

Reconstructing the Middle Ages

Dirck van Bleyswijck's Beschryvinge der stad Delft and its uneasy relationship with the past

MARCIN POLKOWSKI

Marcin Polkowski (1978) obtained an M.A. in English (2001) and Dutch (2003) literature from Warsaw University. In 2007 he defended his doctoral thesis on the sonnets of P.C. Hooft at the Jagiellonian University of Kraków. He subsequently obtained a Habilitation Degree, based on his book on the local dimension of Dutch Catholic religious literature from the Middle Ages to the Golden Age. He currently teaches at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin. His fields of interest include Dutch, English, and Polish Renaissance poetry, religious literature, urban literary networks, Anglo-Dutch and Polish-Dutch relations, Dutch economic history, and interconfessional relations in early modern Europe.
m_polkowski@hotmail.com

Abstract

Dirck van Bleyswijck's *Beschryvinge der stad Delft* presents an ambiguous and problematic attitude to the medieval history of Delft, which makes it interesting to scholars wishing to explore the perception of the Middle Ages as it crystallized during the early modern period. The aim of this contribution is to determine the intellectual origins of Van Bleyswijck's work as a historian in the context of his perception of the medieval past. The analysis of Van Bleyswijck's performance as a historian is based on a case study derived from the narrative: quotations from source texts and commentary about the life of the medieval Delft beguine Geertruyd van Oosten will be compared. Van Bleyswijck's representation of the Middle Ages was formed by a combination of humanist and proto-Enlightenment concepts, which entailed a critical reaction to forms of religious culture known to medieval society.

Keywords: Chorography, historiography, medievalism, Catholicism, Geertruyd van Oosten, Delft, humanism, Dutch Early Enlightenment.

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Introduction

During the early modern period the medieval history of Delft and its religious identity were the focal point of interest for a heterogeneous group of chroniclers, writers of Catholic saints' lives and (amateur) historians. The confessional and ideological background of these authors determined the choices they made in the process of reconstructing and reinterpreting the events of the past. Prominent among them was Dirck van Bleyswijck (1639–1681), author of the first large seventeenth-century vernacular chorography on the subject of the city's medieval and contemporary history, the *Beschrijvinge der stad Delft*.¹

Dirck van Bleyswijck adopted an ambivalent posture with regard to the medieval identity of his native town. On the one hand, he phrased his discourse of the Middle Ages, especially when it concerned persons, places, institutions and events associated with the Catholic religion, in negative terms. On the other hand Van Bleyswijck could not, as a historian, avoid delving into these Catholic aspects of Delft's history. On the contrary, almost against his own will, as it were, Van Bleyswijck proved to his readers that the medieval (and, by extension, Catholic) identities of Delft necessarily

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¹ D. van Bleyswijck's *Beschryvinge der stad Delft* was published in two parts – the first part (not identified as a separate volume) appeared in 1667 and the second 'continued' part, *Vervolg*, came out after a lengthy interval in 1680: D. van Bleyswijck, *Beschryvinge der stad Delft*, Delft: Arnold Bon, 1667, vol. I; D. van Bleyswijck, *Vervolg van de beschryvinge der stad Delft*, Delft: Arnold Bon, 1680, vol. II. The first volume, which concerns Delft's principal historical monuments, including its two churches, the *Oude* and the *Nieuwe Kerk*, as well as its cloisters and the beguinage, will be of the most interest to us here. The pages in both volumes are numbered consecutively; only the 'Nodige na-reden en aenhangsel' ('Required afterword and appendix') at the end of the first part does not carry page-numbers. The system of numbering folia originally used for this part of the 1667 edition of Van Bleyswijck's *Beschryvinge* has been retained in this article alongside consecutive page numbers referring only to the position of the page in the 'Nodige na-reden' (in square brackets).

had to be an inherent part of any well-documented investigation concerning the town history and topography. Indeed, Van Bleyswijck's chorography incorporates many quotations from religious sources identifiable with the Catholic Church. Yet although Van Bleyswijck did not leave out or rewrite those parts of the quoted sources that brought to mind a Catholic identity with which he obviously disagreed, he embedded these texts in a 'master-narrative' intended to undermine their validity as social practices or beliefs. This paper aims at exploring the nature of this tension and the textual strategies involved. The author's ambivalence with regard to manifestations of the medieval Catholic past, will be put in the context of humanism and Early Enlightenment thought.

Up to this date not much systematic critical research has been done on the intellectual formation of Dirck van Bleyswijck or the historiographic theory and practice underlying his work. Some attempts, however, have been made to assess the strategies by which Van Bleyswijck redefined the identity of Delft through a reconstruction of its pre-Reformation history.² Recently, the American historian Charles C. Parker offered this concise re-appraisal of the attitude of the Delft chronicler:

In no way sympathetic to the Roman faith, Van Bleyswijck nonetheless described in laborious detail the outward manifestations of Catholic piety throughout the middle ages. While he occasionally reminded readers that the observances were 'popish superstitions', his chronicle exhibited a profound sense of civic pride in the city's rich religious legacy.³

This observation accurately reflects the tension between, on the one hand, Van Bleyswijck's image of medieval history, its spiritual dimension infused by Roman Catholic religious practice, and on the other hand, his ideologically-founded conceptualization of history which tended to downplay this aspect of the past.

Dirck van Bleyswijck's position as narrator of the *Beschryvinge der stad Delft* was ambiguous and problematic. The issue of authorial subjectivity is a recurring theme

² The most important modern scholarly publications about Van Bleyswijck are few in number. They begin with J. Soutendam, 'Mr. Dirck Evertszoon van Bleyswijck en de Kaerte Figuratyf der Stadt Delft, 1675-1678', in: F.D.O. Obreen (red.), *Archief voor Nederlandse kunstgeschiedenis*, Rotterdam 1880-1881, vol. 3, p. 197-206. See for a sketchy outline of Van Bleyswijck's life and work E.R. de Jager, *De beschrijvinge der stad Delft door Dirck van Bleyswijck Ezn.*, Amsterdam 1957. A useful biographic entry is provided in *Nieuw Nederlandsch Biografisch Woordenboek*, vol. 6, col. 116. Van Bleyswijck's map of Delft, the *Kaerte figuratyf*, is the subject of J.J. Kühn, *Beschrijving van de 'Kaerte figuratyf' van Mr. D.E. van Bleyswijck, Delft 1678*, Delft 1967. An essential introduction to Van Bleyswijck's activities as a historian is by H.W. van Leeuwen, 'Dirck Evertsz. van Bleyswijck, geschiedschrijver', in: R.A. Leeuw and I.V.T. Spaander (eds), *De stad Delft. Cultuur en maatschappij van 1667 tot 1813*, vol. 1, Delft 1982, p. 126-129. Biographic information is also provided by M. Gout and M.A. Verschuijl, *Delft in de 17e eeuw*, Delft 1996. The most recent contribution to the study of Van Bleyswijck's historical work is by E. Verbaan, *De woonplaats van de faam. Grondslagen van de stadsbeschrijving in de zeventiende-eeuwse republiek*, Hilversum 2011, esp. p. 220-222. Verbaan situates Van Bleyswijck's writing in the literary context of seventeenth-century chorographies, apodemic practices and poems in praise of cities.

