# The Dutch Republic as a Bourgeois Society

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Historians have often portrayed the Dutch Republic as the first 'bourgeois' society. What they had in mind was an early example of a society dominated by the sort of middle class that emerged in most other European countries after the French and Industrial Revolutions. In this article, 'bourgeois' is perceived in a slightly different way. By looking at the 'bourgeois' as 'citizens' – often, but not necessarily, middle class in a social sense – the article paints a picture of a plethora of blossoming urban civic institutions. Such civic institutions also existed in other European countries. What set the Dutch Republic apart, however, and indeed made it an early example of a 'bourgeois' society, was the dominance of these civic institutions in the Republic's socio-political life.

## Introduction

Johan Huizinga remains Holland's most famous historian, more than fifty years after his death in 1945. His short book on *Dutch Civilisation in the Seventeenth Century*, first published in Dutch in 1941, probably remains the single most famous text on this particular episode in Dutch history. In it, Huizinga focuses on one element of Dutch society in particular: its bourgeois [Dutch: *burgerlijk*] character.[1] Few modern historians would quarrel with the characterisation of Dutch society as 'bourgeois'. However, their interpretation of this key word would probably be radically different from what Huizinga had in mind in 1941. For Huizinga, 'bourgeois' was first and foremost a lifestyle, and most likely the lifestyle that he had experienced first-hand himself, as a member of the Dutch upper middle class. A lifestyle that he would have contrasted with that of the aristocracy, which he evoked so impressively in his *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*.[2] Huizinga's interpretation was rooted in a discourse on the Dutch national character that first emerged in the late eighteenth century, but came into full

◀ Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn, Begging Family Receiving Alms at the Door of a House, 1648. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

bloom during the nineteenth. Modern research, on the other hand, tends to emphasise very different traits.[3] It associates 'bourgeois' with civil society and its institutions, and especially urban citizenship. In a sense, this implies a return to an earlier definition of the word 'bourgeois', as it was understood during the seventeenth century itself.

The foundations for this new interpretation of early modern 'bourgeois' – perhaps we should say at this point: *bürgerliche* – society were laid in Germany. It has a number of different roots, which ultimately all come back to constitutional history, a type of historiography more popular in Germany than in most other countries. German historians Peter Blickle and Heinz Schilling have used constitutional history to provide a novel interpretation of late medieval and early modern European societies. Blickle introduced the term 'communalism' to describe urban and rural societies in Southern Germany and Switzerland.[4] In 'communalist areas', the owners of the means of production (land, or artisan workshops) were politically in charge of their communities. Authorities were elected in the form of general assemblies, for example. The republican states that developed in these regions were rooted in the

1    Remieg Aerts, 'De burgerlijkheid van de Gouden Eeuw: Geschiedenis van een constructie', in: Harald Hendrix and Marijke Meijer Drees (eds.), *Beschaafde burgers. Burgerlijkheid in de vroegmoderne tijd* (Amsterdam 2001) 20-21; also Remieg Aerts, 'De erenaam van burger. Geschiedenis van een teloorgang', in: Joost Kloek and Karin Tilmans (eds.), *Burger. Een geschiedenis van het begrip 'burger' in de Nederlanden van de middeleeuwen tot de 21ste eeuw* (Amsterdam 2001) 313-345; J.L. Price, *Dutch Society 1588-1713* (London 2000), especially chapter 4, 'A Bourgeois Society?'

2    For this cultural interpretation of 'bourgeois', Remieg Aerts and Henk te Velde (eds.), *De stijl van de burger. Over Nederlandse burgerlijke cultuur vanaf de middeleeuwen* (Kampen 1998).

For a cultural interpretation that connects to the approach favoured in this chapter, see the works by literary historian Herman Pleij, in particular his *De sneeuwpoppen van 1511. Literatuur en stadscultuur tussen middeleeuwen en moderne tijd* (Amsterdam 1988); Herman Pleij et al., *Op belofte van profijt. Stadsliteratuur en burgermoraal in de Nederlandse letterkunde van de middeleeuwen* (Amsterdam 1991); Herman Pleij, *Het gevleugelde woord. Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse literatuur 1400-1560* (Amsterdam 2007); and historian Arjan van Dixhoorn: *Lustige geesten. Rederijkers in de Noordelijke Nederlanden 1480-1650* (Amsterdam 2009) and Arjan van Dixhoorn and Susie Speakman Sutch (eds.), *The Reach of the Republic of Letters: Literary and Learned Societies in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Leiden 2008).

3    A comprehensive survey from the perspective favoured in this chapter is Maarten Prak, *The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge 2005).

4    Peter Blickle, *Deutsche Untertanen. Ein Widerspruch* (Munich 1981); and Blickle, *Kommunalismus. Skizzen einer gesellschaftlichen Organisationsform,* volume 2 (Cologne 2001).

communalist traditions, according to Blickle. Schilling, who objects to Blickle's conflation of town and countryside, proposes an urban republicanism that he too considers typical of the political culture of early modern German towns.[5] This urban republicanism consisted of four main elements. Firstly, urban citizens were entitled to personal freedom, which protected them and their property against arbitrary assault. Secondly, all citizens were considered equal in their rights and duties as these were derived from their membership of the community. Thus, they paid taxes according to their capacity, helped to defend the town in times of crisis, and so on. Thirdly, the citizenry claimed political representation, not on an individual basis, but as a collective. The community was bound by oath as a corporate unity, entitled to underwrite important political decisions either directly, in general assemblies, or through an elected body that represented all citizens. And fourthly, the community did accept oligarchic rule, but only if it was exercised collectively (and not dominated by a single family or individual) and protected the well-being of the community as a whole. Interesting observations could be made about similarities and differences between urban and rural communities in the Netherlands[6], but the main point here is to note that, according to Blickle and Schilling, constitutional arrangements were not just political, but rather expressions of a whole social system that I prefer to call 'corporatist'. Corporatism was a social system defined by urban institutions, most of which were extensions, in one way or another, of the guild model (hence 'corporatism'), embedded in the framework of a more or less autonomous urban community which was a super-corporation in its own right. These institutions not only shaped the lives of late medieval and early modern European urban communities, but they also provided their citizens with an identity, expressed in numerous manuscripts and printed documents, and in works of art.[7]

5    Heinz Schilling, 'Gab es im späten Mittelalter und zu Beginn der Neuzeit in Deutschland einen städtischen "Republikanismus"? Zur politischen Kultur des alteuropäischen Stadt-bürgertums', in: Helmut Koenigsberger (ed.), *Republiken und Republikanismus im Europa der Frühen Neuzeit* (Munich 1988) 101-143; translated as 'Civic Republicanism in Late Medieval and Early Modern German Cities', in: Heinz Schilling, *Religion, Political Culture and the Emergence of Early Modern Society: Essays in German and Dutch History* (Leiden 1992) 3-59.

6    For reasons of space, but also because of a lack of specific studies, the countryside will not be discussed in this paper.

7    Elaborated in Maarten Prak, *Republikeinse veelheid, democratische enkelvoud. Sociale verandering in het Revolutietijdvak. 's-Hertogenbosch 1770-1820* (Nijmegen 1999) chapter 7; in abbreviated form also in Maarten Prak, 'Indentité urbaine, identités sociales: Les bourgeois de Bois-le-Duc au xviiie siècle', *Annales ESC* 48 (1993) 907-933; Ann Katherine Isaacs and Maarten Prak, 'Cities, Bourgeoisies, and States', in: Wolfgang Reinhard (ed.), *Power Elites and State Building* (Oxford 1996) 208-210, and Maarten Prak, 'Bourgeoisie, Föderalismus und Modernisierung in der Frühen Neuzeit', in: Nada Boskovska Leimgruber (ed.), *Die Frühe Neuzeit in der Geschichtswissenschaft. Forschungstendenzen und Forschungserträge* (Paderborn 1997) 91-108.

A strong stimulus for the kind of approach favoured in this chapter has been provided in recent years by the renewed interest among social scientists in the role of 'civil society' in the creation of social stability and economic prosperity.[8] Particularly influential in this literature has been the work of American political scientist Robert Putman, who has demonstrated that civic institutions and citizen participation could explain why Southern Italy was poor and Northern Italy rich. He also argued that the contrast between the two regions was historically determined.[9] In recent years, economists, for example, have argued about the role of institutions – short-hand in most cases for civil society – in the creation of economic prosperity.[10] All of which raises some very interesting questions about Dutch history. At least since the seventeenth century, the Netherlands has been among the most prosperous nations in the world.[11] To what extent have the institutional make-up of its society, and more specifically its citizenship arrangements, contributed to this remarkable feature? The purpose of this chapter is to investigate citizenship and its attendant aspects in the Netherlands for the early modern period. To come to grips with the somewhat slippery concept of 'civil society', I will discuss the legal dimensions of citizenship, but also its practical applications in the political conflicts of the time. We will, moreover, look at the discourse of citizenship, and ponder the existence of something we might call 'urban republicanism'. Finally, we will briefly place this in a wider European perspective, to see how Dutch citizenship arrangements can throw light on features of the European socio-political landscape.

