DAVID ONNEKINK

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The Body Politic

In the engraving *Prosperity of the Land* (1613), a multitude of ships are depicted, anchored in, entering, or leaving the port of Amsterdam.* At first sight it is a representation of wealth through commerce. However, the engraving is part of a popular genre of sea- and harbourscapes that has clear allegorical meaning, relaying an image of combined strength and prosperity through unity. The ships carry flags of a province or a city, or the national tricolour, stressing the multilayered nature of the United Provinces. An accompanying text connects commerce with civic identity, but also specifically with an emerging national consciousness.[1]

This complex nature of the Dutch Republic, a compound state in which power was shared by the States General, the provinces, and the cities, has fascinated both contemporary observers and later historians. For the late seventeenth-century English diplomat William Temple, the United Provinces were 'the envy of some, the fear of others, and the wonder of all their neighbours'. His contemporary Jonathan Swift, however, remarked that the Dutch Republic was 'a commonwealth so crazily instituted'.[2] Nineteenth-century historians, notably Robert Fruin, often lauded the rise of the nation-state and regarded the decentralized United Provinces as an aberration. At the same time, Fruin acknowledged the value of a political system characterized by liberty and consensus through persuasion. This ambiguity has cast a long shadow on the historiography of the Dutch Republic.

* I would like to thank Charles-Edouard Levillain, Arjan Nobel, Gijs Rommelse, and Coen Wilders for commenting on drafts of this chapter. Needless to say I remain responsible for any shortcomings.

It is only in more recent decades that the political system of the Dutch Republic has been reappraised. Firstly, increasingly historians believe that it was precisely the decentralized nature of the Republic that made it such an effective state. Secondly, historians have become less interested in formal structures and institutions and more in political culture. A proper overview of the body politic must therefore pay attention to formal institutions and underlying power structures, but also to a culture of politics. In recent years the awareness that politics is essentially a discursive process has gained ground and has changed the focus of research. It has also led to a re-appraisal of static interpretations of the Dutch body politic in recovering the dynamic interaction between multiple political discourses. This notion is the central guideline for this chapter, which aims to understand the Dutch body politic as a constructed entity that was discursively reshaped continuously, leaving room for contesting narratives and identities. It will do so by analysing the structure of the body politic, the political process, and ideologies and identities.

Historical Background

Historians have been eager to stress Dutch exceptionalism, using terms such as 'enigma' and 'miracle' to describe the political, cultural, and economic success of the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth century. At first glance this seems warranted. A decentralized state, emerging as if by accident in the late sixteenth century, admired for its achievements, must stand out in the midst of centralized kingdoms that went through periods of great political and economic turmoil. More recently, such comparisons have been presented in less stark contrast. For instance, the centripetal forces within the Dutch Republic, which lessened its decentralized character, have received more attention. At the same time, kingdoms such as France, which were traditionally presented as centralized and absolutist, were actually multi-layered in their political make-up. Nor is the compound nature of the Dutch Republic unique, as most of Europe constituted what historians now call dynastic conglomerates. This is not to say that the Dutch Republic was more normal than often thought, but rather that in the context of early modern Europe there was no norm, as each state was a unique composite.

The peculiar constitution of the Dutch Republic can be explained based on the country's chequered historical background. The seventeen

provinces of the Low Countries were incorporated gradually into the dynastic conglomerations of the Burgundians and the Habsburgs in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The dukes of Burgundy created several institutions that were to facilitate the process of centralization for their territories. The provincial high courts served as executive offices, and a chamber of accounts dealt with financial matters, while each province was ruled by a stadholder on behalf of the absent duke. The States General infrequently met as an assembly representing all provinces. The Habsburgs added several councils and unified the provinces under Habsburg rule by the 1549 Pragmatic Sanction of Charles V. The Dutch Revolt left these institutions largely intact but changed their functions. In 1579 the Union of Utrecht was established, a defencive pact between several provinces, mostly in the north, against the Spanish army and in favour of religious freedom, but it was not until 1588 that the Raad van State (Council of State) definitively took executive control.