³ Ch.C. Parker, *The Reformation of community. Social welfare and Calvinist charity in Holland (1572-1620)*, Cambridge 2006, p. 34.

in his work.⁴ It is precisely owing to this ambivalence (and Van Bleyswijck's awareness of this problem) that the *Beschryvinge der stad Delft* may be of interest for scholars exploring the image of the Middle Ages in the Renaissance. That such studies can be intellectually fruitful has already been shown by historians inquiring into how the concept of the Middle Ages functioned in the work of Renaissance humanists. As Istvan Bejczy wrote in *Erasmus and the Middle Ages*:

By studying the Renaissance view of the Middle Ages, medievalists may come to understand the earliest conceptualisation of their own period of interest. Also, and perhaps more important, such a study offers Renaissance scholars a chance to grasp the identity of the Renaissance movement.⁵

The argument of this paper will concentrate, likewise, on the salient features of Van Bleyswijck's attitude towards the Middle Ages (all the while remembering that he actually never called the Middle Ages by this name or used any related adjective).⁶ Because historical examples of social manifestations of the Roman Catholic religious tradition were the object of this representation, the analysis of Van Bleyswijck's performance as a historian will take the form of a 'case study' of a sub-narrative from the *Beschryvinge* about the life of the medieval Delft beguine Geertruyd van Oosten.

The problematic medievalism of Dirck van Bleyswijck may be situated within the larger scope of what Raingard Esser researched as the 'cultures of memory' in early modern Dutch historiography and chorography.⁷ Strategies of presenting medieval history (including religious history) in early modern Dutch chorographies are classified in recent scholarship, including Esser's, as belonging to the domain of 'political memory' with its mechanisms of constructing and conserving 'a desired memory of past events'.⁸ The question raised with regard to Van Bleyswijck's *Beschryvinge*, however, is why the author, and other chroniclers or chorographers, considered specific narrative re-inventions of memory more desirable than others. And what extraneous intellectual or cultural factors informed their choices in this regard? In the case of Van Bleyswijck,

4 Of course this self-reflexivity can be seen through the lens of the conventions of *artes apodemici*, which supplied the observer-traveler-author, who had found himself in a foreign setting, with a specific set of procedures for structuring (and hence interpreting) raw information. At the same time the subject was free to make his own choices as to using (or not) the guidelines he was supplied with. On Van Bleyswijck's use of the *artes apodemici* see E. Verbaan, 'Aan de oevers van de Theems en Nieuwe Rijn. Nostalgie en burgerplicht in beschrijvingen van Londen (1598) en Leiden (1614)', in: *De Zeventiende Eeuw* 24 (2008), p. 89-107, esp. p. 96. What makes Van Bleyswijck's case even more complicated was that he was not a model user of an *ars apodemica*, since Delft was not an alien environment to him. This necessitated an adjustment of the authorial perspective, which oscillated between that of a visitor (a constructed position) and the immediate one of a citizen of Delft.

5 I. Bejczy, *Erasmus and the Middle Ages. The historical consciousness of a Christian humanist*, Leiden 2001, p. xi.

6 Van Bleyswijck preferred, for instance, terms such as 'the times of our forefathers', 'superstitious times' or a 'darkened age'; *Beschryvinge der stad Delft*, p. 150 and p. 189.

7 R. Esser, *The politics of memory. The writing of partition in the seventeenth-century Low Countries*, Leiden, Boston 2012.

8 *Ibidem*, p. 12.

his own position as member of an elite social category, the *regenten*, was a possible, though not exclusive, factor of influence in his manipulation of memory to fit within that group's religious-political frame of reference.

If the construction of memory is one possible theoretical approach to the subject, a different set of concepts has been offered by Coen Maas, who interpreted the medievalist themes of Renaissance historiography (especially the theme of the 'dark' Middle Ages) as the material of narrative rhetoric. Humanist authors such as Janus Dousa exploited, according to this view, a negative view of the Middle Ages as an instrument of rhetorical persuasion.⁹ Textual links between Van Bleyswijck's *Beschryvinge* and the chronicle of Dousa (as well as possibly other historians whose work was covered by Maas) and commonalities in humanist-rhetorical training provide a possible reason why the former resorted to negatively-charged representations of the Middle Ages. However, other explanations, apart from the widespread practice of *imitatio* (to which Van Bleyswijck, like any other Renaissance author, was no stranger), should be sought as well in order to account for why these particular rhetorical *loci* were so frequently chosen in a process of rhetorical *inventio* (the stage of selecting the material of a rhetorical utterance) leading to the composition of a rhetorical narrative.¹⁰

Defining the Middle Ages: the humanist and proto-Enlightenment conceptualization

The notion of the 'dark' Middle Ages accepted by van Bleyswijck imposed ideological constraints on the representations of the past in *Beschryvinge van Delft*. Not surprisingly, therefore, van Bleyswijck distanced himself from some of the consequences brought about by an excessively negative image of the Middle Ages, even while perpetuating, in his authorial glosses and comments, the concept of the times preceding the Reformation as a *saeculum obscurum*. Van Bleyswijck confessed to his readers that it had been an arduous task

to retrieve from all corners such an obscure, dark, unknown and lost history, and to collect all that had been dispersed; and once all bits and pieces of so many extracts, records and old texts had been gathered and distilled from all kinds of old chronicles and from various authors, to fashion them, as it were, into a single body [...]¹¹

⁹ C. Maas, *The lure of the Dark Ages. Writing the Middle Ages and political rhetoric in humanist historiography from the Low Countries*, Leiden 2012.

¹⁰ For the rhetorical procedure of *inventio* in the seventeenth century see e.g. G. Vossius, *Elementa Rhetorica*, Amsterdam: J. Janssonius, 1655, p. 6, reproduced in facsimile in: G.J. Vossius, *Podstawy retoryki*, ed. by B. Popiel, Szczecin 2012, p. 203.

¹¹ For the entire passage from which this quotation originates, see Van Bleyswijck, *Beschryvinge der stad Delft*, 'Nodige na-reden', p. [46]/fol. [*** A 2 v]: 'Ende hoewel ick het selfde als een hater van leuge ledigheydt/om met yets eerlijcks ende nuttelijcks myn tydt te passeren aengevangen hadde/soo is sulcks nochtans niet sonder sware moeyte en veel hoof-breeckens dus verre gebracht. Het sal misschien voor d'onervaeren evenwel licht schijnen te wesen/nu alles by een/en yder materie op syn behoerlijcke plaets