## 1. The urban community defined

If we are correct in assuming that 'bourgeois' in the early modern era was defined by membership of the urban community, it is obviously important to establish how urban communities were constituted, and how their membership was regulated. This is not to imply that legal definitions suffice to understand how urban communities and citizenship worked. As we will see later, there was a whole set of practices that coincided only in imperfect ways

8   E.g. Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani (eds.), *Civil Society: History and Possibilities* (Cambridge 2001).

9   Robert D. Putnam, with Robert Leonardi and Raffaella Y. Nanetti, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton 1993). Basically the same argument, but now applied to the modern USA, in Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York 2000).

10   Most significantly in the work of Douglass C. North; see e.g. his *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (Cambridge 1990).

11   For recent assessments of the (positive) way the Dutch experience their lives, see Richard Layard, *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science* (London 2005) 32, and Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better* (London 2009) 7.

with the legal definitions, but even where these diverged, they as often as not employed the vocabulary and mental framework of those legal definitions.

### Urban community

Urban communities originated in north-western Europe during a relatively short span of time. In the Southern Netherlands, the formation of these communities took place mainly in the eleventh century; in the North, the process started probably between the first half of the twelfth and the middle of the fifteenth centuries.[12] The late arrivals generally failed to establish themselves as genuine towns, but early towns would usually also be difficult to distinguish from rural communities, at least during their early stages. This is because the creation of a medieval town was a two-pronged process. On the one hand, there was the emergence of a socio-economic and spatial unit, distinguished by its density of population and its diversified economy and range of occupations. On the other, the acquisition by this community of a certain amount of – albeit always incomplete – legal and administrative autonomy.[13] These urban communities went by a variety of Latin names, such as *oppidum*, *urbs*, *burgus*, *port*, until the Dutch finally settled on the German word *stad* [English: town, or city]. The fully-fledged members of the community, distinguished from the other inhabitants by the fact that they were entitled to the entire range of local privileges, became known as *burger* [English: burgess, or citizen], or *poorter*.[14] Official documents from the period always mention citizens and inhabitants alongside one another, as two distinct categories, although it was well-understood (and often explicitly articulated) that citizens also had to be inhabitants; we might therefore say that they were a superior form of inhabitant.

Urban communities normally emerged slowly, as did their establishment as a town. Amsterdam is a case in point. Originally a fishing village in the marshy lands of the county of Holland, it acquired certain legal privileges in the last quarter of the thirteenth century. These were

12   Excellent surveys for the Low Countries are R. Van Uytven, 'Stadsgeschiedenis in het Noorden en Zuiden', in: D.P. Blok et al. (eds.), *Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden,* volume 2 (Haarlem 1982) 188-253; Adriaan Verhulst, *The Rise of Cities in North-West Europe* (Cambridge 1999); and more specifically for the northern Low Countries: Reinout Rutte and Hildo van Engen (eds.), *Stadswording in de Nederlanden. Op zoek naar overzicht* (Hilversum 2008). On community formation, also Bas van Bavel, *Manors and Markets: Economy and Society in the Low Countries, 500-1600* (Oxford 2010) 103-123.

13   The conflation of the two has been an object of both deliberate and accidental confusion ever since. For an example of how contemporaries played with the various registers of citizenship discourse, see Maarten Prak, 'Cittadini, abitante e forestieri: Una classificazione della popolazione di Amsterdam nella prima eta moderna', *Quaderni Storici* 30:89 (1995) 331-357.

14   Frans C. Berkenvelder, *Stedelijk burgerrecht en burgerschap in Deventer, Kampen en Zwolle 1302-1811* (Zwolle 2005) chapters I and II.

consolidated for the first time in 1300, when a single document listed several legal elements that set the community of Amsterdam apart from the surrounding countryside, and required the community to henceforth regulate its own justice and administration. In 1342, these arrangements were described in greater detail in another privilege; it was at this point that the precise geographical boundaries of Amsterdam's legal and administrative territory were also set out. Articles 13-15 regulated the status of citizenship. This second privilege was acquired in return for a considerable sum of money pledged by Amsterdam to the Count of Holland.[15] This demonstrates how urban autonomy could be achieved at the initiative, and to the benefit of, the community, rather than being imposed from above.[16]

### Citizenship

Citizenship was – on paper at least – a clearly defined status, obtained in a variety of ways, all of which were, again, clearly defined. In Amsterdam, the bylaws distinguished four modes of acquisition.[17] The first was inheritance: anyone born in Amsterdam from citizen parents more or less automatically inherited their parents' status. This then merely had to be activated, by swearing the citizens' oath at the town hall and having oneself registered as a citizen on the same occasion. The surviving documents suggest, however, that many people did not bother to register, until they specifically needed to demonstrate their citizenship. In other cases, they relied on witnesses to prove their citizen status. The second was marriage: non-citizens who married a citizen from Amsterdam were entitled to citizenship, provided again that they registered as such. The third way of becoming a citizen of the city was to buy the status. For this, the city charged a fee which increased steadily during the first half of the seventeenth century. Although it has been suggested that this was an attempt to regulate the labour market[18], the more likely explanation is that citizenship was used as a good source of income. Given the attraction of

15    Eef Dijkhof, 'Op weg naar autonomie', in: Marijke Carasso-Kok (ed.), *Geschiedenis van Amsterdam*, volume 1. *Een stad uit het niets, tot 1578* (Amsterdam 2004) 63-73.

16    Two opposed schools argue that the creation of urban communities was either the result of bottom-up initiatives, or the outcome of deliberate policies by the princes: see Jaap Kruisheer, 'Stadsrechtbeoorkonding en stedelijke ontwikkeling', in: E.H.P. Cordfunke, F.W.N. Hugenholtz and Kl. Sierksma (eds.), *De Hollandse stad in de dertiende eeuw* (Zutphen 1988) 44-54 and Reinoud Rutte, *Stedenpolitiek en stadsplanning*

*in de Lage Landen (12de-13de eeuw)* (Zutphen 2002), respectively.

17    Prak, 'Cittadini'; Erika Kuijpers and Maarten Prak, 'Burger, ingezetene, vreemdeling. Burgerschap in Amsterdam in de 17e en 18e eeuw', in: Kloek and Tilmans, *Burger*, 113-132.

18    Hubert Nusteling, *Welvaart en werkgelegenheid in Amsterdam 1540-1860. Een relaas over demografie, economie, en sociale politiek van een wereldstad* (Amsterdam 1985) 145.

19    Erika Kuijpers, *Migrantenstad. Immigratie en sociale verhoudingen in zeventiende-eeuws Amsterdam* (Hilversum 2005) chapter 2.

Amsterdam as a port of destination for immigrants from all over Europe[19], the town council saw an opportunity to raise money for the expansion of certain public services, which were in any event under pressure from this same steady influx of immigrants.[20] When, in the second half of the seventeenth century, Amsterdam became less attractive to immigrants, the authorities were more or less forced to introduce a cheap variety of citizenship, called *ingezetene* [literally: inhabitant], which gave access to the guilds, but denied its owner other advantages of citizenship. The fourth mode of acquisition was as a personal gift from the town. A handful of famous Dutchmen, most notably successful admiral Michiel de Ruyter, received this honour, but otherwise it was a perk for ministers of the Dutch Reformed church, appointed in Amsterdam.

Citizenship entailed several distinct, and sometimes even necessary, privileges. The most obvious of these was access to one of the city's dozens of guilds. Only citizens could be admitted as a member. By implication, anyone who wanted to set up shop in one of the incorporated trades, had to make sure she or he was a citizen. The same was true for those vying for a political career. Senior posts in the local administration, including membership of the town council [*vroedschap*] were only open to citizens. Admission to the Civic Orphanage [*Burgerweeshuis*] of Amsterdam was likewise restricted to citizens. Ordinary inhabitants who died could expect their children to be sent to the Almoner's Orphanage [*Aalmoezeniersweeshuis*], where the food was poor, and no serious education was provided to the children. The Civic Orphanage, on the other hand, provided both aplenty. Contemporary sources suggest that among those who bought citizen status, this, together with guild membership, was seen as one of the more significant advantages.[21]

Generally speaking, both the modes of acquisition and the advantages attached to citizen status were similarly organised in other Dutch towns.[22] Some notable variations can nonetheless be observed. In 's-Hertogenbosch, for example, everybody who had been baptised in that town was automatically granted citizen status.[23] In some eastern towns, on the other hand, serious obstacles were placed in the way of outsiders who wanted to join the citizen community. Citizenship fees were remarkably high: in Arnhem and Nijmegen, not exactly great poles of attraction, it was two or even three times as expensive to become a citizen as in Amsterdam.[24] Moreover, several

20  Kuijpers and Prak, 'Burger, ingezetene', 121-122.

21  Kuijpers, *Migrantenstad*, 133.

22  For example in Haarlem: Gabriëlle Dorren, 'De eerzamen. Zeventiende-eeuws burgerschap in Haarlem', in: Aerts and Te Velde, *Stijl van de burger*, 60-79.