The events of the Dutch Revolt were closely intertwined with the development of a political ideology for the fledgling Republic. Early modern states did not have written constitutions but were guided by what contemporaries believed to be unwritten fundamental laws, such as the principle of hereditary succession in monarchies. The Union of Utrecht and the Act of Abjuration (1581) could be considered part of a cluster of foundational documents from which fundamental laws were deduced. The Union stipulated that the provinces act as one in their foreign policy, but maintain their provincial sovereignty. They would join to repel 'Spanish' troops and maintain freedom of religion. With the Abjuration, the rule of Philip II was replaced with that of the provinces, which represented the cities and localities as their constituents.

A Bottom-Up State

The Dutch Republic was therefore a bottom-up state. The great commercial cities were fiercely proud, building on traditions of self-regulation. The city councils were made up of *burgers* or *poorters* (citizens who had acquired the right to live within the gates of the city). From their numbers the magistracy was composed, consisting of one or more burgomasters and the magistrates. There were significant regional differences, and historians also speak of an eastern and a western model,

which are distinguished by the active role of the *meente*, a body representing a selected part of the burghers. Generally, in the eastern provinces, the council had a less active role than in the west. The countryside also showed a rich pattern of administrative bodies. The highest official was the bailiff, assisted by sheriffs, but there was also a proliferation of regulating bodies, such as the *heemraadschap*, a cooperative body for water management. The difference between the cities and the countryside was less stark than is often presented by historians. The countryside, just like the city, was marked by a dynamic political culture and administrative diversification.[3]

Variety was also characteristic on a provincial level. Each province had a very different composition and consisted of a variety of delegations of constituent members. In Holland and Zeeland, the assemblies were dominated by the cities. In Gelderland, Groningen, Utrecht, and Overijssel, there was a balance between representatives from the cities and from the countryside. In Friesland the countryside was dominant. Sovereignty was primarily vested in the provinces, and the provincial assemblies considered themselves more or less independent. The States General was essentially an assembly of delegates from the provinces. They were often required to confer with the provinces before voting on important matters, showing that provincial sovereignty often superseded national unity.

Still, the provinces did delegate power to the national level. The States General assumed responsibility for matters of war, foreign policy, taxation, and religion. The grand pensionary, who formally presided over Holland's delegates, acquired the status as *de facto* First Minister of state. Influence was primarily decided by the power of the purse, which was converted in the so-called *quotensysteem*, a key to distribute the level of annual federal taxes for each province. Holland paid the lion's share (58 per cent) and was often able to dominate the States General. This position was also spatially reproduced in the design of the Binnenhof in The Hague, in which the States General's meeting room was situated close to that of Holland.

Quarters in the Binnenhof were also allocated to the stadholder. Of all the offices of the Dutch Republic, his was the most peculiar. In Habsburg days, the stadholders dispensed royal authority in the provinces, but in the new Republic they were servants of the provincial States. Stadholders were usually appointed in more than one province, lending supra-provincial weight to the office. In practice, the princes of Orange were usually the stadholders in all of the provinces except for

Friesland and sometimes Groningen, which were reserved for the counts of Nassau. The stadholders combined their office with those of captain-general and admiral-general, making them chief military and naval commanders of the provinces. Thus, though servants of the provinces, through the accumulation of offices they could develop into quasi-monarchical unifying figures.

The princes were sovereigns of the principality in Orange, so that the Orange court had a dual function as a princely as well as stadholderly court. The princely court, modest in international perspective, was a social, cultural, and political centre in its own right. The stadholder typically worked through brokers, powerful local or provincial allies who managed his client network. In Utrecht, for instance, William III relied on the nobleman Godard Adriaan van Reede van Amerongen and the burgomaster's son Everard van Weede to supervise his affairs as patron and manage access. The Oranges and the Nassaus built up two parallel and separate client networks, a formal one as stadholders, and an informal one as princes and counts, adding to the complexity of the body politic.[4]

The diverging principles of union and provincial independence at the core of the new Republic's constitution left the issue of sovereignty unresolved. In theory the provinces delegated part of their authority to the States General. In practice, however, provincial sovereignty remained paramount. This was especially the case for Holland, which was able to stand alone against the other six. These six were disunited, but on certain issues they banded together, sometimes under the leadership of the stadholder, to stem the gravitational forces of decentralization and counterbalance the power of Holland. In the crisis of 1618 this constitutional conundrum engendered conflict when Holland insisted on provincial sovereignty in matters of religion, and the other provinces called for a national synod. The defeat of Holland in 1618 signified a temporary ascendancy for federal unity, but for most of the time, and certainly after 1650, the dominance of provincial sovereignty remained an axiom.