The words that stand out in this longish passage are the adjectives used to describe the past: ‘obscure’, ‘dark’, ‘unknown’ and ‘lost’. Especially the two former adjectives appear more than once in his *Beschryvinge der stad Delft*.¹² Sometimes these words connote merely the inability of entirely knowing the past. In one passage, Van Bleywijck complained that the origins of the Holland cities were regrettably ‘cloaked in thick darkness’ (‘met [...] dikke duysternisse bewolkt’).¹³ Elsewhere Van Bleywijck wrote that the events of the past had been drowned in ‘a dark pool of forgetfulness’ (‘t Verloop der tijden heeft veele notabile saecken en aenmerckens-waerdigheden in een duysteren poel van vergetenheyt wegh-ghesleept’).¹⁴ These were the same qualifications that the humanists of the Renaissance, starting with Petrarch, had applied to the long interval between Roman antiquity and the historical present that they considered to be a time of ‘darkness’ (*tenebrae*) corresponding to a decline of the arts, culture and learning.¹⁵ We may also discern in Van Bleywijck’s qualifications an echo of the Catholic historian Caesar Baronius’ description of the *saeculum obscurum*, the ‘Dark Ages’, the period around the year 900 as a time incomprehensible to historians owing to a dearth of historical records.¹⁶ A model for this ‘dark’ representation of the Middle Ages can be

is gestelt/en alles aen malkanderen hangt en vast is gehecht: maer wat moeyte/arbeydt/naerstige en onvermoeyden yver werd gerequireert/om soo een obscure/duystere/onbekende en verdwaelde Historie over al uyt alle hoecken op te soecken/ende het geen dat allenthalve noch verstroyt was by een te versamelen/en daer na alle stucken en brocken/van soo veelderhande Extracten/Memorien en oude Aenteeckeningen allerwegen opgeraep/en uyt soo veelderhande oude Chronijcken en allerley Auteurs getrocken/gelijck als tot een Lighaem te brengen [...]. Translated into English: ‘And even though I had set out on this work as a person who hated empty leisure, merely in order to pass my time by doing something useful, it would not have been brought to completion without much heavy effort and mental exertion. Such work might, perhaps, seem an easy task to those lacking this kind of experience, especially now, when everything is in its proper place, and everything is joined together, but what arduous effort and untiring zeal was required to retrieve from all corners such an obscure, dark, unknown and lost history, and to collect all that had been dispersed; and once all bits and pieces of so many extracts, records and old texts had been gathered and distilled from all kinds of old chronicles and from various authors, to fashion them, as it were, into a single body [...]’.

12 The examples cited below are found in the dedicatory preface of *Beschryvinge der stad Delft*. This preface is addressed to Johan van Bleywijck, receiver-general of the confiscated ecclesiastic property of Holland, and to Delft burgomasters and civic officials: Albrecht van der Graeff, Zacharias Beresteyn van Hofdijck, and Cornelis Onderwater.

13 Van Bleywijck, *Beschryvinge der stad Delft*, ‘Dedicatie’, fol. * 2 v.

14 *Ibidem*, fol. * 2 r.

15 For Petrarch’s role in establishing this qualification see T. Mommsen, ‘Petrarch’s conception of the “Dark Ages”’, in: *Speculum* 2 (1942), p. 226–242. For a recent appraisal see A. Borowski, *Renesans*, Kraków 2002, p. 16–22; M.L. Mc Laughlin, ‘Humanist concepts of the Renaissance in the Tre- and Quattrocento’, in: *Renaissance Studies* 2 (1988), p. 131–142. The antithetical imagery of ‘light’ and ‘darkness’ in the context of Renaissance historiography is explored with reference to Habsburg Spain by Chr. van der Heijden, *De zwarte Renaissance. Spanje en de wereld 1492–1536*, Amsterdam 2008.

16 C. Baronius, *Annales ecclesiastici*, ed. by Augustinus Theiner, Paris 1867, vol. xv, p. 467: ‘Et incipit annus Redemptoris nongentesimus, tertia Indictione notatus, quo et novum inchoatur saeculum, quod sui asperitate ac boni sterilitate ferreum, malique exundantis deformitate plumbeum, atque inopia scriptorum appellari consuevit obscurum’.

found in the historiography of Italian Renaissance ‘civic humanism’. In the *History of the Florentine People*, for instance, Leonardo Bruni offered a well-known example of a paradigm of history in which the Middle Ages, represented as a ‘thousand-year lapse into darkness’, were contrasted with the era of greater civic liberty heralded by the Renaissance rebirth of the republican city-state.¹⁷

The enduring legacy of Renaissance historiography (and of its by-product, ‘Renaissance medievalism’) is that it articulated a discourse that even today is associated with the historical conceptualization of the Renaissance. Van Bleyswijck’s complaints about the ‘darkness’ of the Middle Ages are essentially in alignment with the discourse in Italian Renaissance historiography. The intermediate link in the transmission of a negative image of the Middle Ages can be found in the historical writing of Dutch humanists like Reynier Snoy, Adrianus Barlandus, Petrus Divaeus, and Janus Dousa.¹⁸ The latter’s *Annales rerum a priscis Hollandiae comitibus per CCCXLVI annos* (1599) was, in fact, one of the sources of Van Bleyswijck.¹⁹ The negative medievalism should be situated, however, within the scope of a wider problem of medievalism as such, namely, the invention of a negative image of the Middle Ages in various epochs (and wider still, the use of any historical image to prove a point in a dialectic argument).²⁰ The question still remains why this particular subject-matter was so insistently re-cycled by Dutch humanists and historians? Was it effective as a means of persuasion, and if so, was its effectiveness merely a matter of convention, convenience, or were other factors involved?

The humanist and proto-rational critique of ‘superstition’

The ‘darkness’ attributed to the past carries different connotations in other passages of Van Bleyswijck’s *Beschryvinge*. When giving an account of the miracles at the Old Church Van Bleyswijck spoke of ‘dark ages’ (‘duystere tijden’) when men and women had been ‘blindfolded’.²¹ Reporting on the popular narrative of the miraculous founding of the New Church in the fifteenth century, he qualified it by references to a ‘darkened age’ (‘verduysterde eeuw’).²² An important characteristic of the medieval past (often appearing in conjunction with ‘darkness’) was for Van Bleyswijck its ‘superstition’. Speaking of the Middle Ages, Van Bleyswijck claimed that ‘[...] credulity and superstition reigned in those times, when people allowed themselves to be deceived, and took for infallible truth what reasonable people in their right minds today [...] would consider to be frivolous and idle fantasies forged on the anvil of frenetic or

¹⁷ See E. Breisbach, *Historiography. Ancient, medieval and modern*, Chicago 2007, p. 154.

¹⁸ Maas, *The lure of the Dark Ages* (n. 9), provides a detailed bibliography of the relevant studies in this area.

¹⁹ Van Bleyswijck, *Beschryvinge der stad Delft*, e.g. fol. 47–48; 53–54 (containing lengthy passages quoted from the *Annales*).

²⁰ A. Dąbrówka, ‘The Middle Ages after the Middle Ages. Medievalism in the study of European drama and theatre history’, in: K. Czibula (ed.), *Színházvilág – Világszínház*, Budapest 2008, p. 23–37.

²¹ Van Bleyswijck, *Beschryvinge der stad Delft*, p. 150.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 189.

diseased minds'.²³ If we were to treat these instances as negative examples intended to achieve a specific effect on the reader, that is, as the subject-matter of rhetoric, we still need to ask why such specific arguments were selected in the rhetorical domain of *inventio* and what may be their origins.

