

I

Introduction

On a January afternoon in the year 1524, the people of The Hague turned out in large numbers to gape at the dazzlingly arrayed funeral procession to pay the last respects to Lord Jan van Wassenaer. An anonymous eyewitness described the ceremony in detail.¹ At the head of the procession walked sixty men dressed in black and wearing black hoods. Each of them carried a torch emblazoned with the Wassenaer coat of arms: the silver ‘waxing moons’ or *wassenaren* on the red field of the house of Wassenaer and the gold crossbeam on the blue field of the burggraviate of Leiden.² Behind them paced the clergy: priests, chaplains and other religious from The Hague and the manors of the lord of Wassenaer. Then came the nobles attached to his household, the bailiffs of his manors and a great number of young noblemen who were not in his service, but who were none the less attired in his colours; then the collectors, councillors, steward of the household, chastelain and shield-bearers of his house. They were followed by the grieving friends and kinsmen, each with a page as pall-bearer. These were the son of the lord of Piennes – a cousin of the lord of Wassenaer – and the Holland nobles Raephorst, Oem van Wyngaerden and Spanghen.³ They were followed by representatives of the central government of the Netherlands: the head of the Privy Council Jean Carondelet, archbishop of Palermo, and Jeroen van Dorp, a nobleman of Holland origin and member of the Great Council of Mechelen. After them came the Holland nobles Duvenvoerde and Schagen, and then followed nearly the entire government of the county of Holland: the president and judges of the Court, the members of the Hague Chamber of Accounts, the collectors of the Domains and the bailiffs, clerks and secretaries of the Court. Only then followed the third estate, representatives of the cities in the States of Holland. At the end of the procession came the ordinary people of The Hague.

¹ Published in *De Navorscher (Nav)* 45 (1895): 488–95, and in H. G. A. Obreen, *Geschiedenis van het geslacht van Wassenaer* (Leiden, 1903), pp. 41–5.

² One of three gules with three silver ‘wassenaars’; two of four azure with a *faas* of gold.

³ The text reads ‘Phls d’Espagne’ but, instead of Philips, his son Cornelis van Spanghen must have participated in the procession. Philips had already died in 1509. Cornelis (1487–1546) was a renowned statesman and military leader. A. J. van der Aa, K. J. K. van Harderwijk and G. D. J. Schotel, *Biographisch woordenboek der Nederlanden* . . . , 21 vols. (Haarlem 1852–78), s. v. van Spanghen.

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1 Jan Steen, 'De hoenderhof' (Mauritshuis, The Hague). Lokhorst House at Warmond, with Jacoba Maria van Wassenaer, daughter of Johan van Wassenaer-Duvenvoirde, lord of Warmond (1672–87), the last male heir of the Warmond branch of the family.

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- 2 Anon., 'Jan van Wassenaer' (Duivenvoorde castle). Jan II, banneret of Wassenaer, burgrave of Leiden (1483–1523).

The destination of the procession was the church of the Dominican monastery, where the lords of Wassenaer had their chapel. It seemed as if the building itself was shrouded in mourning. The decorations that had been placed in the church had to express not only the sorrow of the occasion, but also the power,

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the prestige and the wealth of the deceased lord and his family. The walls of the nave and the crucifix above the altar were hung with costly woollen cloth. On this cloth, spaced about eight feet apart, were more shields with the Wassenaer coat of arms. Black candelabra hung all around, with so many candles burning that the interior of the church was radiant.

The main altar was draped with a black velvet cloth, which had been decorated with ingenious figures in gold brocade. The altar curtains were of black taffeta silk, and the communion rails were hung with black cloth. Twenty feet in front of the altar a high black canopy had been erected. On it were more than a hundred glowing candles, and on a drapery, the lambrequin, the arms of Lord Wassenaer again appeared. In this small chapel stood the catafalque, the focal point of the funeral rites. A black velvet cloak with a richly decorated gold-brocade cross hung down from it to the ground. Signs of the dignities of the deceased were displayed at the head of the bier: the pointed banner, helmet, and standard, the square flag of battle that only bannerets were allowed to carry.