Political Process

A mere analysis of formal structures and institutions does no justice to the practice of politics in the Dutch Republic. This is because the precise

jurisdiction of offices and institutions was never crystal-clear, because of the lack of a proper constitution, but also because of the clout of informal authority and networks. The stadholder was officially subservient to the provincial assemblies, but with his wealth, power, and prestige he could exert considerable pressure through his personal patronage network. Likewise, the grand pensionary was officially a secretary. But he was also the official spokesman of Holland's nobility, chaired Holland's delegation to the States General, and sat on several committees. He dominated diplomatic correspondence and was *de facto* secretary of foreign affairs. As such, the stadholder and the grand pensionary emerged as the two leading figures in the political landscape, precisely because of the hybrid construct of formal and informal influence they acquired.

Policy-making was often successful precisely when it was conducted informally. One way that the elaborate process of formal decision-making could be circumvented was by shifting it to the preliminary stage, institutionalized in the committee system. To facilitate swift decision-making, the States assemblies established several committees to study and advise on complex issues. In the States General, likewise, informal power was channelled through committees, such as the committee for foreign affairs, which was highly influential, especially under Frederick Henry. After 1674, a standing committee for foreign affairs of the States General discussed important matters. The committee consisted of influential representatives of all provinces and thus had the necessary authority to carry its decisions through in the assembly. Committees essentially institutionalized the informal power of core groups of influential regents, ensuring swift and efficient decision-making.[5]

The most notorious example of the power of informal decision-making, in which even these committees were completely bypassed, was the Dutch invasion of England in October 1688, which initiated the Glorious Revolution. It was conceived in utter secret in April 1688 by Stadholder William III, a few of his favourites, and Grand Pensionary Gaspar Fagel. The plan was for troops to depart from fortresses and head to the port of Hellevoetsluis, where a fleet was assembled, ready to carry an army to England. As stadholder, captain-general, and admiral-general, William was able to initiate and supervise this process himself. It was only in June that the basis for support was widened by drawing in the burgomasters of Amsterdam in secretive talks, rather than going

through official channels. Only in September 1688 did the States General officially support William. Although the concentration of power in William's hands in 1688 was exceptional, the process of building up informal coalitions before bringing a matter into official assemblies was typical.

Except for the stadholders and a few nobles, the Dutch Republic was essentially ruled by patricians. They were known as regents, an ambiguous term signifying a social, economic, and political group that, however, lacked coherence, although they were recruited exclusively from the higher echelons and economic top layers of society. The regent typically had his power base in the city where he held a local office. It has been estimated that all of the political offices in the Dutch Republic were shared by around 2,000 regents, always bearing in mind that it was not unusual to combine offices.[6] During the early decades of the Dutch Republic, a ruling class emerged from the wealthy merchants who earned their fortune in the booming overseas trade and rose to public office. However, a regent was never defined solely by economic power, but also by family ties, religious persuasion, friendship, and political acumen. The welding of established political experience with newly created commercial wealth led to a relatively enclosed new socio-economic elite that formed the regent class. A case in point is Grand Pensionary Johan de Witt, scion of a Dordrecht regent family that can be traced back to well before the Dutch Revolt. He married Wendela Bicker, daughter of a rich Amsterdam merchant, and granddaughter to one of the founders of the East India Company. By the middle of the seventeenth century, social mobility came to a grinding halt as the established regent classes closed ranks to new members. An 'aristocratization' of the ruling classes set in, as regents withdrew from active commerce and retired to landed estates.[7]

Political Communication

The Dutch Republic was a republic but not a democracy. Nevertheless, several administrative practices at least suggest a level of proto-democratization. Local politics was partly steered by popular demand through requests by locals, shifting the initiative for law-making to burghers. Another way for burghers to exert influence was through lobbying, usually through interest groups at a provincial or national

level. Burghers could also present petitions for specific political issues. People were able to articulate concerns, through riots but also through verbal and written communication. The local militias in particular were highly politicized corporations which could exert strong pressure on city councils, as indeed happened in the revolutions of 1672 and 1747. Local regents might dismiss popular pressure in theory, but remained sensitive to criticism.