Van Bleyswijck's derogation of the Middle Ages (and specifically of discourses and practices associated with medieval Catholicism) can be plausibly tied in with, for instance, the impact of Erasmus' *Praise of Folly* (1510, Dutch translation 1560), the *Colloquies* (1518), the *Antibarbari* (1520, written c. 1500) and so many more of his pronouncements on the subject of 'superstition'. This was, indeed, one of the strongest accusations that the humanist scholar raised against later-medieval devotions.²⁴ Erasmus was an author well-known to Van Bleyswijck who not only cited copiously from his writings but also approvingly presented his religious philosophy as a model of the 'correct' way of implementing the Reformation in the Netherlands.²⁵

The Erasmian concept of 'superstition' was later adopted by the Reformation in its critique of the Catholic Church. All that was not based on a literal reading of the Scripture was, by extension, labeled a form of 'superstition'. Such argumentation was already quite common in Dutch political writing and pamphleteering around 1600. In the anti-Remonstrant pamphlet 'Gulden legende van den nieuwen St. Jan' the chief polemist of the orthodox Calvinist faction, François van Aerssen, claimed that Johan van Oldenbarnevelt 'had shown himself to be an enemy of the true Religion, to which we, having emerged out of the papist darkness into the light, and purified of superstition, rightly give the name of Reformed'.²⁶ This form of linking 'superstition' to Catholic forms of devotion, especially those involving sacred imagery, is a commonplace in Van Bleyswijck's *Beschryvinge der stad Delft*. The miraculous vision that led to the founding of the New Church in Delft was called, for instance, 'a strange history [...] (that the Jews, much less we, should believe)'.²⁷ Elsewhere Van Bleyswijck compared the medieval Roman Catholic tradition of pilgrimages to Marian shrines such as

23 Ibidem, p. 150: 'Dus heerschten de licht en by-geloovigheydt in die tijden dat de luyden haer lieten over reden en wijs-maken/ooock voor onwijselbare waerheydt aennemen/dingen die by rechtsinnige en verstandighe luyden athans weynigh credyt souden meriteren/doch meerendeels geacht souden werden voor frivole en ydele fantasien op het Aenbeeldt van frenetijcke ofte krancksinnighe hersenen gesmeet'.

24 For Erasmus' use of the term 'superstition' to launch an assault on popular later-medieval piety see e.g. Bejczy, *Erasmus and the Middle Ages* (n. 5), p. 160–161. Examples of this type of discourse can be found in the *Colloquies* (Erasmus, *Collected Works*, ed. by C.R. Thompson, Toronto 1997, vol. 39, p. 351–367 ('Naufragium') and vol. 40, p. 619–674 ('Peregrinatio religionis ergo')).

25 Van Bleyswijck, *Beschryvinge der stad Delft*, p. 400–403.

26 [F van Aerssen], *Gulden legende van den nieuwen St. Ian: dat is: Cort verhael van den edeldom, deuchden, ende handelingen van meester Ian van Barnevelt*, s.l. s.n. 1618, Knuttel collection 02758, p. 8: '[...] dat hy [Oldenbarnevelt] hem allenthalven een vyandt getoont heeft van de ware Religie, die wy, als uyt de Pauselicke duysternisse in het licht gebracht, en van de superstien [sic] gesuyvert zijnde, met recht de Gereformeerde namen'.

27 Van Bleyswijck, *Beschryvinge der stad Delft*, p. 194: '[...] welcke vreemde historie hier in 't breede verhaelt (die de Joden selfs veel min wy souden gelooven)'.

the one in Delft, in negative terms, to ‘the heathen going to the Temple of Delphi’.²⁸ A similar negative proof was devised in order to interpret the historical past when medieval miracles recorded in the chronicles of the New Church in Delft were compared to idolatry, and therefore, using a theological argumentation, deemed inadmissible as opposed to Christ’s miracles recorded in the Gospels.²⁹

In Van Bleyswijck’s days, the proto-rationalist critique of the belief that a metaphysical reality could be involved with, or intervene in, the human world in historical times was growing. Three years after the first volume of the *Beschryvinge* was published in Delft, Spinoza’s *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670) proposed to ‘[...] liberate the individual, and society, from “superstition” fostered by fear and, by freeing society from superstition, liberate the individual from intellectual servitude’.³⁰ The Dutch followers of René Descartes and Spinoza expressed a powerful critique of the belief in manifestations of the supernatural in the immanent world. The writers of the Dutch Early Enlightenment, Lodewijk Meijer, Adriaen Koerbagh, Anthonie van Dale, Pierre Bayle – and perhaps most of all Balthasar Bekker, who in his *De Betoverde Weereld* (1691) rejected the possibility that metaphysical evil might manifest itself in human affairs – are, notwithstanding all differences, the key figures of this movement.³¹ These intellectual trends, antagonistically disposed against revealed religion, provide another angle from which one can interpret Van Bleyswijck’s formation as a historian.³²

Van Bleyswijck and the Early Enlightenment

Van Bleyswijck presented himself as an author whose ‘best friend is the truth’ (‘de waerheydt myn beste vriendt is’).³³ He invested his authorial voice with such values as neutrality and impartiality – or so at least he claimed. The narrator’s position was explicitly constructed as the voice of a scholarly humanist. In the epilogue to the first part of *Beschryvinge der stad Delft*, Van Bleyswijck established his humanist credentials by citing from the classics (e.g. Cicero, Ovid, Horace, Martial), the Bible (especially the Gospels and Proverbs), modern humanists (especially Erasmus) and a plethora of

²⁸ Ibidem, p. 229: ‘veele Christen menschen van verre tot desen Tempel van Delft quamen trecken/ten naesten by als tot den Tempel te Delphi de Heydenen eertijts deden’.

²⁹ Ibidem, p. 231 and 238.

³⁰ J.I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic. Its rise, greatness, and fall 1477–1806*, Oxford 1998, p. 920.

³¹ Ibidem, p. 925–931 for Dutch proto-Enlightenment debates.

³² In theology a ‘revealed religion’ is a religion based on divine revelation to individuals, communicated to a wider group of believers through sacred texts. Revealed religion is unlike forms of religious beliefs based on an understanding of nature as divinity (e.g. ‘natural religion’, deism). The rationalists of the seventeenth century were opposed to the former but did not necessarily reject the latter. See e.g. G. Wießner, ‘Offenbarung’, in: *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, ed. by H.R. Balz et al., Berlin, New York 1995, vol. 25, p. 109–210, esp. p. 169–172.

