

The Mediaeval Prestige of Dutch Cities

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In the Dutch Republic the mediaeval past was important not only to the nobility but also to the cities, particularly in the Province of Holland.¹ Many of the cities in the former County of Holland had obtained their formal city rights in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and the sealed charters attesting to these privileges were the city council's most treasured possession. In the seventeenth century these city charters took on an added significance in the regular politics of the Provincial States of Holland. Following the 1581 repudiation of the authority of their Habsburg ruler, Philip II, the Count of Holland was for a while a vacant title.² After a few years, the Provincial States of Holland resolved that they would appropriate the sovereign rights of the county to themselves. The States had originally been set up as an advisory panel for the Count, composed in those days of representatives of the peerage and the province's six oldest cities. Now, the political assembly took on the Count's own authority and extended the number of cities represented in it to eighteen. In the seventeenth century, the States of Holland was made up of representatives of each of these eighteen cities, plus one representative of the nobility. These cities thus formed part of the sovereign government and each had (in theory) equal vote. Differently than in many other European countries of the period, local government in the cities of Holland did not represent the central power but rather vice versa.³ This made the cities effective city-states with a great deal of autonomy, and above all with a pronounced sense of their individual worth and city pride. That attitude was reflected in the architecture of urban public buildings.

The representative of the nobility always had the first word in the States of Holland, so that he was able to influence the rest of the assembly despite his single vote being heavily out-represented. After him, it was the cities' turn

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- 1 This contribution is also published in Dutch, as chapter 10 in Enenkel K.A.E. – Ottenheym K.A., *Oudheid als ambitie. De zoektocht naar een passend verleden 1400–1700* (Nijmegen: 2017) 265–291.
 - 2 Together with the other titles which combined to make up the collective term 'Lord of the Low Countries: these included also the titles of Duke of Guelders, Count of Zeeland, Lord of Utrecht and the Oversticht, and Lord of Friesland.
 - 3 Israel J.I., *De Republiek 1477–1806* (Franeker: 1996), vol. I 305–314.

to speak one by one. The set order of their interventions was determined by the date at which they had been admitted to the States, and here age was a great factor, with the year of official granting of the city charter being decisive. Most cities in Holland had been founded in the twelfth or thirteenth centuries, typically at the Count's own initiative.⁴ In most cases, these were not new towns built from scratch but acknowledgements of the importance of existing settlements.⁵ It was only from the thirteenth century onwards that these cities in Holland began to acquire their city rights. Dordrecht counted as the oldest city in the province, with city rights dating from 1220, followed by Haarlem (1245) and Delft (1246). Fourth came Leiden (1266), followed by Amsterdam (1306) and Gouda (1272). That is to say, although Gouda's city rights topped Amsterdam's for age, Gouda had been a lordship of its own for a lengthy period and only pledged to Holland. Gouda's actual admission to the States of Holland had come later than Amsterdam's, which is why it had sixth place. After 1585, this group grew to include Rotterdam, Gorinchem, Schiedam, Schoonhoven, Brielle, Alkmaar, Hoorn, Enkhuizen, Edam, Monnickendam, Medemblik and finally Purmerend. It will be apparent that it was far from being merely a question of honour who got to speak first in the provincial assembly. It was also a matter of impact: the earlier speakers could chip in with extra points and steer the course of the debate. Later speakers could usually only endorse what had already been aired. Thus, politics was largely determined by Holland's oldest cities, and so in this hierarchy, just as with the nobility and with the interrelations of royal families, age was the key to political clout. This being so, it is only understandable that numerous cities sought to show off their ancientness in their public architecture, particularly that of their town halls.

1 Town Halls

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, town halls were the centre of urban power: they were the seat of the city council, chaired by a handful of burgomasters, with treasurers in charge of city finances and a panel of councillors (*vroedschap*) acting as advisory body. It was also where the sheriff (*schout*) and aldermen (*schepenen*) pronounced judgement on civil and criminal cases.

4 Henderikx P., "Graaf en stad in Holland en Zeeland in de twaalfde en vroege dertiende eeuw", in Rutte R. – Engen H. van (eds.), *Stadswording in de Nederlanden. Op zoek naar overzicht* (Hilversum: 2005) 47–62.

5 Rutte R., *Stedenpolitiek en stadsplanning in de Lage Landen (12de–13de eeuw)* (Zutphen: 2002) 123–143.

Consequently, government and jurisprudence tend to be central themes in the iconography of the facades and interiors of town halls in Holland. Although the council met in closed session, legal cases were open to the public. For these, the sheriff and aldermen came to the aldermen's hall (*schepenzaal*), where people were allowed to witness the trial. A separate solemn courtroom (*vierschaar*) was reserved for the handing-down of death sentences. The right to judge executable offences was regarded as the highest privilege in jurisprudence, and when a city acquired this 'capital justice' (*halsrecht*), it was typically expressed in the architecture by giving the *vierschaar* a prominent location and striking decor. Local government and justice were supported by town secretaries, clerks and in some cases committees charged with particular remits. Naturally, the scope of these civil service jobs depended on the size of the city. The cities did not start off with dedicated council buildings; in the early days, they met at taverns, cloth halls or guild lodges. However, all cities developed purpose-built city halls for their councils during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

With the expansion in population in the late sixteenth century, the administrative burden also swelled, so that almost all cities in Holland had to extend their existing council premises at some point during the Dutch Republic era. In some cases, they resolved to construct completely new buildings. As well as providing more room, these premises were intended to be prestigious and to showcase each city's newly-acquired status as a practically independent city-state. Here, two apparently contradictory impulses were at play as to how best to express that worthiness. It was an obvious choice to have the new building designed in the most current architectural style, so as to display status and wealth. Nevertheless, in many cases it was more judicious to demonstrate the city's great age, from which it derived its worth and rank. The mediaeval past, then, could play a role in shaping the urban authorities' headquarters, and not just contemporary architecture. To keep this history straightforward, we shall restrict ourselves for the rest of this contribution to the first six cities in Holland, observing the seventeenth-century order of precedence among them.

2 Dordrecht (1220)

That Dordrecht was the oldest and 'first' city of Holland was a point dwelt upon in all seventeenth-century descriptions of the city. It is said that the settlement arose as a fishing village in the tenth century along the dike beside the residence of the first Count of Holland, Dirk I, in his core district on the banks of

the Merwede.⁶ It was from this origin that the city had obtained its privileges as premier among the cities of Holland, as the location where the Counts of Holland were inaugurated in office and as the mediaeval seat of the county's mint. In the Republican era, too, Dordrecht retained its place as chief among the cities of the Province of Holland. As well as netting the city the first right to speak (after the knights' representative), this also made Dordrecht the city which supplied the State Pensioner (*raadspensionaris*), the official who led the day-to-day-government of the province.

In 1284, Dordrecht City Council was given a building, while part of it was also used as a meat hall. This was not a rare combination of functions in the era, since most cities permitted meat sales to the public only under official oversight in council-run halls. In 1544, the council moved to what had previously been a trade hall (*handelshal*), a large building specially built for visiting overseas traders.⁷ A tall brick building, it dated from 1383 and its front abutted the Groenmarkt (the Vegetable Market). The building contained originally one large space, forty metres deep and twelve wide, with the back extending over the water of the Oude Haven. In 1544–1550, the internal space was subdivided, leaving a smaller hall at the front, behind which were chambers for the aldermen, burgomasters and various clerks. The court of justice (*vierschaar*) was also housed in the new front section. The detail in the interior was entirely in contemporary style, as we can see from surviving architectural traces of this renovation. Later, there were several more renovations to install yet more offices and chambers. In 1671, the adjoining building to the south was demolished, making way for a gracious square beside the town hall [Fig. 16.1]. What had been its side wall now became the front entrance, ornamented with an outstanding example of a Classical entrance section. Notably, however, the fourteenth-century appearance of both sides remained substantially the same, apart from new frames for the windows and the new main entrance. Until the early nineteenth century, the town hall continued to look rather castle-like, its brick gables crowned with battlements and buttressed by a number of small towers. As time went on, the mediaeval exterior contrasted more and more with the fronts of the surrounding residential homes, which – unlike the town hall itself – did regularly adapt to changing tastes. Precisely by not modernising the exterior of its town hall, Dordrecht displayed its venerable antiquity.

6 Beverwijck Johan van, *'t Begin van Hollant in Dordrecht, mitsgaders der eerster stede beschrijvinge, regeringe, ende regeerders, als oock de gedenckwaerdigste geschiedenissen aldaer gevallen* (Dordrecht, Jasper Gorrisz.: 1640) 76–82.

