



Helmer J. Helmers, Geert H. Janssen, eds.. *The Cambridge Companion to the Dutch Golden Age.*
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Edited by Helmer Helmers and Geert Janssen, *The Companion to the Dutch Golden Age* investigates historiographical topics related to Dutch populations, warfare, politics, economics, religions, the arts, and education. The time line accessed to understand these topics during the Dutch Golden Age proceeds from the rise of the United Provinces after the Union of Utrecht in 1579 through the religious debates at the Synod of Dort in 1618-19 into the Enlightenment, culminating at the Peace of Rijswijk with France in 1697. The volume questions what previous generations of scholars considered to be the miracle of Dutch cultural and social development during the seventeenth century. That historical thesis argues that the development of a relatively small nation into global prominence was based upon the emergence of capitalism, the Protestant work ethic, the rise of the first middle class, migration from other European nations, and maritime ingenuity. This volume continues a long historiographical project that has questioned the tenets of that general thesis, which can be found in the works of earlier historians such as K. W. Swart and Johan Huizinga. Scholars who criticize these arguments frequently point to the overemphasis on Dutch exceptionalism during the early modern era, arguing, as authors frequently assert within this volume, that the Dutch were facing similar cultural,

economic, and political fluctuations as much of the rest of western Europe.[1]

The introduction, nineteen chapters, and epilogue fulfill the obligations for an academic primer while often posing controversial questions for broader historiographies that push beyond the study of the Dutch Golden Age. As befits a reference work, the editors include important timelines, glossaries, and introductory notes that help guide the reader into the major events covered by the collection. The introduction explicitly investigates many controversial ideas of exceptionalism that define the Dutch Golden Age as a period of historical enigmas that arose from a combination of Dutch ingenuity, Calvinism, and the Protestant work ethic, which have frequently been related to ideas of supposed racial, cultural, and intellectual superiority above different European nations and colonized others. This volume recurrently revises earlier histories that relied on these theories of Dutch exceptionalism by building upon recent scholarship that places the Dutch Golden Age within greater processes of European development rather than as exceptional to broader European trends during the early modern era. Through specifically exploring the relationship between pastoral scenes within artwork of the Dutch Golden Age and narratives of empire, the introduction describes the development of the

United Provinces in a way that focuses much more on tension and ambiguity than the scholarly accounts of economic progress and democratic development that previously related to myths of Dutch superiority.

The first section concentrates three chapters on the movement of peoples and the development of new spatial regimes within the Netherlands. Maarten Prak emphasizes the importance of urbanization to the development of what scholars previously deemed the Dutch economic miracle, which was generally understood as a domineering historical development that urbanized the Netherlands through the rise of capitalism and emerging state bureaucracies. Prak critiques an overestimation that asserts that all regions of the Netherlands saw increased levels of urbanization during the seventeenth century. Rather, for Prak, urbanization occurred at an exceptional level only in the states of Holland. Therein, the development of greater towns, and the expansion of Amsterdam, led to superior political freedom and class development through the integration of civic and political cultures. This urbanization, especially in Holland, increased education, furthered architectural development, and pushed a higher literacy rate through a substantial publishing industry. The importance of urbanization, as foregrounded by Prak, centers many later debates within the volume regarding Dutch development through the expansion of the *burgher* class, the different political regimes of the Stadtholders, and civic changes in Holland.

The second chapter, from J. L. Price, explores a frequently investigated topic for Dutch history: the control and maintenance of the sea. Rather than focus on a narrative of reclamation and dikes that sets the Dutch people against the rising tides of the North Sea, Price investigates how the Dutch worked with the changes of the tides, sometimes through reclamation but also through the creation of a vast canal system and the necessary waterways for irrigation as a part of the Dutch

agricultural revolution of the seventeenth century. Because of technological changes to windmills, water increasingly became an agricultural ally for the greater development of transportation systems, communication networks facilitated by barges, and urbanization that came from the spatial control afforded by the *polders* (drained lands). Moreover, the Dutch were often able to work with the power of the sea to create military advantages out of their small territories when set against other European powers, as with the use of interior waterways to move goods during the Dutch Revolt against the Habsburgs that persisted at different levels of intensity from 1568 until 1648.

The first section, on people and space, ends with a chapter by Geert Janssen on immigration and emigration during the Dutch Golden Age, which both worked to create a heterogeneous population that shaped economic opportunity and necessitated policies of religious and political freedom. The Netherlands became, in part, a land of refugees who often arrived to a patriotic sense of welcoming that was an emerging aspect of Dutch nationalist identity. Following traditions of the Batavian Myth, whereby earlier Dutchmen saw themselves as ancestors of a renegade Germanic tribe that defied the Roman Empire, many in the Netherlands of the seventeenth century understood themselves as heroes who overcame a similar Spanish power through the Dutch Revolt to become a nation that welcomed the rebellious from other regions. However, as Janssen points out, this generally positive understanding of migration during the Dutch Golden Age is also countered by the rise of Dutch involvement in the slave trade of the Atlantic World and as a central part of colonialist experiments within Asia.