³³ Van Bleyswijck, *Beschryvinge der stad Delft*, ‘Nodige na-reden’, p. [21]/[*** C 2 r].

sixteenth to seventeenth century historians,³⁴ but – tellingly – not so much from the work of the theologians of the Reformation.³⁵ Protected by these ‘authorities’, Van Bleyswijck adopted the position of an observer who supposedly ‘[...] gave the members of the Roman Church credit, where credit was due’, and at the same time did not hesitate at points to criticize the Calvinists.³⁶

But in practice, the negative, biased opinion on Roman Catholic religious beliefs and traditions – inseparable as it was from the image of the Middle Ages – contradicted any pretense of neutrality. One finds few signs of impartiality, in any case, in the conclusion of the narrative about Geertruyd van Oosten, where Van Bleyswijck once again launched a typical tirade against the Middle Ages (‘dark and blind centuries’) and, in the same breath, against the Catholic religious tradition (‘a powerful superstitious zeal and impulse’).³⁷

To the modern reader Van Bleyswijck’s ‘medievalist’ discourse may evoke, at best, a stereotypical representation of that era of history as one that is not only ‘dark’ or ‘obscure’ in the sense of being unknown, but also ‘barbarous’, ‘irrational’, ‘backward’ and ‘ignorant’. In the modern conceptualization of this dichotomy the Middle Ages are placed in opposition to the ‘light’ of the Renaissance, where that ‘light’ automatically connotes values such as ‘civilized’, ‘rational’, ‘progressive’, ‘lucid’ and ‘scientific’. It is an image of the Middle Ages that we know all too well from schoolbooks and it is perpetuated, even today, by the media and in political discourse.³⁸

This dichotomy is manifest in Van Bleyswijck’s chorography not only in frequent references to ‘darkness’ but also – on the opposite pole – to ‘reason’. Its expression is found in the narrative practice of equating religious belief with partiality, and religious skepticism with objectivity. Similarly to other Dutch proto-Enlightenment writers, most notably Van Dale and Bekker, Van Bleyswijck anticipated, in many ways, the dynamics of late-seventeenth century French *histoire raisonnée*, and Enlightenment

34 Van Bleyswijck resorted frequently, according to information in the marginal notes, to works by P. Bor, M. Boxhorn, J. Dousa sr, H. Grotius, P.C. Hooft, E. van Meteren and E. van Reyd.

35 In the entire ‘Na-reden en aehangsel’ Cicero and other classical authors are cited fifteen times, the Bible five times and Erasmus once. This selection gives an impression of van Bleyswijck’s intellectual background and training in the classics.

36 Van Bleyswijck, *Beschryvinge der stad Delft*, ‘Nodige na-reden’, p. [24]/fol. [*** D v]: ‘[...] oock den Roomsche gesinden gelijk gevende/daer sy gelijk in hadden/ende die van myn eygen Gesinte niet ont-siende te bestraffen/daer sy te bestraffen waren’.

37 Van Bleyswijck was the most vocal attacking the Catholic religious belief that God may intervene to perform miracles in historical (non-Biblical) times: ‘[...] ick geloove alle die ghesustineerde Miraculen van die duystere en blinde eeuwen/soo wonderlijk beschreven/ganschelijck gheen gheloof en meriteren/gelijk oock naderhand (behalven soo veel en menighvuldigh bedrogh) dickwils ondervonden is/dat sy meerendeels uyt beuselachtige uytleggingen oorspronckelijck ghesproeten/of door eenige fantastijcke geesten in haer ledige eensaemheydt nae het ontwerp van haer eygen melancholijcke hersenen gefabri-ceert/en vervolgens door een krachdadige superstitieuse drift en yver/jae oock dickwils by de versierders selfs/voor de waerheyt wonderlick ingebeelt zijn’; *Beschryvinge der stad Delft*, p. 314.

38 For a recent critical reaction to the post-Enlightenment dichotomy of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance in the Dutch context see e.g. F.W. Korsten, *Lessen in literatuur*, Nijmegen 2004, p. 113.

historiography in general, where the emphasis would be to situate the past, described in a strongly anti-religious manner, in a narrative of historical evolution towards a somehow better, more 'rational' and 'enlightened' future.³⁹

One finds evidence of this new intellectual trend in the dialectic that Van Bleyswijck engages in with the reader. The reader is asked to accept as the narrator's chief intellectual credentials his secular notions of skepticism and disbelief in the intervention of the divine supernatural. In this way – embodied in the figure of the 'reasonable reader' ('den verstandigen Leser') who may test all information on the touch-stone of 'discernment and reason' ('op den toet-steen van syne bescheydentheydt en raisonnement') – a community of like-minded 'rational' individuals was invented on the pages of the chorography.⁴⁰

The Reformation, in Van Bleyswijck's view, is the outcome of such historical evolution in recent events, considering it quite simply a victory over the human belief in divine intervention through miracles!⁴¹ But, even when he praised God for having 'enlightened' mankind by taking away a 'cloak of darkness' covering its eyes,⁴² Van Bleyswijck's attitude towards organized religion was on the whole negative. If his religious beliefs may be called Christian, it was a Christianity of some strongly idiosyncratic and, arguably, deistic variety.⁴³ The key concept that Van Bleyswijck employed in his dialectic with the reader was 'reason'. As a matter of fact, 'human reason' was extolled as 'the finest and most divine of all (human qualities)'.⁴⁴ These references to 'reason' in a text published in 1667 are interesting since they stem from approximately the same period as the crucial publications of Spinoza, Meijer and others. They indicate how rapidly, in Van Bleyswijck's day, the new intellectual trend of questioning the possibility of supernatural intervention in the immanent world was making inroads among the intellectual elites of Holland.

Van Bleyswijck's narrative about the life of Geertruyd van Oosten

If Van Bleyswijck considered the Middle Ages, along with the humanists of the Renaissance, to be a 'dark' *terra incognita*, this darkness was nonetheless worth exploring. The methodology that he devised for the *Beschryvinge der stad Delft* involved using hard evidence in the form of attested written sources.⁴⁵ Van Bleyswijck testified to his methodological awareness when he stated in the epilogue to the first part of the *Beschryvinge*:

39 Some more famous exponents of this discourse included the philosopher Montesquieu and the historians Turgot and de Condorcet. See e.g. Breisbach, *Historiography* (n. 17), p. 207.

40 Van Bleyswijck, *Beschryvinge der stad Delft*, 'Nodige na-reden', p. [23]/fol. [*** C 3 r].

41 Ibidem, p. [24]/fol. [*** C 3 v].

42 Ibidem.

43 Ibidem, p. [27-28]/fol. [*** D r - *** D v], but for a rare reference to the 'grace of God' see p. [29]/fol. [*** D 2 r].

44 Ibidem, p. [29]/fol. [*** D 2 r]: 't menschelijcke verstant ('t heerlijckste ende Godlijckste van alle)'.

45 The marginal gloss 'Apologie ofte verantwoordinghe over eenige Methoden' offers evidence of van Bleyswijck's methodological awareness; ibidem, p. [19]/[*** C r].