23  Prak, *Republikeinse veelheid*, chapter 2; Aart Vos, *Burgers, broeders en bazen. Het maatschappelijke*

*middenveld in de zeventiende en achttiende eeuw* (Hilversum 2007) chapter II.

24  Piet Lourens and Jan Lucassen, '"Zunftlandschaften" in den Niederlanden und im benachbarten Deutschland', in: Wilfried Reininghaus (ed.), *Zunftlandschaften in Deutschland und den Niederlanden im Vergleich* (Münster 2000) 16.

Gerbrand van den Eeckhout, The Wardens of the
Amsterdam Guild of Coopers and Wine Tapsters, 1673.
Amsterdams Historisch Museum.

eastern towns implemented legislation during the seventeenth century to prevent non-Calvinists from acquiring citizen status. This was a remarkable contrast with the towns of the west, where, on paper at least, no religious discrimination applied.[25] Only Jews would often find themselves unofficially barred from citizenship in many towns.[26] In Amsterdam, however, they were admitted, albeit subject to restricted conditions. They could not enter the craft guilds, even as citizens, and their status could not be inherited, thus forcing each generation of Jewish citizens to acquire their status anew.[27]

## 2. Living in the urban community

Citizenship was a legal status, but it would not have meant much if it were to remain just that. To see how that status affected ordinary Dutch people, we have to know more about the role urban institutions played in their daily lives.

### The guilds

Between twenty and thirty percent of all urban households were directly involved in the various guilds that existed in Dutch towns. If we include all the apprentices and journeymen, this number should probably be doubled, at least.[28] Previous generations of historians have been obsessed by the 'monopolies' exercised by the guilds, but modern research has emphasised the variety of contributions provided by the guilds to the urban community.[29] Central, however, to the guilds' self-perception was the citizen status of their members. As citizenship was a prerequisite for membership, this may seem self-evident, but in their petitions guilds also insisted that, as steady householders and regular taxpayers, they considered themselves to be the

25  Maarten Prak, 'The Politics of Intolerance: Citizenship and Religion in the Dutch Republic (17th-18th C.)', in: Ronnie Po-chia Hsia and Henk van Nierop (eds.), *Calvinism and Religious Toleration in the Dutch Golden Age* (Cambridge 2002) 159-175.

26  E.g. Berkenvelder, *Stedelijk burgerrecht,* 355, 359, 373-377.

27  Prak, 'Cittadini', 337.

28  For the quantitative dimensions of the guild system, Bert De Munck, Piet Lourens and Jan Lucassen, 'The Establishment and Distribution of Craft Guilds in the Low Countries, 1000-1800', in: Maarten Prak et al. (eds.), *Craft Guilds in the Early Modern Low Countries: Work,*

*Power and Representation* (Aldershot 2006) 32-73; for Amsterdam also Piet Lourens and Jan Lucassen, 'Ambachtsgilden binnen een handelskapitalistische stad. Aanzetten voor een analyse van Amsterdam c. 1700', *NEHA-Jaarboek voor economische, bedrijfs- en techniekgeschiedenis* 61 (1998) 145; for Den Bosch Prak, *Republikeinse veelheid,* 91.

29  A general survey of Dutch (and Flemish) guilds is provided in Prak, *Craft Guilds in the Early Modern Low Countries.* Also Karel Davids, *The Rise and Decline of Dutch Technological Leadership: Technology, Economy and Culture in the Netherlands, 1350-1800* (Leiden 2008) volume 2, 380-384, 392-393, 422-424.

backbone of urban society. In 1796, the dean of the Amsterdam tailors' guild suggested that ignoring the vital interests of the guild masters might force them to leave the town – this was a threat regularly incorporated into guild petitions – and could eventually reduce towns to mere villages again: which would be the ultimate disgrace, of course.[30]

As it was, guilds did have some very good grounds for claiming a pivotal role in society. First of all, they organised major sectors of the economy, in particular urban industries. Even though some of the newly established industries, such a sugar refining or diamond cutting[31], were never incorporated, it would be wrong to picture the guilds as hotbeds of traditionalism. Not only was an innovative industry such as painting incorporated, but there seems to be a strong causal link between the establishment of guilds in this industry and the development of Dutch Golden Age painting.[32] Moreover, the number of guilds increased in per capita terms from the late Middle Ages to the end of the eighteenth century, demonstrating that they were a living institution rather than dead wood surviving from a backward age.[33]

Guilds also provided conviviality to the middling sort in a variety of ways.[34] There were annual banquets on the name day of the patron saint, even after the introduction of the Reformation. Guild members, and often their wives, were buried by the guild. In Utrecht and Dordrecht, the guilds owned common graves, where the less affluent members could be buried.[35] About a quarter of all Dutch guilds had special insurance provisions for members in need.[36]

30  Maarten Prak, 'Individual, Corporation and Society: The Rhetoric of Dutch Guilds (18th. C.)', in: Marc Boone and Maarten Prak (eds.), *Statuts individuels, statuts corporatifs et statuts judiciares dans les villes européennes (moyen âge et temps modernes) / Individual, Corporate, and Judicial Status in European Cities (Late Middle Ages and Early Modern Period)* (Louvain, Apeldoorn 1996) 276. On the self-image of guilds, also L.H. Remmerswaal, *Een duurzame alliantie. Gilden en regenten in Zeeland, 1600-1800* (Middelburg 2009) chapter 4; Nico Slokker, 'Ruggengraat van de stedelijke samenleving. De rol van de gilden in de stad Utrecht, 1528-1818' (PhD dissertation Utrecht University 2009; publication expected in 2010) chapter 9.

31  Lourens and Lucassen, 'Ambachtsgilden binnen een handelskapitalistische stad', 133-144.

32  Maarten Prak, 'Painters, Guilds and the Art Market during the Dutch Golden Age', in: S.R. Epstein and Maarten Prak (eds.), *Guilds, Innovation and the European Economy, 1400-1800* (Cambridge 2008) 143-171.

33  De Munck, Lourens and Lucassen, 'The Establishment and Distribution of Craft Guilds', 39.

34  Vos, *Burgers*, chapter IV; Remmerswaal, *Een duurzame alliantie*, chapters 8-9; and Slokker, 'Ruggengraat', chapters 8 and 11 provide many examples.

35  Maarten Prak, 'Politik, Kultur und politische Kultur. Die Zünfte in den Nördlichen Niederlanden', in: Reininghaus, *Zunftlandschaften*, 78-79; Eric Palmen, 'De Dordtse gilden en hun sociale betekenis', in: Willem Frijhoff, Hubert Nusteling and Marijke Spies (eds.), *Geschiedenis van Dordrecht van 1572 tot 1813* (Hilversum 1998) 226-231.

### Civic militias

In the Middle Ages the *schutterijen*, or civic militias, had been the exclusive domain of people with citizen status.[37] The militias were small, elitist, and organised on the guild model. At times they were consulted as representatives of the citizen community. This happened more frequently during the Dutch Revolt, when local governments were keen to share the blame for controversial decisions with a wider group of people. At the same time, the cash-strapped rebels also began to think of the militias as cheap (because non-paid) soldiers. They were mainly used as defensive forces, and in some cases they acted heroically under siege. In the field, on the other hand, they were most of the time pretty hopeless against professional soldiers. Nonetheless, their numbers were hugely increased by drafting in non-citizens under a scheme of compulsory service for all 18 to 60-year-old males. In practice, the lower classes were excluded because they could not afford to buy their own equipment. Since this reformation of the militias during the 1580s, and especially after the end of hostilities in the Dutch Revolt, the militias became basically part-time police forces, patrolling the towns at night. Therefore they were also known as the night watch, and as such they were eternalised by Rembrandt in his homonymous painting from 1642.[38] This painting, a work commissioned by the militia officers themselves for public display in the militia premises, testifies to the importance attached to this institution by contemporaries. The militiamen were commonly known as the *burgers*, a word that in Dutch denotes citizens as well as members of the middle class. As we will see in greater detail below, the militiamen saw themselves as representing the urban community. On state visits and similar official occasions, they would be called out to parade through the streets, as the embodiment of the community. Such days usually ended with common drinking and eating in the *doelen*, or militia premises. In officer portraits, they are often depicted seated around a table, symbolising their confraternity as citizens on public duty.

