in any case, this is not the subject studied here. For the income of the monastery of St Gall, see Robinson, *Die Fürstabtei St. Gallen*, 160–67.

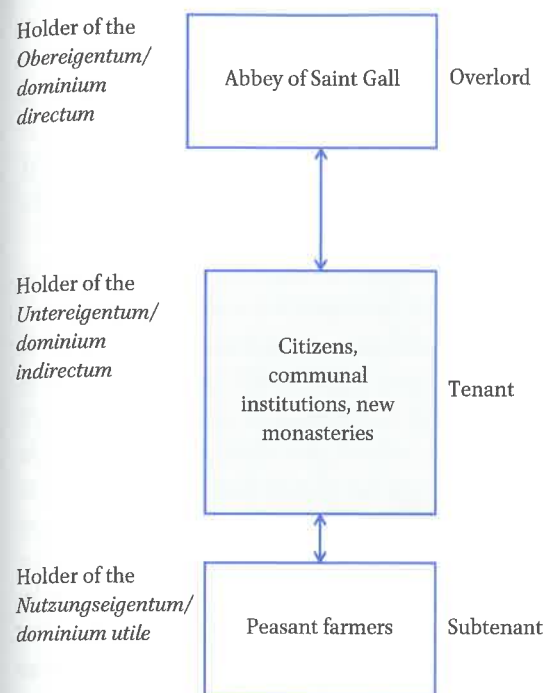


FIGURE 11.1 Visual representation of subtenure

as to others, partially bound to serfdom.<sup>28</sup> These subtenants – the peasant farmers – were the ones who used the territory for agricultural use; they were the holders of the *dominium utile* / *Nutzungseigentum*.<sup>29</sup> In this way, the holders of the *dominium indirectum*, that is, the citizens, urban institutions, and new monasteries, were in fact made into manorial lords themselves, who received duties from their subtenants who actually cultivated the land.

28 An example of this were the so-called 'Fasnachtshühner' (Carneval chickens), which the wine farmers of the urban hospital of St Gallen were obliged to pay in the mid-fifteenth century. StadtASG SpA, C, 2, fol. 31v and 32r.

29 Gilomen, *Die Grundherrschaft des Basler Cluniazenser-Priorates*, 209–11. The peasants in subtenure could themselves sublease parts of their land, as in theory the system of subtenure was open to the bottom, but this is difficult to find sources for. For leases of land between farmers, see Tim Soens and Erik Thoen, 'The Origins of Leasehold in the Former County of Flanders', 31–55, at p. 47; further, for England, see Jane Whittle, 'Leasehold Tenure in England c. 1300–c. 1600: Its Form and Incidence', 139–54, and Miriam Müller, 'Peasants, Lords and Developments in Leasing in Later Medieval England', 155–78, all three in Bas J.P. van Bavel and Philipp R. Schofield (eds), *The Development of Leasehold in North-western Europe, c. 1200–1600*, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008).

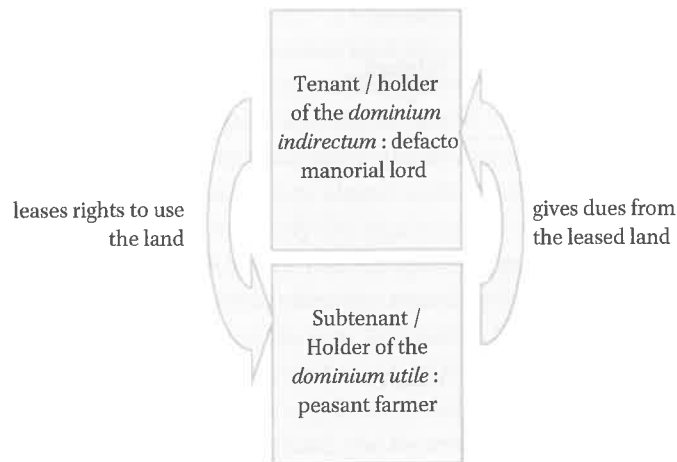


FIGURE 11.2 Visual representation of de facto lordship

The results that I present in this article are based to a large extent on the relations between tenants and subtenants. Thus, the relationships are examined at the level of subleasing. It was at this level that most of the contact between lords and peasant farmers took place, since the farmers were not in direct contact with the overlord (the holder of the *dominium directum*), but with some of his tenants (the holders of *dominium indirectum*); the latter took the de facto position of the manorial lord, not only acting as representative of the overlord, but widely independent of him and with his own distinct interests.<sup>30</sup>

## 2 Peasant Agriculture – Cooperation and Dependencies

Peasant agriculture was connected intimately with their lords. Swiss studies on the history of rural society in the late Middle Ages based on the example of different manorial systems reach the same conclusion on one important point: between landlord and peasant farmer there was not simply a bond of duties but instead a complex relationship based on exchange. The following will show peasant agriculture in the interplay of cooperation and dependence between manorial lord and tenant. Those called 'tenants' in the following are generally 'subtenants / peasant farmers' according to the model above.

<sup>30</sup> Therefore, the common term of '*Herrschaftsdelegation*' (delegation of lordship) is not applicable here.

### 2.1 *Constancy in the Relationship with the Manorial Lord*

The quality of the relationship between peasants and lords depended greatly on the conditions on which the lords gave their land to the peasant farmers in tenure. In the north of Switzerland, there are two contrasting legal forms in the late Middle Ages: the temporary (*Zeitleihe*) and the hereditary tenure (*Erbleihe*).<sup>31</sup>

The *Zeitleihe* is a non-hereditary, time limited right of use of the land.<sup>32</sup> The specified period of lease could be from one year to twenty-five years. In the female Cistercian monastery in Magdenau in the canton of St Gallen, where the *Zeitleihe* was the most common type of lease on the brink of the sixteenth century, fifteen years was the most common time period.<sup>33</sup> In the Premonstratensian monastery of Rüti in Zurich, lease periods of one, two, three, five, seven, eight, ten, twelve, and twenty-five years are known, though the three-year period was by far the most common. This may well have to do with the three-year cycle of crop rotation.<sup>34</sup> The three-year, short-term lease could have been a kind of trial period, where after the so-called '*Umschnitt*', the three-year contract was either dissolved or replaced by a contract that was more profitable for the tenant. This could have been beneficial for both parties; it allowed the monastery to judge the capabilities of the tenant farmer, and the latter to judge the quality of the land, its productivity, and yield. Regarded in this light, the short-term lease can be seen as the normal precursor to a longer, fixed-term lease or even to a hereditary tenure.<sup>35</sup> Despite its benefits, the short-term lease would have been a risky type of lease, not conducive to furthering the initiative of the tenant in working and managing the farm.<sup>36</sup>

The high legal and economic availability of the land given as leasehold, that evolved from the long-term use, is the most important criterion distinguishing

<sup>31</sup> As a comparison to the situation in northwestern Europe, see Bas J.P. van Bavel and Philipp R. Schofield (eds), *The Development of Leasehold in Northwestern Europe, c. 1200–1600* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008).