7 Stades-Vischer M.E., *Het stadhuis te Dordrecht* (Dordrecht: 1985).



FIGURE 16.1 Dordrecht, the former trade hall of 1383, since 1544 in use as town hall. Drawing by Paulus Constantin La Fargue (ca. 1770), Gemeentearchief Dordrecht

IMAGE © GEMEENTEARCHIEF DORDRECHT

Only in 1835–1845, once the cities had lost their quasi-sovereign status and a settlement's age had no further bearing upon politics, was the town hall given a clean-lined new Classical front by city architect G.N. Itz, hiding the mediaeval structure from view under a fashionable white plaster coat replete with tall columns and pediment.⁸

3 Haarlem (1245)

Haarlem, the second city of Holland, had obtained its city rights from Count William II. The city's connection with that count, who reigned from 1234 to 1256, always remained a key point in later Haarlem historiography, the more so given that William II was also elected as Roman King of the German Empire in 1248, which – in the city's own view – lent it a 'royal' air (although William II died too early to see himself crowned as Holy Roman Emperor). The city had arisen from a modest hamlet around the old seat of the Count. According to

⁸ Meffert A. – Schook R., *G.N. Itz, stadsbouwmeester van Dordrecht 1832–1867* (Delft: 1985) 29–35.

tradition, the Counts of Holland had had a residence here since around 1100, in the time of Count Floris II, and William II's contribution had been to have it rebuilt in brick around 1240–1250.⁹ However, that building was ravaged by a conflagration a century later, around 1350. Since the Counts were even at this early stage no longer making a circuit of the residences dotted around their territory, and more and more central administration was gravitating to The Hague, the city obtained the grounds of the destroyed court for free. On that very place, at the city's market square, Haarlem's new town hall arose around 1370, forming the kernel of the current municipal hall complex to this day.¹⁰ Seventeenth-century descriptions of the city easily confounded these various stages of the building; hence, the kernel of the old town hall, with its Grote Zaal as the focal point, was wrongly taken to be a vestige of William II's residence. So it is that Hadrianus Junius, in his *Batavia* of 1588, writes of a 'royal palace' when describing Haarlem Town Hall.¹¹ Samuel Ampzing was even more florid in his 1628 *Beschrijvinge ende lof der stad Haerlem* [Fig. 16.2]:

Hier siet Gy dat Paleys, dat William, Graef en koning
heeft tot sijn Hof gesticht, en Koninklijke woning:
gelijk soo voor als na het Grafelijke Hof
te Haerlem is geweest tot onser eer en lof.¹²

Here seest thou the palace that Count and King William
did found as his court and kingly residence:
thus, in old times and new times, the Count's Court at Haarlem
hath long been our pride and our town's brilliance.

As set out in the contribution of Karl Ehenkel to this volume, Holland's legacy of mediaeval counts exerted a powerful social pull in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This being so, the main building of the fourteenth-century Haarlem town hall, which was believed to have been the palace of

9 Ampzing Samuel, *Beschrijvinge ende lof der stad Haerlem* (Haarlem, Adriaen Rooman: 1628) 48–50.

10 Cerutti W., *Het stadhuis van Haarlem. Hart van de stad* (Haarlem: 2001) 48–52.

11 Glas N. de, *Holland is een eiland. De Batavia van Hadrianus Junius (1511–1575)* (Hilversum: 2011) 323.

12 Ampzing, *Beschrijvinge ende lof der stad Haerlem* s.p., caption for engraving by Jan van de Velde after Pieter Saenredam: 'De Grote Markt met het stadhuis in Haarlem'. Schwartz G. – Bok M.J., *Pieter Saenredam. De schilder in zijn tijd* (Den Haag: 1989) 42, 266, cat. no. 88. Also featured in this sense in Blaeu Joan, *Toonneel der Steden van de Vereenighde Nederlanden met hare beschrijvinge* (Amsterdam, Joan Blaeu: 1652) s.p.: 'het koninglijck paleis. Dit is nu 't Raethuijs' ('The royal palace, which now is the town hall').



FIGURE 16.2 Market square and town hall of Haarlem before its transformation of 1630–1633. Etching by Jan van de Velde II after Pieter Saenredam. From: Samuel Ampzing, *Beschryvinge ende lof der stad Haerlem in Holland* (Haarlem: 1628). Etching and engraving, 16.1 × 23.8 cm
IMAGE © RIJKSMUSEUM, AMSTERDAM

thirteenth-century King William II, was spared any renovations or adaptations in the seventeenth century.¹³ Its long, rectangular hall already had a pair of short wings in the fourteenth century, perpendicular to the front entrance on the Market; these were the large and small courts of justice (*vierschaar*). In the mid-fifteenth century, the town hall was extended with a building at the corner of the Market and Zijlstraat, which came to be known as the *stedehuis* (city-house). In 1620–1622, a Zijlstraat wing was added to the complex, designed by Lieven de Key, containing facilities such as basement jail cells and a number of chambers on the ground floor for the panel of councillors (*vroedschap*) and the aldermen. This wing, with its modern architecture, sharply contrasted with the older elements on the Market side. In 1628, Ampzing, while praising the new architecture, pointed out the ‘old[er] glory’ of the hall beside it on the Market:

Ook is by onsen tijd een werk ter hand genomen
tot meerd'ring van't Stad-huys en tot den eynd gekomen

13 Royaards C.W. – Jongens P. – Phaff H.E., *Het stadhuis van Haarlem. Algemeen restauratieplan* (Haarlem: 1961).

en kloeklijk uytgevoerd dat ver in sijn zieraed
 en pracht en mogendheyd het oud te boven gaet.
 So mag dit stuck wel mee: ja mag ten desen tijden
 in ouder heerlijkheyd met alle steden strijden.¹⁴

In our own time, too, a work was begun
 to extend the town hall, and has fitly been done;
 which in its design, both ingenious and bold,
 and its decoration and power, far exceeds the old.
 So, then, that part [*i.e. the old wing*] too well deserves to remain;
 for old glory, not a city can match it again.

In 1630–1633, the front of the town hall was likewise modernised, probably to a design by Salomon de Bray. In this renovation, the *stedehuis* on the corner was melded with the 1620 wing and given a fitting entrance on the Market. The front entrance to the great court of justice was also renovated in Classical style, with pillars on the ground floor, topped with a pile-up of Doric, Ionic and Corinthian sequences of pilasters. The small court of justice and the great hall (*zaal*) were merely given new window frames and a new entrance section. This deliberately preserved the ‘mediaeval’ character of the council hall, with its great arches and battlements, intact, so that even in its modernised design, the origin of the complex as a possession of the counts would remain recognisable [Fig. 16.3].

There is another drawing in existence showing an alternative design for the new front of Haarlem town hall, which could date from approximately 1630 [Fig. 16.4].¹⁵ In this proposal, both judgement halls would have been removed, the staircase up to the entrance more than doubled in width, and, most strikingly, two new corner turrets with battlements and pinnacles added, in order to give even more of the appearance of an old count’s castle. Moreover, this design called for the walls separating the windows to be ornamented across the whole width of the front with 23 images of the previous Counts of Holland. The old town hall already had a few images of old Counts of Holland before that time, but in this design, the building would have boasted almost a full genealogical set. It was customary in the late-mediaeval Low Countries to affix

14 Ampzing, *Beschrijvinge ende lof der stad Haerlem* 53.

15 The attire of the figures in the foreground indicates that this must have been intended as a contemporary design for the seventeenth century, rather than being any kind of fantasy reconstruction of mediaeval Haarlem. This drawing is also attributed by some to Pieter Saenredam, and is known only from black-and-white reproductions (current whereabouts of original unknown). Schwartz – Bok, *Pieter Saenredam* 58 (Fig. 59), 266, cat. no. 89.



FIGURE 16.3 Haarlem town hall. Photo ca. 1920
IMAGE © RCE

such series of national rulers' images to façades; something similar is seen to this day in the Brabantine town halls of Brussels and Leuven. This practice made it clear in whose name it was that the men within handed down their edicts and sentences. In the seventeenth century, however, the citizens of Haarlem no longer viewed these hall-front images as tokens of the city's subordination, but rather as proof that the building truly was a former count's residence:

En geven dit ook niet hun beelden, die nog huyden
hier aen de puije staen, genoegzaem aen te duyden
die van de Graven selfs voor't grafelijk gesticht
voor't grafelijke hof sijn eertijds opgericht?¹⁶

And do their statues, seen yet today
upon the facade not clearly say
that the building was founded by counts so bold,
built for their own use in courts of old?