36  Sandra Bos, *'Uyt liefde tot malcander'. Onderlinge hulpverlening binnen de Noord-Nederlandse gilden in internationaal perspectief (1570-1820)* (Amsterdam 1998), abbreviated and in English: Sandra Bos, 'A Tradition of Giving and Receiving: Mutual Aid within the Guild System', in: Prak, *Craft Guilds*, 174-193.

37  The best work on Dutch civic militias is Paul Knevel, *Burgers in het geweer. De schutterijen in Holland, 1550-1700* (Hilversum 1994). See also M. Carasso-Kok and J. Levy-van Halm (eds.), *Schutters in Holland. Kracht en zenuwen van de stad* (Haarlem, Zwolle 1988); Prak, *Republikeinse veelheid*, chapter 4; Vos, *Burgers*, chapter III.

38  E. Haverkamp-Begemann, *Rembrandt: The Nightwatch* (Princeton 1982).

Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn, The
Company of Captain Frans Banning
Cocq and Lieutenant Willem
van Ruytenburch, known as 'The
Nightwatch', 1642.
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

### Wards and neighbourhoods

Whereas all the towns of the Dutch Republic had their civic militias and their guilds, neighbourhood organisations were much more haphazard. Leiden and The Hague for instance, had as many as 96 and 71 respectively (in 1795), but as far as we know, Delft and Rotterdam had none.[39] Neighbourhood organisations were more marginal within the formal framework of urban institutions, but in the daily lives of their constituents they could nonetheless be quite important. In Haarlem, some of the neighbourhoods organised annual meals, which could last up to three days. Special songs would be composed for the occasion, washed down with abundant quantities of wine and beer. Poor neighbours would be allowed to participate for a very small financial contribution.[40] In Utrecht too, neighbourhoods organised such common meals.[41] In 's-Hertogenbosch, the nine *Blokken*, or wards, raised money to support the paupers of the neighbourhood, were involved in fire-fighting and during the winter were charged with ensuring access to water. There is no mention of common meals or other social activities, however.[42] Leiden actually had a double system. Official wards, known as *bon*, were involved in the registration of aliens and the creation of tax registers. They were very much part of local governance. The *gebuurten*, which consisted of no more than a block of houses most of the time, mainly served purposes of sociability. In the eastern provinces, on the other hand, the neighbourhoods – often called *straat* [literally: street] – were the basic institutions for citizen representation. Zwolle, for example, was subdivided into four such 'streets', each of which was entitled to twelve seats on the town's Common Council. Membership of the Common Council was co-optive, but councilmen were supposed to represent the interests of the citizens in their district.[43]

39  Herman Roodenburg, 'Naar een etnografie van de vroegmoderne stad. De 'gebuyrten' in Leiden en Den Haag', in: Peter te Boekhorst, Peter Burke and Willem Frijhoff (eds.), *Cultuur en maatschappij in Nederland 1500-1850* (Amsterdam 1992) 219-243, especially 233; also Gabriëlle Dorren, *'Het soet vergaren'. Haarlems buurtleven in de zeventiende eeuw* (Haarlem 1998), and Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly, 'Neighbourhood and Social Change in West-European Cities: Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries', *International Review of Social History* 38 (1993) 1-30.

40  Dorren, *'Het soet vergaren'*; also Gabriëlle Dorren, *Eenheid en verscheidenheid. De burgers van Haarlem in de Gouden Eeuw* (Amsterdam 2001) chapter 3.

41  Llewellyn Bogaers, 'Geleund over de onderdeur. Doorkijkjes in het Utrechtse buurtleven van de vroege middeleeuw tot in de zeventiende eeuw', *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden [BMGN]* 112: 3 (1997) 336-363.

42  Ton Kappelhof, *Armenzorg in Den Bosch. De Negen Blokken 1350-1810* (Utrecht 1983).

43  J.C. Streng, *'Stemme in staat'. De bestuurlijke elite in de stadsrepubliek Zwolle 1579-1795* (Hilversum 1997) chapter 3.3; also Maarten Prak, 'Verfassungsnorm und Verfassungsrealität in den niederländischen Städten des späten 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts. Die Oligarchie in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Deventer und Zutphen 1672/75-1795', in: Wilfried Ehbrecht (ed.), *Verwaltung und Politik in Städten Mitteleuropas. Beiträge zu Verfassungsnorm und Verfassungswirklichkeit in altständischer Zeit* (Cologne 1994) 55-83.

### Welfare

As early as during the Middle Ages, urban social arrangements had become a private-public enterprise. Even where these were nominally provided by the Roman Catholic church, basic welfare provisions were tightly regulated by the local authorities.[44] The poor were simply too important to be abandoned to the insecurities of private initiative. The Reformation, which was introduced in most Dutch towns during the 1580s, created a major problem wherever the church was still in charge of welfare. Roman Catholicism as an organised creed was officially prohibited, even though individuals were still allowed to adhere to the teachings of the Roman Catholic church. The Calvinist church provided welfare to its own membership, but not necessarily to everybody. At the same time, it understood the potential benefits of providing welfare more broadly; welfare provisions would be a powerful instrument of recruitment for the newly official church. Depending on a combination of the strength of Calvinism locally, the position of the town government and the stage of development of the local labour market, a variety of arrangements emerged in which the Calvinist church either agreed to support all paupers, irrespective of their faith, Calvinist and public authorities worked out a division of labour, or the public authorities provided basic welfare and allowed the churches to provide supplementary payments, in money or in kind.[45]

There was no rule against poor people being citizens. As a matter of fact, the Amsterdam authorities were anxious that too many sailors and other common folk were acquiring citizenship, precisely because this gave them access to some of the more generous forms of welfare provision.[46] In many ways, however, citizenship was a prerogative of the middle classes. It is therefore hardly a coincidence that most charities fundamentally differed from the civic militias and the guilds in that they had no membership. As a result, the poor basically had to accept whatever middle class governors decided for them. At the same time, the poor were seen very much as members of the wider civic community, as becomes evident when we look at the ways these charities were funded. Alongside government subsidies, welfare institutions had to rely for most of their funding on voluntary

44  Survey in Maarten Prak, 'Armenzorg 1500-1800', in: Jacques van Gerwen and Marco H.D. van Leeuwen (eds.), *Studies over zekerheidsarrangementen. Risico's, risicobestrijding en verzekeringen in Nederland vanaf de middeleeuwen* (Amsterdam 1998) 49-90, and in abbreviated form also Prak, 'The Carrot and the Stick: Social Control and Poor Relief in the Dutch Republic, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries', in:

Heinz Schilling (ed.), *Institutionen, Instrumente und Akteure sozialer Kontrolle und Disziplinierung im frühneuzeitlichen Europa / Institutions, Instruments and Agents of Social Control and Discipline in Early Modern Europe (Ius Commune,* Sonderheft volume 127) (Frankfurt am Main 1999) 149-166.

45  Charles H. Parker, *The Reformation of Community: Social Welfare and Calvinist Charity in Holland, 1572-1620* (Cambridge 1998).

46  Kuijpers, *Migrantenstad,* 133.

Jan Victors, The Feeding of the Orphans, around 1659-1660.
Amsterdams Historisch Museum.

donations from local people. These were provided in small collection boxes, strategically placed in various locations, but more often through the regular Sunday collections, as well as occasional door-to-door collection. In both cases, people were asked to donate by placing money in an open plate, so that the collector and other onlookers could assess the size of the gift. Research in the towns of Friesland has demonstrated that the intake remained largely stable throughout the economic ups and downs of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, suggesting that people donated fixed sums and saw these collections as the equivalent of a poor rate.[47] Still, whereas middle class citizenship was perceived as an active participation in the civic community, the poor were supposed to remain passive.

Some welfare institutions catered specifically to middle-class citizens; this happened particularly in the civic orphanages which existed in many towns, in addition to pauper orphanages. Civic orphanages provided better care, for instance in the form of richer and more varied food. More importantly, they ensured a proper education for their wards, allowing boys to train as apprentices with the craft guilds, whilst the girls were educated in the skills of running a household. In pauper orphanages, both boys and girls were sent out to do proletarian work at an early age, and risked being shipped to the Indies by the time they came of age.[48] Obviously, the civic orphanage was a safeguard against the loss of social status.