<sup>32</sup> Karl Otto Scherner, 'Art. Zeitpacht', in Albrecht Cordes, Bernd Kannowski, Hans-Peter Haferkamp, et al. (eds), *Handwörterbuch zur deutschen Rechtsgeschichte*, v (Berlin, 1998), para. 1645–46.

<sup>33</sup> Schäfli, 'Herrschaft und Wirtschaft', 39.

<sup>34</sup> Zangger, *Grundherrschaft und Bauern*, 392.

<sup>35</sup> Temporary leases could, as shown by Rippmann, be dependent on location. Leases close to the town in Basel were always for a short period only. The urban workspaces were allotted at a high rate in the period before the fifteenth century. Thus, the type of *Zeitleihe* there had to do with the high rentability of the territory. Rippmann, *Bauern und Städter*, 240–301.

<sup>36</sup> Rippmann, *Bauern und Städter*, 397, esp. 129.



the hereditary tenure from the temporary lease. A farm could, in theory, be managed over many generations by the same family. The holders of hereditary tenure had great control over the land they held in lease. They could sell,<sup>37</sup> sublease, or mortgage either parts of the fief, or rights of use of the land held in hereditary tenure. In theory, the consent of the overlord was necessary, which can be seen in documents where sellers ask their lord to agree to a sale of land to a new tenant or to take on a new subtenant. Conflicts between lord and tenant that ensued after the latter had sold their land or the rights to it without the consent of their lords show that in fact the holders of an hereditary tenure did view themselves as owners.<sup>38</sup> Hereditary tenures could be dangerous for the landlord, as it resulted in the slow but continuous estrangement from legal claims.<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, and this is a relevant difference from short-term

37 The possibility of a sale allows for the conclusion that within the rural community there was a market for lands and rights connected to land that has not yet been sufficiently studied. Exceptions to this are Rippmann, *Bauern und Städter*, and recently decisively Krauer, 'Die Beteiligung städtischer'. For this subject in general, see Markus Cerman, 'Bodenmärkte und ländliche Wirtschaft in vergleichender Sicht: England und das östliche Mitteleuropa im Spätmittelalter', *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 2 (2004), 125–50; Markus Cerman, 'Social Structure and Land Markets in Late Medieval Central and East-central Europe', *Continuity and Change*, 23/1 (2008), 55–100; Bas J.P. van Bavel, 'The Organization and Rise of Land and Lease Markets in Northwestern Europe and Italy, c. 1000–1800', *Continuity and Change*, 23/1 (2008), 13–54; Volker Stamm, 'Kauf und Verkauf von Land und Grundrenten im hohen und späten Mittelalter: Eine Untersuchung zur historischen Wirtschaftsanthropologie', *Vierteljahresschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 2009/1 (2009), 33–43.

38 Cf. Peter Liver, 'Zur Entstehung des freien bäuerlichen Grundeigentums', *Zeitschrift für Schweizerisches Recht*, 65 (1946), 329–60; Otto P. Clavadetscher, 'Die Annäherung der spätmittelalterlichen Erbleihe im nordalpinen Graubünden an das freie Grundeigentum', in Ludwig Petry (ed.), *Festschrift für Johannes Bärman*, part 1, *Geschichtliche Landeskunde*, 3 (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1966), 27–44; Martin Salzmann, 'Heimfall eines verwirkten Lehens. Motive und Hintergründe zu einem Prozess aus dem Thurgau des 16. Jahrhunderts', in Clausdieter Schott and Eva Petrig Schuler (eds), *Festschrift für Claudio Soliva zum 65. Geburtstag* (Zurich, 1994), 233–52.

39 For examples of conflicts between lords and farmers concerning claims of ownership, see Stefan Sonderegger, 'Das erste Zinsbuch: Spiegel von Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft im Spätmittelalter', in Katrin Eberhard and Ursula Hasler (eds), *St. Katharinen: Frauenkloster, Bibliothek, Bildungsstätte – Gestern und Heute* (Herisau, 2013), 134–37. See also Claudia Sutter, 'Frankrüti, Berg SG: Wirtschafts- und Konfliktgeschichte eines spätmittelalterlichen Hofes unter dem Kloster St. Katharinen St. Gallen', Master's thesis, University of Zurich, Zurich, 2012; Walter Müller, 'Gelehrte, Juristen und bäuerliche Urteilsfinder in einem sanktgallischen Lehenprozess', in W. Lendi (ed.), *Festgabe für Paul Staerke zu seinem 80. Geburtstag am 26. März 1972*, *St. Galler Kultur und Geschichte*, 2 (St. Gallen, 1972), 64–75. Compare also Salzmann, 'Heimfall eines verwirkten Lehens'.

leases, the larger scope for action and the possibility of passing on the land to one's family motivated those with an hereditary tenure to a far greater extent to apply their own initiative. This was largely encouraged, for instance, by urban and secular manorial lords.

The type of lease used most often by the Heiliggeist hospital in the town of St Gallen when giving land in leasehold to peasant farmers from the region was hereditary tenure. This indicates that it was important to the manorial lords to maintain good relations with the tenant over the years. The hereditary tenure favoured continuity in the agricultural management of the land. Farms were in the same hands for decades. Thus, the environment changed only marginally, and the contacts on both sides remained the same for a long period of time, only altering over the generations. The parties knew each other, and a trusting relationship between manorial lord and tenant farmer could be built up. Both sides could profit from the fact that the land remained in the family over generations: if a son inherited from his father, he would be familiar with the land from the beginning and would know exactly what to look out for and how to work it,<sup>40</sup> quite different from when a family newly took over a farm and first needed to familiarize themselves with its running.<sup>41</sup>

One method used by the landlords to keep their tenants on the farm was to allow and encourage ways of generating additional income, for example, through the transport of grain, wine, empty barrels of wine, straw, or especially wood. Sometimes tenant farmers would also carry out building work for their lords.<sup>42</sup>

## 2.2 *Labour and Agricultural Cooperation between Farmers and Lords*

Further opportunities for additional income for the families of peasant farmers came through cooperation of manorial lord and tenant when it came to structural investment on the farm. In the case of the most important secular

40 Michael Mitterauer, 'Mittelalter', in Andreas Gestrich, Jens-Uwe Krause, and Michael Mitterauer (eds), *Geschichte der Familie* (Stuttgart, 2003), 160–363, at p. 300.