16 Ampzing, *Beschrijvinge ende lof der stad Haerlem* 53.

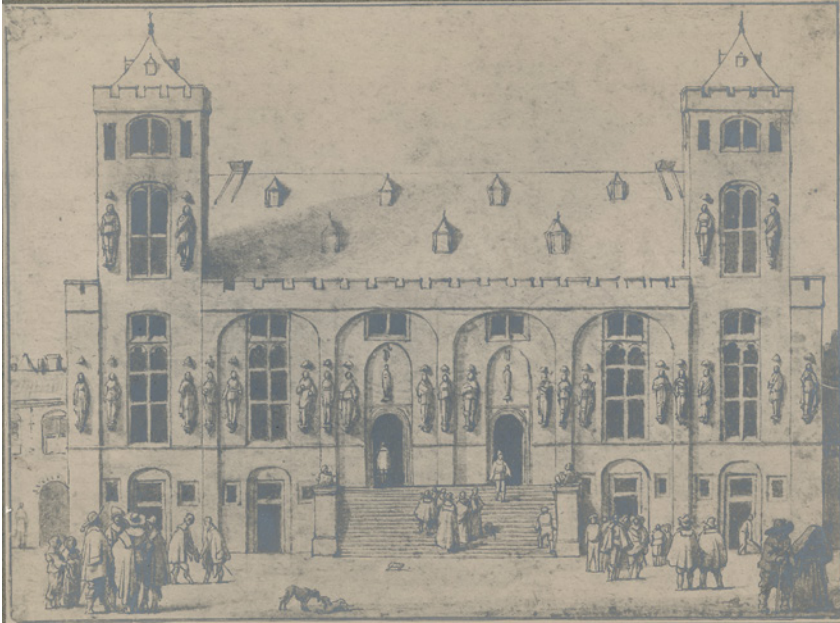


FIGURE 16.4 Anonymous artist, Alternative design for the transformation of the town hall's facade (ca. 1630). Current location unknown
IMAGE © RCE

This extreme plan to deliberately antiquate the architecture was never carried out. In 1630, it was decided to make a point of keeping the existing mediaeval elements, such as the battlements and high window arches, and to combine them with a few carefully-detailed contemporary Classical elements, including the windows, the entrance section and the balcony above the entrance. The identification of the town hall with the old count's castle was also seen in the interior. The walls of the Grote Zaal, referred to from the seventeenth century onwards consistently as 'the Counts' Hall' (*Gravenzaal*), had since the late sixteenth century been decorated with the series, dating from approximately 1490, of nineteen painted panels (mentioned in the contribution of Karl Enenkel) depicting a complete set of the thirty-two Counts of Holland from AD 900 up to Mary of Burgundy and Maximilian I.¹⁷ These portraits thus afforded the supposed 'Counts' Hall' its own ancestor gallery, visually reinforcing the illusion that the former Counts of Holland really had resided in this building.

17 For the history of this series of portraits, see the contribution of Karl Enenkel to this volume, and Cerutti, *Het stadhuis van Haarlem* 257–267.

4 Delft (1246)

In Delft, too, the architectural history of the town hall is bound up with the Counts of Holland.¹⁸ Unlike in Haarlem, here there are still remnants of the old counts' court in the present building. At the crux of that court was a brick tower, about twenty metres high, which must have been built around the middle of the thirteenth century. This tower, christened the *Nieuwe Steen*, served as the county jail, and there may have been a count's hall on the upper storey. In 1436, the Count donated this complex and the adjoining market square to the city, and it was remodelled as the town hall [Fig. 16.5]. Beside the high tower, there now arose several council chambers, and the tower itself was raised higher by the addition of a natural stone construction for the city bells. Following the devastating Delft Fire of 1536, the town hall had to be renewed but the tower itself had survived the flames and had only to be given a new wooden pinnacle.

This town hall also burned down, less than a century later, in 1618. The Amsterdam sculptor-architect Hendrick de Keyser was retained for the years around 1618 for the construction of the monument to William the Silent in the Nieuwe Kerk, on the opposite side of the market square, and so it was only natural that he was awarded the commission for the replacement town hall too. The result was a completely new structure, now with its front facing the market, occupying a near-square area of 25 by 25 metres [Fig. 16.6a, b]. The



FIGURE 16.5
The old town hall of Delft before the fire of 1618.
Detail from the map of Delft in Georg Braun
and Frans Hogenberg, *Civitates orbis terrarum*
(ca. 1580)

IMAGE © PUBLIC DOMAIN

18 Groot A. de, "Het stadhuis van Delft. Aspecten van zijn bouw – en restauratiegeschiedenis", *Bulletin Koninklijke Nederlandse Oudheidkundige Bond* 83 (1984) 1–42.



FIGURE 16.6A Hendrick de Keyser (architect), Town hall of Delft (1618–1620)
IMAGE © AUTHOR

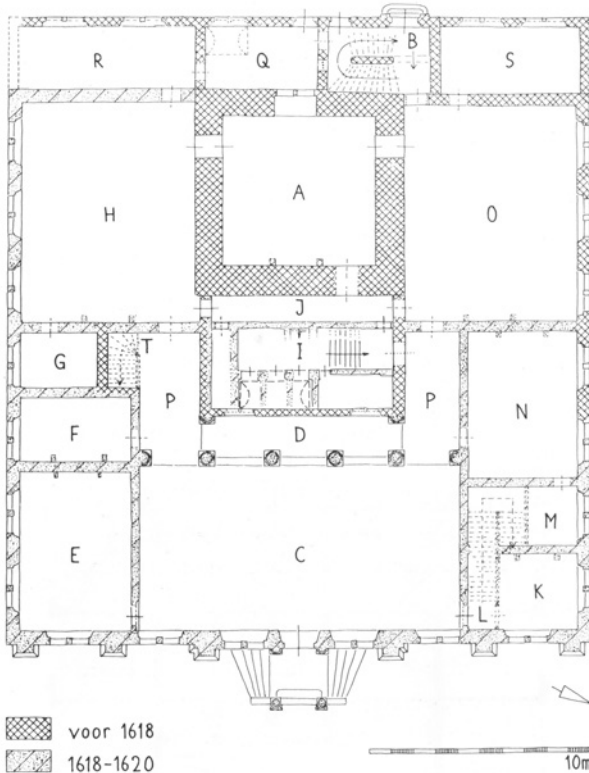


FIGURE 16.6B Town hall of Delft, ground plan.

Drawing A. de Groot

IMAGE © BULLETIN KNOB 83 (1984) 13

building has two stories topped with a trapezoid roof (*kap*), and its gables are richly ornamented with sculpted natural stone. The front is articulated with Doric and Ionic pilasters and in pride of place is a high central apex with Corinthian pilasters. Between and above the windows in this section, even more fantastical sculpted ornamentation has been applied. In its day, this was regarded as the most finely-decorated town hall in Holland and far beyond, and as a showcase of the contemporary architecture for which Hendrick de Keyser was so celebrated; this accolade was largely due to the copious application of artistically ingenious decorative sculpting based on Classical idiom.¹⁹

19 Terwen J.J., "Het stadhuis van Hendrik de Keyser", in Meischke R., e.a. (eds.), *Delftse studiën* (Assen: 1967) 143–170. Ottenheym K.A. – Rosenberg P. – Smit N., *Hendrick de Keyser, Architectura Moderna. Moderne bouwkunst in Amsterdam 1600–1625* (Amsterdam 2008) 106–109.

Yet all the while, the old tower was sticking out above the new building and attracting the gaze. This was all as intended; part of a carefully thought-out scheme. De Keyser's design refined the existing counts' tower, the *Nieuwe Steen*, to fit the new architectural design. In a U-form, the seventeenth-century new building wraps around the old tower, which thus acts as the hinge of the new plan. The spread of functions around the various chambers of the new complex also underscores the great ceremonial importance attached to that architectural relic of the Middle Ages: on the ground floor, the tower was now flanked by the burgomaster's chamber on one side (H) and the aldermen's chamber on the other (O), and the tower itself had become the council chamber (*raadzaal*) for the *vroedschap* (A). Higher up the tower was the archive, guarding documents including the city charters.