Since politics is discourse, communication is at the heart of the political process. The most common way for the regents to communicate with the public was through placards, official statutes which were printed and distributed. Declarations by the States General or provincial States formed a significant part of the circulation of pamphlets in the Dutch Republic. Between 1650 and 1672, roughly a quarter of pamphlets were published by the authorities.[8] This also means that, on an annual basis, dozens, sometimes hundreds, of pamphlets were published, often discussing current political affairs. Although historians disagree as to whether this constituted something like 'public opinion', clearly there was a readership that was being politicized. More sweepingly, David Zaret sees the 'origins of democratic culture' in the rise of public opinion in seventeenth-century England, which developed not unlike that in the Dutch Republic.[9]

All in all, it seems fair to suggest that a large percentage of the population was kept abreast of current political affairs, albeit perhaps superficially. Pamphlets passed from hand to hand several times, whereas the strong oral tradition ensured a further circulation of opinions. Next to the polemic pamphlets was another source for information, the newspapers and news books. The *Opregte Haarlemsche Courant*, the oldest continuous newspaper, was established by Abraham Casteleyn in 1656 and was soon followed by newspapers in Utrecht and Amsterdam. Newspapers were affordable, but contained almost exclusively foreign news. Of more importance for domestic politics were the more expensive newsbooks which started to appear in the second half of the seventeenth century. Abraham's brother, Pieter Casteleyn, took the initiative in 1650 to publish the *Hollantsche Mercurius*, a voluminous overview of annual events based on printed documents which were collated by an editor. In 1690 a similar initiative was launched, the *Europische Mercurius*, mainly focusing on the wars against France. For reasons unclear to historians, the volume of pamphlets dramatically reduced after the turn of the eighteenth century.

Whether this was due to a decrease in interest, general consensus, or increasing government pressure on publications is unclear.

The International Stage

For the young Republic it was essential to assert itself on the international stage. Formally, it was not until 1648 that the Dutch Republic was recognized as a fully independent state, but the 1596 alliance with England and France could be interpreted as a first *de facto* recognition. The Twelve Years' Truce with Spain in 1609 signified one step closer to full international recognition. In the highly formalized international relations, the Dutch Republic was allotted the rank just under the Republic of Venice. The States General appropriated the title 'High Mightinesses', but it took an effort to have it internationally recognized; Spain did not do so until 1729.

International hierarchy was, however, not fixed, but a malleable construct. A case in point is a metaphor often employed by English pamphleteers, in which the Dutch Republic was equated with a burgher and England with a nobleman so as to suggest an hierarchical relationship. The metaphor was highly effective and tied in to social composition of the diplomatic services, in which Dutch diplomats were often of the bourgeoisie rather than the nobility. Likewise, diplomatic discourse often employed the language of age and seniority to the disadvantage of the young Dutch Republic. Dutch authors contested these constructions in flagrant dissent from the established international hierarchy. An example is a book by Carel Allard, *Nieuwe Hollandsche Scheepsbouw* (1695), in which he describes the flags of the seafaring nations. Allard acknowledges the precedence of the king of England, but consciously places the Dutch Republic well in front of the Kingdoms of France and Spain by reason of its naval superiority. Indeed, through military, naval, and financial capacity Dutch diplomacy acquired leverage to renegotiate its place in the international hierarchy.

The conduct of foreign policy reflected the myriad complexity of the compound state that was the Dutch Republic. The States General was represented by ambassadors in the main capitals of Europe, but it was not unusual for cities and provinces to conduct a foreign policy independent of that of the States General, even if the practice was controversial. In 1705, for example, in the midst of the War of the Spanish

Succession, the city of Amsterdam more or less independently negotiated with a French agent. Consuls represented trade interests and Dutch citizens abroad, but usually also took care of their private commercial interests. In embassy chapels, ministers played their part in official diplomacy but also maintained transnational confessional relations. Loosely attached to the official diplomatic service was a diffuse group of agents, spies, merchants, personal confidants, newsagents, and even art dealers who were constantly seeking to affect international relations.

