

Elzevirian Republics, wise merchants, and new perspectives on Spain and Portugal in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic

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Abstract

Between 1625 and 1649, the Leiden publishing house Elzevir issued a series of thirty-five descriptions of all European, a selection of non-European, and three ancient states, that became known as the ‘Elzevirian Republics’. This essay focuses on two of these ‘Republics’, Johannes de Laet’s descriptions of Spain and Portugal. I argue that these books convey an attitude towards geopolitics that is best understood in the light of Caspar Barlaeus’s ideal of the ‘wise merchant’ (*mercator sapiens*) and the historical regent-merchant culture in seventeenth-century Amsterdam. The essay draws on recent scholarship in the history of knowledge, commerce, and the pre-history of objectivity.

Keywords: Elzevirian Republics, *mercator sapiens*, knowledge and commerce, descriptions of Spain and Portugal, seventeenth-century Amsterdam, Dutch merchant-regents, pre-history of objectivity

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Introduction

Between 1625 and 1649, the Leiden publishing house Elzevir issued a series of thirty-five descriptions of all European, select non-European, and three ancient states, Greece, Israel and Rome.¹ In some cases, earlier descriptions were reprinted; in other cases the authors, mostly Dutch merchants and scholars, compiled and systematized accounts derived from travelogues, histories, and chronicles; occasionally, the authors preferred to publish ‘fresh volumes’ and made use of existing accounts to write new books. Each volume depicted the respective country’s geography, its landscape and various regions, its people and mores, its government, its economy, its kings and noble families, and, in some cases, its arts and sciences as well. Because the titles of most of the volumes begin with *De republica*, the books were quickly referred to as ‘Elzevirian Republics’. Owing to their small size, they caused a stir among early modern printers and quickly became famous as the first pocketbook series in history.²

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1 For an overview of the series and a reprint of the frontispieces, see J.A. Gruys, ‘De reeks “Republieken” van de Elzevirs en Joannes de Laet’, in: B.P.M. Dongelmans, P.B. Ghoftijzer and O.G. Lankhorst (eds), *Boekverkopers van Europa. Het 17de-eeuwse Nederlandse uitgevershuis Elzevir*, Zutphen 2000, p. 77–106. See also G. Frick, *Die Elzevierschen Republiken*, Halle 1892. For an analysis of some of the volumes, see V. Conti, *Consociatio civitatum. Le repubbliche nei testi elzeviriani 1625–1649*, Florence 1977.

2 See G. Oestreich, ‘Politischer Neustozismus und Niederländische Bewegung in Europa und besonders in Brandenburg-Preußen’, in: idem, *Geist und Gestalt des frühmodernen Staates. Ausgewählte Aufsätze*, Berlin

Until now, the Elzevirian Republics have been classified as a kind of encyclopedia of history and political science,³ and studied in the context of the early modern history of political ideas,⁴ or as part of the history of early modern ‘statistics’.⁵ But scholars have yet to determine the readership of the Elzevirian Republics. From the fact that the volumes were written in Latin and that some of them were dedicated to political dignitaries or their sons it is evident that they were aimed at an international audience of scholars and future politicians. However, a close look at the subjects discussed in the books and the worldviews expressed in them suggests that the Elzevirian Republics were also directed at the new generation of Dutch merchant-regents addressed in Barlaeus’s famous speech *Mercator sapiens*, given at the opening of the Amsterdam Athenaeum Illustre in 1632. This is indicated, for example, by the secularizing tendency that can be traced in many volumes. This tendency has recently been attributed to a circle of Leiden scholars influenced by French *politiques*.⁶ But it is equally prominent in Barlaeus’s *Mercator sapiens* or in the policy of the Amsterdam curators of the Athenaeum Illustre. In my future research I will discuss this phenomenon in detail while situating the Elzevirian Republics within the particular seventeenth-century Dutch merchant-regent-culture. In doing so, I hope to contribute to recent publications on mercantile cultures of knowledge.⁷

For the purpose of this essay, I will focus on the descriptions of Spain and Portugal in the Elzevirian Republics. These two volumes are of special significance within the series for three reasons. First, they came out in the midst of the Dutch war with Spain; second, they were issued at a time when the Elzevirian editors sought to publish

1969, p. 126. The Elzevirian Republics became the object of frequent imitation. For examples from the Amsterdam book market, see Guillaume Postel, *De republica seu magistratibus Atheniensium liber*, Maire: Leiden 1635, or Johann Angelus von Werdenhagen, *Introductio universalis in omnes republicas sive politica generalis*, Blaeu: Amsterdam 1632, equally titled and printed in 16°. As for Werdenhagen’s book, it has to be mentioned that it is not an introduction into the description of states [*Staatsbeschreibungen*] but a plea for the return to political science based on the Divine Word.

3 Frick, *Die Elzevirischen Republiken*, p. 21.

4 See V.I. Comparato and E. Pii (eds), *Dalle ‘Repubbliche’ Elzeviriane alle Ideologie del ‘900. Studi di storia delle idee in età moderna e contemporanea*, Florence 1997; Conti, *Consociatio civitatum*.

5 For a study of the Elzevirian Republics as part of the history of early modern ‘statistics’, see V. John, *Geschichte der Statistik. Ein quellenmässiges Handbuch für den akademischen Gebrauch wie für den Selbstunterricht. Erster Teil. Von dem Ursprung der Statistik bis auf Quetelet (1835)*, Stuttgart 1884. The term ‘statistics’ (from latin *status* [state]) can be traced back to Johann Georg Achenwall and originally signifies the description of states in the broadest sense of the word. This use of the term should not be confused with the type of political arithmetic that was founded by William Petty and that we usually refer to today when we use the term ‘statistics’. For an overview, see M. Rassem and J. Stagl, ‘Einleitung’, in: M. Rassem and J. Stagl (eds), *Geschichte der Staatsbeschreibung. Ausgewählte Quellentexte 1456-1813*, Berlin 1994, p. 2-8.

6 See M. Somos, *Secularisation and the Leiden Circle*, Leiden, Boston 2011.

7 For recent publications concerning the Dutch context, see H.J. Cook, *Matters of Exchange. Commerce, Medicine, and Science in the Dutch Golden Age*, New Haven 2007; S. Huigen, J.L. de Jong and E. Kolfin (eds), *The Dutch Trading Companies as Knowledge Networks*, Leiden, Boston 2010. I am myself preparing a book on the series of the Elzevirian Republics, entitled *Mit Wissen Handeln. Niederländische Regentenkaufleute und ihre Weltbeschreibungen im 17. Jahrhundert*. I expect it to be finished by 2014.

'fresh volumes'; and third they were the work of Johannes de Laet (1581–1649), one of the series' most important authors who perfectly embodied the ideal of the *mercator sapiens*.⁸ De Laet combined commercial and scholarly skills in an impressive manner, as evidenced by the fact that he was not only one of the founding directors of the Dutch West India Company (wic), but also wrote the first history of the organization. More than that, he was a good example of the separation of religion from commerce and politics. Although De Laet actively sided with the Counter-Remonstrant party at the Synod of Dordt, he subsequently abstained from mixing his religious opinions with his geographical scholarship.⁹

In the first part of this essay, I will outline the ideal of the 'wise merchant' (*mercator sapiens*), which arose as a product of the very particular mixture of merchant and regent cultures in seventeenth-century Amsterdam. In the second part, I will discuss the Elzevirian Republics and more specifically the two volumes on Spain and Portugal. In the third part, I will show the affinities of the perspectives promulgated in these state descriptions with the ideal of the wise merchant and the Dutch merchant-regent-culture. In the fourth and final part, I will situate my conclusions within recent discussions in the history of science, connected to the history of epistemic virtues and aspects of the pre-history of objectivity.¹⁰

The 'Wise merchant'

On the 8th and 9th of January 1632, the Athenaeum Illustre, forerunner of today's University of Amsterdam, opened its doors with a festive ceremony. Officially intended for the youth of Amsterdam, the school's founding was not only a response to the establishment of the University of Leiden constituted by William of Orange at the beginning of the Dutch Revolt, but also the expression of a new merchant-regent culture.¹¹ From its very inception the Athenaeum was to serve the city in which it was located. In the years following 1585, Amsterdam had emerged as a trading metropolis and had become the power center of the Northern Netherlands. In the first third of the seventeenth century, it numbered some 125,000 citizens.¹² Amsterdam regents,

8 For De Laet, see R.H. Bremmer Jr and P. Hofstijzer (eds), *Johannes de Laet (1581–1649). A Leiden Polymath* (Amsterdam 1998), special issue of *Lias. Sources and Documents Relating to the Early Modern History of Ideas* 25. 2 (1998), p. 135–230.