5 Leiden (1266)

For long ages, Leiden's town hall has stood on Breestraat, the main thoroughfare. The oldest element of the building dates from the first half of the fourteenth century, and with the passage of time the complex was enlarged with additions including a court of justice (*vierschaar*) and the council chamber (*raadzaal*).²⁰ Around 1410, the building was extended to the right with a long hall running parallel with Breestraat. Its ground floor became the meat hall; its upper storey served as the cloth hall. On that occasion, the complex had acquired a new front, melding the old and new elements together. In total, it was a roughly 40-metre-long complex, with a castle-like crown sporting battlements and small turrets, as if it were a patrolling wall. At the rear of the oldest part of the compound was a high city tower dating from around 1400, which had since been raised several times. That tower aside, the general aspect of this town hall was in the late sixteenth century roughly comparable with Dordrecht's. But Leiden's mediaeval complex was given a completely new natural stone gable in 1595–1598,²¹ designed by Haarlem's city building master (*stadsmeester*) Lieven de Key. This new feature was supplied prefabricated by Luder von Bentheim, an architect-stonemason and contractor from Bremen. In a departure from the practice of Dordrecht, Haarlem and Delft, here all the elements reminiscent of castles were radically removed. The battlements-and-turrets crown

20 Oerle H.A. van, *Leiden binnen en buiten de stadsvesten. De geschiedenis van de stedenbouwkundige ontwikkeling binnen het Leidse rechtsgebied tot aan het einde van de gouden eeuw* (Leiden: 1975) 88–91.

21 Meischke R., "Een nieuwe gevel voor het Leidse stadhuis (1593–1598)", *Leids Jaarboekje* 81 (1989) 54–83.

was replaced with a Classical balustrade, ornamented by three monumental summit façades bearing Classical elements and sculpted contemporary designs. This made Leiden town hall the first monumental example – pre-dating the renovation of its counterpart at Delft and the addition of the new wing at Haarlem – of the rich, sculptural architecture which would become so characteristic of the art of building in Holland as the seventeenth century began.

Even in Leiden, however, citizens were highly aware of the importance of the origins of their own history in the chivalric era and of the connection of their home to the old Counts of Holland. The Roman King of the German Empire, William II, and his son Count Floris V had both come into the world in Leiden; a boast unfailingly made in Leiden city histories. However, Leiden commemorated its historical link to the counts not at the town hall but in the second centre of local government, the Courthouse (*Gerecht*). As the crow flies, the buildings were merely a hundred metres or so apart. The Courthouse formed the hub of the neighbourhood sandwiched between Breestraat and Rapenburg. It was here that the Counts of Holland had held residence in the second half of the twelfth century, possessing a private chapel (the forerunner of the Pieterskerk) and a jail located in a defensible natural-stone tower, known simply as *het Steen*.²² A moat demarcated *het Steen* and the execution ground from the city proper. Even once the residence no longer housed the counts, this part of the complex remained the county's judicial seat, with the jail and execution ground still in use. [Figs. 16.7a, b]. When the city took on *het Steen* and began exercising its own jurisprudence in 1463, sentencing continued to be done there. During the fifteenth century, the complex was extended to the east with a few outbuildings; the old square tower was given a brick top storey and tall capping, so that the old kernel could remain readily recognisable in its new urban environment. In 1556, a new jail was built at the western end, and a covered (and trellis-enclosed) gallery connected the two wings left and right of the old tower. In 1670, city architect Willem van der Helm built a new court of justice (*vierschaar*) in front of the sixteenth-century jail. It became a model of seventeenth-century Classicism: a slim rectangular block with an entirely sandstone ground floor topped with high pilasters, the whole crowned at the front with a pediment containing Leiden's coat of arms and the personification of Justitia. Through all the fifteenth-, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century extensions, the vista to the counts' old stone tower was purposely left uncluttered, so that in the end it peeped out as a treasured relic among the showy new architecture. The ensemble unmistakably proclaimed that in this location, the city had taken on the time-honoured roles of the Count of Holland.

22 Oerle, *Leiden binnen en buiten de stadsvesten* 67–72.



FIGURE 16.7A The Court of Justice of Leiden (“het Gerecht”).
 Drawing H.A. van Oerle

IMAGE © H.A. VAN OERLE, *LEIDEN BINNEN EN
 BUITEN DE STADSVESTEN* (LEIDEN: 1975) 71



FIGURE 16.7B Leiden, Court of Justice (“het Gerecht”)

IMAGE © AUTHOR

This was more than a simple historical reference or boast of age; it was also a legitimation of the city's entitlement to rule.

6 Amsterdam (1306)

Amsterdam would appear to be the major exception to this trend. Its modest mediaeval town hall, built in 1368–1395, had mushroomed over a couple of centuries into an extensive complex occupying the entire block between the Dam and Nieuwezijds Voorburgwal, including the buildings of a former hospital. All that had been swept away, as is common knowledge, in the years 1648–1665, making way for the most magnificent city palace that the Europe of that time had ever seen [Fig. 16.8].²³ Amsterdam was the most powerful city in Holland and in the whole Republic, and in practice substantially dominated the agenda of the States of Holland and even the national States-General.



FIGURE 16.8 Jean-François Daumont, View on Dam Square of Amsterdam, with the town hall built in 1648–1667. Etching and watercolour (ca. 1750), 28.5 × 42.7 cm. See also Fig. 17.6

IMAGE © RIJKSMUSEUM, AMSTERDAM

23 Vlaardingebroek P.F., *Het paleis van de Republiek. Geschiedenis van het stadhuis van Amsterdam* (Zwolle: 2011).

Its paltry fifth place in the official provincial hierarchy stood in jarring contrast to its actual political clout, and clearly the high and mighty of Amsterdam felt it quite beneath them to engage in Holland's other represented cities' mutual rivalries about their age. Quite the contrary; Amsterdam made great play of its modest mediaeval origins, which served to enhance the glorious contrast with the present day: just as Rome's world empire had begun from an unassuming shepherds' hamlet, so Amsterdam had begun as a quite ordinary fishing village on the Amstel.²⁴ The scale and execution of the architecture, and the idiom of the imagery, of the town hall which presented Amsterdam as a latter-day Rome – presented as the hub of global trade and meeting-point of the world's oceans – demonstrates that for Amsterdam, actual prosperity and real power far outweighed quibbles about age, which the city would never have been able to win anyway. Nevertheless, this is only superficially so; the yearning for a celebrated mediaeval past was found in Amsterdam too, as we shall see further below.

7 Gouda (1272)

Gouda obtained its city charter from Count Floris v in 1272 but he had no residence of his own here. This was because the city was held in fiefdom by the hereditary Lord of Gouda, only reverting to the Count directly in 1397. Although of greater age than Amsterdam, this city was admitted to the States of Holland later than Amsterdam in view of this interruption, thus assuming sixth place in the speaking order. The old feudal centre of power of the local lord was on a hill fort beside the Molenwerf (Mill Quay), south of the Grote Kerk (alias St. Jan's church). However, in the mid-fourteenth century the Lords of Gouda moved to a new castle beside the harbour.²⁵ Unlike in Haarlem, Delft or Leiden, the town hall at Gouda thus lacked any connection with the historical counts. The first town hall built here was amidst the buildings along the side of the market. That square (or rather triangle) itself was still the property of the Lords of Gouda, and only after the handover of the market to the city in 1395 was the plan formulated of building a new municipal government complex in the middle of the market. After all, it had been stipulated in the transfer agreement that the city was entitled to build a new town hall complex

24 Fremantle K., *The Baroque Town Hall of Amsterdam* (Utrecht: 1959). Goossens E.J., *Het Amsterdamse paleis: schat van beitel en penseel* (Amsterdam – Zwolle: 2010).

25 Sprokholt H., "De motte" and "Het kasteel", in Denslagen W., *Gouda, De Nederlandse monumenten van geschiedenis en kunst* (Zeist – Zwolle: 2001) 28–47.



FIGURE 16.9
The town hall of Gouda
(1450–1459)
IMAGE © RCE

on the market, with cloth hall and meat hall, on the provision that the rest of the space remain undeveloped. As it turned out, this new town hall for Gouda was not built until 1450–1459 [Fig. 16.9].²⁶ The tall, rectangular building has natural-stone sides all around, and a richly-elaborated summit façade at the front bursting with sophisticated details typical of fifteenth-century Gothic architecture, such as pinnacles, corner turrets, profiled arches around the windows, and an ornamental steeple topping the whole. In 1599, a tall flight of stairs was added in front of the entrance, elegantly decorated with figures *all'antica*. A century later, in 1692–1695, the entire interior was renovated by Amsterdam builder contractor Hendrick Schut. In that project, the corridors, halls and fireplaces were completely renewed after the model of Amsterdam Town Hall on the Dam [Fig. 16.10]. A gallows supported by columns arose at the rear. The side elevations, too, were modernised by removing all Gothic detail

26 Pot G.J.J., “De bouwrekeningen van het Goudse stadhuis van 1450”, *Bulletin Koninklijke Nederlandse Oudheidkundige Bond* (1950) 129–145. Scheygrond A. (ed.), *Het stadhuis van Gouda* (Gouda: 1952). Denslagen W., *Gouda, De Nederlandse monumenten van geschiedenis en kunst* (Zeist – Zwolle: 2001) 212–225.