41 Adrian Zwahlen, *Die wirtschaftliche Entwicklung der Schoretshueb: Eine Mikrogeschichte zur spätmittelalterlichen Getreideproduktion in der spezialisierten Landwirtschaft der Nordostschweiz* (Zurich, 2012), 105–06, Table 3. The farm Schoretshueb of the St Gallen hospital is a model example of the constancy enabled through hereditary tenure in the relations between landlord and tenant farmer, looked at by Schwab, 'Das Urbar des Zürcher Heiliggeistspitals'. The constancy is expressed in the long period of time that the farm remained in the same family – more than a hundred years. The inheritance of the sons of the following generation was a longstanding tradition in this instance.

42 Schwab, 'Das Urbar des Zürcher Heiliggeistspitals', 87–93.

manorial lord in the town of St Gallen – the communal hospital, which was an active participant in the rural economy due to commercial interests – this is very well documented in the administrative archival records. As opposed to the usual maintenance of the farm, which was the duty of the tenant, renovations and new buildings were financially subsidized by the hospital as landlord, by allowing the tenants a reduction of the duties undertaken as manual labour and its associated expenses. These renovations and new building works presented an opportunity for the tenant to pay his duties not only with agricultural produce but also through different services. Alongside those times in the annual cycle when the farmer was fully occupied with agricultural duties, there were other times in which diverse work was possible that provided the family additional income. Such work is well documented when it comes to woodcraft, for instance, in the reduction of duties for the manufacturing of wooden shingles,<sup>43</sup> or for cutting, preparing, and delivering of wood.<sup>44</sup> New buildings or renovations on the farms were usually carried out by lords and tenant farmers together; both had a vested interest in them. Special initiatives of the tenant were supported financially by the lords because they served to preserve or increase the value of the farm. Similar work undertaken autonomously by the tenant was ‘pre-financed’ by him and compensated for by the lord in the case of his departure from the leasehold.<sup>45</sup>

Since, according to legal practice, wooden buildings and especially such buildings as stables or granaries were counted as movable goods, the tenant could be return on such investments even after having left the leasehold. Such chattel did not belong to the manorial lord, but to the tenant.<sup>46</sup> Peasant families who moved were able to dismantle such buildings and rebuild on the new site.

43 Stadtarchiv St Gallen, Spitalarchiv, vol. A, 3, fol. 63r.

44 Stefan Sonderegger, ‘Gaiserwald im Mittelalter’, in Ernst Ziegler (ed.), *Gaiserwald: Abtwil, St. Josefen, Engelburg* (Gaiserwald, 2004), 11–36, at pp. 24–28. For the history of Swiss forest use, see Katja Hürlimann, ‘Worum geht es in der Wald- und Forstgeschichte?’, *Schweizerisches Zeitschrift für Forstwesen*, 154 (2003), 322–27.

45 Stadtarchiv St. Gallen, Spitalarchiv, vol. A, 3, fol. 67r.

46 Werner Meyer, *Hirsebrei und Hellebarde: Auf den Spuren des mittelalterlichen Lebens in der Schweiz* (Olten, 1985), 86. This is still applicable in modern law; see Article 677 in Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft, *Schweizerisches Zivilgesetzbuch (ZGB)* [Swiss Civil Code], Art. 677.A.III.5.1, <https://www.admin.ch/opc/de/classified-compilation/19070042/index.html#a677>: ‘Hütten, Buden, Baracken u. dgl. behalten, wenn sie ohne Absicht bleibender Verbindung auf fremdem Boden aufgerichtet sind, ihren besonderen Eigentümer’. (‘Sheds, huts, shacks, cabins and the like retain their separate owner if they are constructed on land belonging to another person without the intention of becoming a permanent fixture.’) Cf. Otto P. Clavadetscher, ‘Kontinuität und Wandel im Recht und in den Lebensverhältnissen’, *Neujahrsblatt, e. by Historischen Verein des Kantons St. Gallen*, 132 (1992),

The opportunity to transfer such buildings when moving away from a farm is well documented in the eastern Swiss sources. One example: in 1453, the monastery of Magdenau to the west of St Gallen gave a farm with a granary and a barn to one Ueli Schnätzer and his wife in leasehold. One can assume this granary and barn to have been separate buildings next to the farm. Schnätzer had probably built these on his own initiative, possibly with financial assistance from the monastery. As owner he was free to do with these as he liked, since in his contract it says: ‘if he does not wish to be there any longer, he shall be free to take barn and granary with him’.<sup>47</sup> Another option upon moving away was to sell the buildings, which had apparently been built without much assistance from the manorial lord by the tenant farmer, in which case the lord would have first refusal. These legal details were in every case noted in the contract.<sup>48</sup> It is apparent from such contracts that, amongst other things, all other real property on the land belonged entirely to the landlord, and the tenant had the duty of maintenance. This was common practice.

Besides the legal information, the contracts also hint at the division of costs. The contribution of the lord comprised the supply of materials, and the providing of money, grain payments, and infrastructure for transport. Grain payments in the German-speaking part of Switzerland often consisted of spelt and oats, the usual winter and summer grains in the Swiss midlands. To a great extent, money and spelt served as salary and meals for the men working on the building site, as well as for their families.<sup>49</sup> Such payments are rarely mentioned in the sources, but we can assume that next to skilled labourers and wagoners, there were also helpers from local peasant families.<sup>50</sup> Thus, such renovations and rebuilding work carried out in cooperation aided the income of the farming families. The prerequisite for such cooperation was the active participation of the lords in the peasant farmer’s economy, as was typical in the newer manorial lordships that only emerged in the later Middle Ages.

7–28, at pp. 22–23; Alfred Zangger, ‘Wirtschaft und Leben im Zürcher Oberland im 15. Jahrhundert’, *Jahrheft der Ritterhausgesellschaft Bubikon*, 61 (1997), 14–35, at p. 26.

47 Archiv des Zisterzienserklosters Magdenau, Bd. XLI, fol. 31r.

48 Archiv des Zisterzienserklosters Magdenau, Bd. XLI, fol. 75r.

49 Dorothee Rippmann, ‘“Sein Brot verdienen”: Die Verköstigung von Arbeitskräften im Spätmittelalter’, *Medium Aevum Quotidianum*, 34 (1996), 91–114.

50 Alfred Zangger, ‘Alltagsbeziehungen zwischen Klosterherrschaft und Bauern am Beispiel des Prämonstratenserklosters Rüti im 15. Jahrhundert’, in Thomas Meier and Roger Sablonier (eds), *Wirtschaft und Herrschaft: Beiträge zur ländlichen Gesellschaft in der östlichen Schweiz (1200–1800)* (Zurich, 1999), 295–309, at p. 303; Sonderegger, *Landwirtschaftliche Entwicklung*, 103–13.