9 See H. Florijn, 'Johannes de Laet (1581–1649) and the Synod of Dort, 1618–1619', in: *ibidem*, p. 165–176.

10 For the concept of 'epistemic virtues', see L. Daston and P. Galison, *Objectivity*, New York 2010, p. 39–42.

11 See W. Frijhoff, 'Het Amsterdamse Athenaeum in het academische landschap van de zeventiende eeuw', in: E.O.G. Haitsma Mulier et al. (eds), *Athenaeum Illustre. Elf studies over de Amsterdamse Doorluchtige School 1632–1877*, Amsterdam 1997, p. 37–65. Also D. van Miert, *Illuster onderwijs. Het Amsterdamse Athenaeum in de Gouden Eeuw 1632–1704*, Amsterdam 2005.

12 For one of the most recent descriptions of early modern Amsterdam, see W. Frijhoff and M. Prak (eds), *Geschiedenis van Amsterdam. Centrum van de wereld 1578–1650*, Amsterdam 2004. For a recent description of the economic history of early modern Amsterdam, see C. Lesger, *The Rise of the Amsterdam Market and Information Exchange. Merchants, Commercial Expansion and Change in the Spatial Economy of the Low Countries*

among them many merchants who had attained their offices after the *Alteratie* in 1578, were extremely influential in the decision-making processes of the States of Holland and the States General. In disputes with the princes of Orange they comported themselves with the confidence of an elite conscious of its power.

As historians have stressed time and again, Amsterdam quickly became a melting pot of all kinds of religions and cultures. But Amsterdam's wealth did not only encourage diversity of religion. A wide spectrum of secular knowledge was in demand as well, and the Amsterdam Athenaeum was to provide the city's elites with the instruction they called for: it offered daily morning lectures for the merchant-regents before the opening of the bourse. In his inaugural speech of January 9, 1632, Caspar Barlaeus (1584–1648), the famous philosopher, poet, and one of two founding professors of the institution,¹³ characterized the new approach to knowledge as follows. Mercury, the god of commerce, was to be joined by Minerva, the goddess of erudition (*eruditio*), culture (*humanitas*) and wisdom (*sapientia*). Under the protection of both these deities, the *mercator sapiens*, the 'wise merchant', was to emerge as a merchant-regent and a regent-philosopher at the same time.¹⁴

Contrary to what scholars commonly suggest, Barlaeus's ideal merchant not only commanded moral knowledge, but also 'speculative philosophy' (*speculativa philosophia*).¹⁵ Indeed, he was to measure his material against his spiritual wealth, acquire no more possessions than he could consciously administer, sell his wares at suitable prices, and support others in need of money. In this respect he seemed to echo the earlier ideal of the 'Christian merchant',¹⁶ with the difference that while the 'Christian merchant' was to remember that any success he had was owed to God, the 'wise merchant's'

c. 1550–1630, Aldershot 2006. For cultural histories, see H. Méchoulan (ed.), *Amsterdam xviii siècle. Marchands et philosophes. Les bénéfiques de la tolérance*, Paris 1993; D. Regin, *Traders, Artists, Burghers. A Cultural History of Amsterdam in the 17th Century*, Assen 1976; S. Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches. An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*, New York 1987.

13 The second professor was Gerardus Joannes Vossius (1577–1649), a well-known philologist and antiquarian. For more detailed biographies on Vossius and Barlaeus, see C.S.M. Rademaker, *Life and work of Gerardus Joannes Vossius*, Assen 1981; F.F. Blok, *Caspar Barlaeus. From the Correspondence of a Melancholic*, Assen, Amsterdam 1976.

14 See C. Barlaeus, *Mercator sapiens. Oratie gehouden bij de inwijding van de Illustere school te Amsterdam op 9 januari 1632. Met Nederlandse vertaling en inleiding uitgegeven door dr. S. van der Woude*, Amsterdam 1967. For a recent edition of the Latin *Mercator sapiens* together with a French translation, see C. Secrétan, *Le 'marchand philosophe' de Caspar Barlaeus. Un éloge du commerce dans la Hollande du Siècle d'Or. Étude, texte et traduction du Mercator sapiens*, Paris 2002.

15 'Auidivistis ergo, quam se cum morali Philosopho maritet mercatura. Paucula ex Speculativa Philosophia petamus, ne hanc quoque se fastidire dicat operosus negotiator.' Ibidem, p. 154.

16 That ideal had been formulated in the Middle Ages in an attempt to negotiate the world of commerce with Christian morality. It persisted well into the eighteenth century. In the time of Barlaeus it was promulgated through texts such as Johann Just Winckelmann's *Christlicher Kaufmans Spiegel* (1652), where merchants were instructed to moderate their striving for material gain, to show charity, to hate lies and to avoid deception.

conduct was to be informed by antique and especially Stoic traditions.¹⁷ Yet Barlaeus's 'wise merchant' was also to make himself a well-educated scholar in the broadest sense of the word.¹⁸ Not only was he to acquire common mercantile knowledge such as being familiar with the conditions of the countries with which he traded, knowing which regions yielded which products and which seasons and routes favored travel to which regions. He was also to study erudite books and to obtain administrative and governmental wisdom. Whereas the 'ordinary merchant' based most of his knowledge on experience and aspired to *ars mercatoria*, the Amsterdam merchant strove to prepare himself for political and social responsibilities as well.¹⁹

According to Barlaeus, the new education would produce a new type of merchant, one whose life was governed by philosophy to such an extent that he would become a philosopher himself. Interestingly, Barlaeus does not only refer to one, but to several generations among his readers. First came the fathers, whose businesses were established and most of whom had lived in Amsterdam for a long time. They were to learn how to conduct their operations with greater efficiency and morality while remaining 'practicing' merchants in travel and trade. However, the younger merchants – to whom Barlaeus addresses himself at the end of his speech – were to become philosophers and they were to *observe* commerce rather than to partake in it. Instead of being actively engaged in wars they were to *read* about them; instead of travelling to distant lands they were to undertake voyages of the *mind*; instead of weighing gold they were to weigh *words*.²⁰

17 Barlaeus's ideal made no references to religious principles as the Amsterdam philosopher generally valued humanist culture over religious inflexibility. Barlaeus himself was more than once attacked and persecuted for his positions. After the Synod of Dordt and as a result of his support of the Remonstrants, the more 'liberal' party in the intra-Calvinist debates of predestination, Barlaeus had lost his position at the Leiden Staatenkolleg and had gone to France to study medicine, where he earned his living writing Latin poetry for special occasions. Only with his relocation to Amsterdam, Barlaeus returned to a life of material security and relative intellectual freedom. But it was not long until he was again heavily attacked and threatened due to an epigram he had written for the Amsterdam rabbi Menasseh ben Israel. See F. F. Blok, 'Caspar Barlaeus en de Joden. De Geschiedenis van een Epigram', in: *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis* 57 (1976–77), p. 179–209 and 58 (1977–78), p. 85–108. Also see S. Rauschenbach, *Judentum für Christen. Menasseh ben Israel in den gelehrten Debatten des 17. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin 2012, p. 114–119.