### Gender

In many ways, the early modern civic community was a men's world. Women were not drafted into the civic militias, guild members were overwhelmingly males and, probably most importantly, in very few of the civic institutions were women allowed to hold office. Worse, some guilds, for instance, explicitly forbade women to join their ranks.[49] Having said that, we also have to make the point that women were included in Dutch civic society in a

47  Joke Spaans, 'De gift aan de armen in Friese steden in de zestiende, zeventiende en achttiende eeuw, toegelicht aan het voorbeeld Sneek', *Tijdschrift voor Sociale Geschiedenis* 22 (1996) 388.

48  Anne E.C. McCants, *Civic Care in a Golden Age: Orphan Care in Early Modern Amsterdam* (Urbana,

Chicago 1997). Also S. Groenveld et al., *Wezen en boefjes. Zes eeuwen zorg in wees- en kinderhuizen* (Hilversum 1997).

49  Bibi Panhuysen, *Maatwerk. Kleermakers, naaisters, oudkleerkopers en de gilden (1500-1800)* (Amsterdam 2000) 205-209.

variety of ways, albeit as second-class participants.[50] The most important of these was the formal status of citizenship itself. This was gender-neutral, in the sense that men and women were equally entitled to it, and generally the same conditions applied to each sex in its acquisition. In official documents, we regularly find the female form of the word for citizen [in Dutch *burgeres* or *poorteresse*].[51] As a matter of fact, female citizenship may have been one reason why local brides had an advantageous position on the marriage market, as male immigrants who married a female citizen acquired citizen status more or less automatically and without further charge.[52] As citizens, women had access to a variety of local petty offices.[53] Equally importantly, women could access the guilds. Of the members of the shopkeepers' guild in Den Bosch, who numbered about 500 throughout the eighteenth century, approximately one in eight were female.[54] In Amsterdam, the seamstresses even had their own, all-female guild. This, it has to be added, was pretty unique.[55] In most guilds, females were a tiny minority, and many of them entering the guild as widows, after their husbands had passed away. Moreover, women never held offices in the guilds, and this was also more generally true: senior civil and political offices were the sole preserve of men.

### 3. Organising the urban community

Having many people organised in civic institutions was an important step in creating an urban community; yet to make that community actually work, some sort of coordination between these institutions was required. This was mainly the role of the urban elites. To be effective, however, these had to engage the rest of the community in their rule, one way or another. Where

50  It has been claimed that Dutch women of this period were more independent than women in other European countries; see Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (New York 1987) chapter 6; Els Kloek, Nicole Teeuwen and Marijke Huisman (eds.), *Women of the Golden Age: An International Debate on Women in Seventeenth-Century Holland, England and Italy* (Hilversum 1994); Els Kloek, *Vrouw des huizes. Een cultuurgeschiedenis van de Hollandse huisvrouw* (Amsterdam 2009).

51  Myriam Everard and Mieke Aerts, 'De burgeres. Geschiedenis van een politiek begrip', in: Kloek and Tilmans, *Burger*, 175-181.

52  Kuijpers and Prak, 'Burger', 120, 123, 130-131; Prak, *Republikeinse veelheid*, 46-47.

53  Everard and Aerts, 'De burgeres', 178-179.

54  Daniëlle van den Heuvel, *Women and Entrepreneurship: Female Traders in the Northern Netherlands, c. 1580-1815* (Amsterdam 2007) 155; also Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk, *De draad in eigen handen. Vrouwen en loonarbeid in de Nederlandse textielnijverheid, 1581-1810* (Amsterdam 2007) 155-159; Marjolein van Dekken, *Brouwen, branden en bedienen. Werkende vrouwen in de Nederlandse dranknijverheid, 1500-1800* (Amsterdam 2009) 72-81.

55  Panhuysen, *Maatwerk*, 209-213.

they failed, political conflict was almost inevitable; then the community would show its teeth.

### Urban elites

Dutch towns were governed by men who were citizens by definition.[56] Among the formal conditions for membership of a town council, local citizenship was paramount. The reason for this was partly a social one. Councillors were recruited from the upper crust of society, and it was much more likely that people in these circles would be citizens. A more important reason was a constitutional one, however. The members of the town councils – collectively known as the 'regents' – were supposed to be the representatives of the civic community. In 1748, a pamphlet discussing the political situation in Leiden reminded its readers that the council had originally received its authority from the 'freeborn people'. In the past, it was claimed, the four mayors, who governed the town on a day-to-day basis, had been elected directly by the citizens.[57]

Although their constitutional position did not change in this respect until the end of the Republic in 1796, socially a gulf seemed to have opened up between the men at the top and the rest of society. The 1748 pamphlet, for instance, spelled out in considerable detail how the forty councillors in Leiden in that year were connected through a myriad of family relations. The rise of this so-called family government has been confirmed in recent decades by numerous historical studies.[58] It has also become clear that these families generally did quite well out of their privileged positions within the political system; perhaps less as a result of corruption – generally kept under control through the checks and balances of collective rule – than of the strategic position occupied by regent families in the rent streams of private-public partnerships.

56  J.J. de Jong, *Met goed fatsoen. De elite in een Hollandse stad. Gouda 1700-1780* (Amsterdam 1985) 35; L. Kooijmans, *Onder regenten. De elite in een Hollandse stad. Hoorn 1700-1780* (Amsterdam 1985) 38; M.R. Prak, *Gezeten burgers. De elite in een Hollandse stad. Leiden 1700-1780* (Amsterdam 1985) 39; Streng, '*Stemme in staat*', 107; also Isaacs and Prak, 'Cities, Bourgeoisies, and States'.

57  *Waaragtig onderzoek wegens verzuim in het waarnemen der oude handvesten van Leiden etc.*, 11 13, 23 (Knuttel 18117).

58  H. van Dijk and D.J. Roorda, 'Social Mobility under the Regents of the Republic', *Acta Historiae Neerlandicae* 9 (1976) 76-102; Prak, 'Verfassungsnorm', 70-77, 81-83; the works by De Jong, Kooijmans and Prak, listed in footnote 56; also C. Schmidt, *Om de eer van de familie. Het geslacht Teding van Berkhout 1500-1950. Een sociologische benadering* (Amsterdam 1986); Julia Adams, *The Familial State: Ruling Families and Merchant Capitalism in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca, London 2005).

Gerard ter Borch, The Deventer Magistrate, 1667.
Historisch Museum, Deventer.

One recurring complaint, already voiced by their contemporaries, was the withdrawal of regent families from active business, and their concentration on holding office and the accompanying lifestyle. In general, this picture has turned out to be misleading; most regent families continued to adhere to bourgeois virtues, and more importantly, bourgeois education and jobs. Significantly, the Dutch nobility snubbed regent daughters on the marriage market. The regents' withdrawal from trade and industry perhaps had more to do with the increasing complexity of regent responsibilities, as the Dutch state increased in size and importance. To prepare for a career in public administration, regent sons went to university to obtain degrees in Law. Whereas an academic degree had been highly unusual at its start, by the end of the seventeenth century the overwhelming majority of regents – in Holland at least – had been properly trained in Law. They had become professional administrators and politicians.[59]

### Participation

Dutch towns were governed in two different ways. In the western provinces, notably Holland, town councils were permanent and co-optive.[60] This system had no direct citizen participation in the political process. There were some exceptions to this general rule, however. For instance, in Hoorn, the citizens participated in the election of the aldermen. And in Dordrecht the guilds, through a special college called *Goede Lieden van Achten* [literally: Eight Righteous Men] helped elect the four mayors every year. It was, however, only in the towns of the eastern provinces that political representation of the civic community was well-developed.

In Arnhem, in the Duchy of Guelders, a Common Council of 48, together with six representatives of the guilds, represented the civic community vis-à-vis the magistrates, who acted as the executive.[61] In Zwolle, in the province of Overijssel, the Common Council of 48 represented each of the four town-districts, each of which sent twelve members to the meetings. Zwolle Common Council had to approve new taxation before it could be introduced, as well as declarations of war and treaties of peace, before they had legal status.[62]

59   See also Jeroen van Bockel, 'Gevormde kaders. Bureaucratische en professionele regulering in het bestuur van de Republiek, 1650-1795' (PhD dissertation Utrecht University, Faculty of Law, 2009).

60   A.J.C.M. Gabriëls, *De heren als dienaren en de dienaar als heer. Het stadhouderlijk stelsel in de tweede helft van de achttiende eeuw* (The Hague 1990) 15-16; also Prak, 'Verfassungsnorm'.