A close cooperation between manorial lord and tenants existed not only in connection with the maintenance of the farm buildings but also in connection with agricultural production. Grain and wine production were more labour-intensive than livestock farming. The latter freed workers, who, at certain times, could then gain employment as hired hands on farms committed to arable farming or wine production; for the vineyards around Lake Zurich as well in the St Gallen Rhine valley, this phenomenon is well documented.<sup>51</sup> For wine production, the cost and returns, and thus also the risks, were noted in the contracts between manorial lords and wine producers.<sup>52</sup> Part-contracts were common, usually in the form of so-called '*Halbpacht*', meaning that half of the yield was given to the lords by the farmers. The payment of material for the maintenance of the vines (vine stakes, fertilizer) and of the workers' salaries for the work in the vineyards, during the vintage and for the transport, was divided between lord and tenant. The burden of work and cost was, on the whole, evenly shared. In years where the yield was poor, manorial lords could forego a part or the whole of the wine due to them, and they would then in good years claim a greater part. With this kind of cooperation, both parties contributed to the upkeep and the intensification – well documented for eastern Switzerland since the fifteenth century – of the market-orientated viticulture.<sup>53</sup>

### 2.3 *Dealing with One Another*

The agricultural labour documented in the interest ledgers provides a good insight into the daily relations between manorial lords and their tenants. As opposed to deeds and *urbaria*, which only record the claims for duties that the lords made, the interest ledgers (*Zinsbücher*) and account books (*Rechnungsbücher*), that are kept in series, record the duties actually paid by the tenant

51 Zangger, 'Wirtschaft und Leben', 21–22; Stefan Sonderegger, 'Der Rebbrief von 1471 – eine wichtige Quelle zum Weinbau im St. Galler Rheintal. Kommentar und Neuedition', in Thomas Meier and Roger Sablonier (eds), *Wirtschaft und Herrschaft: Beiträge zur ländlichen Gesellschaft in der östlichen Schweiz (1200–1800)* (Zurich, 1999), 43–53.

52 The legal form of lease (*Halbpacht*) in viticulture shows similarities to the *mezzadria* in Tuscany, cf. Steven A. Epstein, *An Economic and Social History of Later Medieval Europe, 1000–1500* (Cambridge, 2009), 59–60.

53 Stefan Sonderegger, 'Landwirtschaftliche Spezialisierung in der spätmittelalterlichen Nordostschweiz', in Markus Cerman and Erich Landsteiner (eds), *Zwischen Land und Stadt: Wirtschaftsverflechtungen von ländlichen und städtischen Räumen in Europa 1300–1600* (Innsbruck, 2010), 139–60.

farmers. Thus, the portrayal of agriculture as recorded on paper or parchment by the lords could diverge widely from the actual practice of peasant farming. Grain duties were paid in cash or different agricultural produce. Feudal claims to natural produce and cash duties were paid in manual labour.<sup>54</sup> As is apparent from the interest registers and bills, daily labourers were tallied together with the feudal claims of duties, meaning that they were deducted from the claims for natural produce or cash. Books kept serially dealing with the management of these lands give the impression that lords and tenants often looked for the best possible solution for both parties with a large amount of flexibility on both sides. Tithes in grain were, in theory, duties that were paid in proportion to the yield.<sup>55</sup> But the information gained from Swiss sources from the fifteenth century show a different picture. Similar to the procedure with interest duties, an amount was fixed, but there was space for leniency on both sides of the mark. This is apparent in formulations such as 'the tithe is usually given' or that the tithe is at one point greater and at another time less.<sup>56</sup> The payment owed fixed by written contract seems to have been more of an approximation,<sup>57</sup> especially in the case of the tithes. The actual duties were often only specified after a personal meeting between the lord and tenant, in which they discussed how much of the land was going to be tilled and how good or bad the yield was likely to be, or already had been. Both sides argued and took positions. It could happen that a farmer 'says he ought not to give it'.<sup>58</sup> This should not be seen in general as a refusal to pay, but rather an understanding on the part of the lord that the position of the tenant farmers that they should be allowed to deviate from the fixed amount was legitimate. The reasons for this could be manifold. One reason often given by the peasant farmers was that one part of the land had not been used,<sup>59</sup> something that was obviously for them to decide and was accepted by the lords. That the exact amount of annual duties was negotiated between both parties on the basis of experience and taking into account the current situation indicates that in general relations were good. Prerequisite for these negotiations was a strong presence of the manorial lord in the living environment of the peasant farmer. Specifically, this means that the manorial

54 However, this did not make it compulsory labour classed as *Fronarbeit*.

55 For the tithes, cf. the work of Köppel, *Von der Äbtissin*.

56 Stadtarchiv St.Gallen, Spitalarchiv, vol. A, 3, fol. 27r.

57 Stadtarchiv St.Gallen, Spitalarchiv, vol. A, 3, fol. 32v, 'git ett wenn' (= gibt etwa, gives roughly).

58 Stadtarchiv St.Gallen, Spitalarchiv, vol. A, 3, fol. 105r.

59 Stadtarchiv St. Gallen, Spitalarchiv, vol. A, 3, fol. 32r ('Der Zehend uff Voelis Huob git de anno 1443 nit me denn 10 Mut Korn, won (= weil) es was ain tail nit gebuwen!') and fol. 105r ('Er spricht, er soell es nit gen, in der Brach'). Cf. also Erni, 'Geschriebene Landschaft', 83.



lords were present through *Amtshäuser* (administrative buildings) and their officials in urban surroundings or in the towns.<sup>60</sup> These were often central locations of manorial administration, which served to supply the rural community with produce that it did not have itself. Further, in such places, the peasant farmers' payments could be collected and the commercial relationships between tenants organized and taken note of. In summary, one can say that late medieval landlords took on the market-like role of provider and a hub for more or less direct exchange between the peasant farmers.<sup>61</sup>

The impression of a consensus between manorial lord and tenant farmer is shown in exceptional situations, too. In Europe, the years of 1442 and 1444 were difficult ones for agriculture; in the interest ledgers there is a markedly higher amount of exemptions from duties than usual.<sup>62</sup> The reasons for this are most likely to be found in failed yield due to adverse weather conditions, which would be especially detrimental for the grain fields, and there are many comments about exemptions from duties due to damage caused by bad weather.