18 For one of the few studies emphasizing the humanist educational ideal over moral conduct, see W. Frijhoff, 'La formation des négociants de la République hollandaise', in: F. Angiolini and D. Roche (eds), *Cultures et formations négociantes dans l'Europe moderne*, Paris 1995, p. 175–198.

19 For *ars mercatoria*, see J. Hooek, P. Jeannin and W. Kaiser (eds), *Ars mercatoria. Handbücher und Traktate für den Gebrauch des Kaufmanns*, 6 vols, Paderborn, München 1991–2010. For an overview of the knowledge of European merchants, see P. Jeannin, 'Distinction des compétences et niveaux de qualification. Les savoirs négociants dans l'Europe moderne', in: Angiolini and Roche, *Cultures et formations négociantes*, p. 363–397.

20 'Dum alii pecunias numerant & ad stateram expendunt, vos Sapientum verba & voces: dum alii aes, piper linum ponderant, vos philosophiae monumenta, dum alii peregrinantur, fluctibus jactantur, aut latro-num saevitiam experiuntur, vos domi intellectum per illustrium scriptorum monumenta securi circumferite & dum Morinorum spolia repetunt audaces Neptuni filii, vos doctorum hominum commentationes, quas posteritatis esse voluerunt, in usus vestros, Dei inprimis gloriam, Patriae ac Ecclesiae salutem convertite.' Secrétan, *Le 'marchand philosophe'* (n. 14), p. 172.

According to Barlaeus, those new merchants would resemble the perfect merchants described in Greek antiquity. They would trade not in material but in mental goods and, in doing so, follow the ideal of Plato.²¹ At the same time, they would embody the perfect merchant depicted by Pythagoras. That type of merchant emerged from a subdivision of the market into three groups. The first group consisted of persons entering the marketplace in order to sell; the second one consisted of persons entering to buy. According to Pythagoras, both groups had to worry constantly and thus could not achieve happiness. Members of the third group came to the marketplace merely to *observe*, and those were the only ones Pythagoras considered to be happy men, free of anxiety and fully capable of enjoying their status.²²

Barlaeus's speech is breathtakingly current and its elegance impressive even today.²³ But what is most arresting is that Barlaeus apparently invoked the *mercator sapiens* because the ideal had gained real weight in seventeenth-century Amsterdam and that the *mercator sapiens* in turn helped to make the acquisition of knowledge among Amsterdam merchants a status symbol, converting the merchant-regent into a new version of the philosopher-king. This nexus has not yet been fully proven,²⁴ but is discernible in recent studies of individual Dutch merchants.²⁵ I will argue that it can also be located in the contemporary Dutch book market and in the series of the Elzevirian Republics.

21 See Secrétan, *Le 'marchand philosophe'*, p. 128, and Plato, *The Republic*, edited and translated by A. Bloom, New York 1991, book 2, 371c-d, p. 48. In fact, although Plato distinguishes between tradesmen, 'who are set up in the market to serve in buying and selling', and merchants 'who wander among the cities', he does not speak of merchants dealing with mental goods.

22 'Quin & Platone antiquior Pythagoras, totum mercatum in tria hominum genera distinxit, quorum alii prodiissent ut venderent, alii ut emerent, quod utrumque genus dicebat sollicitum esse, ac proinde minus felix: alios non ob aliud venire in forum, quam ut spectatores agant, quos ille solos felices esse perhibebat, quod vacui curis gratuita voluptate fruarentur.' Secrétan, *Le 'marchand philosophe'*, p. 128. Barlaeus's statement is in fact a quote from Erasmus' *Convivium fabulosum*, while Erasmus seems to refer to Diogenes Laertius, who mentions that Pythagoras 'compared life to the Great Games, where some went to compete for the prize and others went with wares to sell, but the best as spectators [...]', Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, translated by R.D. Hicks, Cambridge (MA) 1965, vol. 2, p. 326-329.

23 Geert Mak has recently pleaded for a return of the *mercator sapiens* so as to help counteract the upheaval and disintegration taking place in modern Dutch society. See Mak, 'Leve Spinoza, leve Gümüs, leve de mercator sapiens!', at http://www.groene.nl/2002/0248/gm_amsterdam.html and Mak, 'De Mercator Sapiens anno 2004. Over eenzaamheid, moed en vertrouwen', at www.rabobankgroep.nl/download/2004Raiffeis/enlezingWord.pdf. (30-11-2012).

24 For the state of research, see Frijhoff, 'La formation des négociants' (n. 18), p. 175-198.

25 E.g. M. Peters, *De wijze koopman. Het wereldwijde onderzoek van Nicolaes Witsen 1641-1717*, Amsterdam 2010.

Spain and Portugal in the Elzevirian Republics

Spain

Johannes de Laet's description of Spain is entitled *Hispania sive de Regis Hispaniae regnis et opibus commentarius* (Hispania, or a commentary on the kingdoms of the king of Spain and their wealth; 1629). Over the course of 520 pages and 28 chapters, the reader is informed about the precise location of Spain, its landscape and climate, the manners and particular talents of the Spaniards, Spain's demography, economy and government, its rulers, noble families and ecclesiastical dignitaries, as well as its possessions in the Mediterranean, the Atlantic and outside Europe.

Overall, *Hispania* is a highly ambivalent book. On the one hand it is written in an astonishingly neutral tone: allusions to religious or political conflicts are reduced to a minimum. Wars, civil wars, and insurrections are passed over. Accounts such as the one of the Spanish monarchy, its councils, and even the Inquisition as an integral part of the Spanish government, lack any affect or polemicism.²⁶ Explicit opinions and comments are missing where one would have expected them most. Generally, De Laet prefers to speak through the voices of others, and due to the number and variety of sources he cites it is easy to get the impression that he is in fact giving an unbiased introduction to Spain and the Spanish dominions.²⁷

On the other hand, *Hispania* is clearly partial. De Laet opens his book with a statement that could hardly be more explicit. In the very first pages, right in the dedication, he echoes parts of what would later be called 'the myth of Spanish decline',²⁸ stressing that the Spanish Empire was badly proportioned, that it was everywhere exposed to danger and that hate and envy turned many populations into enemies of the Spaniards.²⁹ Afterwards, De Laet uses quotes to reproduce negative stereotypes about Spain or to covertly voice his own opinions.³⁰ In his chapter on mores, for example, De Laet refers to John Barclay and Francesco Guicciardini, who stressed the arrogance and avarice of the Spanish people. In his chapter on demography De Laet paraphrases Juan de Mariana to describe how Spain suffered from being underpopulated. Further into the chapter, De Laet touches on the explosive subjects of the expulsions of the Jews and the *moriscos*, but he conceals his own opinion by pretending to ventriloquize

²⁶ See J. de Laet, *Hispania sive de Regis Hispaniae regnis et opibus commentarius*, Leiden 1629, p. 106–152.

²⁷ This impression earned the Elzevirian publishers a reputation for being impartial and 'objective'. See Frick, *Die Elzevierschen Republiken* (n. 1), p. 31.

²⁸ See F.J. Aranda Pérez (ed.), *La declinación de la monarquía hispánica en el siglo XVII. Actas de la vna Reunión Científica de la Fundación Española de Historia Moderna*, Cuenca 2004. See also J.H. Elliott, *Spain and its World 1500–1700*, New Haven, London 1989, p. 217–240, and H. Kamen, 'The Decline of Spain. A Historical Myth?', in: *Past and Present* 81 (1978), p. 24–50.

²⁹ De Laet, *Hispania*, 'Ad Lectorem', p. A2v.