61   Maarten Prak, 'Corporate Politics in the Low Countries: Guilds as Institutions, 14th to 18th Centuries', in: Prak, *Craft Guilds,* 96-99; also Arjan van Dixhoorn, '"Voorstanden van de vrije wetten". Burgerbewegingen in Arnhem en de Republiek tussen 1702 en 1707', *Tijdschrift voor Sociale Geschiedenis* 25 (1999) 25-54.

62   Streng, '*Stemme in staat'*, chapter 3.

Although they did not have direct political representation, citizens in the western towns were not without 'voice'.[63] They filed lots of petitions, and these were taken very seriously indeed.[64] Guilds and civic militias were sometimes asked for their opinions on sensitive issues, and when the regents forgot to ask for this, they were often given it nonetheless.[65] Intermediaries from the civic community were invited by the regents to introduce sensitive legislation concerning, for instance, new taxation.[66]

### Conflict

When the citizens became frustrated with the limitations of routine politics, they could also take to the streets. The political privileges of the civic community were in themselves a strong incentive for the formulation of political claims. In the eastern provinces of Overijssel, Guelders and Utrecht, the French War of 1672 had left deep political scars. These three provinces had been suspended from the Union because they had given in to the French too easily, according to the other provinces. They were readmitted in 1674-1675, but put under the custody of the stadtholder, William of Orange. He used the opportunity to appoint many of his supporters and cronies, and these shackled the representative institutions of the eastern towns. After William died in 1702, civic communities rose in protest against this situation, and forced some of the Orangists from office, appointing their own favourites in their place.[67]

These revolts of 1703 and subsequent years were part of a much longer tradition of urban rebellions.[68] These rebellions had two major objectives. On the one hand, they were directed against authorities outside the urban

63 The concept comes, of course, from Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge Ma. 1970). For its application to Dutch history, see Maarten Prak, 'Challenges for the Republic: Coordination and Loyalty in the Dutch Republic', in: André Holenstein, Thomas Maissen and Maarten Prak (eds.), *The Republican Alternative: The Netherlands and Switzerland compared* (Amsterdam 2008) 51-71.

64 Henk F.K. van Nierop, 'Popular Participation in Politics in the Dutch Republic', in: Peter Blickle (ed.), *Resistance, Representation, and Community* (Oxford 1997) 272-290; Van Nierop, 'Private Interests, Public Policies: Petitions in the Dutch Republic', in: Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr. and Adele Seeff (eds.), *The Public and Private in Dutch Culture*

*of the Golden Age* (Newark 2000) 33-39.

65 Guild participation in politics is discussed in Maarten Prak, 'Corporate Politics', 74-106.

66 Maarten Prak and Jan Luiten van Zanden, 'Tax Morale and Citizenship in the Dutch Republic', in: Oscar Gelderblom (ed.), *The Political Economy of the Dutch Republic* (Aldershot 2009) 143-165, especially 151-158.

67 W.F. Wertheim and A.H. Wertheim-Gijse Weenink, *Burgers in verzet. Onrust in Sticht en Oversticht (1703-1706)* (Amsterdam 1976).

68 Marc Boone and Maarten Prak, 'Rulers, Patricians and Burghers: The Great and Little Traditions of Urban Revolt in the Low Countries', in: C.A. Davids and J. Lucassen (eds.), *A Miracle Mirrored: The Dutch Republic in European Perspective* (Cambridge 1995) 99-134.

community, with the purpose of safeguarding the political autonomy of the town. In one sense, the Dutch Revolt is an example of this type of rebellion. Obviously, much more was at stake than urban autonomy, but insofar as the towns were concerned, this was a very important aspect and it is no coincidence that the protection of urban privileges figures prominently in the first clause of the Union of Utrecht of 1579, in which the rebels laid down the terms of their collaboration and the foundations of the Dutch state.[69] The wave of rebellions of 1703, known as *Plooierijen*, had a similar objective, and during the 1780s the country would again be taken to the brink of a full-scale revolution, during the 'Patriot Troubles': and for much the same reasons.[70]

At the same time, the *Plooierijen* and Patriot Revolution displayed characteristics of another strand of urban rebellion directed against the local regent elites.[71] This time, the objective was a greater say for the civic community in local affairs. Another example is provided by the events of 1748 in Leiden. During the previous year, the threat of a French invasion had brought almost half a century in which the province of Holland had been ruled by the regents, without an Orange stadtholder, to an end. According to many contemporaries, the regents had by now evolved into a separate class. One pamphlet published in Leiden claimed that, a century previously, the regents had still been actively involved in the town's trade and industry, rather than 'trying to enrich themselves with other people's money'. But now, they had become aristocrats, 'who seek to enhance their status through princely and baronial' display.[72] Leiden's citizens organised themselves through the civic militias, and several mass meetings were held at the militia premises. A committee was appointed and drew up a ten-point programme of reform.

69  English translation available in H.H. Rowen (ed.), *The Low Countries in Early Modern Times* (London 1972) 70.

70  The literature on the Patriots is far too extensive to review here in full, but key titles include Th.S.M. van der Zee, J.G.M.M. Rosendaal and P.G.B. Thissen (eds.), *1787: De Nederlandse revolutie?* (Amsterdam 1988); H. Bots and W.W. Mijnhardt (eds.), *De droom van de revolutie. Nieuwe benaderingen van het Patriottisme* (Amsterdam 1988); Wayne Ph. Te Brake, *Regents and Rebels: The Revolutionary World of an Eighteenth-Century Dutch City* (Oxford 1989);

S.R.E. Klein, *Patriots republikanisme. Politieke cultuur in Nederland (1766-1787)* (Amsterdam 1995); Prak, *Republikeinse veelheid*. For a recent survey, see Joost Rosendaal, *De Nederlandse Revolutie. Vrijheid, volk en vaderland 1783-1799* (Nijmegen 2005).

71  A more extensive version of this argument can be found in Maarten Prak, 'Citizen Radicalism and Democracy in the Dutch Republic: The Patriot Movement of the 1780's', *Theory and Society* 20 (1991) 73-102; also Prak, *Republikeinse veelheid*.

72  *Waaragtig onderzoek*, 8.

When it failed to reach its objectives, the militiamen effectively took over the town and demanded the resignation of several key regents and their replacement with more popular men. They also insisted that the militia council would, in the future, have greater autonomy and be allowed to speak on behalf of the civic community. Through these reforms, the citizens clearly hoped to make the regents more accountable.[73]

## 4. Thinking about the urban community

These urban rebellions are interesting in their own right, but also because they were occasions for civic communities to express their ideals and aspirations more clearly than they normally would. It was particularly during these times of political turmoil, in other words, that the identities of the civic communities and their citizens were articulated and committed to paper.

### Public opinion

Due to the high levels of urbanisation and the impact of Protestantism, the Dutch Republic probably also had the highest literacy rates of early modern Europe. It certainly produced more books than any other country during the seventeenth century, when the European book trade was dominated by Dutch firms.[74] As a result, printing presses were readily available. Newspapers, which started to appear for the first time in the seventeenth century, restricted themselves to factual information – a political opinion press emerged only in the 1780s, but in the meantime genuine public opinion was created with the help of pamphlets or 'broadsheets'. Although notoriously difficult to define with great precision, two characteristics of these stand out: these pamphlets were generally cheap, and they were opinionated. Their aim, in other words, was to reach and influence the largest possible audience.[75]

73  Maarten Prak, 'Burgers in beweging. Ideaal en werkelijkheid van de onlusten te Leiden in 1748', *BMGN* 106:3 (1991) 365-393; Van Dixhoorn, '"Voorstanden van de vrije wetten"'.

74  The literature on this topic is too vast to summarize here, but helpful introductions in English are provided by Paul Hoftijzer, 'Metropolis of Print: The Amsterdam Book Trade in the Seventeenth Century', in: Patrick O'Brien et al. (eds.), *Urban Achievement in Early Modern Europe: Golden Ages in Antwerp, Amsterdam and London* (Cambridge 2001) 249-263; and Jeremy D.

Popkin, 'Print Culture in the Netherlands on the Eve of the Revolution', in: Margaret C. Jacob and Wijnand W. Mijnhardt (eds.), *The Dutch Republic in the Eighteenth Century: Decline, Enlightenment, and Revolution* (Ithaca, London 1992) 273-291.

75  Marijke Meijer Drees, 'Pamfletten: Een inleiding', in: José de Kruif, Marijke Meijer Drees, Jeroen Salman (eds.), *Het lange leven van het pamflet. Boekhistorische, iconografische, literaire en politieke aspecten van pamfletten 1600-1900* (Hilversum 2006) 9-28.