The consequences for agriculture and thus for the community were grave. Hail, or storms described with hail to show their severity, destroyed the forthcoming harvest. Destructive storms radically changed the conditions. Instead of being able to provide for themselves from their own agricultural produce and being able to generate a small amount of income through sales, farmers had to buy in more grain for their own provision. Added to this, the tenant farmer had not only lost the basis of his food supply for the next or possibly the

60 For delegation of feudal obligations to officials, see, for instance, Teuscher, *Erzähltes Recht*, 114–16.

61 Zangger, 'Alltagsbeziehungen', 300. For the exchange between Glarus and Zurich, see Rolf Kamm, *Glarus zwischen Habsburg und Zürich: Die Entstehung des Landes im Spätmittelalter* (Baden: Hier & Jetzt, 2010). For the administration of the hospital of St Gallen in the region with viticulture, see Sonderegger, *Landwirtschaftliche Entwicklung*, 302 and 363–70.

62 Stefan Sonderegger, "'...der Zins ist abgelon...': Aushandeln von Schadensteilungen zwischen Grundherren und Bauern in schwierigen Zeiten der Landwirtschaft', in Rolf Kiessling, Wolfgang Scheffknecht (eds), *Umweltgeschichte in der Region*, Forum Suevicum: Beiträge zur Geschichte Ostschwabens und der benachbarten Regionen, 9 (Konstanz, 2012), 139–57. See also Christian Jörg, 'Teure, Hunger, Grosses Sterben': *Hungersnöte und Versorgungskrisen in den Städten des Reiches während des 15. Jahrhunderts*, Monographien zur Geschichte des Mittelalters, 55 (Stuttgart, 2008); Horst Buszello, 'Teuerung und Hungersnot am Ober- und Hochrhein im Spätmittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit (circa 1300–1800)', in Ursula Huggle (ed.), *Kriege, Krisen und Katastrophen am Oberrhein vom Mittelalter bis zur Frühen Neuzeit, Tagung des Historischen Seminars Abteilung Landesgeschichte an der Universität Freiburg und der Stadt Neuenburg am Rhein 13. und 14.10.2006*, Das Markgräflerland, 2 (Schopfheim: Geschichtsverein Markgräflerland, 2007), 32–71.

next few years, he also faced the difficulty of only partly, or in the worst case, not being at all able to pay his duties to his lord.

If the harvest was ruined through no fault of the farmer, tenants were often exempted from part of the duties. This fact shows the following: this stance – the reduction or waiving of peasant farmers' duties by the lord, as is often documented for loss of yield due to poor weather – is a concession on the side of the landlords. The reasons for this are primarily rational; just like their lords, peasant farmers live off the management of the land. If there was no reason to assume a fault of the tenant, negligent management of the land, or embezzlement, then it was more important to show consideration for bad harvests and allow continuity on the farm, than to provoke the peasant farmers into leaving by insisting on payment. Land that was not worked did neither party any good; it was vital, especially in precarious situations, for the tenant farmer to be able to count on constructive engagement of the landlord to find a solution.

### 3 Credit and Debt of Peasant Farmers

But since the concessions made by the lords were usually only a reduction and not total exemption from duties, the consequences of a bad harvest could still weigh on the family for a considerable time: in order to pay for missing yield, the tenant often had to take out loans with their lords or other credit lenders. When discussing the lords' loans to their tenant farmers, one must also consider the negatives, namely, the wide-spread indebtedness of peasant farmers. This led to a high level of economic dependency within the rural community, which manifested itself differently depending on agricultural structure. The form of indebtedness that was probably most common among peasant farmers was the need to take out a loan to tide themselves over during the low times in the fluctuating yield from year to year.<sup>63</sup> Debt was incurred for various different reasons. In cases like those mentioned – of failed harvests, in which case a loan was needed alongside the reduction of duties, and possibly even loans in the form of grain from the possession of the feudal lord – the reason is obvious. But there were other forms, too, not always clear from the sources. It could be that large sums of money were paid in order to buy added land, or to pay off inheriting siblings, as well as higher maintenance costs and duties after having

63 Hans-Jörg Gilomen, 'Das Motiv der bäuerlichen Verschuldung in den Bauernunruhen an der Wende zur Neuzeit', in Susanna Burghartz, Hans-Jörg Gilomen, and Guy Paul Marchal (eds), *Spannungen und Widersprüche*, Gedenkschrift für Frantisek Graus (Sigmaringen, 1992), 173–89.

acquired more land. In such cases, the debt could make up a multiple of the annual interest, and the reduction of such debt could have lasted a generation or perhaps was not possible at all, so that it was impossible to avert the need to give up the farm – in fact an insolvency.<sup>64</sup>

In commercial agriculture, influenced by urban requirements, the indebtedness of peasant farmers was part of the structure of the relations between farmers and lords. This financial obligation allowed the lords to participate even more actively in the economy of their tenant farmers. Studies of agricultural specialization of cattle farming and viticulture of the late Middle Ages in the eastern parts of modern-day Switzerland testify to this. The driving force was the economic interest of the regional centre, the imperial city of St Gallen, which greatly influenced the rural economy through manorial urban institutions and citizens who owned territory in the countryside. In the foreground stood the securing of subsistence; then, there were commercial interests, which furthered cattle farming and viticulture through the sale of beef cattle, whey products, and wine in the town and in the countryside. As a result, three specialized agricultural zones emerged around the town that were dependent upon one another, with a focus on grain, cattle, and wine. This model resulted in a spatial network with zones of different agricultural structure that stand in a complementary relationship to each other. Seemingly, at the central point, there was the town of St Gallen as regional centre and intermediary between the three zones.<sup>65</sup> Such agricultural specialization led to risky financial ties and dependencies of many peasant families. In commercial cattle farming orientated along urban demand, and similarly with viticulture, this is well documented, as the following shall show.

In so-called '*Viehgemeinschaften*' (livestock collectives), urban investors – butchers, merchants, and hospitals – participated in the farming of livestock of the regional farmers.<sup>66</sup> In this widespread form of shared capital, the creditor

64 Alfred Zangger, 'Wittenbach im Mittelalter', in Edgar Krayss, et al. (eds), *Wittenbach. Landschaft und Menschen im Wandel der Zeit* (Wittenbach, 2004), 47–146, at pp. 125–32, has proven that some debts consisted of five times as much as the annual interest.

65 Sonderegger, 'Landwirtschaftliche Spezialisierung'. However, it is to be noted that such specialization should not be seen as a closed system. Exchange existed not only between the different zones of one region, but also with regions outside of these. For eastern Switzerland, we already have proof of grain import from Swabia. Studies from similar regions would be desirable for comparison.