What I write, I generally prove, and the proof that I have supplied here is not derived from far-away or strange places, nor is it the product of a fantastic imagination, but it represents what our forefathers experienced and what the best and finest chroniclers of that time left to us; they based what they wrote on their special knowledge, writing either on the orders or with the approval of high authorities. And to make this work more convincing and more impregnable to critique, in various places I resort not only to using the words of the authors, all respectable men of great renown, but also, oftentimes, of the governing authorities themselves.⁴⁶

It may seem paradoxical that even though Van Bleyswijck condemned the Middle Ages, he stopped well short of undermining the reliability of the historical documents produced in this period. Quite on the contrary, the readers were invited to accept these documents as trustworthy, even though the age that produced them was defined as a time of darkness, superstition and delusion. Van Bleyswijck was not the only one to follow this strategy. A somewhat similar course of justifying an argument by calling on the legitimacy of historical documents from the Middle Ages was pursued in the Dutch Republic by the advocates of the theory of States sovereignty, whose leading exponent was Hugo Grotius. For Grotius, the laws of the Dutch Republic, and in fact its entire 'constitutional' framework, rested on the interpretation of legal acts dating back to the Burgundian and Habsburg period.⁴⁷ If such documents retained their legal force, then the authorities that had once provided these documents with their seal of approval were similarly beyond reproach. Legal scholars and historians were therefore at liberty to examine such documents and to cite from them according to their own good judgment. The strategy used by Van Bleyswijck thus guaranteed, in practice, that the sources related to Delft's medieval history (and to events concerning social manifestations of Catholic religious beliefs) were not entirely suppressed, even though the authorial voice of the historian consistently downplayed their contents as the products of a 'superstitious age'.⁴⁸

Van Bleyswijck implemented a strategy of building upon source documents in the narrative of the life of the Delft beguine Geertruyd van Oosten (fig. 1). After a stereotypical reference to this narrative being an 'incredible and ludicrous tale' the author

46 Van Bleyswijck, *Beschryvinge der stad Delft*, p. [28]/[*** D v]: 't Geen ick schryve/bewijs ick doorgaens; ende de bewijzen die ick hier toe by-brenge/zyn niet van verre ontleent/ofte yewers vreemts gehaelt/veel min fabuleuselijck verdicht/maer 't selve dat by onse voor-Ouders ondervonden en by de treflijckste en bescheidenste jaerschrijvers van die tyden nagelaten is/welckers verscheyden geschreven hebben met speciale kennise/ende uyt last ofte met approbatie van de Hooge Overheden. Ende om dit werck te eygen-geloofwaerdiger en onwederspreeckelijcker te maecken/soo gebruycke ick tot verscheyde plaetsen niet alleen de eygen woorden van die Auteuren/Mannen van aensien ende grooten naem/maer oock veeltijds van de Overheden self'.

47 See especially H. Grotius, *Van de oudheydt der Batavische, nu Hollandsche republieque*, Haarlem: Adriaen Roman, 1636, p. 24-34; idem, *Verantwoordingh van de wettelijcke regeringh van Hollandt*, Paris 1622, p. 1-4. In the latter, for instance, an argument in favor of the sovereignty of the States of Holland is derived from documents by representatives of the sixteenth and seventeenth century Burgundian and Habsburg dynasty conferring certain rights upon the representatives of that province.

48 When treating the subject of religious miracles, Van Bleyswijck called such documents a product of 'self-deception' even when these involved a complete legal apparatus of 'sworn depositions, witnesses and questioning' ('eeden/getuygen en examinaten'); *Beschryvinge der stad Delft*, p. 142.

nevertheless opined that one should not ‘yield to the detrimental and commonplace error of prejudice’. Adopting a somewhat legalistic tone Van Bleyswijck opted, therefore, to ‘hear the principal points of the case, instead of condemning things that were once considered holy without having examined them’.⁴⁹ Meanwhile, the readers who had ‘tender ears’ were invited to skip this part, for they could find it just as well, ‘collected and described for the sake of remembrance’, in the work of other history-writers.⁵⁰

This passage, in which the historian explicitly evoked the metaphor of a court hearing, emphasizes the essentially rhetorical character of Van Bleyswijck’s historiography. In this proceedings the authorial voice of the narrator had a two-fold role, that of a prosecutor and judge. The defendant was identified with the his-

torical belief in religious miracles, and the reader was invited to be the spectator of the proceedings. The metaphor of a legal hearing functioned in all this as a genre-marker, alerting the reader to the fact that he was going to hear an oration (*oratio iudicialis*), in other words, an enunciation belonging to the judicial sort (*genus iudiciale*) of seventeenth century rhetoric.⁵¹ This *genus* entailed accusation or defense and related to ‘things past’ (*Versatur hoc genus circa praeterita*) which made it applicable to history as well.⁵² The argumentation addressed the state (*status*) of the case, a dubious problem



Fig. 1 The statue of Geertruyd van Oosten next to the Old Church in Delft, photo M.M. Minderhoud.

49 For the entire passage see Van Bleyswijck, *Beschryvinge der stad Delft*, p. 308: ‘Verhael van dese Historien is niet alleen ongelooflijck maer oock bespottelijck/echter om te betoonen wy de schadelijcke en gemeene faut van vooroordeel/selvs oock hier geen plaets in ons te willen verleen/en ten eerste niet en soude laten blijcken te gelooven/dat so groot een getal van Menschen/die gheseyt werden so wel uyt verre als alle na by gelegene plaetsen herwaerts aen quamen vloeyen/om dese wonderheden te aenschouwen/alle te gelijk met blintheyt geslagen zijn geweest/so laet ons liever de saeck ten principalen horen uyt spreken/dan sulke heylig-geachte dingen ongehoort te verwijzen’.

50 Ibidem: ‘[...] ondertusschen indien eenig Leser ofte toeghhorder van een vies gehoor dese vertellinge soude moghe vervelen/en nochtans misschien noch noyt gehoort en heeft/dat men sulcke wonderheden van syne Vaderlijcke Stadt van outs noch wist voor den dach te brengen/die mach met zijn eygen sinnelijckheyt onverhindert voortvaren/en dese bladren ongemoeyt laten passeren/het staet’er evenwel uyt de oude Chronijck van Hollandt etc mitsgaders andere Histori-schrijvers klaer en duydelijck ter memorie uytgetrocken ende gedescribeert’.

51 For a treatment of *genus iudiciale* (*juridiciale*) in an elementary rhetorical handbook that Van Bleyswijck must have been familiar with, see Vossius, *Podstawy retoryki* (n. 10), p. 8.

52 Ibidem.

arising from a divergence of opinion. Here the argument concerned the *status* of historical miracles, a thing as to which, Van Bleyswijck admitted, a different opinion existed in the past.

So, who represented the defendant in this case? One answer is the Roman Catholic historiography of the Low Countries. The passages dealing with the life of Geertruyd van Oosten are a *cento* of quotations from authors ranging from late-medieval chroniclers Jan Gerbrandszoon van Leiden and Cornelius Aurelius,⁵³ to the hagiographers of the Catholic Counter-Reformation, Petrus Ribadineira, Heribertus Rosweyduus,⁵⁴ and Dionysius Mudtsaerts.⁵⁵ In a marginal note (p. 311) Laurentius Surius and Jacobus Mosander are also mentioned. These Catholic sources were part of an extensive textual ‘network’ of hagiographies of Geertruyd van Oosten.⁵⁶ Conspicuously missing from Van Bleyswijck’s sources is a small booklet published at Louvain in 1589 and recently attributed, tentatively, to the Catholic vicar apostolic of the Northern Netherlands, Sasbout Vosmeer.⁵⁷ We can safely assume however, in the light of what has been said previously, that if a source was lacking, it was not omitted for any ideological reason but most probably simply because Van Bleyswijck did not have it in his possession.