³⁰ For the origin and the diffusion of similar stereotypes, see M. Meijer Drees, *Andere landen, andere mensen. De beeldvorming van Holland versus Spanje en Engeland omstreeks 1650*, Den Haag 1997, p. 1–24.

the Jesuit historian.³¹ In another chapter, De Laet uses Jacques Auguste de Thou and Traiano Boccalini to refute one of Giovanni Botero's statements about the universal and absolute power of the Spanish kings. Finally, in his chapter on economy, De Laet again quotes De Thou and the Spanish reformer Fernando de Navarrete to explain the Spanish king's shortage of money and the bankruptcy of the kingdom of Castile.³²

The aforementioned examples are representative. De Laet presents Spain as an empire whose demise was inevitable, but he suggests that there was no poignant reason for the Dutch to hate or fear the country. Rather, he thinks it sufficient to *observe* its decline and speaks with the rhetorical ethos of someone who is so confident in his superiority that he does not need to engage in the means or methods of current propaganda: let others comment on the state of affairs on the Iberian Peninsula – De Laet seemingly contents himself with 'soberly' reporting the facts. The Elzevirian editors corroborated De Laet's attitude in that they did not make any overt political statements, but still anticipated political developments and created *faits accomplis* through their publication strategies. The most striking example for this is the treatment of Italy and the Netherlands: no part of *Hispania* was devoted to the Spanish possessions in either country. Instead, both state descriptions were assigned to separate books, which the Elzevirs already printed in the 1620s.³³ Portugal, on the contrary, was integrated into *Hispania* in 1629. This seems to confirm the observation that it was common in the Netherlands not to distinguish properly between Spain and Portugal.³⁴ However, the Elzevirian publishers changed their attitude after 1640, and in 1641 Portugal received a separate *Portugallia* that I will now discuss in more detail.

Portugal and the Spanish succession to the Portuguese throne

The Elzevirian *Portugallia sive de Regis Portugalliae regnis et opibus commentarius* (Portugallia, or a commentary on the kingdoms of the king of Portugal and their wealth) was published in 1641. Also written by De Laet, it contains some of the same argumentative strategies and intellectual attitudes described earlier. However, the context of the description of Portugal was more politically sensitive than that of Spain, and De Laet's depiction was even more ambiguous.

In 1578 King Sebastian of Portugal had been killed at the Battle of Alcácer Quibir in Morocco, and his death was of enormous consequence for Portuguese history. His corpse had never been recovered from the battlefield and speculations about a

31 See De Laet, *Hispania*, p. 96–103.

32 Ibidem, p. 502–520. This chapter is entitled: 'De Aerarii Regis Hispaniae inopia illiusque causis'.

33 See De Laet's comment at the beginning of his book, in which he states that he had in fact integrated all Spanish territories except for those mentioned in his other descriptions: 'Regno Neapolitano & caeteris illius ditonibus in Italia, de quibus alibi jam egi, & Burgundia, Belgicisque provinciis solum exceptis.' De Laet, *Hispania*, 'D. Euardo Powello', p. A2v.

34 See Meijer Drees, *Andere landen, andere mensen*, p. 80.

quasi-messianic return of the young king were rampant.³⁵ King Sebastian, grandson of John III of Portugal, left no heirs, and the question of his successor became a pressing problem in 1580 with the death of Henry, last surviving brother of Sebastian's grandfather. When the Portuguese nobility gathered to elect their future king, there were three pretenders to the throne: 1) King Philip II of Spain, whose mother was a sister of John III and who had married one of John III's daughters; 2) Antonio de Crato, another nephew of John III, but of illegitimate descent; and 3) Catherine of Portugal, niece of John III and wife of John I Duke of Braganza. It was decided that a committee of professors from the University of Coimbra should convene and consider the claims. Yet, Philip II decided not to wait. In the same year, he had the Duke of Alba march into Lisbon, and Portugal fell to the Spanish crown.

In the immediately following years the world of diplomacy and letters seemed to accept the inclusion of Portugal into the Spanish Empire as a *fait accompli*. Voices like that of the Dominican José Teixeira (1534–1604), who went into exile in 1592 and later published his *Speculum tyrannidis Philippi, Regis Castellae, in usurpanda Portugallia* (1592; Mirror of the tyranny of the Castilian King Philip in his forcible accession to power in Portugal) were distinct exceptions, and the Dutch editors of the 'Republics' did not react differently. Yet in the first decades of the seventeenth century, confrontations between the Portuguese and Philip's successors increased, and European scholars started battling in the form of polemics, apologia, pamphlets and learned treatises.³⁶ Finally Philip IV was so heavily attacked that he himself intervened. In 1639 he commissioned the Cistercian monk Juan Caramuel y Lobkowitz (1606–1682) to compose a tract in Philip II's defense. Caramuel's *Philippus prudens Caroli v., Imperatoris filius, Lusitaniae, Algarbiae, Indiae, Brasiliae legitimus Rex demonstratus* (Philip the Wise, son of emperor Charles V, proven and established king of Portugal, Algarve, India and Brazil) was published in 1640. But events had advanced too far for the treatise to have more than a mere rhetorical effect. In the same year as the Catalan insurrections, the Portuguese rebelled. The Spanish regent in Lisbon, Duchess Margarita of Mantua, was deposed, and on the 15th of December, 1640, the Portuguese nobility declared John IV, son of Catherine of Braganza, as their new king.

It is evident that *Portugallia*, printed in 1641, was not simply a testimony to the general struggle of the Elzevir family to keep their series up to date. It also represented an attempt to reconfirm the not yet generally recognized Portuguese king in his new position. De Laet himself corroborated the editorial policy of the Elzevirs' in his introduction by explicitly welcoming the Portuguese into the club of those who had

³⁵ This conjectural belief left a lasting imprint on Portugal even into the late-modern period. See M. Mendonça (ed.), *O Sebastianismo, política, doutrina e mito (sécs. XVI–XIX)*. *Actas do Colóquio O Sebastianismo*, Lisbon 2004. For a concise history of Sebastianism, see J.L. de Azevedo, *A evolução do Sebastianismo*, 2nd edition; Lisbon 1947; J.J. van den Besselaar, *O Sebastianismo. História sumária*, Lisbon 1987.

³⁶ See P. Schmidt, *Spanische Universalmonarchie oder 'teutsche Libertet'.* *Das spanische Imperium in der Propaganda des Dreißigjährigen Krieges*, Stuttgart 2001, p. 217–226.

successfully overthrown the Spanish yoke. Furthermore, he wished the Portuguese king success and prosperity for the duration of his reign.³⁷ Yet, beyond the introduction, and beyond the obvious solidarity of the Dutch with the Portuguese, De Laet pretended to present to his readers a picture as seemingly complete and well-balanced as he had in *Hispania*. Like *Hispania*, *Portugallia* lacks passages on religious or military conflicts (especially where the Dutch were involved), and like *Hispania*, *Portugallia* is devoid of direct personal comments by its author. Furthermore, as in *Hispania*, De Laet reduces direct commentaries or criticism to a minimum and makes extensive use of his technique of eclecticism to suggest ‘neutrality’. But of course De Laet’s eclecticism is as partisan in *Portugallia* as it is in *Hispania*, and his use of quotes and paraphrases is everything but ‘neutral’.

This is best exemplified by De Laet’s discussion of the Spanish succession to the Portuguese throne in 1580 and a comparison of the corresponding chapters in *Hispania* and *Portugallia*. In *Hispania*, the *De successione*-chapter comprises fourteen pages,³⁸ and De Laet only quotes neutral or even pro-Spanish sources such as Jacques Auguste de Thou’s *Historia sui temporis* (1604–1620; History of his time) or Girolamo Conestaggio’s *Dell’unione del regno di Portugallo alla corona di Castiglia* (1585; The integration of the kingdom of Portugal into the [lands of the] Castilian crown).³⁹ In *Portugallia*, the *De successione*-chapter is not only considerably expanded (comprising forty-three pages), it is also deliberately interspersed with arguments of the opponents of the Spanish seizure of power.⁴⁰

Like the *De successione*-chapter in *Hispania*, the *De successione*-chapter in *Portugallia* starts with a paraphrase of Conestaggio. But De Laet adds a second paraphrase of Conestaggio, authored by Teixeira (the Portuguese emigrant and polemicist against the Spanish king), and he directly continues with Teixeira’s comment that Philip had in fact illicitly seized the Kingdom of Portugal.⁴¹ Later in the chapter, there are two references

37 ‘Vulgo tamen jam obtinet & creditur, potius jus videri possidentis: & licet rationibus & argumentis etiam in talibus causis agatur, tamen raro aliter quam armis deciditur: & nobis haud dubium est, Deum & dare & adimere Principibus imperia: & cito, tardeve res redire ad legitimum dominum & haeredem, ut jam credimus factum, & precamur ut Regi Ioanni quarto & ipsius posteris, felix, faustum & diuturnum Portugalliae regnum sit.’ J. de Laet, *Portugallia sive de Regis Portugalliae regnis e opibus commentarius*, Leiden 1641, ‘Ad Lectorem’, p. *4r.