66 Cf. the examples in Stefan Sonderegger and Matthias Weishaupt, 'Spätmittelalterliche Landwirtschaft in der Nordostschweiz', *Appenzellische Jahrbücher*, 1987 (1988), 29–71; Rippmann, *Bauern und Städter*, 204–30; Matthias Steinbrink, *Ulrich Meltinger: Ein Basler Kaufmann am Ende des 15. Jahrhunderts*, vswg Beiheft, 197 (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2007), 169–72.

lent money for the livestock to the farmer, who had to pay for the buying, stabling, care, and feeding of the animals. For this expenditure, the farmer received milk and manure in return and could use the animal for its strength. The common profit lay in the increase of value and in the offspring, which could be shared, depending on the investment of the creditor. Such livestock sharing clearly shows how strongly the peasant's indebtedness was linked to urban investment of capital in the rural economy. Often the peasant farmer would add to his debts, for instance, taking on further loans in order to buy feed, to buy more livestock, or other things. With these loans one can assume, just by looking at the size of the *Viehgemeinschaften* – there were ones with over thirty cattle<sup>67</sup> – that the sums were high. To lessen the risk, creditors demanded that the farmers stake their property as pledge for the loan. Difficulties in repayment ended in worst-case scenarios with the auctioning off of the farm and movable property of indebted families.

A different type of debt can be seen resulting from urban influence on agriculture in the case of viticulture. In zones where the specialization of viticulture was so far progressed that it resembled monocultures, to a large extent staple foods had to be bought in. Urban manorial lords in particular are known to have exchanged wine with their peasant farmers for necessary items, such as grain, meat, and even cash.<sup>68</sup> Such a credit-based service served the everyday needs of the consumer – in this case the wine farmer – and made cashless trade relations possible.<sup>69</sup> This tied the tenant farmers very strongly through commitments to the lords and their economic interests. In addition to the feudal duties in the form of interests, tithes, and manual labour, continuous long-term debts bound the tenants to their manorial lords.<sup>70</sup> The question is, whether the manorial lords actually encouraged this kind of debt in order to strengthen the foundation for their claims to power and/or to safeguard their material interests.<sup>71</sup>

67 Stadtarchiv St. Gallen, Spitalarchiv, G, 9, fol. 35v.

68 Sonderegger, *Landwirtschaftliche Entwicklung*, 363–78; Bruno Meier and Dominik Sauerländer, *Das Surbtal im Spätmittelalter: Kulturlandschaft und Gesellschaft einer ländlichen Region (1250–1550)*, Beiträge zur Aargaugeschichte, 6 (Aarau, 1995), 145.

69 Hans-Jörg Gilomen, 'Die ökonomischen Grundlagen des Kredits und die christlich-jüdische Konkurrenz im Spätmittelalter', in Eveline Brugger and Birgit Wiedl (eds), *Ein Thema – zwei Perspektiven: Juden und Christen in Mittelalter und Frühneuzeit* (Innsbruck, 2007), 139–69, at p. 146.

70 See the examples concerning viticulture in Sonderegger, *Landwirtschaftliche Entwicklung*, 378–93.

71 Stefan Sonderegger, 'Wirtschaftliche Regionalisierung in der spätmittelalterlichen Nordostschweiz. Am Beispiel der Wirtschaftsführung des Heiliggeistspitals St. Gallen', *Schriften des Vereins für Geschichte des Bodensees und seiner Umgebung*, 105 (1987), 19–37. With

#### 4 Written Rules and Controls

Risk and profit sharing, investment sharing and help, loans, exemption from duties and more document the predominantly cooperative side of the active engagement of the lords with the peasant farmer's economy. But legal dependencies – as shown in the case of commercial and specialized cattle farming – were also superimposed on the relationship between lord and tenant by financial obligations from loans. Here we are dealing with a complex situation of dependencies. Peasant farmers were bound by feudal rights to lords, and economically they were dependent on their lord in various ways – for production, their subsistence, and even for the sale of the end product.

These dependencies were actively controlled and managed. On the one hand, this was done through the presence of feudal bailiffs and *Amtshäuser* in the countryside, and on the other, through legal and administrative documents. Writing was used specifically for economic administration. This can be seen on two levels: legal and administrative. Regarding the legal level, on the leasing of land, the connected rights and duties of the tenants were documented in great detail in writing. The duty of annual payment of dues and the tax duty when the property changed hands in a sale (*Erschatz*) of the land were specifically mentioned. Further, particulars could be found on arbitration procedures in case of conflict, and on sanctions in the case of the farmer failing to pay taxes or in a case of bad management. Even risk and damage sharing between the hospital and the tenant farmers in case of a failed harvest has been documented since the middle of the fourteenth century. But here, too, it depends on the type of landlord. New, urban lordships differed from the old, ecclesiastical lordships in the same region in the fifteenth century. The level of detail illustrated above is inherent in the urban context, meaning in urban hospitals and new urban monasteries founded in the thirteenth century. In comparison, leasehold contracts from the old Benedictine monastery of St Gall, that were issued at the same time, have far less detail.<sup>72</sup> The monastic contracts do not regulate the management of the farm; they only document the relationship of the feudal overlord to his tenants and not to the subtenants, who were the peasant farmers.

In addition to this legal level, there is the administrative one. Alongside thousands of deeds, the hospital of St Gallen possessed an extensive collection

a focus on lordship, see recently Julien Demade, 'Grundrente, Jahreszyklus und monetarisierte Zirkulation: Zur Funktionsweise des spätmittelalterlichen Feudalismus', *Historische Anthropologie*, 17/2 (2009), 222–44.

72 Cf. Sonderegger, 'Vom Nutzen', 86–116.

of administrative documents. Administrative records, interest ledgers, annual financial statements, and debt registers served to control the enforcement of that which was legally agreed to in the deeds, as well as to control the payments and debts of the farmers.<sup>73</sup> In this area, too, there were great differences, for a collection of administrative writing like this did not exist in the old Benedictine monastery of St Gall, or at least it hardly approached the quantity of that produced elsewhere.<sup>74</sup> Here is a concrete example showing how the extension of the use of written text occurred in pragmatic connection with and in the context of urban economic life, in the north Alpine region.<sup>75</sup> Urban hospitals embodied the new 'category' of lords,<sup>76</sup> for whom economic interest was a high priority. This can be explained by the hospitals' function. Alongside their social role, they also had an economic role to fulfil. With their territory in the urban surroundings, they not only secured food for their inhabitants, but through the agricultural produce trade they also ensured the provision of the inhabitants of the town and its surroundings. It is within this context that the active participation of manorial lords such as these in the economy of their tenant farmers must be seen. In urban institutions in particular, there are many examples that show how late medieval manorial lords acted in an economically dynamic and innovative way. Late medieval manorial lordship was diverse; the generalizing idea of a withdrawal of the lord from the peasant farmer's economy does not do it justice.

73 Cf. the collection of records in the Stadtarchiv der Ortsbürgergemeinde St. Gallen: Stadtarchiv St. Gallen, SpA, vol. A, 3–A, 204 (Pfennigzinsbücher des Spitals von 1442 bis 1872); SpA, vol. B, 1–B, 370 (Jahrrechnungen des Spitals von 1444 bis 1849), SpA, vol. C, 1–C, 97 (Schuldbücher des Spitals von 1434 bis 1869).