The process of ‘reconstructing’ the past for the present did not stop for Van Bleyswijck at the point of collecting and citing at length from source documents. The personal experience of the historian was also brought to bear upon this ‘reconstruction’ that involved inseparably the Middle Ages and the Catholic religious tradition. Sometimes this method led to unexpected results. When Van Bleyswijck ventured into the Delft beguinage (*Bagijnhof*), he tried to locate the cell where (on his information) Geertruyd van Oosten had lived and where she had received the stigmata. This cell, Van Bleyswijck maintained, was the site of a contemporary, authentic *cultus* of Geertruyd van Oosten.⁵⁸ However, when he asked to see this cell, the Catholic inhabitants

53 C. Aurelius, *Die cronyncke van Hollandt, Zeelandt ende Vrieslant*, Leiden: Jan Seversz., 1517. Van Bleyswijck cites on p. 308–311 of *Beschryvinge der stad Delft* the account that we find on pages 204v–205v of Aurelius’ chronicle.

54 P. Ribadineira and H. Rosweyduus, *Generale legende der heiligen*, Antwerp: Hieronymus Verdussen, 1649, p. 131–134.

55 D. Mudtsaerts, *Generale kerckelücke historie*, Antwerp: Hieronymus Verdussen, 1624.

56 L. Surius and J. Mosander, *Tomus VII. De probatis sanctorum historiis*. Cologne: Geruinus Calenius et haeredes Quentelios, 1581, p. 14–18. For a detailed analysis of the sources narrating the *vita* of Geertruyd van Oosten see A.M.J. van Buuren, ‘Geertruyd van Oosten and “Het daghet inden Oosten”’, in: M. Wintle and P. Vincent (eds), *Modern Dutch studies. Essays in honour of Peter King, professor of modern Dutch studies at the University of Hull on the occasion of his retirement*, London 1988, p. 75–87; M. Carasso-Kok (ed.), *Repertorium van verhalende historische bronnen uit de Middeleeuwen. Heiligenlevens, annalen, kronieken en andere in Nederland geschreven verhalende bronnen*, The Hague 1981, p. 34–35.

57 M. Polkowski, *A struggle for survival. The continuity of Catholic religious literature in Holland. The example of Delft (1450–1650)*, Lublin 2012, p. 209–266; Van Buuren, ‘Geertruyd van Oosten’.

58 For the reason why a procedure of canonization was apparently never instituted and for information about the popular *cultus* that accompanied the figure of Geertruyd van Oosten during the later Middle Ages and the Renaissance, see A.H. Bredero, ‘De Delftse begijn Gertrui van Oosten (ca. 1320–1358) en haar niet-erkende heiligheid’, in: D.E.H. de Boer en J.W. Marsilje (eds), *De Nederlanden in de late middeleeuwen*, Utrecht 1987, p. 83–97.

of the beguinage politely but firmly refused, for reason (as Van Bleyswijck believed) of ‘their extreme suspicion’.⁵⁹ The inhabitants of the beguinage were most probably aware that their religious experience would not be treated fairly by someone like Van Bleyswijck.⁶⁰

This was not the only instance in the *Beschryvinge der stad Delft* when Van Bleyswijck gave an account of his personal search for historical evidence. On another occasion he was invited into the home of ‘a good family’ in Delft, where he saw, framed on the wall, a page with ‘some little refrains’ in fine gothic script about the construction of the tower of the New Church (‘Noch onlangs deser dagen sagh ick by seecker eerlijck huysgesin/die oude Refereyntyjes van ’t opbouwen des Nieuwe-Kercks-Toorn [...] met een kunstigh handt-geschrift in een Bortetje te pronck hangen’).⁶¹ Somewhat disappointingly, however, that discovery turned out to be an item that van Bleyswijck already had in his possession.

On the subject of the Delft beguinage Van Bleyswijck told a similar story of tangibly inspecting source documents. There, however, the letters and papers in question ‘had been buried in the ground during the war and the troubles’, as a result of which they had disintegrated or become illegible.⁶² Was it a true statement? Just a few decades later two other chroniclers, but this time Catholics, Hugo Franciscus van Heussen and Hendrik van Rijn, did actually quote from these historical documents in their *Oudheden en gestichten van Delft en Delfland* (1720).⁶³ So maybe there had been two sets of documents, one of which had indeed suffered the fate reported by Van Bleyswijck, or perhaps the story was invented by the Roman Catholic inhabitants of the beguinage for the sake of protecting a valuable historical artifact from being appropriated by the historian?⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Van Bleyswijck, *Beschryvinge der stad Delft*, p. 315: ‘[...] middervijl hebbe ick van besyden aen eens wel ende te recht verstaen, ende sulcx my kennelijck is, dat t’eeniger plaetse, het sy van hier of op het ander Begijnhof, het kamertje daer dese H. Suster op geleefft heeft ende gestorven is, ofte (soo men pretendeert) de voorschrewe wonder-teecken ontfangen heeft, als noch by de superstitieuse en bygeloovigst Roomsche-gesinden in grooter veneratie en eerbiedigheyt ghehouden wert, ende by vele Begijnkens en andere bliintverige zieltjens jaerlijcks met haer ordinarische gebedekens metter dousijnen, in bedertganck en andersints wert besocht; welckers aengaende de onderrechtige van recht bescheyt, by den genen die sulcx wel ende best wisten, uyt al te grooten suspicie en achterdencken, aen my is gheexcuseert ende geweygert’. This passage in an English translation: ‘[...] meanwhile I received all kinds of information to the effect that, as I understand it, this saintly nun lived and died in one of the rooms in this or the other beguinage [i.e. Grote Begijnhof or Falie-Begijnhof] or (as they pretend it to be) received the above-mentioned stigmata there, for it is still held in great veneration by the superstitious Papists, and many beguines and other simple souls come to visit it each year by the dozen, saying their prayers, like on a pilgrimage; however, those who possessed the exact information regarding [this room] denied it to me on account of their extreme suspicion’.

⁶⁰ Polkowski, *A struggle for survival*, p. 228–229.

⁶¹ Van Bleyswijck, *Beschryvinge der stad Delft*, ‘Nodige na-reden’, p. [3]/[*** A 1].

⁶² Van Bleyswijck, *Beschryvinge der stad Delft*, p. 314: ‘[...] des selfs Brieven en Papieren, mits den Oorlogh en veranderinge, gedolven ende in de aerde begraven zijnde, gantschelijcken zijn vergaen ende onleesbaer bevonden’.

⁶³ H.W. van Heussen and H. van Rijn, *Oudheden en gestichten van Delft en Delfland*, Leiden: Christiaan Vermey, 1720, p. 203.

⁶⁴ See Polkowski, *A struggle for survival*, p. 228.

Assuming Van Bleyswijck's assertion about the documents on the beguinage was truthful, more research is required to determine what might have been the reason why he had been unable to inspect these documents.