The obsequies lasted for two days. On the first day, after the funeral procession had settled in the black-draped pews, strictly according to rank and station, the wake was held. The clerical vestments were of black velvet and black damask, with crosses of red satin and green fringe. On the following day the signs of dignity of the deceased were carried in procession. The lord of Schoten carried the banner, Lord Adriaan van Dorp the coat of arms, the lord of Wyngaerden the helmet, and the steward Steenbeke the standard. A herald, arrayed in the livery of Wassenaer, but bare-headed, carried a black velvet cushion with the emblems of the order of the Golden Fleece. The armour and battle-sword of the deceased were displayed on the catafalque. During the offering these attributes were carried solemnly to the altar and held there by two nobles, the brothers Bartholomeus and Adriaan van Egmond. Later these tokens were exhibited in the chapel of the lords of Wassenaer.

These imposing ceremonies were dedicated to Jan II van Wassenaer, burgrave of Leiden, knight of the order of the Golden Fleece, the last male descendant of the main branch of his illustrious clan.⁴ He had lived a true knightly life: honourable, luxurious, adventurous – and at times extremely troubled. In 1500, at the age of seventeen, he had formed part of the train of Philip the Fair, when the latter passed through France on his way to collect his inheritance in Spain. But Jan's mother, worried about the dangers attached to the trip, had had her son recalled. In 1507 he accompanied his uncle Lodewijk of Halewyn, the lord of Piennes, stadholder of the king of France in Picardy, who went as French envoy to Venice. He took part in Emperor Maximilian's campaign in Italy, and during the storming of the walls of Padua in 1509 he

⁴ Obreen, *Wassenaer*, pp. 38–41. Later the Duvenvoirdes, a collateral branch of the Wassenaers, would again bear the family name.

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received a bullet in his jaw, by which he lost seven teeth; on that occasion the emperor himself appeared at his camp-bed. The following year he fought on the side of the Danes against Lübeck, and the year thereafter the troops under his command at Jutphaas defeated the Gueldrians. Yet the latter were able to take him prisoner in 1512. They locked him up in an iron cage that was hung from the attic of a strong tower by a rope and pulley. This uncomfortable abode was not lowered except to provide the lord of Wassenaer with food and drink through a small shutter. He was released only after two years, when a ransom of no less than 20,000 gulden had been raised. In 1516 he was received into the order of the Golden Fleece, and his appointment as supreme commander of the Habsburg armies in Friesland followed in that same year. In this role the lord of Wassenaer was mortally wounded at the age of forty, in December 1523, in battle against the Gueldrians.

Jan II van Wassenaer had been one of the emperor's major vassals in Holland.⁵ He held as fiefs the high and low justice in Wassenaar, Zuidwijk, Het Zand, Katwijk, Voorschoten, Oegstgeest and Wimmenum, and the justice of Oostbarendrecht, Voorburg, Valkenburg, Sassenheim, Heerjansdam, De Linde and Burggravenveen. In all these villages he also possessed land, tithes, houses, farmsteads and seigneurial rights such as *botting*, tribute-money, tolls, milling rights, the right to keep swans, bridge-crossing, fishing, fowling, market and ferry rights. He also owned feudal rights in several villages where he did not hold the manor: in Ketel, Zoeterwoude, Haagambacht, Vlaardingen, Eikenduinen, Leiderdorp, Zwammerdam and Hillegommerhout, and in the towns of Delft and Leiden. The income from all these rights and possessions made it possible for the lord of Wassenaer to live – and to die – as a nobleman.

Seventy years after the funeral of the lord of Wassenaer, a young Englishman travelled through the Netherlands. He was amazed that in these regions no nobles were to be found. 'The Nobility or Gentry hath long been rooted out by the people', he declared, '... after the example of the Sweitzers, especially in *Holland* and *Zealand*.' In these provinces he could find only three noble families, and these 'lived after the Plebeian maner of the other inhabitants, so as it were in vain to seeke for any Order of Knighthood among them. Neither are there Gentlemen – as those of Germany – curious to mary amongst themselves; for those who come to greatest honour in this Commonwealth, are either Advocates of the Law or Sonnes of Merchants', he noted in his travel diary.⁶

The contrast between these two witnesses, the anonymous report of the funeral of the lord of Wassenaer and the travel diary of Fynes Moryson, could hardly be more striking. The spectacle of 1524 was Burgundian. The principal actors were nobles, the symbolism was knightly. Granted, everything that would

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 48–51.