FIGURE 16.10 Upper hall of the Gouda town hall, interior created 1692–1695 by Hendrick Schut
IMAGE © RCE

and installing contemporary windows.²⁷ Despite all these modernisations, the town hall's late-mediaeval front was preserved. In seventeenth-century Gouda, as elsewhere, it appears to have been a conscious choice to show the world at large that the roots of the town hall, and thus of the city, were mediaeval.

8 Cities' Claims to an Earlier Origin

We are now in a position to conclude that the architecture and official imagery of the town halls discussed above, those of the six oldest cities of Holland, was more or less congruent with their actual position in the province's hierarchy of city relations. The apparent age radiated by the town halls was not

²⁷ During the 1947–1952 restoration, the Gothic elements at rear and side façades were reconstructed.

so far removed from the age indicated in the (scarce) historical documentation. Errors were, however, sometimes made in the dating of the oldest elements of the buildings, thereby tacking a century onto the age of some town halls, but we do not see any explicit assertions of flagrant fantasies that these buildings had been handed down from mythical Trojan or Roman forebears. While such origin stories were not unknown, they were not expressly retold either, at least not in the formal seat of power.²⁸ The town hall refrained from openly questioning the official age-based priority order between the cities which was so crucial for relations at the States of Holland. That said, there very much were attempts elsewhere in these cities, in other public buildings with a slightly less formal function, to assert extra age for the settlement, thereby calling into question the justness of the set order. Although none quibbled with the official dates of the city charters, in practice all city historians nevertheless claimed that their own city had been founded far earlier than the date in question, sometimes with the explicit assertion that it was at least older than some other city. The stories which they used to make these claims were accounts of Batavian or Roman date, or from the following centuries, the age of the first Counts of Holland in the ninth and tenth centuries, or from some other juncture in the legendary chivalric age that followed (which was as richly elaborated with tales as earlier eras were).

9 Dordrecht, Haarlem, Delft

We have seen already the example of Dordrecht, which, although universally known to have held its city rights only since 1220, asserted that its history as Holland's first ever city began in the early tenth century under Dirk I, the inaugural Count of Holland. Writing in 1640, city historian Johan van Beverwijck constructs this history as follows. The name Dirk is a derivative of Theodoricus, also shortened to Dorcus. The first fort which this Dirk or Dorcus built stood on the banks of the Merwede and was thus known as 'Dorcs-fort', later elided to 'Dorfort'. In the settlement which arose alongside it, judicial sentencing was pronounced in his name; consequently, it came to be known as 'Dorcs-recht', or 'Dordrecht'.²⁹ The later counts, he writes, extended the city from those

28 Tilmans K., "Autentijck ende warachtig'. Stedenstichtingen in de Hollandse geschiedschrijving: van Beke tot Aurelius", *Holland, regionaal-historisch tijdschrift* 21 (1989) 68–87. Verbaan E., *De woonplaats van de faam. Grondslagen van de stadsbeschrijving in de zeventiende-eeuwse Republiek* (Hilversum: 2011).

29 Beverwijck, *t Begin van Hollant in Dordrecht* 75–82.

beginnings. Since Dirk IV suffered an attack in this location in 1048, it must, van Beverwijck goes on to reason, already have been a town of some import by that date. Its oldest kernel, he reckons, was the Puttox-toren, a mediaeval defensive tower on the Merwede whose last remains collapsed in the early seventeenth century.³⁰ When that occurred, the monumental Groothoofdspoort, built close to that spot in 1619, took on the role of waterside city limit.

Seventeenth-century Haarlem had a remarkable ace to play in order to question subtly whether Dordrecht deserved its primacy. In the Fifth Crusade (c. 1215–1221), it was said, a Haarlem vessel was involved in the breaking of the chains at the mouth of the Nile Delta harbour of ‘Damiate’ (Damietta, or modern-day Egyptian Dumyāt), allowing the knights to capture the city.³¹ According to this account, Frederick II Barbarossa, the Holy Roman Emperor, permitted Haarlem to add a sword to its coat of arms (which then consisted of a field of four stars), and the Patriarch of Jerusalem added the Cross to the design. In reality, the arms of four stars, sword and cross are not attested to earlier than the late fourteenth century, over a century and a half after that last Crusade. Moreover, the oldest source for the story is only late fifteenth-century. None of this was allowed, however, to detract from the swashbuckling account of the taking of Damietta. In the seventeenth century, this was Haarlem’s central legend, represented in several paintings, celebrated as a scene in a monumental tapestry ordered for the town hall, and always the image depicted whenever the city presented an artwork to other settlements in the province. The first Damiate artwork was donated to Sint Janskerk in Gouda, to which a number of cities in Holland each gave a large stained-glass window between 1594 and 1603 to complete the cycle commenced in that church in the mid-sixteenth century. Here, too, Haarlem presented itself as the hero-city of the Crusade. William Thybaut’s 1596 massive design is eleven metres high and nearly five metres across³² [Fig. 16.11]. Because not everyone outside Haarlem might be familiar with the tale, the city’s name was added, together with the year of the famed opening of the harbour by a Haarlem ship with a saw under its keel: ‘1219’. That is a crucial date for the importance of the story: if Haarlem had truly been able in that year – *a year before* Dordrecht obtained its charter – to send such a mighty fleet out on the Crusades, then it must have been no mean city even then, although official recognition did not come for many years subsequently.

30 Beverwijck, *t Begin van Hollant in Dordrecht* 118.

31 Moolenbroek J. van, *Nederlandse kruisvaarders naar Damiate aan de Nijl. Acht eeuwen geschiedenis en fantasie in woord en beeld* (Hilversum: 2016).

32 Ruyven-Zeman Z. van (ed.), *The stained-glass windows in the Sint Janskerk at Gouda 1556–1604*, Corpus Vitrearum Netherlands 3 (Amsterdam: 2000).



FIGURE 16.11 The capture of the port of Damiate as depicted on the window offered in 1596 by the city of Haarlem in de St. Jan's church, Gouda. Detail from a print by Pieter Tanjé and Julius Boétus after Willem Thybaut (1738–1754).
IMAGE © RIJKSMUSEUM, AMSTERDAM

Holland's third city, Delft, likewise had its own understanding of its 'true' age and its connection with the Crusader era. The kernel of the settlement which later grew into Delft was said to have sprung up along the canal which the Roman general Corbulo had had dug in the first century AD. The pre-eminent historian of Delft, Dirck van Bleysweijck, reports that the bottom sections of the tower of the Oude Kerk, which stands practically on the quayside of Old Delft, originated from a Roman watchtower which Corbulo had installed alongside his freshly-dug canal, as was customary along the military limes. On the authority of unnamed scholars of 'Batavische Outheydt' ('Batavian antiquity'), van Bleysweijck reported that 'the bottom of the Oude Kerk tower was once (when the country was still wild, desolate and sparsely-populated) a redoubt or watchtower meant to provide a view over the canal, just as others

of its kind were installed here and there, particularly along the Rhine'.³³ He insisted that however the matter lay, this tower was the oldest building in Delft and for many miles around, as was borne out (in this instance too) by the tufa blocks used in its foundations: 'as the grey tuff-stones at the base of the fundaments indicate in a few places'.³⁴ Later, as he had it, the first Counts of Holland pronounced sentences at this tower, thereby gradually giving rise to the settlement. A true city only arose here, according to his account, in 1071 at the initiative of Count Godfrey the Hunchback (who is also discussed by Karl Enekel in this volume) he fortified an existing village with doughty walls and towers, which, van Bleysweijck states, made the city 'the largest in area and best-fortified of all Holland in olden times'.³⁵ He goes on to claim that the cities of Dordrecht and Haarlem were much less amply fortified and that they only grew a touch larger than Delft in later times. A castle also formed part of Godfrey the Hunchback's fortifications. Van Bleysweijck reports that there are two possible locations for it: either outside or inside the city. In the latter case, the author adds, the likeliest location for it was on the market square, which had previously been a moat island; the castle would have been where the city hall later came to stand, and the castle gardens where the Nieuwe Kerk was erected.³⁶ He thus omits any treatment of whether the old counts' tower, Het Steen, may have been it a remnant of the very first castle on the spot.

10 Leiden

Certainly, Leiden was much older than the date of 1266, the year of its city charter. Local historians had proclaimed the city's presumed ancient

33 Bleysweijck Dirck van, *Beschryvinge der Stadt Delft, betreffende des selfs Situatie, Oorsprong en Ouderdom* (Delft, Arnold Bon:1667) 45: 'het onderste van de Oude-Kercks Toorn wel eer (als het Landt noch wilt en woest en weynich bewoont was) tot een Redoute ofte Wachttooren ten opsichte over de Gracht soude zijn ghestelt gelijck verscheyde van die nature hier en daer in sonderheydt langers den Rijn waren gheordonneert'.

