



Anton Poot, ***Crucial Years in Anglo-Dutch Relations (1625-1642): The Political and Diplomatic Contacts*** (Hilversum: Verloren, 2013, 192 pp., ISBN 978 90 8704 380 3).

Anton Poot's book, *Crucial Years in Anglo-Dutch Relations (1625-1642): The Political and Diplomatic Contacts*, was published only days after the death of the author in August 2013. Following his retirement as chairman and managing director of the Philips concern in the United Kingdom, the author devoted himself to the study of history, culminating in his Ph.D. from Royal Holloway College, University of London, where his supervisor was Pauline Croft. His book is based on his thesis, for which he also received guidance in aspects such as Dutch historiography and primary sources from Simon Groenveld, who also provided an introduction to the book.

The author is correct in characterizing the time frame 1625-1642 as one of crucial importance in Anglo-Dutch political and diplomatic relations, as this period witnessed a fundamental transition during which the United Provinces developed from a client owing fealty to England to a *de facto* independent state that felt confident enough to pursue its own strategic interests, to the extent of assertively ignoring English wishes and demands. Charles I, who was crowned King of England, Scotland and Ireland on 27 March 1625, regarded himself as the champion of international Protestantism and had inherited from his predecessors the role and self-image of benevolent patron towards the Dutch provinces in their rebellion against their Spanish overlord. This had its origin in the Treaty of Nonsuch of August 1585, in which Elizabeth I agreed to aid the Dutch by providing the States General with some 7,500 troops under the leadership of the Earl of Leicester. As security for future Dutch repayment of the expenses, England demanded control over the 'cautionary towns' of Brielle and Flushing, as well as the fortress Rammekens. In addition, Elizabeth received the right to appoint representatives to the Dutch Council of State. Leicester's mission was largely unsuccessful, and English control over the towns and the fortress had been relinquished in 1616, following repayment by the Dutch of their debt, yet the English perception of the Republic as a humble, subservient client remained unaltered.

Throughout his reign Charles continually attempted to exploit the United Provinces in the pursuit of his own foreign policies, even when these were diametrically opposed to Dutch strategic interests. His primary objective, Poot points out, was the restoration of his brother-in-law Frederick V, the Elector Palatine. Frederick, having

accepted the invitation of the Protestant Bohemians to be their champion in defiance of the Austrian Habsburgs, was defeated at the beginning of the Thirty Years' War, losing also the Palatinate. He and his consort, Charles's sister Elizabeth, the 'Winter King and Queen', were granted asylum by the States General and took up residence in The Hague. Charles hoped to use his ambassador's membership of the Dutch Council of State to direct the Republic towards military intervention against the Emperor. In this he was disappointed, however. The States General, undesirous of such direct involvement in the war, countered his cajolery by rescinding, in 1626, the English membership of the Council of State. From then on, mutual relations grew increasingly tense. Charles, who was anxious to safeguard his royal prerogative in foreign-policy matters from what he perceived to be attempts by Parliament to infringe it, exerted increasing pressure on the Dutch. He forcefully claimed satisfaction for the 'Amboyna Massacre', in which some English traders in the Indies had been accused of spying and executed by officials of the Dutch East India Company, and demanding that they support him in his war against France. Taking advantage of English naval dominance, Charles emphasized his practical and ideological 'sovereignty of the seas' by abrogating the right of Dutch fisherman to fish freely in the 'English Seas'. From 1633 onward, Charles sought the assistance of Spain in the matter of the restitution of the Palatinate. In exchange for cash and a vague promise of political support, he sent his warships to protect the transport of troops, ammunition and money to the Spanish Netherlands. In addition, he also offered the protection of English ports to Flemish privateers operating against Dutch shipping.

Despite these flagrant breaches of English neutrality, which were clearly detrimental to Dutch military interests, the United Provinces could ill afford an armed conflict with England and so could do little more than tentatively issue formal complaints and offer Charles a diplomatic alternative to his Spanish connection. In October 1639, however, the Battle of the Downs took place, in which a Spanish armada carrying military reinforcements for the Spanish Netherlands was decisively defeated, while sheltering in English territorial waters, by the Dutch fleet, despite prior warnings by Charles. This led to a sharp deterioration in Anglo-Dutch relations. Charles's domestic position had by now seriously weakened as a consequence of the growing opposition against his obstinate absolutist rule. With a civil war on his hands, Charles I sought to strengthen his ties with the House of Orange and the Republic by giving his daughter Mary in marriage to Willem II. In 1642 Queen Henrietta-Maria travelled to the Dutch Republic to pawn the crown jewels, in order to raise funds for weapons and ammunition to aid the Royalists. Charles had now thus become the supplicant, while the Dutch Republic had become a formidable naval power in its own right.

*Crucial Years in Anglo-Dutch Relations (1625-1642)* provides a solid analysis of a hitherto somewhat neglected period in English and Dutch history. Historians of English foreign policy tend to focus on the Elizabethan, Interregnum and Williamite eras, while relatively little attention has been paid to the early Stuart period. Remarkably perhaps, the period discussed by Poot seems also to have been overlooked by scholars specializing

in Anglo-Dutch political and diplomatic relations. Poot's highly traditionally Realist approach of international relations may not appeal to the more culturally-interested specialists in Anglo-Dutch relations, but his book certainly fills an important lacuna. In doing so, he makes clear how the Anglo-Dutch wars of the 1650s to the 1670s were in fact long in the making, despite the rapprochement resulting from the Willem-Mary marriage and Orange support to Charles during his Civil War.

Although the author has consulted archival sources and literature from both sides of the North Sea, the book provides a predominantly English perspective on Anglo-Dutch relations. Poot explains how Charles perceived these and why he believed he was entitled to meddle in Dutch politics, but offers little insight from a Dutch perspective. As a consequence, the Republic's role, except for violent interludes such as the Battle of the Downs, comes across as largely passive. Similarly, the reader receives only a vague impression of Charles's character and ideas. It is made clear that the restitution of the Palatinate was of the first importance for him, but the considerations that lay behind this strategic aim remain unclear. The same is true for the connections between English internal and foreign policy, and for the perception by Charles's subjects of Anglo-Dutch relations. Finally, more careful editing would have improved the readability of the text by inserting the numerous missing spaces that cause words to be run together.

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