38 See De Laet, *Hispania* (n. 26), ‘De successione Regis Castellae in Regnum Portugalliae’, p. 291–306.

39 Conestaggio was later strongly attacked for his friendly attitude toward Spain. See his apology in his introduction to the Latin translation, G. Conestaggio, *De Portugalliae coniunctione cum Regno Castellae*, Frankfurt 1602, ‘Epistola lectori’, p. 6.

40 See De Laet, *Portugallia*, ‘De successione Regis Castellae in Regnum Portugalliae’, p. 226–269.

41 ‘[...] Sereniss. Regem Philippum illicitis artibus, nimirum pecuniae largitione, magnificis pollicitationibus, gravibus etiam nimis regum Portugalliae extorsisse potius, qua[m] obtinuisse: ut mirum nulli videri debeat, si luctuosissima Portugallia funestum illum suum casum flebilibus toties, tantisque querimoniis & lamentationibus deploret.’ De Laet, *Portugallia*, p. 239–240. In a less conspicuous passage of *Portugallia* – namely in the chapter where he introduces the Portuguese kings one after another – De Laet likewise asserts that following the mysterious disappearance of the young Sebastian and the death of his great-uncle Henry, it was ‘not without the use of force’ (*non sine vi*) that Philip II was able to ascend to power in Portugal –

to Caramuel y Lobkowitz (who had defended Philip and the Spanish kings in 1639), which are also telling. In the first passage, De Laet *does* base his text on Caramuel and his *Philippus prudens*, but instead of using a chapter where Caramuel presents his own position, he uses one where Caramuel summarizes the arguments of his opponents and hence lists the authors who were *for* Catherine's and *against* Philip's accession to the Portuguese throne.⁴² In the second passage, De Laet refers to Caramuel, but he does not base his text on the words of Caramuel himself. Instead he makes use of the anti-Spanish *Manifeste du Royaume de Portugal* (Paris 1641), in which an anonymous author quotes Caramuel, refutes him and finally comes to affirm John IV's claims against Philip II.⁴³ Furthermore, still in the same chapter of *Portugallia*, De Laet follows Teixeira's lengthy discussion of the question whether or not women (and hence Catherine) were to be excluded from accession to the Portuguese throne. Then he repeats Teixeira's statement that Philip also traced his claims back to a woman (his mother) and that he was therefore wrong no matter the general verdict on the legitimacy of royal heiresses in Portugal.⁴⁴ At the end of the chapter De Laet cites Teixeira's appeal – clearly in accordance with his own strategy – to join those who judge the matter at hand 'without passion or partisanship' (*sine affectu aut partium studio*). In line with this strategy he then goes on to also repeat Teixeira's conclusion that these non-partisan voices had rightfully judged the Spanish king to be a tyrant on the Portuguese throne (*Tyrannus in Regno Portugalliae*).⁴⁵

The combination of quotations and paraphrases in *Portugallia's* chapter *De successione* leaves no doubt that De Laet is against the Spanish and with the Portuguese. But yet again De Laet's eclecticism works to conceal his feelings and to create a semblance of objectivity. More than that, in *Portugallia* De Laet even makes his strategy of argumentation explicit, stating with regard to the Spanish succession to the Portuguese throne that 'it is not our intention to discuss or to judge about right or wrong in this affair. Instead, we modestly want to learn a few things from the opinion of important men'.⁴⁶ Further into the book, De Laet repeats:

though in the above-mentioned chapter on the succession to the throne, De Laet prefers to remain silent and simply let Teixeira speak for him. *Ibidem*, p. 209.

42 *Ibidem*, p. 252–254. De Laet introduces his section quoting Lobkowitz: 'Pro Serenissima Infante Catharina (quae Duci Brigantino nupsit) scripserunt quam plurimi, sed tantummodo mihi noti sequentes.'

43 *Ibidem*, p. 268–269.

44 *Ibidem*, p. 254–255. De Laet also discusses the question of royal heiresses in earlier chapters of *Portugallia* and prepares his readers for the controversy before he explicitly comes to speak about the Spanish reign in Lisbon. For an example, see *ibidem*, p. 131.

45 'Ergo Philippus, cum populi electione existente, tum faeminarum admissa successione, nullum jus habet in Regno Portugalliae, eademque ratione hodierna die per Orbem universum à viris doctis & piis, qui rem sine affectu aut partium studio, ut est, inquirunt, Tyrannus in Regno Portugalliae est iudicatus, habitus vocatus.' *Ibidem*, p. 256.

46 'Non est tamen nobis propositum de jure hujus causae disputare aut iudicare, pauca & parce ex magnorum virorum sententia delibabimus.' *Ibidem*, 'Dedicatoria', p. v.

It is not the right place or work to give an exact definition of the controversy between the [different] pretenders [to the throne] and to disclose on which laws they based their claims or who was having the stronger arguments. Instead, we want to refer to a few arguments of other authors and herewith to avoid the impression that we totally elided [the aforementioned question].⁴⁷

His words are remarkable: when De Laet wrote *Hispania*, his compatriots had just resumed their war against Spain. When *Portugallia* was published, the war was still going on. Its first phase until the Twelve Years' Truce (1609–21) as well as its second phase until the Peace of Westphalia (1648) was accompanied by intense propaganda. The propaganda publicized cruelties perpetrated by the Spanish and was to contribute heavily to the identity of the newly founded Republic. One of its main elements consisted in the dissemination throughout Europe of Bartolomé de las Casas' *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (A brief account of the destruction of the Indies; 1552).⁴⁸ Originally written as an admonition to Charles I to withdraw from the *encomienda* system and its consequences for the Indian populations in the Americas, the book was quickly translated into several European languages and made a seminal contribution to the spread of the *leyenda negra*.⁴⁹ Its Dutch translation, originally published in 1578, was re-edited in 1596, now entitled *Spieghel der Spaensche Tyrannye, gheschiedt in West-Indien* (Mirror of the Spanish tyranny, exerted in the West-Indies). After the Truce, it was published in yet another edition now supplemented with a *Spieghel der Spaensche Tyrannye, Gheschiedt in Nederlandt, onder Philippus, Coninck van Spaengien* (Mirror of the Spanish tyranny, exerted in the Netherlands under Philip, king of Spain).⁵⁰ Other Dutch descriptions of the war, too, meticulously recorded and condemned the atrocities of the Spaniards. The publication of those descriptions lasted well past the time of the publication of the Elzevirian Republics. Only in the late seventeenth century did new perspectives make their way into Dutch geography

47 'De Controversia inter competitores agitata, & quo jure quisque niteretur, & quis jure potior esset, non est hujus loci aut operae definire: pauca tantum ex aliis auctoribus referemus, ne omnino praeteriisse videamur.' Ibidem, p. 209–210.

48 L. Cruz, 'The Epic Story of the Little Republic that Could. The Role of Patriotic Myths in the Dutch Golden Age', in: L. Cruz and W. Frijhoff (eds), *Myth in History. History in Myth*, Leiden 2009, p. 159–173.