Extra-European relations were established and maintained through commercial companies. These were never fully independent, but operated through an *octrooi* (charter) from the States General. However, they acquired semi-sovereignty and were authorized to declare war, make peace, and conclude alliances within their sphere of influence. For the East India Company (VOC) this was Asia, for the West India Company (WIC) the Americas and Africa's west coast. The Heeren XVII (VOC) and Heeren XIX (WIC) formed the Boards of Directors of the two largest commercial companies. Each board consisted of several chambers in which the most important participating cities were represented. As such, the VOC and the WIC also reflected the compound character of the Dutch Republic. With an eye on distance and communication problems, governance of the VOC was delegated to Batavia (modern Jakarta), where the governor general ruled together with the Council of the Indies. They were responsible for policy decisions but remained accountable to the Heeren XVII. The WIC operated within a similar structure, but a major difference between the two organizations was the lack of an administrative centre in the west. A representative of the States General took a seat in Heeren XIX, testimony to the integration of the two commercial companies in the governmental structure of the Dutch Republic.

The VOC mainly operated through *factorijen*, local merchant settlements ruled by a governor but within the territory of Asian rulers. But the VOC also acquired territory, such as the island of Formosa (Taiwan), which was occupied for several decades and ruled by a governor. Such governors were appointed by the governor-general in Batavia, the administrative centre of the VOC empire. In Asia, the Dutch held an indistinct position. When a merchant settlement was established, relations with princes were usually marked by parity or even inferiority. For instance, in Japan, Dutch ambassadors performed *kowtow*, the ritual of

kneeling before the emperor with the head touching the ground. At the other extreme was Formosa, where the Dutch acquired sovereignty during the middle of the seventeenth century. Much more than in Europe itself, the diplomatic service unofficially consisted of merchants, rather than formal ambassadors, who tried to make inroads into local markets.[10] The WIC was in a different position altogether. Territorial control was more limited and frequently unsuccessful in the long run. The territorial colonies of Brazil and New Netherland only lasted several decades, and the focus shifted to small island entrepôts such as Curaçao, a profitable commercial hub for the slave trade.

The nature of Dutch extra-European expansion has been debated, interpretations fluctuating between a commercial and a military-territorial enterprise. The haphazard structure of overseas expansion and the delegation of power to various commercial companies has caused many Dutch historians to deny it the epithet 'empire' altogether.[11] This seems a rash conclusion, inspired by an overly institutional approach and monolithic conception of empire. The patchwork of overseas possessions and interests could be reconceptualized as a network empire, in which myriad connections and multiple regional centres formed the constituent parts. Moreover, in the perception of rival states and commercial companies, the existence of a Dutch empire was never questioned, witness for example English Restoration politicians who were wary of Dutch universal commercial dominion.[12] Whether the empire was actually Dutch is questionable, given the multi-national character of the Companies' populations.

Political Ideology

In a country dominated by cities, local politics was paramount. This was dominated by factions, political alliances forged by families but also by groups of families who agreed to maintain and divide power among themselves. This they did through written agreements to divide vacancies for office equally. Different factions could establish some sort of balance of power as offices were distributed by rotation. On many issues, factions had no specific ideology or political programme, and they were not dependent on an electorate. They simply were part of the political elite intent on maintaining power for themselves, their families, and their political allies.

However, ideology certainly played a role in Dutch politics, even if there were no well-organized parties. In times of national crisis, an accumulation of local groups of regents could form something that might resemble a national party. Traditionally, historians distinguished two national parties in Dutch politics. Orangists supported the princes of Orange as stadholders and natural leaders of the Dutch Republic. They represented the monarchical element in the mixed constitution of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. They also symbolized national unity and military leadership. They gained support among the landlocked provinces. Republicanism, contrariwise, lauded the aristocratic republican leadership and represented the maritime interest and particularistic tendencies. It reached its apogee in the period of True Freedom (1650–72), the stadholderless period, and gained most support in the province of Holland.