The second section of the *Companion* centers upon the emergence of mixed politics within the Dutch state and new perceptions of warfare. Pepijn Brandon starts the section by showing how the Dutch military was reconstituted into a central-

ized state army even as the United Provinces remained nominally republican. With this state army at hand, the Dutch Golden Age was an era of nearly permanent warfare, whereby a financial complex developed that linked the state and the military through sometimes corrupt monetary arrangements. Judith Pollmann shows how expansion of the new Dutch armed forces was supported through motivating discourses on war, violence, and memory. Through articulating the Dutch recollection of Spanish atrocities, she portrays how victimhood narratives allowed the Dutch to consolidate a national description of martyrdom that became glorious with the victories of the Dutch Revolt and later wars against European nations. To impose these narratives, Dutch civic culture increasingly elaborated a commemoration culture of medals, memorials, and tombs for fallen soldiers.

The third section of the volume focuses on changes to Dutch political culture within a transnational early modern era that exchanged politics and politicians across new national borders. David Onnekink's chapter centers upon the complex networks of informal and formal political power that created patchwork relationships between the local and federal, republicans and monarchy, and the lower classes and aristocrats. Because of these many flexible relations, political discourses had to be upheld through narratives of nationalism, like the ethnic roots observable within the Batavian Myth. Helmer Helmers's chapter complements the introductions within Onnekink's interlude to show how flexible politics often created aspects of what other scholars have deemed a discussion culture or a public sphere during the Dutch Golden Age. Focusing on aspects of both freedom and repression that came through a burgeoning print culture, Helmers revises earlier positive ideas of discussion culture to pose modern questions regarding the role of hegemony. This analysis focuses on the rise of pamphlet wars, especially those surrounding the Dutch Revolt, whereby the new state of the United Provinces

may have emerged out of controversies debated through print. Later development of the print culture involved the importance of civic petitions, the uses of *coranto* (newspapers), and the role of barges for moving information either through spoken word or upon the many new types of paper.[2]

The fourth section looks at the growing Dutch economy and emerging global networks that stretched into Asia and across the Atlantic world. Danielle van den Heuvel first explores Marxist debates on whether the Dutch Golden Age created the first market economy and the consequential rise of modern capitalism. Focusing on agricultural specialization and maritime trades, this chapter engages the importance of guilds, migrant workers, and child labor to early market development. Through the later rise of credit systems, what emerged in the seventeenth century looks much like consumer markets, early capitalism, and forms of class development, often generated through the increased wealth gained from overseas colonial adventures. That global trading empire is investigated in the next chapter, from Michiel van Groesen, where a specific type of political pragmatism is articulated as vital in the emergence of Dutch colonialism. The Dutch often faced indigenous resistance within their Asian colonies, where the Dutch East India Company (VOC) created political forms of extractive colonialism and possible genocides upon the inhabitants of places like the Banda Islands. In the Atlantic world, the Dutch West India Company (WIC) worked to create colonies with experiments in Brazil and New Amsterdam, but generally shifted focus to the profits of the slave trade during the seventeenth century when Dutch colonies in Asia were becoming more solidified and those in the New World were faltering.

The fifth section explores the Reformation, Calvinism, and other aspects of religious culture within the Netherlands during the Dutch Golden Age. Charles Parker's essay examines Dutch reli-

gious traditions in the wake of the Reformation, when Dutch Calvinism emerged as the fundamental religious force in the Netherlands. However, even with this dominant enthusiasm, Dutch religious culture was inherently pluralist due to the mass immigration that had been a relative constant of Dutch society since the Middle Ages. As a result, many theological debates shook Dutch Calvinism, including encounters with Arminianism and Cartesian Rationalism during the seventeenth century. Christine Kooi explores these forms of pluralism in the following chapter by summarizing how the Dutch state set up a regime of toleration, whereby laws existed to contain heretical religious behavior but were rarely enforced against minorities. This informal respect for other religious traditions possibly emerged out of the spiritual concerns of the Dutch Revolt, whereby a respect for freedom of conscience was important for overcoming the dreaded Spanish Inquisition.

Angela Vanhaelen's chapter finishes the section on religion, providing an analysis of spiritual culture through the lens of materialism, patronage, and aesthetics. These fields offered the Dutch a relatively paradoxical spiritual culture based upon a pluralism that respected contributions from religious minorities while arguing for discipline and devotion in daily life. Specifically, Jewish patrons were essential in the creation of the vast networks that spread Dutch artworks to other spaces of Europe. Additionally, Catholic artworks and architecture were retained, even during stages of the Reformation when iconoclasm and the rise of *vanitas* paintings were common. While Catholics were often able to practice in the open, even to the point of continuing pilgrimages to sacred sites, members of reformed sects that did not adhere to organized Calvinism often faced more legal impositions on their daily lives.