Justifying his course of action as a historian writing about the Middle Ages, Van Bleyswijck had to acknowledge that monuments such as churches and cloisters, although no longer in use for Catholic religious worship or turned to a different use, were nevertheless a living reminder of the pre-Reformation chapter of Delft's history. This information, therefore, could not be omitted in a history of the town. To come to this conclusion Van Bleyswijck went through a process of (re-)discovering the past, of (re-)inventing the Middle Ages, taking his information 'from many hundred books, and from dirty, dusty and mouldy age-old papers, written in a no-longer legible hand, here and there smothered and packed in worm-eaten boxes and chests of drawers'.⁶⁵ This information could not be suppressed, if only for the reason that 'a vast number of events happened [in Delft] concerning the Church and clergy' and 'in no other town in this country [Holland] were there more persons belonging to the priesthood'.⁶⁶ In so many words Van Bleyswijck acknowledged that the history of the Middle Ages was inextricably connected to events concerning the Catholic Church and its religious traditions. Together, these constituted the cornerstones of the historical identity of Delft that could not be simply removed or glossed over.

We may discern, therefore, in Van Bleyswijck's epilogue ('Na-reden en aenhangsel') placed at the end of the first volume of the *Beschryvinge*, a sense of a certain respect towards the Catholic religious tradition that manifested itself in the history of Delft. In that authorial 'master-narrative', however, such sub-narratives as the life of Geertruyd van Oosten were no longer acknowledged as referring to the present, as a living religious tradition. Instead these narratives were situated in a historical past that those living in the present might perhaps find useful to understand:

[...] however, because they contain and describe the state and condition of the times in which our forefathers lived, and from there we derive [our knowledge of] the things they valued most highly, so we cannot (letting history, as Cicero did, be the life of memory and a messenger of antiquity) pass next to these [accounts] in silence.⁶⁷

Besides, as the Delft regent opined, it is always better to have knowledge of the past than to live in ignorance of it, especially when this past concerned one's own country.

⁶⁵ Van Bleyswijck, *Beschryvinge der stad Delft*, 'Nodige na-reden', p. [7]/fol. [*** A 3 r]: '[...] uyt allerhande vuyle/stoffige en vermufte Papieren van voorleden eeuwen/met een oude en nauelijcks leesbare handt geschreven/hier en daer vermyterde kisten en kassen gelijk als verstickt en versmoordt leggende'.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, p. [22]/fol. [*** C 2 v]: '[...] sulcks is geschiet ten opsichte [van] de Clergie oft Kerckelijckheyd in dese Stadt aldergrootst is geweest, en dat nergens hier te Lande meer van de soogheseyde Geestelijckheydt gevonden wierdt'.

⁶⁷ Van Bleyswijck, *Beschryvinghe der stad Delft*, p. 150: '[...] nochtans dewijl de selfde mentioneren/en vermelden den staet en hoedanigheydt van de tijden onser Voor-Ouderen/en dat wy daer uyt verstaen hare grootste en hoogh-geachste saken/soo en moghen wy (ende met Cicero de Historie het leven der geheugenisse/ende bode der oudtheydt laten zyn) dese niet stilswijgens voor-by-gaen'.

This extended, in particular, to discerning the ‘foundations’ (‘grondt-slagh’) of present-day reality.⁶⁸ The point of historiography, therefore, was in its ability to help those living in the here-and-now attain an understanding of how the events of the past are causally linked to present-day situations.

This overt definition of the historian’s intentions could point at the search for historical truth (specifically historical mentality and causality) as being his most important concern. Was this aim subordinated to the rhetorical considerations of an *oratio iudicialis*? Van Bleyswijck compared the belief in miracles to chivalric romance but even though he rejected both as ‘fantastic inventions’ (‘fabuleuselijck verdicht’), he believed the former more worthwhile because the latter ‘did not concern us’.⁶⁹ Yet at the same time the historian admitted that his work offered an opportunity for condemning the ‘origins’ of medieval religious institutions.⁷⁰ If we follow Van Bleyswijck’s argumentation, therefore, it becomes clear that the reason why the narrative of Geertruid van Oosten was not suppressed or ‘silenced’ at all,⁷¹ did not arise exclusively from a love of tradition or a sense of well-considered civic pride. The other motive, a less obvious one, was to enact, in the guise of a historical narrative, a proceedings in which the discourse of the ‘dark’ Middle Ages (and subsumed into it, all references to historical examples of socially-manifested religious beliefs), would be rhetorically juxtaposed against – and subordinated to – a new understanding of ‘reason’ and ‘enlightenment’ that was antithetical to revealed religion. Finally, another explanation could point to the biographic context. The *oratio* against Roman religious institutions provided a rhetorical argumentation that would have been music to the ears of Johan van Bleyswijck (1618–1696), mayor of Delft and receiver-general of ecclesiastic property, to whom the historian dedicated his narrative.

Conclusion

In his *Beschrijvinge van Delft* Van Bleyswijck made ample use of transcribed documents to craft his early modern image of the medieval past. These sources did retrieve, in a

68 Ibidem, p. 195: ‘[...] het [is] in allen deelen lofelijck [...] /kennisse van syn eyghen Vaderlandsche saecken te hebben/en den grondt-slagh van veele dinghen te weten/en niet te leven als de kinderen sonder eenighe wetenschap van den grijsen ouderdom der eerste tijden/gelijck den wijzen Solon voormaels seyde’. This passage in English: ‘[...] it is in every respect praiseworthy [...] to know the affairs of one’s own native country, and to be aware of the origins of various things, instead of living like children without any knowledge of the grey-haired senility of the first ages, like the wise Solon once said’.

69 Ibidem, ‘Nodige na-reden’, p. [24]/fol. [*** C 3 v]: ‘[...] noch nuttelijcker en dienstiger zyn te lesen/dan alle die andere Historien/by sommige noch in waerde/hoewel soo fabuleuselijck verdicht/dat nooyt in ’s menschen herte eenigh geloof geordineert hebben/oock ons in ’t alderminste niet aengaende noch raeckende zyn’.

70 Ibidem, p. [23]/fol. [*** C 3 r]: ‘[...] oock om aen te wysen de fundamentele oorsprong eeniger Gestichten/ofte oock sommiger instellingen/uyt soodanige voorgevingen ende gepretendeerde miraculen alder-eerst ontstaan’.

71 Ibidem, p. [24–25]/fol. [*** C 3 v–*** C 4 r]: ‘niet verzwegen/maer veel eer met reden zyn vermeldt geworden’.

way, the past for the present, although it always happened in a fraught and unlikely way. Does this imply that Van Bleyswijck's historical writings were an exercise in seventeenth century Dutch tolerance? Partly, the answer should be yes. Within the scope of a literary text, the Delft regent revived, albeit grudgingly, a range of Catholic voices speaking on the subject of miracles, visions, devotion to the Virgin Mary and Catholic saints, liturgical customs, et cetera. It is to Van Bleyswijck's credit as an historian, that those images of Catholic identity obtained a place of their own in his work. All considered, however, the position of these sub-narratives in Van Bleyswijck's writing was still an ambiguous one. The *Beschryvinge's* conglomerates of citations were always circumscribed by a framing 'master-narrative' which sought to invalidate any references to Catholic religious tradition that the cited passages may have contained. In the event of critique Van Bleyswijck strove to disassociate himself from any suspicion of being sympathetic to the Catholic religion or traditions, doing this partly to placate his (Protestant) readers.⁷² And yet the Catholic and pre-Reformation identity of Delft appeared to Van Bleyswijck as too powerful and profound to be ignored.

72 Ibidem, p. [23], fol. [*** C 3 r].