49 For recent overviews see I. Schulze Schneider, *La leyenda negra de España. Propaganda en la guerra de Flandes 1566–1584*, Madrid 2008; J. Pérez, *La leyenda negra*, translated by C. Manzano, Madrid 2009. For the translation and illustration of Bartolomé de las Casas' treatise as an important contribution to the *leyenda negra*, see W. Cilleßen, 'Massaker in der niederländischen Erinnerungskultur. Die Bildwerdung der Schwarzen Legende', in: C. Vogel (ed.), *Bilder des Schreckens. Die mediale Inszenierung von Massakern seit dem 16. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt, New York 2006, p. 93–135. For an overview of foreign perspectives on early modern Spain, see R. García Cárcel, *La leyenda negra. Historia y opinión*, Madrid 1992.

50 See Meijer Drees, *Andere landen* (n. 30), p. 88–91. For the first edition of the supplement different publication dates are given. Meijer Drees refers to an edition of 1625 which relies on an earlier edition of 1621. Cilleßen, 'Massaker', p. 109, mentions another edition of 1621. H. de Schepper, 'La "Guerra de Flandes". Una sinopsis de su leyenda negra (1550–1650)', in: J. Lechner (ed.), *Contactos entre los Países Bajos y el mundo ibérico*, Amsterdam, Atlanta 1992, p. 80–81, refers to an edition of 1620.

and finally created a ‘semblance of neutrality’, which also changed Dutch descriptions of Spain.⁵¹

Hispania and *Portugallia* did not contain similar descriptions of atrocities or cruelties, and they did not or only marginally touch on the main themes of the *leyenda negra*.⁵² Interestingly, De Laet even passed over the cruelties of the Spaniards in the New World that constituted the core of the *leyenda negra* in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic.⁵³ This is all the more remarkable as De Laet himself had written one of the most important descriptions of America of his time,⁵⁴ and was over several years locked in a debate with Hugo de Groot about the origins of the indigenous populations in the New World.⁵⁵ However, in *Hispania* and *Portugallia*, De Laet programmatically ignored all contemporary debates about the Americas.

Granted, the Elzevirian Republics were anything but neutral, yet they were free of hatred and even the partiality they embodied was very particular: in its explicit form it was limited to the introductions and very few chapters of the books. In its implicit form it consisted in a careful choice of quotes, De Laet’s disguised extrapolation of the assertions of other authors and the subtle dissemination of the myth of Spanish decline. This myth as well is usually considered to be part of the *leyenda negra* and the Elzevirian Republics might have contributed to the dissemination of this idea in the extra-Spanish world.⁵⁶ But the account of Spain’s decline had a different ring to it than descriptions of Spanish slayings and cruelties and it offered new perspectives on the Spanish peninsula. Those perspectives can be described as the result of a combination of distance and interest, but an interest dictated by a feeling of superiority. They correspond exactly to the perspectives I consider to be characteristic of the seventeenth-century Amsterdam merchant-regents: the latter recognized that a certain degree of pragmatism was

51 See B. Schmidt, ‘Inventing Exoticism. The Project of Dutch Geography and the Making of the World, circa 1700’, in: P.H. Smith and P. Findlen (eds), *Merchants and Marvels. Commerce, Science, and Art in Early Modern Europe*, New York 2002, p. 360–361. Contrary to Schmidt, De Schepper, ‘La “Guerra de Flandes”’, p. 67–86, stresses the survival of the *leyenda negra* in Dutch historical writing into the first decades of the nineteenth century.

52 For a similar observation with regard to German travel accounts and state descriptions, see H. Kürbis, *Hispania descripta. Von der Reise zum Bericht. Deutschsprachige Reiseberichte des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts über Spanien. Ein Beitrag zur Struktur und Funktion der frühneuzeitlichen Reiseliteratur*, Frankfurt a. M. 2004, p. 256. However, the Dutch case is for obvious reasons much more delicate than the German one.

53 See B. Schmidt, *Innocence Abroad. The Dutch Imagination and the New World 1570–1670*, Cambridge 2001.

54 See J. de Laet, *Nieuwe Wereldt ofte Beschrijvinghe van West-Indiën*, Leiden 1625. De Laet’s book was also issued under the auspices of the Elzevirian publishing house albeit not as part of the ‘Republics’.

55 See B. Schmidt, ‘Space, Time, Travel. Hugo de Groot, Johannes de Laet, and the Advancement of Geographic Learning’, in: Bremmer and Hoftijzer, *Johannes de Laet (1581–1649)* (n. 8), p. 177–199.

56 With regard to the spread of the myth outside Spain, present-day scholarship usually refers to early Italian emissaries who made use of the Spanish sources to counter the Spanish claims for dominion in the world. See I. Pérez de Colosía Rodríguez and J. Gil Sanjuán, ‘Inicios del declive hispano según los embajadores venecianos’, in: Aranda Pérez, *La declinación* (n. 28), p. 267–279. If one takes into account the impact sixteenth-century Italian sources had on the Elzevirian Republics and the importance the Elzevirian Republics had for seventeenth-century political thought, it would also be possible to link the spread of the myth of Spanish decline to the Dutch merchant-regents.

necessary for them to succeed in their business affairs. Their pragmatism entailed not only a particular attitude with regard to religious difference, but also with regard to the ‘national enemy’. The Elzevirian Republics and more specifically the descriptions of Spain and Portugal are perfect examples of this.

*The Elzevirian Republics, the Dutch merchant-regents,
and the history of science*

In her illuminating book *A Culture of Fact*, Barbara Shapiro has argued for the importance of early modern travel accounts and state descriptions for the transition from ‘human’ to ‘natural fact’. The latter then became the condition for the rise of ‘scientific fact’ in experimental science and natural philosophy. According to Shapiro an early modern ‘culture of fact’ developed first in the legal area, spread into early modern historiography and chorography and was only afterwards adopted by the ‘community of naturalists’.⁵⁷ Bacon’s draft of a New Science and the Royal Societies’ adoption of it were not limited to natural philosophy. On the contrary, the methods they posited for a better understanding of nature were the same as – and probably even inspired by – the ones they proposed for a better understanding of historical, political and social phenomena.⁵⁸

Correspondingly, the Royal Society was one of the first early modern institutions systematically to advance empirical and experimental knowledge about foreign countries and peoples. Important examples were the questionnaires their early secretary Robert Hooke handed to merchants and travelers in order to record their experiences and to use them subsequently for scientific research. As Antonio Barrera-Osorio has shown, many of those questionnaires relied on early colonial and, again, *mercantile* experiences of Spaniards in the New World.⁵⁹ In the project of the Royal Society descriptions of states took on precisely the same empirical significance as natural history did in the sciences. Bacon had written eloquently that scholars should work like bees, going back and forth between the work of collecting and the interweaving of information.⁶⁰ The Elzevirian Republics as well as other contemporary state descriptions can be seen as clear expressions of the empirical part of this program in the realm of early modern politics. As should be added, not only the Elzevirian Republics but also others

57 B. Shapiro, ‘The Concept of “Fact”. Legal Origins and Cultural Diffusion’, in: *Albion* 26.2 (1994), p. 227–252. For a detailed study of the contribution of early modern chorography, description and travel reporting to the rise of the scientific concept of fact, see B. Shapiro, *A Culture of Fact. England 1550–1720*, Ithaca 2000, p. 63–85.

58 B. Shapiro, ‘Empiricism and English Political Thought, 1550–1720’, in: *Eighteenth Century Thought* 1 (2003), p. 22.

59 A. Barrera-Osorio, *Experiencing Nature. The Spanish American Empire and the Early Scientific Revolution*, Austin 2006.