34 Bleysweijck, *Beschryvinge der Stadt Delft* 60: 'gelijck de grijze Duijfteenen onder aen de Fundamenten dat eenigermaelen uytwijzen', Evidently, van Bleysweijck believed that tufa was an artificial stone, perhaps something like Roman cement, whose production was a lost art: 'welcke soort van Steen van soo hooghen ouderdom is, dat haer compositie en maecksel nu alt'eenemael vergeten en uyt de wereltd is eraeck't' ('This kind of stone is of such great antiquity that its composition and production has now been entirely forgotten and lost to the world').

35 Bleysweijck, *Beschryvinge der Stadt Delft* 60: 'in voortijden de grootste van begrip en best ghefortificeerde is geweest van gansch Hollandt'.

36 Bleysweijck, *Beschryvinge der Stadt Delft* 59–60.



FIGURE 16.12 The Keep of Leiden, “de Burcht” (the 12th-century fort) and its surroundings at the confluence of two branches of the river Rhine.

IMAGE © GEMEENTE LEIDEN

origin, identification Leiden with the Roman fort of Lugdunum on the *Tabula Peutingeriana*. No bones were made about this: Jan Orlers blithely wrote in his 1614 city history that Leiden, or *Lugdunum Batavorum*, was the centre of Holland and perhaps the province’s oldest city, and older at any rate than Dordrecht or Haarlem, since they had no Roman history: ‘Leiden [is] not just old but the oldest and principal city of Holland, certainly older than Dordrecht and Haarlem.’³⁷ While those two cities assert their privileges, nobody, he dismissively adds, has ever seen the documents. The key proof of Leiden’s great age was the round fort on the high motte at the confluence of two branches of the Rhine [Fig. 16.12]: ‘The Fort, being an ornament to this city, is not only the first and oldest building which has stood in Leiden for several centuries but is

37 Orlers Jan Jansz., *Beschrijvinge der Stad Leyden* (Leiden, Henrick Haestens: 1614) 13–14: ‘Leyden [is] niet alleen out maer de outste ende voornaemste Stadt van Hollandt, seeckerlijck ouder als Dordrecht ende Haerlem’.

even one of the very oldest establishments and fortresses of all Holland.³⁸ It was generally believed that the city had come into being as a fishing village at the foot of that fortress. Opinions varied as to the exact date of construction. Aurelius, in his early sixteenth-century *Divisiechroniek*, thought that it had been founded by Julius Caesar.³⁹ A century after Aurelius, a later dating was given: under Nero.⁴⁰ Yet another account, circulating since the Late Middle Ages, spoke of its having been founded by Engistus (Hengist), King of the Frisians and later pioneer of the Anglo-Saxon settlement, in AD 449.⁴¹ From the late sixteenth century onwards, the fairy-tale elements of this mediaeval story, with the fortress as a refuge from the merciless forest beyond, were disregarded, but the date itself continued to be regarded as reliable.⁴² Bleau's mid-seventeenth-century *Toonneel der Steden*, too, repeats the account. In the current state of historical knowledge, this dating would be half a millennium too early: the first impulse to build a modest hill fort may have come around AD 1000 and it was raised in height around 1050, with the first ring-wall being raised around 1150 (subsequently repaired and fortified numerous times).⁴³

Just after the mid-point of the seventeenth century, the age of this fortress became a very current topic. After all, the *Burcht* (Fort) had since time immemorial been the property of the Viscounts (*burggraven*) of Leiden. Besides the Fort, the office entailed a number of financial and political privileges. From 1340 onwards, the office was in the hands of the Lords of Wassenaer, and in the sixteenth century the title transferred to the Southern Netherlands noble family de Ligne. In 1651, the City of Leiden purchased the feudal rights and the title 'Viscount of Leiden' from Claude Lamoral de Ligne for a princely sum. This finally brought the city autonomy over its land and the ownership of the concomitant privileges. Until that time, the Fort had been a sealed enclave within the city, inaccessible to the burghers and abandoned for centuries since by the

38 Orlers, *Beschrijvinge der Stad Leyden* 59: 'Den Burch wesende een verciersel deser Stede is niet alleene het eerste ende alderoutste gebou het welcke eerst buyten en de over eenige Honderden Jaren binnen Leyden gelegen heeft maer selfs een van de alleroutste gestichten ende Sterckten van gantsch Hollant!'

39 Aurelius Cornelius, *Die cronijcke van Hollandt, Zeelandt ende Vrieslant, beghinnende van Adams tiden tot die geboorte ons heren Jhesu: voertgaende tot den jare 1517* (Leiden: 1517) fols. 16v–17r. Tilmans, "Autentijck ende warachtig" 85.

40 Leeuwen Simon van, *Korte Besgryving van het Lugdunum Batavorum nu Leyden* (Leiden, Johannes van Gelden: 1672) 23 and 42.

41 Oerle, *Leiden binnen en buiten de stadsvesten* 37–41; Vlist E. van der, *De Burcht van Leiden*, Leidse historische reeks 14 (Leiden: 2001) 9–18.

42 Junius Hadrianus, *Batavia* (Leiden, Franciscus Raphelengius: 1588). Used Dutch translation by Glas, *Holland is een eiland* 338. Orlers, *Beschrijvinge der Stad Leyden* 59.

43 Vlist, *De Burcht van Leiden* 82–87.

titular viscounts. Following this acquisition, the city transformed the Fort and its surroundings into a public city park with an inviting open-air dining area at the foot of the mound.⁴⁴ A new access gate to the Fort grounds was also installed, right on the corner of Burgsteeg and Nieuwstraat. The importance of this development for the city's prestige is seen from the appointment in 1658 of court architect Pieter Post to supply drawings for it.⁴⁵ Post was one of the leading Classical architects of the Golden Age and had an intimate command of the idiom of antique forms. His skills were already well known in Leiden, as he had just the previous year delivered the designs for the new weighing-house (*waag*) and butter exchange (*boterhuis*) behind it.

Also in 1658, to improve access to the Fort, the city bought up a few houses lining the old path up to it. They were demolished, together with the old gate which had stood there so long. Pieter Post's new gate was erected in 1658–1659 ten metres closer to the city centre, on the corner of Nieuwstraat and Burgsteeg. This aligned its central opening perfectly with the broad Nieuwstraat. On the left-hand side, the gate opening abutted an existing residential house; to the right, there was some space left over to install a suitable porter's lodge or similar accoutrement. However, to preserve balance in the whole complex, Post also included the house to the left of the gate in his plans. Its corner was remodelled as a gate tower, as a pendant of the same structure seen on the right-hand side, so that the access route to the Fort would be nicely and symmetrically flanked by a pair of corner towers. Yet this work consisted only of a cosmetic retouching to match the corner of the house optically with the gate; the inner space of this 'tower' remained part of the private property as before. In fact, this intervention necessitated a near-complete reconstruction of the corner house – all at the city's expense. Evidently, money was no object for the city fathers in this beautification project.

For this gate, Post took leave of his customary Classical style to apply an almost chivalric architectural idiom, with towers, battlements and pinnacles [Fig. 16.13]. The frieze above the gate was topped by Leiden's coat of arms, with a heavy-set lion as shield-bearer, flanked by two round towers. Evidently, the aim was not to allude to the fortress' supposed Roman antiquity – for, if so, the Classical architectural idiom would have been a perfect choice – but rather to emphasise its mediaeval past. Besides his castle-like towers, Post added other deliberate anachronisms in the detail, such as the arch frieze under the tower cornices. In addition, the gate's great arch includes in its fabric some older

44 Moerman I.W.L., "De Leidse Burcht", in Hoekstra T.J. – Janssen H.L. – Moerman I.W.L. (eds.), *Liber Castellorum* (Zutphen: 1981) 257–269.

45 Terwen J.J. – Ottenheim K.A., *Pieter Post (1608–1669), architect* (Zutphen: 1993) 195–197.



FIGURE 16.13 Entrance gate to the "Burcht" of Leiden (1658–1659), architect Pieter Post
IMAGE © AUTHOR

elements of true Gothic profiling. These older components, which to judge by the profiling date from around 1500, may have come from the old gatehouse that used to stand just a dozen yards away. By including these anachronistic architectural forms in his construction, Post was deliberately setting out to emphasise the historical and venerable character of the fortification. The historicising gate designed here by Pieter Post might seem to have more in common with stage decor than with real-life architecture, but that was desirable to resonate with the structure's chivalric past.