74 Roger Sablonier and Alfred Zangger, *Inventar spätmittelalterlicher Wirtschafts- und Verwaltungsquellen im Stiftsarchiv Einsiedeln*, Stiftsarchiv St. Gallen, Staatsarchiv des Kantons Schaffhausen, Staatsarchiv des Kantons Thurgau, (Zürich, 1989). According to Robinson, *Die Fürstabtei*, 202, the recordkeeping at the monastery of St Gall was not very extensive, if compared to the records kept by other ruling institutions, for instance, those of towns.

75 Hagen Keller, 'Die Entwicklung der europäischen Schriftkultur im Spiegel der mittelalterlichen Überlieferung: Beobachtungen und Überlegungen', in Karl Leidinger and Dieter Metzler (eds), *Geschichte und Geschichtsbewusstsein, Festschrift für Karl-Ernst Jeismann zum 65. Geburtstag* (Münster, 1990), 171–204. See also Dorothee Rippmann, 'Leben, Arbeit und materielle Kultur im Lichte pragmatischer Schriftlichkeit in der Schweiz', in Gudrun Gleba and Niels Petersen (eds), *Wirtschafts- und Rechnungsbücher des Mittelalters und der Frühen Neuzeit: Formen und Methoden der Rechnungslegung: Städte, Klöster und Kaufleute* (Göttingen, 2015), 209–53.

76 Ludolf Kuchenbuch, 'Vom Dienst zum Zins? Bemerkungen über agrarische Transformationen in Europa vom späteren 11. zum beginnenden 14. Jahrhundert', *Zeitschrift für Agrargeschichte und Agrarsoziologie*, 51 (2003), 11–29, at p. 16.

## 5 Conclusion

The present article has looked at relations between lords and farmers in the day-to-day economy of the late Middle Ages. The basis for this has been recent study of the late medieval rural community, with a focus on the German-speaking part of Switzerland and southern Germany. As an initial result, it has become clear that there is a need to differentiate the typical narrative of literature on the topic, which depicts the shift from manorialism / *Grundherrschaft* to the so-called rental-based manorial system / *Rentengrundherrschaft* in the course of the high and late medieval period. Traditional features of a *Rentengrundherrschaft* include the extensive relinquishing of the manorial demesne in favour of parcelling out land in leasehold in return for payment in duties, and the general tendency of the proprietor of the land to disengage from agricultural production. However, newer regional studies of the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries point in another direction. They show that many manorial lords participated more actively than before in the economy of their tenant farmers, and that they were very active. Thus, one late medieval lordship system does not exist. Or, to put it in highly simplified terms: at the two ends of a wide spectrum of different manorial lordship, both of these types of lord could be found; at one end was the lord who engaged more than ever in the farming economy whilst at the same time continuing to work his own demesne, and at the other end the type of lord who was himself hardly active at all any longer in agriculture and only collected payments due.

This is the conclusion arrived at when asking the question of which manorial lords the peasant farmer had a relationship with his day-to-day activities. Connected to this question is that of actual ownership and lordship. These are questions that, in my opinion, have as yet not been asked enough when studying rural society. Answering them will help to gain a differentiated picture of the late medieval manorial system. Using the example of the imperial abbey of St Gall, it is possible to show what is meant by this. With many territories in eastern Switzerland, the ancient Benedictine monastery of St Gall, founded in the early Middle Ages, had the overlordship – the *dominium directum* / *Obereigentum* – but did not work the land itself, rather leasing it to urban citizens or urban institutions, lay or ecclesiastical, that were founded in the late Middle Ages. The old abbey of St Gall thus still held the overlordship, *the dominium directum*, over the land; citizens and communal institutions were thus their tenants with all the associated rights, that is, they were the holders of the *dominium indirectum* / *Untereigentum*. Like the monastery, these urban actors usually did not work the land themselves, but subleased it to peasant families in the region. These subtenants – peasant farmers – were those who used the

territory for agricultural purposes; they held the *dominium utile* / *Nutzungseigentum*, the right to use the land, which they paid for in natural produce, money, and other obligations. Thus, the holders of the *dominium indirectum* – citizens, communal institutions, and new monasteries – in practice turned into manorial lords themselves, over their subtenants, that is, over the peasant farmers. Whilst the overlord had mostly withdrawn from the agricultural economy, the new de facto manorial lords were participating more than ever, and with their own, mainly commercial interests in the farming economy.

These new lords of the late Middle Ages and the early modern period were in close contact with their peasant farmers. Daily economic relations can be summed up as ambivalent. On the one hand, in many regions there was intense cooperation that encouraged consensual agreement. On the other hand, strong economic and financial ties caused great dependencies. With the active engagement of these new manorial landlords in the rural economy, the duties of the peasant farmers towards their landlords were strengthened. Added to the traditional dependencies, more and more economic ones came into existence. The peasant families were still bound legally – manorial – to their landlord, and new dependencies were created economically, from the production to the commercialization. The relationship between lord and peasant farmer, which up until then had been of a strongly feudalistic nature, was increasingly superimposed with capitalist<sup>77</sup> momentum.

## 6 Prospect

The question remains whether the results offered here for the regions of northern Switzerland and the region around Lake Constance are also representative of the Alpine regions of Tyrol and Bavaria, which are the focus of this collection of essays. Current research only allows an indication, not a conclusive answer. With the following comments, I would like to encourage further regional studies, on the basis of which it may in future be possible to make general statements about the relations between manorial lords and peasant farmers in the transition period from the late Middle Ages to the early modern period.

<sup>77</sup> Capitalist is here (based on the results of this research and in the context of the agriculture) understood to mean that the following criteria were of great importance: free disposition of the proprietors over the various categories of property; great freedom of decision for the actors as well as freedom of action; agriculture focused on profit and a high importance of loans. For the discussion of the term in general, see Jürgen Kocka, 'Writing the History of Capitalism', *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute*, 47 (2010), 7–24.

One argument in favour of the result presented here being in part representative is based on the following line of thought: work on the development of the manorial system relies mainly on edited sources. This can be shown by the region of St Gallen, which is the focus of my research. The monastery of St Gall is cited – as shown above – as a model case for the development of an important ecclesiastical lordship into a *Rentengrundherrschaft*. But the sources used to defend this view are taken from the old edition of charters (*Urkundenbuch*) of the abbey of St Gall.<sup>78</sup> This is – the name gives it away – an institutional collection, that mainly indexes only those charters and urbaria up to 1463 that are connected to the monastery of St Gall. However, this choice means that nearly half of the existing regional documents are ignored. Many older editions take this stance and only publish the sources of one single landlord. Thus, they only give us an insight into a very narrow section of the relations between manorial lord and peasant farmer. Current editions from the region studied here that take a regional approach<sup>79</sup> have a view to a more encompassing collection. They try to collect as many of the pertinent sources of a region as possible. Thus, they publish a mass of hitherto unpublished private documents, amongst which there are many leasehold contracts with details of the relationship between lord and lessee.