The regularly illustrated sixth section of the volume looks at arts and letters, generally considered the center of study for the history of the

Dutch Golden Age. This important section starts with an essay from Claartje Rasterhoff on the developing markets for books and paintings that contributed to the development of a public sphere that included nationalist beliefs regarding the importance of Dutch intellectual creativity. Such a national myth of Dutch ingenuity through artwork frequently developed within this public sphere and the associated discussion cultures of the urbanizing Netherlands. In an essay that focuses much more on historiography than the rest of the edition, Rasterhoff summarizes debates on the exceptional nature of Dutch artworks like Delftware and genre paintings, the importance of civic sponsorship, and the role of foreign investment and immigration in aesthetics.[3] Genre paintings are the central subject of the next chapter from Wayne Franits, who explores how Dutch artists created images of everyday life that were amenable to their patrons and purchasers. The peasant imagery prized within much Dutch art often represents ideas of domestic virtue and wholesomeness that were much more uncommon than suggested by the popularity of artworks from Johannes Vermeer and Rembrandt.[4]

Theo Hermans engages aesthetics in the following chapter via a chronological reading of changes to the field of literature within the Dutch Republic. Focusing more on the public aspects of literary culture, this essay examines the introduction of metric poetry, the importance of written war memorials, and the talents of writers like Joost van den Vondel. The chapter ends with an analysis of the importance of classicism in these debates, which becomes the central aspect of Stijn Bussels's work within the next chapter. Therein, Bussels explores historiographical debates related to how Dutch scholars understood the importance of ancient knowledge to the modern development of aesthetics within Dutch artworks and architecture. These debates were often transnational and involved many similarities between understandings of the baroque and the classical. Focusing on how Dutch artists and scholars read Erasmus and

imitatio, Bussels analyzes the role of French classicism in the theaters of Vondel, Daniel Heinsius, Jacob Cats, and Jan Vos.

The seventh and final section investigates questions of Enlightenment, political radicalism, and changing regimes of knowledge. The first of three essays in this section, from Dirk van Miert, looks at education systems in the Netherlands, which cultivated high literacy rates through a focus on vernacular reading of the Bible that arose during the Reformation and the previously existing importance of reading for guilds, craftwork, and civic development. This essay exposes the central importance of philology, humanism, and the scientific method in the creation of different Dutch sciences. Harold Cook engages these debates on the New Science, focusing on transnational elements of scientific development that engaged scholars like Christiaan Huygens and pressed alongside consumerist tendencies and the collecting culture of Dutch aristocrats. Through an interesting aside on the debate regarding the invention of the telescope, Cook engages the importance of practical uses within these early aspects of the Scientific Revolution in the Netherlands. The final chapter, from Jonathan Israel, investigates the importance of Dutch radical thought within the Enlightenment, a topic he has addressed often and astutely. Focusing on Baruch Spinoza, Israel shows how the radical elements of the Dutch Enlightenment emerged out of unstable governmental systems within the Netherlands. These radical foundations linked anti-Catholic and antimonarchical tendencies from many transnational writers to create diverse beliefs on heresy and democracy that came from the Spinoza Circle.[5]

Generally, the volume references multilingual historiographies to cover the relevant topics of the Dutch Golden Age. A short epilogue from the editors of the collection recenters the important contributions of the reference aspects of the collection through a reading of historical memory.

The editors search the memory of the Dutch Golden Age applied within the popular writings of Simon Schama, which defines Dutch abundance and cultural greatness during the Golden Age without offering context on colonial spaces from where that wealth derived. These debates focus on what place the Dutch should occupy in the deliberation on the European rise of modernity and the radical secularism that has often been defined as an important aspect of the Western Enlightenment.[6]

Although the topic might seem too theoretical for a reference work, the *Companion* does seem lacking in direct analysis of racial identities within Dutch colonial experiments in the Atlantic world and Asia. Furthermore, a chapter on everyday home life for the different classes of Dutch citizens may have helped to cure an often-lacking analysis of gender. Still, this *Companion* is an essential reference for anyone starting an academic project on the Dutch Golden Age. And, as with the essays from Price, Helmers, Bussels, and Israel, the work engages and expands important historiographical fields regarding Dutch involvement as a part of capitalist, democratic, and liberal forms of modernity rather than an exceptional force pushing those advances.

Notes

[1]. Koenraad W. Swart, *The Miracle of the Dutch Republic As Seen in the Seventeenth Century: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered at University College, London, 6 November 1967* (London: H. K. Lewis & Co, 1969); Johan Huizinga, Pieter Geyl, and F. W. N. Hugenholtz, *Dutch Civilisation in the Seventeenth Century, and Other Essays* (London: Collins, 1968).

[2]. Willem Frijhoff and Marijke Spies, *1650: Hard-Won Unity* (London: Palgrave, 2004).

[3]. Jan de Vries and Ad van der Woude, *The First Modern Economy: Success, Failure, and Perseverance of the Dutch Economy, 1500-1815* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[4]. Timothy Brook, *Vermeer's Hat: The Seventeenth Century and the Dawn of the Global World* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2008).

[5]. Jonathan Israel, *A Revolution of the Mind: Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

[6]. Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (London: Knopf, 1987).

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