The Latin inscription in the frieze above the gate, briefly commemorating the fortress' history, emphasises this intent. It commences local history with the van Wassenaers as viscounts: *ARX EGO BELLONAE BIFIDO CIRCVMFLVA RENO / WASNARAE FVERAM GLORIA PRIMA DOMVS* ('I am a military fortress enclosed by the Rhine on both sides; I was once the prime glory of the House of van Wassenaer'). By having the fortress' history begin with the van Wassenaers, this text alludes to the myths as to the supposed (late) Antique origin of the structure. After all, although in Leiden the office of viscount is documented



FIGURE 16.14
Dirck Wouters, The hero Hengist
(Engistus), founder of castle of Leiden
in ca. 440 AD (ca. 1570). Nationaal Archief
3.20.87, Van Wassenaer van Duvenvoorde
1226–1996, inv. no. 3A, fol. 10
IMAGE © NATIONAL ARCHIEF

‘only’ from the eleventh century onwards and the House of van Wassenaer acquired the title as late as 1340, the impression was given in the family’s later chronicles that their forefathers had been lords of the fort here since the hoary antiquity of the fifth century. In the well-known illustrated chronicle of around 1570, we find Engistus (Hengist) holding the family’s old coat of arms, devoid of the three crescent moons, as he keeps watch at Leiden Fort [Fig. 16.14], and a couple of pages later, he is followed by Alewijn, the eleventh-century, first historically-documented viscount [Fig. 16.15], bearing the same arms.⁴⁶ In fact, this illustrated van Wassenaer genealogy admits of no distinction between the architecture or heraldry of the fifth century and that of the eleventh: all this chivalric antiquity was rather regarded as one long period of continuity, with no recognisable developments in style or form. The poem above the gate identifies no other details as to who this first van Wassenaer viscount was – Hengist, Alewijn or another man – but it is at least congruent with the story that the van Wassenaers had always fulfilled that role.

The poem in the panel above the gate goes on to give a description of a documented event from the dawn of the thirteenth century: ‘1203 ARX INVICTA [...]’ (‘the invincible fortress’), a reference to the siege of the fort that year.

46 Nationaal Archief (National Archive, The Hague), Van Wassenaer van Duvenvoorde Family, access number 3.20.87, inventory number 3A, fols. 10 and 27.



FIGURE 16.15

Dirck Wouters, Knight Alewijn, the first documented viscount of Leiden, with Leiden and its keep in the background (ca. 1570). Nationaal Archief 3.20.87, Van Wassenauer van Duvenvoorde 1226–1996, inv. no. 3A, fol. 27

IMAGE © NATIONAAL ARCHIEF

This served at least to prove that Leiden must have been a significant location before Dordrecht obtained the province's first official city status in 1220.

11 Amsterdam

In the seventeenth century, Amsterdam was able to supply several arguments for perhaps not being so low in the hierarchy of cities of Holland after all. In economic clout and influence, it far exceeded all the others, but this was of no account to its official priority, to the chagrin of the city's wealthy gentlemen. To demonstrate an importance outweighing that of other cities, Amsterdam would have to come up with formal historical claims. It had some of these, too, such as a special connection with the Holy Roman Emperor: in 1489, Maximilian of Habsburg, in gratitude for services rendered by the city, had given licence for his crown to adorn the city's coat of arms. The crown depicted was at that stage still the crown of the Roman King of the German Empire. As Maximilian was elevated to the status of Emperor in 1508, Amsterdam was privileged from the sixteenth century onwards to mount the imperial crown above its coat of arms. For this reason, the tower of the Westerkerk, the city's highest tower, built in 1638, is topped by the imperial crown, and it is also



FIGURE 16.16 Capital in the composite order from the facade of the Amsterdam town hall, with the double eagle and the imperial crown (ca. 1650)
IMAGE © AUTHOR

worked into the capitals of the city hall on the Dam here and there [Fig. 16.16]. It may seem a purely symbolic honour to have a crown on a city's arms, but the only other cities with the imperial crown on their arms in the Empire were the Free Imperial Cities, such as Augsburg, Regensburg and Nuremberg. These Free Imperial Cities were directly answerable to the Emperor, with no involvement of a count, duke or other provincial lord. There were several imperial cities in the Northern Low Countries, too, including Nijmegen and Deventer; but none in Holland. Amsterdam was never officially declared a free imperial city, but the granting of the imperial crown to the city crest can, with a little goodwill, be interpreted as tantamount to awarding such status. In the seventeenth century, by flaunting the visible symbols of its imperial freedom, Amsterdam continually emphasised its understanding of its own privileged position vis-à-vis the other cities of Holland.

A second substantiation for its claim of deserving higher status in the province's order of cities had to do with the city's early history. The oldest extant mention of the name Amsterdam is on a document by Count Floris v of Holland dating from 1275. Yet Amsterdam was not officially a city at that time,

and formally it still belonged to *het Sticht*, the territory ruled by the Bishop of Utrecht. It was therefore that prelate who, sometime in the early 1300s, granted Amsterdam its city charter. In the seventeenth century, the date of 1306 was cited. Yet the Bishops of Utrecht were already a declining political force by that age, and the real fourteenth-century lord of the land on which Amsterdam stood was the Count of Holland. Besides the Bishop of Utrecht and the Count of Holland, there was a third key party to the earliest history of Amsterdam. Sometime in the twelfth century, the Lords of Amstel had obtained the Amstelland district, holding it as vassals of the Bishop. This local noble family, the most famous son of whom was Gijsbrecht IV van Amstel, sought to turn the Amstelland into an autonomous territory, in hock to neither Utrecht nor Holland. Their hopes were dashed; Amsterdam and the Amstelland definitively became a possession of Holland in 1317.

Yet the notion of an independent Amsterdam, which must have existed even before the city fell under the control of the County of Holland, was an undimmed hope in the seventeenth century. Central to that ambition was the myth that the Lords of Amstel had had a castle there. The very oldest section of Amsterdam was said to have arisen at the foot of a castle built by Egbertus van Amstel on the west bank of the Amstel in 1152. Because of his complicity in the assassination of Count Floris V in 1296, Gijsbrecht IV van Amstel was besieged and overthrown by Floris' son and heir, Count William III, a few years later. The Lords of Amstel were driven out of the country and all the city's defensive works and bridges destroyed. According to the traditional account, the Count's troops also pulled down the castle, wiping any trace of it from the face of the earth. It was with this tradition in mind that Olfert Dapper wrote in his 1663 guide to Amsterdam that the Hollanders 'drove Gijsbert out, and razed to the ground and destroyed the castle, never to be rebuilt'.⁴⁷ Thereupon, for nearly two centuries, Amsterdam lacked any fortifications, and only in the late fifteenth century did Maximilian of Habsburg order the construction of a new city wall, with towers and all other accoutrements. The modern-day remnants of these works are seen at De Waag (formerly Sint Antonispoort or St Anthony's Gate) on Nieuwmarkt and in the Schreierstoren (Criers' Tower) on the River IJ.

The myth of the lost castle of the Lords of Amstel received a boost from the later confusion that arose as to the city's first defensive works, those destroyed around 1300. The oldest source on these fortifications is from approximately 1350, a full half-century after the events it describes. It speaks of 'oppidum

47 Dapper Olof, *Historische Beschryving der Stadt Amsterdam* (Amsterdam, Jacob van Meurs: 1663) 69: 'Gysbert verdreven, en het kasteel, dat noit weder opgemaekt is, tot den gront toe vernielden en sloopten'.

suum ligneis pontibus et turrinis propugnaculis' ('its town with wooden bridges and fortified towers').⁴⁸ However, in the Dutch version of this account, which came into circulation from 1400 onwards, the Latin noun *oppidum* is translated as *kasteel* ('castle') rather than in the sense of a town.⁴⁹ This was how the Latin noun was adopted in Johannes Isaac Pontanus' history of the city of Amsterdam, and the Dutch translation of it by Montanus in 1614 also used the noun for 'castle'. In turn, these city chronicles served as the source for Joost van den Vondel's *Gijsbrecht van Aemstel*, a play portraying Gijsbrecht IV as a noble fighter against tyranny who tragically fails in his striving to gain independence for Amsterdam.⁵⁰ Vondel's Amsterdam is betrayed by intrigue by allowing entry to an apparently innocuous ship which turns out to be concealing enemy troops. To complete the Trojan analogy, this ship is called *Het Zeepaard* (The Seahorse). However, at the end of the drama, the Archangel Raphael reveals a glimpse of Amsterdam's glorious future: 'Though the city be ruined, yet tremble ye never; She'll rise from the dust with more glory than ever.' He prophesies that in three hundred years' time (i.e., ca. 1600), 'the ruling count will lose his right' and the city will 'bear stately rule', whereupon 'your city's crown will reach the heavens'.⁵¹ This literary version presents Amsterdam's new glory and power as revenge for the defeat of the Amstelland's aspirations for independence. As Rome sprang from the destruction of Troy, so the new Amsterdam of the Dutch Golden Age is the heir to the lost realm of the Lords of Amstel. This message was repeated year upon year at the Amsterdam Theatre.