60 F. Bacon, *The New Organon*, edited by L. Jardine and M.J. Silverthorne, Cambridge 2000, art. 1.95, p. 79.

of De Laet's contributions to scholarship, such as his discussion about the origins of the American Indians, can be read in the light of Bacon's approach and interpreted as an 'advancement of geographic learning'.⁶¹

Once we understand the Elzevirian Republics in the context of seventeenth-century 'New Science', it makes sense to compare questions of perspective and general methodical approach in both programs. Here as well we can discern affinities. Such observation owes much to recent studies of the history of epistemic virtues and the pre-history of modern objectivity. Lorraine Daston and Julie Solomon have both suggested that predecessors of the modern scientific ideal of 'objectivity' did emerge in different fields of knowledge and social practice and were only later transferred to the sciences.⁶² Daston's and Solomon's studies differ considerably with regard to the periods and the sources they take into account. For my purposes, however, both are equally illuminating. Daston declares objectivity to be a radically new value of the nineteenth century. However, she identifies an early modern precursor of one element of the idea – 'aperspectival objectivity' – in the 'perspectival suppleness' she locates in eighteenth-century moral philosophy and aesthetics. This precursor is defined as the 'ability to assume myriad other points of view'.⁶³ According to Daston, 'perspectival suppleness' ultimately implies a point of view beyond any subjective perspective. In our context, perspectival suppleness recalls De Laet's explicit strategy of compilation as a distancing technique described earlier.

Solomon, whose subject matter is closer to the period immediately relevant for the Elzevirian Republics has argued that it was in fact the attitude of merchants and travelers that Bacon pleaded for when he broke with traditional ways of acquiring scientific knowledge and established the foundations for what would later become the concept of scientific 'objectivity'. According to Solomon, merchants and travelers knew more than anybody else that they could only succeed if they initially distanced themselves from their own interests and deferred to the views of the people whom they visited and with whom they traded. And it was exactly this knowledge that led them to the seemingly contradictory but highly successful attitude of 'disinterested interestedness': an attitude of distance combined with the effort to realize personal aims and ambitions. Bacon transferred this principle to the scientific context arguing that natural philosophers should likewise distance themselves from their interests and defer to the things they observed in nature so that they could then use their knowledge to pursue their interests and rule over those things.⁶⁴

⁶¹ See Schmidt, 'Space, Time, Travel' (n. 55).

⁶² L. Daston, 'Objectivity and the Escape from Perspective', in: *Social Studies of Science* 22.4 (1992), p. 597–618; J.R. Solomon, *Objectivity in the Making. Francis Bacon and the Politics of Inquiry*, Baltimore, London 1998, p. 110. Shapiro, in her history of fact, speaks about 'impartiality', which is also closely connected to forerunners of the concept of objectivity. For the connection between the history of fact and the history of impartiality, see Shapiro, 'Empiricism and English Political Thought, 1550–1720', p. 27, and Shapiro, 'The Concept of "Fact"', p. 242.

⁶³ Daston, 'Objectivity and the Escape from Perspective', p. 604.

⁶⁴ Bacon, *The New Organon*, art. 1.3, p. 33. See also Solomon, *Objectivity in the making*, p. 107–110.

When drawing a connection between English merchants, travelers and the attitude of ‘disinterested interestedness’, Solomon addresses precisely the same aspects discussed in this essay. The parallels between the perspective I have traced in the Elzevirian Republics and the one Solomon describes with regard to the English context are evident. But Solomon’s reference to merchants and travelers seems to fit as well. If we recall Barlaeus’s reference to the antique merchant and the Pythagorean ideal, there are striking similarities between the perspectives conveyed to the *mercator sapiens* and the readers of De Laet’s *Hispania* and *Portugallia*. In the same way the *mercator sapiens* was asked to observe the business transactions *others* were pursuing, De Laet’s readers were asked to follow the political debates *others* were having. In the same way the *mercator sapiens* was supposed to pursue his interests while keeping his distance, so were De Laet’s readers. In *Hispania* and *Portugallia* their stance was expressed through a particular form and content. The particular form was the compilation. The particular content was the myth of Spanish decline.

The only remaining question is what connects Barlaeus’s conception with the actual seventeenth-century Amsterdam regent-merchants. To answer this question, historians have lately conducted a considerable amount of research into the ‘reality’ and the self-perception of Dutch regent-merchants, their experience of trade, learning, and art.⁶⁵ However, due to the difficult state of sources it will probably never be completely answered. But there is evidence suggesting that at least some of the Amsterdam regent-merchants had ideals similar to the ones Barlaeus formulated, a fact that might have contributed to the success of Barlaeus’s discourse. As one piece of evidence (to which I will only briefly allude here because it goes beyond the scope of this essay) we might consider the impact of Neo-Stoicism on early modern Dutch culture which Gerhard Oestreich so strikingly captured in several of his books and essays.⁶⁶ According to Oestreich, this Neo-Stoicism which combined virtues of the Roman Stoa with basic principles of Italian *ragion di stato*, was anything but purely contemplative.⁶⁷ It ended up being a leitmotif for early modern Dutch political and military organization and gave birth to ideals such as the philosopher-soldier, whose attitudes undoubtedly resemble

⁶⁵ For an overview, see Frijhoff, ‘La formation des négociants’ (n. 18). For more recent studies see C. Lesger, ‘Merchants in Charge. The Self-Perception of Amsterdam Merchants ca. 1550–1700’, in: M. Jacob and C. Secrétan (eds), *The Self-Perception of Early Modern Capitalists*, New York 2008, p. 75–97; M. Keblusek, ‘Mercator sapiens. Merchants as Cultural Entrepreneurs’, in: M. Keblusek and B. Noldus (eds), *Double Agents. Cultural and Political Brokerage in Early Modern Europe*, Leiden, Boston 2011, p. 95–109.

⁶⁶ G. Oestreich, ‘Der römische Stoizismus und die oranische Heeresreform’, in: G. Oestreich, *Geist und Gestalt des frühmodernen Staates* (n. 2), p. 11–34. With regard to English natural scientists, Solomon, too, speaks of an ‘epistemic stoicism’. See Solomon, *Objectivity in the Making*, p. 43.

⁶⁷ G. Oestreich, ‘Politischer Neustoizismus und Niederländische Bewegung’ (n. 2), p. 107. Elsewhere, Oestreich characterizes this active Neo-Stoicism as a connection between Jesuit thought and selected ideas of Calvinism. See his ‘Der römische Stoizismus und die oranische Heeresreform’, p. 15. In recent scholarship, Oestreich’s confinement of ‘active Neo-Stoicism’ to the early modern Dutch context has been criticized, but his association of ‘active Neo-Stoicism’ with the Dutch context is still valid. See N. Mout, ‘Einleitung’, in: G. Oestreich, *Antiker Geist und moderner Staat bei Justus Lipsius 1547–1606. Der Neustoizismus als politische Bewegung*, edited by N. Mout, Göttingen 1989, p. 35.

those of Barlaeus's philosopher-merchant.⁶⁸ Interestingly, Justus Lipsius, to whom early modern Dutch political Neo-Stoicism was strongly indebted, also used a technique of compilation in his *Politica* (1589) to conceal his interests while projecting an attitude of superiority and distance.⁶⁹

Another indication could be seen in Barlaeus's 'generational model' and the socio-political constellation prevailing in seventeenth-century Amsterdam, one characterized by close ties between merchant and regent families.⁷⁰ Following the *Alteratie* of 1578 numerous merchants ascended to public office. New elites took shape that over time would become significant power factors. Parts of these elites were the merchant-regents who had little in common with earlier generations of merchants. They had wealth, lived from their capital and were engaged in government and administration. Their new social position found expression in a new mentality which scholars generally trace back to the years around 1650 and which they link more or less explicitly to the emergence of a stock market.⁷¹ Horst Lademacher, however, a renowned expert in the history of the Netherlands, speaks of an earlier sea change and this may well be of interest here. Lademacher distinguishes between three generations of merchants: the first generation stemmed from the years of the Revolt; the second generation used the years of the Twelve Years' Truce from 1609 to 1621 to expand Dutch trade relations around the world (Lademacher calls them the generation of 'adventure-merchants'); and the third generation was one that had 'arrived'.⁷² With regard to this generation, Lademacher writes succinctly:

The merchant had hardly any cares; and he had wealth at his disposal that allowed him the possibility of studying law, of furthering his education, in the best instance through educational tours; and then, should he so desire, to preoccupy himself with governmental matters.⁷³

One might well suspect that it is precisely this type of merchant that both Barlaeus and De Laet envisioned. In the morning he would go to the Athenaeum to hear the Latin lectures of the famous professors; at noontime he would check in at the Bourse to follow stock developments; and in the afternoon he would devote himself to studying scientific books, among them descriptions of the world such as the Elzevirian

⁶⁸ Oestreich, 'Der römische Stoizismus und die oranische Heeresreform', p. 23-25. As shown by Oestreich, this stoicism has been influential in modern economic thought, too. See *ibidem*, p. 31-34.