Although earlier examples do exist, the pamphlet really came into its own during the seventeenth century. In 1672, the Year of Disaster, when the Dutch Republic was attacked from three different sides and almost went under, some one thousand different pamphlets were published.[76] Many of these were vicious attacks on Grand Pensionary Johan de Witt, who was generally blamed for the dismal state of the country's defences. In August 1672, this incitement led to De Witt and his brother being lynched by middle class civic militiamen in The Hague. Some months earlier, mass rioting had forced the regents to accept William III of Orange as stadtholder, and hence the new political leader of the country. These events clearly demonstrate to what extent public opinion could dictate political events.

### Urban republicanism

In 1784, an anonymous pamphlet was published in the town of Dordrecht by an author who introduced himself as an 'enemy of slavish coercion and anarchy', who wished to make a *Proposal to Dordrecht's citizenry*.[77] Like many other republican authors, this one too viewed the republic as inherently unstable and precarious, likely to develop into an aristocracy of ruling families. In these 'aristocratic, or so-called noble governments, offices ... [would] inevitably be inherited by a restricted number of families' (6) and it was to be expected that such families would be deaf to the will of the people. Dordrecht, despite having a 'free government' since the thirteenth century, if not earlier, had not escaped from these tendencies altogether. This had happened, notwithstanding the fact that the town's ancient constitution contained numerous safeguards against it. The most important of these safeguards was no doubt the role of the 'Deans of the Guilds, who, it was well-understood, were representing the whole citizenry' (8) in the election of the members of the town council. On top of this, the Great Privilege ruled that every year, the deans would elect twenty-four men from the 'Burgher estate'. From these, the Count of Holland, as lord of the region – or his governor – would choose the 'Eight Righteous Men' as representatives of the four districts of the town. The Eight Righteous Men were supposed to permanently oversee the acts of the local government. In case of abuses, they issued warnings to 'the Deans, their principals' (11).

76  Michel Reinders, 'Printed Pandemonium: The Power of the Public and the Market for Popular Political Publications in the Early Modern Dutch Republic' (PhD dissertation Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam 2008) 36. Important works about Dutch pamphlets include Craig E. Harline, *Pamphlets, Printing and Political Culture in the Early Dutch Republic* (Dordrecht 1987); De Kruif, Meijer Drees and Salman, *Het lange leven van het pamflet*; Joost Vrieler, *Het poëtisch accent. Drie literaire genres in zeventiende-eeuwse Nederlandse pamfletten* (Hilversum 2007); Clazina Dingemanse, *Rap van tong, scherp van pen. Literaire discussiecultuur in Nederlandse praatjespamfletten (circa 1600-1750)* (Hilversum 2008); also check out the PhD dissertation by Roeland Harms, to be completed in 2010.

77  *Voorstel aan Dordrechts burgery, en inzonderheid aan Dekenen van de onderscheiden Gilden aldaar, etc.* (Knuttel 20907).

Therefore, the author of the *Proposal* seemed to be on firm ground when describing Dordrecht's constitution as 'a regular popular government' (7), in which the people were more precisely defined as 'the membership of all the guilds together' (11). However, the representative character of Dordrecht's constitution was jeopardised now that the deans allowed the town council to influence the recruitment of the Eight Righteous Men. The deans had forestalled the independence they were supposed to maintain according to the constitution; an independence that, of course, lay at the heart of their constitutional role (14, 18-19).

In the Leiden pamphlet from 1748 quoted above, the local constitution of Leiden was characterised as a 'Well-established Commonwealth Government' (15).[78] The same pamphlet proposed the introduction in Leiden of 'Commissioners, or Representatives from the Citizenry ... who will control the accounts and tax registers' (11). This was only reasonable, because:

> the governance of the town's ... finances, or its receipts and expenditures ... does not happen for, or in the interest of the Regents or on the basis of their authority, but to the benefit of, for and in the place of the Citizens and Inhabitants, whose receipts and expenditures these really are, as they stem from their goods and possessions, their profits and labour; but about which (like in the rest of the government of towns and places) they cannot rule all together in person, as there are too many of them, and therefore they have chosen some of the most competent to administer their goods and receipts as custodians and stewards. But in the election and appointment [of the regents-custodians] the Citizens and Inhabitants have never signed away their natural and inbred right to ask for, and if necessary demand, whenever they want, [a] view [of] and if necessary full accounts of this administration (11).

These examples testify to the existence of an urban republican ideology, with roots in the seventeenth century, but becoming more elaborate in the eighteenth. It was a set of ideas shared, it seems, by broad sections of the urban community. This urban republicanism was never developed into the sophisticated arguments produced by better-known 'classical' republican thinkers, however.[79] As an undercurrent of early modern popular politics, it was nonetheless reasonably powerful.[80]

78  *Nasporing van beswaarnissen etc.*

79  Eco O.G. Haitsma Mulier, *The Myth of Venice and Dutch Republican Thought in the Seventeenth Century* (Assen 1980); Martin van Gelderen and Quentin Skinner (eds.), *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage* (2 volumes, Cambridge 2002), especially chapters by Wyger Velema, Karin Tilmans, Martin van Gelderen, and Hans Erich Bödeker, all in volume 1.

80  See also Schilling, 'Gab es im späten Mittelalter und zu Beginn der Neuzeit in Deutschland einen städtischen "Republikanismus"?'

On 2 August 1786 the patriotic Civic Guard seized power. The Vroedschap [City Council] was deposed and replaced by an elected council, controlled by civilian delegates, in accordance with the regulations established.
Anonymous, Termination of the Regulations of Government on the Neude in Utrecht on 12 October 1786, 1786-1800.
Centraal Museum, Utrecht.

### 5. The end of the corporatist community

The Patriot Revolution of the 1780s marked both the high point of the corporatist community and the beginning of its demise. It was its heyday in the sense that the demands put forward (and the arguments supporting these) were more radical than ever before in the Dutch Republic.[81] The Patriots claimed to be restoring the traditional order of corporatism; as a matter of fact, their demands for popular influence on urban government went much further in many areas than that traditional order had ever allowed. They also came closer than any previous opposition movement to upsetting the alliance of Orange stadtholder and conservative regents. It was only due to an equally unprecedented foreign intervention – by the stadtholder's brother-in-law, the King of Prussia in the late summer of 1787 – that the regime was saved.[82]

The Patriots then managed, in the winter of 1794-1795, to re-launch their revolution, this time with the help of their own foreign ally, France.[83] It was, however, a different revolution altogether. The combined disillusion with their own failed attempt of 1787 and the success of the French Revolution two years later, persuaded Patriot leaders that corporatism would no longer suffice as a recipe for reform. Its essentially urban, and therefore fragmented, character had made it ill-suited for the fundamental reform of the state that many Patriots acknowledged was desperately needed.[84] They now subscribed to a combined programme of centralisation and democratisation as the key to progress.[85] This transition was eased by the rise of a new ideal of citizenship: equally reform-minded, but with a cultural emphasis.[86] In this, the new ideal differed fundamentally from the essentially political model of corporatist citizenship as it had been practiced in Dutch towns since the late Middle Ages.

81  Prak, 'Citizen Radicalism'.

82  For the fate of the exiled revolutionaries in France, Joost Rosendaal, *Bataven! Nederlandse vluchtelingen in Frankrijk 1787-1795* (Nijmegen 2003).

83  Simon Schama, *Patriots and Liberators: Revolution in the Netherlands 1780-1813* (New York 1977).

84  An analysis of the Republic's economic and political problems in Jan Luiten van Zanden and Arthur van Riel, *The Strictures of Inheritance: The Dutch Economy in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton 2004) chapter 2.

85  Thomas Poell, 'The Democratic Paradox: Dutch Revolutionary Struggles over Democratisation and Centralisation (1780-1813)' (PhD dissertation Utrecht University 2007); also Maarten Prak, 'Burghers into Citizens: Urban and National Citizenship in the Netherlands during the Revolutionary Era (c. 1800)', in: Michael Hanagan and Charles Tilly (eds.), *Extending Citizenship, Reconfiguring States* (Lanham etc. 1999) 17-35.