The great success of Vondel's *Gijsbrecht* made his castle, the focus of action in his drama, a study object of interest to Amsterdam historians even during the seventeenth century itself. Vondel situates the Lords of Amstel's castle somewhere near the Schreierstoren.⁵² Most authors, however, sought its location on the Nieuwezijde, the west bank of the Amstel. From the sixteenth century, successive ground works had repeatedly dug up slivers of heavy masonry, which

48 Beke Johannes de, *Chronographia*, ed. H. Bruch, Rijksgeschiedkundige Publicatien Grote Serie 143 (The Hague: 1973) 253.

49 Verkerk C.L., "De benauwde veste in Amsterdam. Een historische vergissing uit de vijftiende eeuw", in Roever M.B. de (ed.), *Het 'kasteel van Amstel'. Burcht of bruggehoofd?* (Amsterdam: 1995) 115–130.

50 Gemert L. van, "3 Januari 1638: opening van de Amsterdamse Schouwburg. Vondel en de Gysbreght-traditie", in Schenkeveld-van der Dussen M.A. e.a. (eds.), *Nederlandse literatuur, een geschiedenis* (Groningen: 1993) 230–236.

51 Vondel Joost van den, *Gysbreght van Aemstel*, ed. M. B. Smits-Veldt (Amsterdam: 1994) stanzas 1829–1840.

52 Thus also in 1663 in Dapper, *Historische Beschryving der Stadt Amsterdam* 69: 'het Kasteel, dat aen d' Oostzyde van den Damrak stont' ('the castle that stood on the eastern side of the Damrak').

were over-enthusiastically associated with the Castle of Amstel.⁵³ Ultimately, the city got its castle back in 1664, when city architect Daniel Stalpaert built a new entrance gate on Leidse Plein in the form of a fortress with four towers at the corners and four pinnacles [Figs. 16.17a, b]. This remarkable construction, torn down in 1862, was an outright fantasy building which seemed able to pass as the Castle of Amstel of Vondel's *Gijsbrecht*. In fact, it is a mere gatehouse with a central passageway on the ground floor, flanked by a pair of wings. What appear from the outside to be corner towers are in reality nothing but a relief of the outer walls. In the internal structure, the towers are nowhere to be seen, as indicated on the plan: on both sides, the structure had a single continuous space (with only an informal subdivision by means of thin partition walls). In this regard, the design of these 'corner turrets' was comparable with that of Post's gatehouse of five years previously. That gate, which is thus best interpreted as having been more of an ornamental object than a true military



FIGURE 16.17A The former "Leidse Poort" on the Leidse Plein in Amsterdam, built 1664 by Daniel Stalpaert. Photo taken before its demolition in 1862
IMAGE © STADSARCHIEF AMSTERDAM

53 Such as the find of foundations in 1564, described by Cornelis Haemrodius in his guide to the city which Pontanus in 1611 included as an appendix. Pontanus Johannes, *Rerum et urbis Amstelodamensium historia: in qua Hollandiae primum atque inde Amstelantiae, op-pidique, natales, exordia, progressus, privilegia, statuta eventaque mirabilia* (Amsterdam, Jodocus Hondius: 1611).

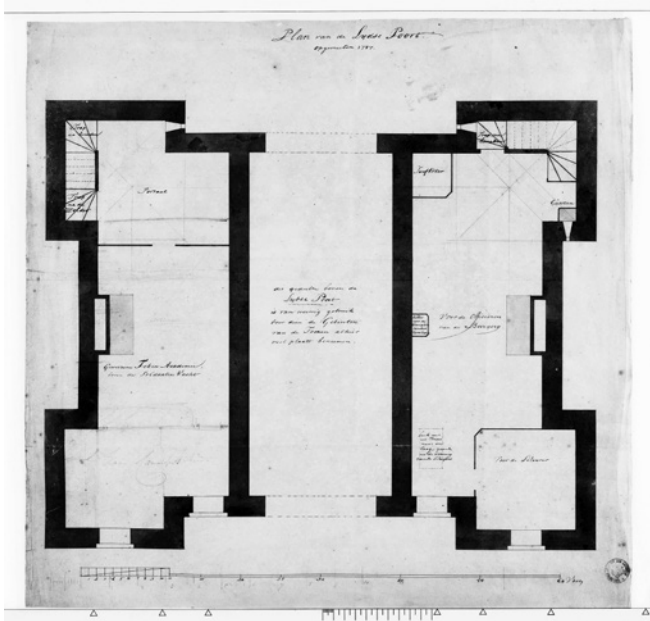


FIGURE 16.17B Amsterdam, ground plan of the former Leidsche Poort. Drawing, 1787. Stadsarchief Amsterdam
IMAGE © STADSARCHIEF AMSTERDAM

fortification, had stood on the city's western flank beside the road to The Hague; that is, in the spot where a city's age was most fraught with significance.

This story about the Castle of Amstel and the first origins of Amsterdam was not in fact altogether invented. Sure enough, archaeological research of recent decades has turned up traces of the late thirteenth-century foundations of a military fortification on the river (in the vicinity of today's Dirk van Hasseltsteeg), with an area of approximately 21 by 23 metres.⁵⁴ It is only a fairly remote probability, however, that these were the remains of the ancestral castle of the Lords of Amstel, which are much likelier to have been in the settlement of Oudekerk aan de Amstel. Rather, this structure may have been a stronghold built by Count Floris v of Holland to keep the population of Amsterdam in check.⁵⁵

54 Roever M.B. de (ed.), *Het 'kasteel van Amstel'. Burcht of bruggehoofd?* (Amsterdam: 1995). Toebosch T., *De Nieuwezijds Kolk en de Nieuwendijk in dertiende-eeuws Amsterdam. Een archeologische speurtocht* (Amsterdam: 2011).

55 Besides, it is not evident whether the building was ever completed. Speet B., "Een kleine nederzetting in het veen", in Carasso-Kok M. (ed.), *Geschiedenis van Amsterdam I. Een stad uit het niets, tot 1578* (Amsterdam: 2004) 21–61 (on the so-called Castle of Amstel: 50–59).

12 Conclusion

All the above examples make it clear that seventeenth-century urban authorities in Holland had a comparable degree of interest in mediaeval history to that of the nobility, which is considered in chapter 12 of this volume. Evidently, cities too could rise in esteem by dint of possessing a chivalric past. For the nobility, ancientness of the family line was key to determining the pecking order and as the ultimate way of setting oneself apart from the overweening *nouveau riche*. For the cities, only the first of these factors applied: the age of a settlement determined its political clout at assemblies of the States, and thereby all manner of other informal negotiations between the cities.

The question remains how special these “old-fashioned” town halls and gatehouses truly were in their own time.⁵⁶ Comparison with the twelve other cities which were given representation in the States of Holland only after 1585 leaves the impression that here, at least in town hall architecture, there was no comparable emphasis on the mediaeval past. Aside from the town halls of Alkmaar and Schoonhoven, which retained their Gothic exterior during the whole life of the Dutch Republic, the town halls of all these “newer” cities kept being built (or substantially rebuilt) in accordance with the dictates of the latest stylistic fashions of the moment. In the other provinces of the Republic, too, old town halls were completely modernised or adapted to the latest taste, with it apparently counting for nothing whether or not the city in question had voting rights at assemblies of its provincial States. Two of the most expressly Classical town halls, those of Maastricht and 's-Hertogenbosch, which in architectural terms and grandeur are every bit rivals for the leading examples in the Province of Holland, were in southern territories which lacked a provincial government of their own and which had no say in national politics at all. It would, therefore, seem that the competition for the title of oldest city was a matter of concern only among the old six cities of the Province of Holland, the first six to have been given representation in the States. For cities which gained this privilege later, there was apparently no further honour to be eked out of this issue.

56 The only building that could perhaps stand comparison with Leiden's Burchtpoort and Amsterdam's Leidsepoort was Utrecht's Wittevrouwenpoort (former city gate at the east side of the town) built in 1649–1652. Cuperus P.H., “De Wittevrouwenpoort van Utrecht”, *Jaarboek Oud Utrecht* (1952) 110–116. Terwen – Ottenheym, *Pieter Post* 193–195.

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