

Introduction

On 11 September 1609, Henry Hudson, an English explorer in the service of the Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC), sailed up the Mahicantuck river off present-day New York. In doing so, he piloted a way into the territory that would develop into the colony of New Netherland. The event was captured by the British-American maritime painter Edward Moran in 1892, one of his 13 masterpieces on famous ships, explorers and sailors.¹ The number 13 was symbolic, of course, a reference to the colonies, as was the cosmopolitan choice of explorers, which included a Spanish, Dutch-English, Italian and Norwegian captain. Moran chose to depict the discovery of New Netherland as a joint Anglo-Dutch achievement. The painting was significant for another reason as well. The VOC ship was shown in the far distance, watched in amazement and curiosity by two Native Americans, male and female, partly hiding behind a rock on the shore on the foreground in the painting. While presenting a crucial moment in Dutch and American history, Moran chose to shift perspective in the encounter between the Dutch and the Native Americans.

In the seventeenth century, the Dutch launched a global enterprise. It was distinctly cosmopolitan, involving Dutchmen, but also Scots, Englishmen, Frenchmen, Danes, Swedes, Norwegians, Swiss, Germans and Jews from Spain, Portugal and Poland. It was also a venture that was shaped by the encounters with non-European peoples. During this period, the Dutch Republic was a world power and its ascendancy heralded an age of modern global capitalism, tying together previously unconnected trading networks, improving existing or creating new financial and insurance facilities for entrepreneurs, and sustaining reliable institutions that did not infringe on private property rights. At the same time, the Dutch built an empire on exploitation, in which Africans were removed from their homeland and put to work on American plantations,

¹ T. Sutro, *Thirteen Chapters of American History Represented by the Edward Moran Series of Thirteen Historical Marine Paintings* (Baker & Taylor Co., New York, 1905), 58.

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in which Native Americans were driven from their territory, and in which Asians were forcibly replaced. The riches of the commercial companies were unevenly distributed, finding their way to investors, while many sailors forfeited their lives for low wages. The Dutch Republic was a global, but also a European, power. Born as a collection of loosely connected Habsburg provinces, it stood up against the great Spanish Empire and the France of Louis XIV (1638–1715), transforming into one of the prominent states in Europe, before going into economic and military decline, and finally being annexed by Revolutionary France.

The history of the Dutch Republic is unique. The Republic that emerged out of nowhere, developed a proto-capitalist society, overseas commercial companies, representative government, a military and financial revolution, a relatively tolerant and liberal society, public opinion and educational and scientific advances that distinguished it from other European powers and has continued to fascinate historians. It is a tumultuous history that started with a Revolt and ended with a revolution. Halfway through the sixteenth century, 17 provinces situated on the North Sea coast, wedged between France, England and Germany, but part of the Spanish Empire, clashed with their overlord in Madrid. The Dutch Revolt that started in 1568 was a complex conflict, international war and civil war at the same time, economic, political and religious in nature. By 1581, the seven northern provinces had established an independent republic, the result, rather than the cause of the conflict. Despite the ongoing war with Spain that lasted for 80 years, it further developed institutions, a fiscal structure, market economy, a standing army and a diplomatic apparatus. A booming economy became the foundation of global expansion in Africa, America and Asia. At the Peace of Westphalia (1648), the Dutch Republic was formally independent and recognized, and regarded as a great power for at least two decades until the near-fatal Anglo-French invasion of 1672. For the subsequent 40 years, the Dutch were locked in battle with Louis XIV. Decline set in after 1713 and became apparent during the War of the Austrian Succession in 1747. By the end of the eighteenth century, the Dutch Republic had taken a back seat in the great European power games. At the same time, it remained a centre of European cultural, financial, economic and diplomatic activity. Moreover, despite its relative decline, the Dutch established a global empire that would be consolidated rather than eroded in the nineteenth century.

This book narrates the story of the Dutch Republic in international and global perspective between 1600 and 1800. It does not intend to provide an overview of Dutch history per se, but rather an account of how this early modern state was uniquely situated at the crossroads of

international and global developments, very different from the Spanish, English, French and Portuguese empires. First and foremost, it is a story of Dutch foreign policy in its broadest sense. That is, the diplomatic and military interaction between the Dutch Republic and its European and overseas neighbours will be studied. The focus will not be on the sequence of events, but rather the mechanisms and contexts of war and diplomacy. How was war organized in the early modern age, financed and developed? How did early modern diplomacy develop, how was it connected to cultural artefacts such as maps and paintings, and how was it entangled with national, social and religious attitudes? Questions concerning cultural identities are also important. How did foreigners perceive the Dutch Republic, and how did the Dutch reflect upon their own position in the world? There will also be attention to networks. How did the Dutch Republic develop into a hub of international migration, science and culture? Lastly, how was the European enterprise of the Dutch Republic connected to its global ambition, Dutch cultural reflections on liberty to its role as enslaving nation, and its tendency to territorially contract in Europe to its role as occupant overseas?

As such, this book takes into account the fruits of New Diplomatic History, a historiographical development that emphasizes the necessity of studying international relations in their broadest cultural and social sense. Foreign policy is studied, not just as a manifestation of high politics, but as an enterprise conducted within a cultural context. Diplomacy, military actions, threat perceptions, global ambitions, economic ventures, and migration policies were all conditioned by Dutch culture and self-perception. Policymakers entertained a specific world view, operated within the context of a specific culture and also in a society that grew increasingly vocal about politics.²

The overall purpose of this book is to provide an accessible narrative of the history of foreign policy of the Dutch Republic. Surprisingly, such a book does not yet exist.³ Moreover, this book aims to newly integrate two perspectives. First, it will connect the role of the Dutch Republic in Europe to the rest of the world. Most textbooks study these two spheres

² J. Watkins, 'Toward a new diplomatic history of medieval and early modern Europe', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 38 (2008), 1–14.

³ Works on the Dutch Republic usually focus on either the whole history of the Dutch Republic, or on the West and East India companies, but not on the Dutch Republic in international and global perspective; e.g., J. I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic. Its Rise, Greatness and Fall 1477–1806* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1995); M. Prak, *The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century: the Golden Age* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005); R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire: 1600–1800* (Hutchinson & Co. Ltd., London, 1965).

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in isolation, but they were very much connected and entwined. Second, foreign policy is interpreted broadly, so as to include the cultural dimension of diplomacy, encounters with other cultures, religious issues, travel journals and the role of public opinion and its reflection on foreign policy.

The backbone of this book will be the chronology of early modern Dutch and global history spread out over six chapters. Each chapter has a similar structure, starting with a panoramic overview and followed by five sections. The latter deal with recurring aspects: foreign policy, domestic organisation of politics, economics, global expansion and culture. A wide range of case studies are integrated into this basic framework, such as the emergence of early modern international law, the development of free-market ideology, encounters with other cultures and developments in cartography. History needs to be tangible. Therefore, one angle employed in this book is object-based research. Each section will start with an object or an anecdote which will serve as a window on the subject discussed and offer the reader a concrete encounter with the past.