It is precisely these private documents, formerly unknown, which show that manorialism was not a dual relationship solely between one manorial lord and peasant farmer, but that there were different actors in-between, that de facto carried out the practice of the lordship. In a multi-layered complex of the manorial system, we are suddenly presented with very active lords and farmers, who entertain tight economic contact with one another. As soon as the mass of as yet unedited sources can be used for other regions too, we are likely to see that there, too, the relationships between lords and farmers were manifold and dynamic. This can also be taken without hesitation as an appeal for new editions from the late medieval – early modern period. The recently completed dissertation by Rezia Krauer on the land market in the region of St Gallen in the fourteenth century, which to a great extent relies on newly edited sources, clearly shows the potential of basic registering of sources for historical research. Her results are confirmed by the studies of Volker Stamm for Tyrol,<sup>80</sup> who – again on the basis of charters – comes to the conclusion that the

78 Hermann Wartmann, Traugott Schiess, Placid Bütler, and Paul Staerkle (eds), *Urkundenbuch der Abtei Sanct Gallen*, 6 vols (Zurich, 1863–1970).

79 Reworked edition of the St. Galler Urkundenbuch (Chartularium Sangallense), the Bündner Urkundenbuch and the Urkundenbuch Fürstentum Liechtenstein digital.

80 Stamm, 'Kauf und Verkauf', 42.

apparently rigid construct of an overlordship concentrated on a handful of territorial lords hides from view the widespread opportunities for economic action of many actors.

But it would be going too far to solely explain away gaps in the research due to missing source editions. This is because the material that provides most insight into the relationship between lords and peasant farmers are urbaria, tax books, interest ledgers, and notes kept by chance. These kinds of records of everyday life only start at the transition from the fourteenth to the fifteenth century, but quickly turn into a mass that is hard to view comprehensively and also not available in editions. The regional studies quoted above are based on such archival matter; Switzerland can fall back on a research tradition of four decades. In the questions and methods, similar studies for Vorarlberg, Tyrol, and Bavaria arrive at comparable results. Peasant farmers are not just seen as passive objects of the lords, (see hereto the chapter 'Peasant Participation', pp. 121–124 and the literature mentioned there); their freedom to dispose of the land they held in lease from manorial lords seems to have been similarly great as in the regions of northern Switzerland and Lake Constance. So, we can assume that in the whole of the eastern Alpine region, in relation to land use, there was the possibility for the peasant farmer to negotiate with the landlord.

Finally, I would like to mention that the present sketch is mainly confined to economic relations between manorial landlord and tenant. However, contact between lords and peasants occurred in all sectors and at all social levels. In northern Switzerland and the region around Lake Constance, as well as in Tyrol and Bavaria, one can assume a strong social differentiation in rural society. Certain new studies of Tyrol and Vorarlberg<sup>81</sup> show the detailed position of some heads of a village between lordship and village community. These so-called 'Ammänner' (mayors), who had legal and political functions, blur the distinctions between belonging to the official nobility or the village community, especially as social climbing and falling was continuous. In any case, villages are central to the exploration of the relations between lords and peasants. It might at first glance be surprising that the rise of communal autonomy that shows itself in the development of village and church communities, of alpine cooperatives and other user communities should strengthen the bonds

81 Matthias Moosbrugger, 'Der hintere Bregenzerwald – eine Bauernrepublik? Neue Untersuchungen zu seiner Verfassungs- und Strukturgeschichte im Spätmittelalter', *Forschungen zur Geschichte Vorarlbergs*, 9, dissertation, University of Innsbruck, Konstanz, 2009; Alois Niederstätter, *Geschichte Vorarlbergs*, i: *Vorarlberg im Mittelalter* (Innsbruck, 2014), 119–46.



between lords and peasants. But it is clear from village regulations (*Weistum / Dorfoffnung*) that the regulation of the neighbouring field, forest, and meadow use, as well as the justice system, was in the interest of the lords as well as the peasants. A good relationship between landlords and peasant farmers was dependent on structures that served to regulate conflict and thus also served the development and maintenance of a certain level of consensus amongst each other. Both – conflict and consensus between manorial lord and tenants – belonged to daily life. The theme of the relations between lords and peasant farmers in Scandinavia and the Alps continues to present a wide field of research.

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## Glossary

- Abgabengrundherrschaft** rent providing manorial system  
**Allmende, Gmain** common (meadows, woods, wastes, or pasturage)  
**Alm** alpine pasture  
**Amman** leader in a Hofmark, elected by peasants and confirmed by the manorial lord  
**Ármaðr (old Norwegian)** bailiff  
**Bauding, Bautaiding** manorial meeting/court  
**Ding, Taiding, Ehafttaiding** thing, court, assembly  
**Dominium directum** direct ownership  
**Dominium utile** proprietorial possession  
**Dómr (Old Norwegian)** ad hoc legal commission  
**Dorfgemeinde** village community  
**Dorfmeister (see also Danish Oldermann)** elected or appointed village leader  
**Dorfordnung** village law  
**Eigenleute, Leibeigene** serfs, bondsmen  
**Eigentum** property  
**Erbrecht** hereditary tenancy  
**Foged (Denmark)** district judge  
**Freistift** tenancy at will  
**Freizügigkeit** freedom to leave at will  
**Fronddienst** labour service, labour obligation  
**Fut/fogd (Norway)** royal bailiff  
**Gemeinde** community, commune  
**Genossenschaft** community  
**Gerichtsbarkeit** jurisdiction, judicial power  
**Gerichtsgemeinde** legal community  
**Gerichtsherrschaft** judicial authority/legal dominion  
**Gmain** an association of inhabitants holding a plot of land in a village with the right to use common land belonging to this village  
**Grundherr** lord of the manor  
**Grundherrschaft (see also Rentengrundherrschaft)** manorial system  
**Häusler, Kötter, Söldner, Sölleute** cottar  
**Herredsting (Denmark)** local thing  
**Herrschaft** dominion  
**Hof** peasant holding, farm  
**Hofmark** territory with manorial jurisdiction  
**Hofmarksgericht** seignorial court  
**Kopfzins** personal tax

# The Northern World

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# Peasants, Lords, and State

*Comparing Peasant Conditions in Scandinavia  
and the Eastern Alpine Region, 1000–1750*

*Edited by*

Tore Iversen  
John Ragnar Myking  
Stefan Sonderegger



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