While this monolithic view of national parties is no longer tenable, the revisionist emphasis on local interest also seems off the mark. Families had interests but could also be carriers of political ideologies. For instance, the De Witt families and the Huygens families passed on their respective republican and Orangist ideologies through the generations. Moreover, factions were building blocks of parties and could acquire an ideological character when supra-local issues were at stake. During the troubles in 1618–19 an accumulation of local factions formed temporary alliances of an ideological and confessional character. This does not mean that the political landscape was dominated by national organized parties, but it does mean that partisan issues could be vehemently defended by temporary coalitions of factions. Neither the traditional image of two national ideological parties nor the revisionist image of non-ideological factions is very satisfactory; rather, the political landscape of the Dutch Republic was a multifarious patchwork of local, regional, and national actors, whose self-interest and ideology were often intertwined.

This ties in with recent insights that politics is essentially a discursive practice, rendering the revisionist distinction between 'interest' and 'ideology' problematic. Revisionists believed that the traditional image of two ideological parties was naive, arguing instead that local factions focused on self-interest. However, in political discourse material interest and ideals are seamlessly intertwined and cannot be separated. The reconceptualization of politics as a discursive rather than social phenomenon has significant implications which historians are

still exploring. Revisionist historians focused mainly on organizational structures, discussing whether partisan or factional groups could be distinguished. More recently, historians have focused more on the role of political language. The lack of formal structures for parties did not stifle the influence of partisan language by Orangists and republicans, and indeed may have intensified it. Despite the fact that party structures were only rudimentary, political discourse on, for instance, foreign policy had an innate tendency to mould itself along partisan lines.[13]

Having said this, political discourse was not exclusively based on party ideology at all. The Year of Disaster, 1672, for instance, witnessed a multi-faceted outburst of public debate. At one level, discussion clustered around the traditional Orangist–republican axis, in which William III and Johan de Witt figured as the main actors. At a completely different level, however, debates bypassed this dichotomy by focusing on issues of citizenship and political participation. Yet another facet of the debate had a more distinct confessional character, linking national politics and culture to the Reformed identity of the Dutch Republic. Lastly, a rather unexplored dimension of the 1672 debates is the way in which the Dutch renegotiated their place within the international hierarchy in response to the charges in the English and French declarations of war that the Dutch Republic was a usurping state that had to be humiliated.

For a young Republic with no apparent unity, discourse on the nature of the body politic and Dutch identity was of paramount importance. The conceptual metaphors that were employed to represent that identity were not just illustrative; they shaped modes of thinking and political discourse and thus, in a way, moulded and remoulded the body politic.[14] A case in point is the representation of the Dutch Republic as a body that had to be kept healthy and vital. As such, corruption and treason became tropes well integrated into partisan discourse. In the whole of early modern Europe there was a long-standing literature on the vices of 'evil counsellors', targeting princely favourites in particular. In 1672 De Witt was murdered out of anger over his foreign policy which, it was widely believed, was responsible for the disastrous French invasion. The charge was that, by allowing libertarianism and lax religion, he had corrupted and ultimately betrayed the body politic. The symbolic retribution was his lynching and the ritual mutilation of his body, which was not the result of blind rage but a conscious act of political symbolism. His body was mutilated, just as De Witt was

believed to have mutilated the body politic of the Dutch Republic. Hence De Witt's finger, which had signed the Perpetual Edict barring William III from office, was cut off. The body politic could therefore function well only if it was healthy. In political discourse, the metaphor of the body was often used in conjunction with a nomenclature that denoted its state of health. In the wave of protest against the republican and liberal regime in 1672, for instance, one Orangist pamphleteer suggested the stadholder as a *Medicin for Holland's illness*.[15]

A body could function well only if corruption did not set in. What precisely encompassed corruption in the early modern context is not so clear, since there was no clear divide between the public and the private spheres.[16] In general, it was accepted that gifts circulated and money changed hands, but there were also activities that were off-limits, such as the selling of offices or state secrets. Crossing these lines was regarded as treason or corruption. *Griffier* Cornelis Musch and the First Noble of Zeeland, Willem Adriaan van Nassau-Odijk, for instance, were notorious for selling offices and secrets. The charge of corruption or treason could not always be proven, and indeed was sometimes wholly fabricated, as was the case with Johan van Oldenbarnevelt and Johan de Witt. The point, however, was not so much that corruption defied some well-described bureaucratic code, but that it was a metaphor for a disease in the body of state and was often turned to partisan ends.

