

## The Price of Bread

A prime contemporary concern, how to maintain fair market relations, is addressed through this study of the regulation of bread prices. This was the single most important economic reality of Europe's daily life in the early modern period. Jan de Vries uses the Dutch Republic as a case study of how the market functioned and how the regulatory system evolved and acted. The ways in which consumer behavior adapted to these structures, and the state interacted with producers and consumers in the pursuit of its own interests, had major implications for the measurement of living standards in this period. The long-term consequences of the Dutch state's interventions reveal how capitalist economies, far from being the outcome of unfettered market economics, are inextricably linked with regulatory fiscal regimes. The humble loaf serves as a prism through which to explore major developments in early modern European society and how public market regulation affected private economic life.

Jan de Vries is Emeritus Professor of History and Economics and Professor of the Graduate School at the University of California at Berkeley. He is the author of numerous publications, including *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Demand and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present*, which won the Ranki Prize. In 2000, he was awarded the Heineken Prize in History, and is a past president of the Economic History Association.

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# The Price of Bread

*Regulating the Market in the Dutch Republic*

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Jan de Vries

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## Preface

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I gathered the data for this study over many years, and thought about what it all meant for as many. All the while I tried out my ideas at seminars in the US, UK, the Netherlands, and Belgium, and thereby benefited from the questions and suggestions of scores of colleagues. Nuffield College, Exeter College, and the Weston Centre, all at Oxford, the European University Institute and Utrecht University all offered their hospitality as I set out to write this book, and once a draft had been written, I benefited again from the comments of readers and anonymous reviewers. I wish to acknowledge especially: Maxine Berg, Bruno Blondé, Oscar Gelderblom, Philip Hoffman, Maarten Prak, Peter Solar, and Bartolomé Yun. All of this scholarly input and support has certainly made this a better, more insightful book. Indeed, as I look back I cannot but feel blessed by my good fortune in being able to work within an international academic community that is both welcoming and intellectually probing.

My colleagues have made this a better book. But research and writing remain, for the most part, an individual affair. As I contemplated my data and pondered the sparse historiographical signposts, I came to believe that most of those signposts pointed in the wrong direction. Thus, as I ventured into the history of one of the most prosaic aspects of everyday life, the pricing and purchase of bread, it appeared increasingly to be a *terra incognita*. If I lost my way in places, the responsibility is mine alone.

Finally, I can now answer in the affirmative a question my family has been asking for some time: “Is the bread book done?”

## Note on the Online Database

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This study makes use of newly gathered data on grain prices, bread prices, and excise tax receipts. A full account of the sources and the methods used to assemble the time series of bread and grain prices is presented in the online database at [www.cambridge.org/9781108476386](http://www.cambridge.org/9781108476386), under “Resources.” The online database also provides full information on the currencies, weights, and measures used in this study.



Map 1. Provinces and regions of the Netherlands

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