86  Joost Kloek and Wijnand Mijnhardt, *1800: Blueprints for a National Community* (London 2004).

### Conclusion: a European perspective

In 1673, the former English ambassador Sir William Temple tried to explain the Dutch political system to his compatriots. He started to point out that, rather than a single country, the Dutch Republic was really a confederacy of seven sovereign provinces, which were largely autonomous. But, he went on, 'to discover the nature of their government from the first springs and motions, it must be taken yet into smaller pieces, by which it will appear, that each of these provinces is likewise composed of many little states or cities, which have several marks of sovereign power within themselves'.[87] He was, in all likelihood, thinking of precisely the sorts of things discussed in the previous pages. Likewise, Montesquieu, who travelled round the country in the autumn of 1729, later described it as a federation of 'about fifty republics [this was the number of enfranchised towns, MP], all very different the one from the other'.[88] Clearly, there was something special about the urban communities of the Dutch Republic. At the same time, contemporaries such as Temple and Montesquieu cannot have overlooked the similarities that also existed between these Dutch institutions and those of their own countries. There too, we find guilds and civic militias, urban citizenship and citizen representation; sometimes more highly developed even than in the Dutch Republic. Towns such as London in England or Nantes in France had political constitutions that provided citizens with serious influence on local politics.[89] So what gave Dutch citizenship its peculiar flavour, and made the Netherlands into a 'bourgeois' country? To answer this question, we have to look beyond the ramparts of individual towns, and analyse the wider context in which these functioned.

One area where the Dutch Republic clearly was different from other societies of the time, was in the sheer numerical impact of its towns. Not only were there a great many of them, packed into a relatively small space, but even more importantly perhaps, they housed a relatively large proportion of the population. By 1700, a third of all Dutch men and women lived in a town of at least 10,000.[90] This was twice as many as in any other European

87  William Temple, *Observations upon the United Provinces of the Netherlands,* George Clark (ed.) (Oxford 1972) 52; also Maarten Prak, 'The Dutch Republic's City-State Culture (17th-18th Centuries)', in: Mogens Herman Hansen (ed.), *A Comparative Study of Thirty City-State Cultures* (Copenhagen 2000) 343-358.

88  Quoted in M.P. Masterson, 'Holland's Fifty Republics: François Janiçon and Montesquieu's Federal Theory', *French Studies* 29 (1975) 27.

89  Gary Stuart de Krey, *A Fractured Society: The Politics of London in the First Age of Party 1688-1715* (Oxford 1985); Guy Saupin, *Nantes au XVII siècle: Vie politique et société urbaine* (Rennes 1996) chapters 3-4.

90  Jan de Vries, *European Urbanization, 1500-1800* (London 1984) 39; the percentage rises to almost half when smaller towns are also included: *ibidem,* 64.

country, apart from the Southern Netherlands. In the western provinces in particular, moreover, the number of noble families had declined.[91] As a result, towns, their bourgeois regent elites and bourgeois middle class, came to dominate society. But there was another, more specific aspect that supported this domination by bourgeois values and identity. And this had to do with the Dutch Republic's political constitution.

The history of Dutch citizenship suggests that there was more to political participation than just a (formal or informal) role in urban government, which could be found in many towns throughout Europe. To have an impact on national politics, local politics had to be connected in an effective way to the central state institutions.[92] The overwhelming opinion in the historical literature is that centralisation was the best way to achieve this. The available data, however, seem to suggest otherwise. France, England and the Dutch Republic represented three different models of governance in early modern Europe. In pre-revolutionary France, the regions were represented by the nobility. In the absence of a national forum (at least after the last meeting of the *États-Généraux* in 1614-1615), this representation was informal and, almost inevitably, sectional. In England, Parliament was directly representing the regions and towns of the realm. Before 1689, however, the effectiveness of this representation was severely limited by the policies of the Crown. The Bill of Rights made parliamentary representation much more effective, as the increased tax income and borrowing capacity (against declining interest rates) of the British state in the eighteenth century clearly demonstrate. The Dutch Republic represents a third model, that of the federal state. This gave local communities a direct stake in national policies. It is precisely this direct connection between urban community and national policies that added a particular, and quite significant, dimension to Dutch local citizenship and raised the *burger*, or citizen, to his elevated position in Dutch society.

There is a moral to this story; but not quite the moral Huizinga had in mind. His was essentially one of modernisation: the Dutch Republic gave a glimpse of what lay in store for other societies, first in Europe and, perhaps, ultimately the rest of the world. A society in which the traditional elites had made way for calculating burghers, who attempted to align their private interests with those of society as a whole. However, in this day of serious

91   J.L. Price, 'The Dutch Nobility in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', in: H.M. Scott, *The European Nobilities in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, volume 1: *Western Europe* (London 1995) 82-113.

92   This paragraph closely follows the argument of another paper, to be published separately: Maarten Prak, 'Citizenship and Urban Politics in Pre-Modern Europe'.

questions about the future of the modern nation state, with its bloated bureaucracy increasingly encroaching on the civil liberties of its citizens, the Dutch Republic seems to provide a recipe for a lightweight version of the state; one in which local and regional institutions have much more scope for independent action. This is a model that still works well in Switzerland, for example.[93] The Dutch Republic also seems to confirm Blickle and Schilling's arguments about the capacity of 'ordinary' people for independent political action in pre-democratic Europe.[94] Our discussion of French and English towns demonstrates that this was not only true for the Dutch Republic.[95] What is particularly striking, however – and contrasts with the rural areas of small-scale production that provided the backbone of Blickle's argument – is how the Dutch Republic managed to combine small-scale politics with a global economy. Contemporaries such as Pieter de la Court believed this to be no coincidence. Economic success, and more generally people's wellbeing, De la Court argued, was most likely to be produced by republican regimes with a broad support:[96]

> The inhabitants of these republics [live] more happily than the subjects of a monarchy or of a republic divided among few heads. Because a republic is the most fortunate and will flourish best where government consists of many of the most prominent citizens … or of all those of considerable property.

True, De la Court did not like the participation of guilds and similar organisations of the lower middle classes. As a textile entrepreneur, he was only too aware of the potential for class struggles, as they had emerged in previous centuries in his native Flanders. However, Flanders in the sixteenth century and the Italian city states of the Renaissance all point up the potential – economic, social and cultural – for coalitions of more or less independent towns, with enfranchised citizens. By the later eighteenth century, it seemed as if this model had outlived its usefulness, as larger and more centralised states started taking centre stage in Europe. These states organised themselves mostly through mechanisms of national democracy. The current crisis of the

93 For the comparison with early modern Switzerland, see Holenstein, Maissen and Prak, *The Republican Alternative.*

94 Cf. Wayne Ph. Te Brake, *Shaping History: Ordinary People in European Politics, 1500-1700* (Berkeley 1998).

95 See also Bickle, *Kommunalismus,* volume 1.

96 Quoted after Haitsma Mulier, *The Myth of Venice,* 163.

modern state suggests that the latter is, perhaps, not the 'end of history' – the fulfilment of a long and gradual process of trial and error, of selection and convergence – but rather another stage in an ongoing history.[97] If this is so, then historical alternatives such as the Dutch Republic have an immediate relevance, both in terms of historical research and political agendas. ◄

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97   Cf. Wolfgang Reinhard, *Geschichte der Staatsgewalt. Eine vergleichende Verfassungsgeschichte Europas von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich 1999) 509 ff.

Schoon Solffer                    geel gheulant

Bartolomeus Assteyn, Tulip and Spider, 1650-1670
Amsterdams Historisch Museum.

Johannes Vermeer, View of Houses in Delft, known as
'The Little Street', around 1658.
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. ▶

# Urbanization, Culture and the Dutch Origins of the European Enlightenment

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The Dutch Republic currently plays a prominent role in the big debates on the origins and nature of the European Enlightenment. However, relatively little attention has been devoted to the role played by urbanization in this. This contribution focuses on the specific form of urbanization that took place in Holland, and a compelling relationship is established between urbanization in the coastal provinces and a series of political and religious issues that were of decisive importance in the early European Enlightenment. The high watermark of this Dutch contribution can be found in the period 1680-1730. After this, and closely related to the decrease in urbanization and the social problems associated with economic decline, the Dutch Enlightenment would acquire a character all of its own, unfamiliar to other Europeans.

Until the end of the 1960s, the historiography of the Enlightenment was a rather clear-cut affair. Intellectual historians were in agreement on a range of issues. The Enlightenment had Paris as its centre, and the rest of Europe as its periphery; it had its intellectual heroes and its humble disseminators, and – most importantly – the Enlightenment was considered first and foremost as a course in philosophy and ideas. In short: the Enlightenment was primarily an intellectual phenomenon and it was from France that the light shone forth, illuminating the rest of Europe.

Over the last few decades, under the influence of a great number of social historians, this French, intellectual vision of the Enlightenment has been replaced by a social interpretation. The Enlightenment has become chiefly associated with the efforts of local literati to identify problems and to contribute to their solutions.[1] Nevertheless, this social approach – emphasizing eighteenth-century practices instead of philosophy – has also found a growing number of critics, deploring the fragmented character and the lack of intellectual cohesion of the new vision. However, an unqualified