Identity

For a young compound state, the development of a sense of national identity took place in the context of strong local and regional self-awareness. The profound experience of the Dutch Revolt became the benchmark for Dutch national identity. An important concept was 'patriot', appropriated in partisan as well as in local, regional, and national contexts. The concept was as multivalent as 'Fatherland', which could refer to the Dutch Republic as a whole, but also to local or provincial ties.[17] The centrality of these concepts is testimony to the ongoing need to construct identities. The greatest challenge, in the light of the chequered history of the United Provinces, was to define a national ideology, something to bind together the provinces through the power of ideology and common interest, which institutions alone could not do. The notion of

a nation forged by the Dutch Revolt was powerfully supported by massive historiographies of the events by Pieter Hooft and Pieter Bor, literary monuments that legitimated the Revolt and fostered a sense of common destiny.

Likewise, images and symbols helped in visualizing the Dutch national body politic and lending it legitimacy. Several national political metaphors rivalled each other. One popular image was that of the 'Garden of Holland'. Throughout the first decades of the seventeenth century the image of an enclosed garden, sheltering seven virgins and guarded by the Dutch lion, became a favoured topic for engravers. Such images embodied the ideal of a small but unified state, one encircled by dangerous predators. A popular but more elitist ideology was that of the Batavian myth. The Batavian revolt against the Romans in the first century AD was seen as an event foreshadowing the Dutch Revolt. Hugo Grotius argued that it supported the case for provincial sovereignty, and the myth gained support mostly in Holland, rather than in the Dutch Republic as a whole. Another influential image was that of the Second Israel, the theological notion that God had favoured the Dutch Republic, just as he had Old Testament Israel. He had done so for the state to shelter the Reformed true church and would continue to do so as long as the Dutch remained united and held fast to their faith. The metaphor was immensely powerful because it conveyed a sense of purpose, but was also limited because of its claim to exclusivity. Moreover, it had a strong transnational character, binding Dutch Protestants to foreign co-religionists rather than the state. All of these metaphors coexisted; there was never one dominant or monolithic Dutch identity.

Conclusion

The body politic of the Dutch Republic was a multi-faceted entity, with local, regional, national, and global dimensions. The political culture of the Dutch Republic and the mentality of its citizens were rooted in the medieval history of the Low Countries, in which the provinces were relatively independent and there was a high degree of local self-regulation. It was also rooted in the history of the Dutch Revolt, which developed a powerful ideology of religious freedom and representative institutions. And it was rooted in the global experiment, in

which trading companies had to define their relationship with foreign rulers.

As a whole, the body politic of the Dutch Republic was marked by complexity and paradox. Although local and provincial independence was hailed, there was also a strong sense of national loyalty in the face of international crises. Although there was a joint effort to expand outside Europe, the Dutch empire remained a chequered phenomenon. Although there was a complex formal constitutional structure, there was also an important informal circuit. There were rival conceptions of national identity, and rival interpretations of the locus of sovereignty. There was a time when historians baulked at the seemingly disordered nature of the Dutch Republic, which fell far short of the ideal of a developing nation-state. Nowadays, the Dutch body politic is instead hailed for its pragmatic, flexible, and conflict-avoiding institutions and decision-making mechanisms.

This complex and paradoxical nature of the Dutch Republic has been the subject of fierce debates by its citizens in the past, as well as by later historians. Rather than validating one interpretation over another, it seems prudent to appreciate the identity of the Dutch Republic as fluent and multi-faceted, as continuously discursively shaped and reshaped. The engraving *Prosperity of the Land*, mentioned in the introduction to this chapter captures this constructed and multi-faceted identity of the Dutch Republic in all its complexity.

Notes

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