⁶⁹ See M. Senellart, 'Le stoïcisme dans la constitution de la pensée politique. Les "Politiques" de Juste Lipse (1589)', in: P.-F. Moreau (ed.), *Le stoïcisme au XVIIe et au XVIIIe siècle. Le retour des philosophies antiques à l'Âge classique*, Paris 1999, p. 126-128.

⁷⁰ For further details, see Frijhoff, 'La formation des negociants', p. 183-189.

⁷¹ For an example, see J. Adams, *The Familial State. Ruling Families and Merchant Capitalism in Early Modern Europe*, Ithaca, London 2005, p. 71-72.

⁷² H. Lademacher, *Die Niederlande. Politische Kultur zwischen Individualität und Anpassung*, Berlin 1993, p. 208-209. For a similar and a more recent perspective of a change of the Dutch merchants before 1650, see A. Goldgar, *Tulipmania. Money, Honor, and Knowledge in the Dutch Golden Age*, Chicago 2007, p. 273-274.

⁷³ 'Der Kaufmann kannte kaum noch Sorgen, er verfügte über ein Vermögen, das die Möglichkeit bot, Jura zu studieren, sich weiterzubilden, am besten durch lange Bildungsreisen, und sich dann, falls gewünscht, mit Regierungsgeschäften zu befassen.' H. Lademacher, *Die Niederlande*, p. 209. The translation is mine.

Republics. For this merchant there was little difference between merchant-knowledge and that pertaining to governance. What is more, his knowledge was an integral part of his self-image and identity. After 1632, the term *mercator sapiens* became an honorary title given to those who had taken the important step into a new era.⁷⁴ The ‘new’ Amsterdam merchant was not only different from other merchants around the world; he also differed from his predecessors in the first phase of the Dutch struggle for independence. His identity was tightly bound up with the image and identity of the city of Amsterdam. As the city changed when the university was founded, so did the merchant when he came into contact with scholarly studies. It was through his erudition that he was ennobled. His wisdom made him into a merchant-regent and philosopher-prince who, for his part, promoted scholarship and contributed to its success. Interestingly enough, not only De Laet but also Barlaeus treat the Spanish as one nation among many, once a political enemy but now a commercial partner that must therefore be observed with an impartial and objective eye.⁷⁵

Conclusion

To conclude, there are two lessons to be learned from the ‘wise merchant’ and his perspectives on Spain and Portugal. The first lesson is a lesson in the history of early modern state descriptions. The second lesson is a lesson in the history of knowledge and epistemic virtues. Both are of course interconnected. Generally, seventeenth-century state descriptions have been referred to as precursors of the works of German university professors such as Gottfried Achenwall (1719–1772) and his followers, who integrated the study of ‘statistics’ into the study of *Staatswissenschaften* and established it as a discipline within law studies at most eighteenth- and nineteenth-century German universities.⁷⁶ Only rarely have they been examined in the broader context

⁷⁴ One prominent example for the ‘new’ Amsterdam merchant – though not for a merchant-regent – was Gerbrand Anslo (1612–1643). Anslo was a cloth trader, but it was not through his merchandising of fabrics that he made his name; rather, his reputation stemmed from the Hebrew lessons he received from Menasseh ben Israel (1604–1657), and because his contact with the Jews and Jewish learning had such an effect on him he began to financially promote projects in which Christian savants came to grips with Judaism and Jewish literature. Accordingly, the Orientalist Georg Genz (1618–1687) dedicated his Latin translation of Maimonides to Anslo, praising the merchant not only for his virtuousness and erudition but explicitly calling him a *mercator sapiens*. See Maimonides, *Hilkhot de’ot sive canones ethici*, translated by Georg Genz, Amsterdam 1640, p. *2v. For Genz and his translation of Maimonides, see A.L. Katchen, *Christian Hebraists and Dutch Rabbis. Seventeenth Century Apologetics and the Study of Maimonides’ Mishne Torah*, Cambridge (MA) 1984, p. 247–259.

⁷⁵ See Secrétan, *Le ‘marchand philosophe’* (n. 14), p. 170.

⁷⁶ For Achenwall, see P. Streidl, *Naturrecht, Staatswissenschaften und Politisierung bei Gottfried Achenwall (1719–1772). Studien zur Gelehrten-geschichte Göttingens in der Aufklärung*, München 2003. For the rise and development of *Staatswissenschaften*, see J. Brücker, *Staatswissenschaften, Kameralismus und Naturrecht. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Politischen Wissenschaft in Deutschland des späten 17. und frühen 18. Jahrhunderts*, München 1977. For the development of academic ‘statistics’ before Achenwall, see my ‘Zwischen Aristoteles und

of a cultural history of knowledge and science,⁷⁷ and only recently have some of them been read in the light of possible influences exercised by mercantile cultures.⁷⁸ Yet, in the case of early modern state descriptions the connection between trade and knowledge seems to be self-evident, and the Dutch context could be useful to promote further research.

The second lesson is connected to the history of knowledge and epistemic virtues in early modern Europe. As I have tried to show, the Elzevirian Republics with their descriptions of Spain and Portugal corroborate perspectives and attitudes such as ‘disinterested interestedness’ and ‘perspectival suppleness’, which have been described as elements of the prehistory of aperspectival objectivity. The ideal of the *mercator sapiens* serves not only as further proof for the connection between those attitudes and early modern merchant cultures but it also helps to link early modern objectivity with superiority. It would then be clear that the specific seventeenth-century Amsterdam culture that originated from the merchant-regents’ struggle for political and material power, their desire for social advancement, their need for pragmatic self-distancing, and their Stoic ideals of active contemplation, contributed to the blossoming of a perspective of superiority and distance. And it would also be clear that the prehistory of aperspectival objectivity comprised epistemic attitudes and virtues such as the perspective of superiority and distance that I have traced in seventeenth-century Dutch state descriptions, but that most likely can also be located in other fields of knowledge and stages of the history of the social sciences and the humanities.

Bacon. Die Begründung der akademischen Statistik an der Helmstedter Universität’, in: J. Bruning and U. Gleixner (eds), *Athen der Welfen. Die Universität Helmstedt (1576–1810)*, Wiesbaden 2010, p. 198–203. For the use of the term ‘statistics’, see n. 5.

⁷⁷ For approaches to the history of state descriptions in the context of the history of science, see M. Rassem and J. Stagl (eds), *Geschichte der Staatsbeschreibung. Ausgewählte Quellentexte 1456–1813*, Berlin 1994. Also see Shapiro, *A Culture of Fact* (n. 57), p. 63–85; J. Stagl, ‘Die Methodisierung des Reisens im 16. Jahrhundert’, in: P.J. Brenner (ed.), *Der Reisebericht. Die Entwicklung einer Gattung in der deutschen Literatur*, Frankfurt a. M. 1989, p. 140–177.

⁷⁸ For a recent case study, see Peters, *De wijze koopman* (n. 25). Also see the different contributions to Huigen, de Jong and Kolfin, *The Dutch Trading Companies* (n. 7).