⁶ Fynes Moryson, 'Moryson's reis door en zijn karakteristiek van de Nederlanden', ed. J. N. Jacobsen Jensen, *BMHG* 39 (1918): 214–305, at 273–4.

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give Holland its exceptional character a century later was already present.⁷ Already in 1514 half the population lived in the cities, which made Holland, along with some parts of northern Italy, the most urbanized region of the world. The cities produced an even greater share of the prosperity of the land; accordingly the nobles had only one vote in the provincial states, while the towns had six. But from a social point of view the nobles in the first half of the sixteenth century were still the dominant class.⁸ Nobles occupied all the highest administrative posts and a large proportion of the lower ones as well. Of the judges in the Court of Holland who accompanied Jan van Wassenaer to his last resting place in 1524, for example, the majority belonged to families regarded as noble.⁹ As lords of the manor, the nobles held practically the entire administrative and judicial power in the countryside. As members of the city councils and the magistracy, they could exert influence in many cities. The highest ranks in the army were occupied by nobles. It may have been ‘the waning of the middle ages’; yet society was still unmistakably medieval.

The picture that Moryson sketched seventy years later was already what would become the traditional image of the Golden Age of Holland, where bourgeois patricians and merchants constituted the leading actors, and there seemed no more role for the nobility. By then nearly 60 per cent of the population lived in the cities¹⁰ and, as opposed to the one vote for the nobles in the provincial states, there were not just six, but eighteen voting cities. An Englishman accompanying the earl of Leicester’s party in 1586 called his queen’s allies, ‘Sovereign Lords Millers and Cheesemen’.¹¹

Yet on this occasion Moryson did not look closely enough. At the end of the sixteenth century there were more than three noble families in Holland, and his remark that they preferred to marry merchants or patricians is also incorrect. But it does not really matter how well informed Moryson was. It says much that

⁷ H. P. H. Jansen, *Hollands voorsprong* (Leiden, 1976), pp. 7–8.

⁸ H. A. Enno van Gelder, ‘1548: De eenheid voltooid’, in *Van beeldenstorm tot pacificatie. Acht opstellen over de Nederlandse revolutie der zestiende eeuw* (Amsterdam and Brussels, 1964), pp. 9–39, at 28–9.

⁹ *Memorialen van het Hof (den Raad) van Holland, Zeeland en West-Friesland van den secretaris Jan Rosa*, ed. A. S. de Blécourt and E. M. Meijers, 3 vols. (Haarlem, 1929), I, pp. xvi–xvii: Floris van Wyngaerden, Jan van Duvenvoorde, Abel van (den) Coulster, Hugo van Assendelft and Gerrit van Assendelft belonged to Holland noble families that appeared in the Ridderschap. Albrecht van Loo and Joost Sasbout belonged to families of high office-holders, although the latter bore the title *ridder* and was lord of Spaland. (Van der Aa, *Biographisch woordenboek*). The two members from Zeeland, Nicolaas Everaerts (president) and Jasper Lievensz. van Hogelande did not belong to the nobility; for the former, cf. A. J. M. Kerckhoffs-de Heij, *De Grote Raad van Mechelen en zijn functionarissen 1477–1531*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam, 1980), II, pp. 69–70. On the definition of the Holland nobility, see chapter 2, below.

¹⁰ Jan de Vries, *The Dutch Rural Economy in the Golden Age* (New Haven and London, 1974), pp. 84–96.

¹¹ Charles Wilson, *Queen Elizabeth and the Revolt of the Netherlands* (London and Basingstoke, 1970), p. 23.

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during his stay he had the impression of a society that had become thoroughly bourgeois.

Only seventy years separated the burial of the lord of Wassenaer and the travels of Fynes Moryson, a space of two generations. An individual might span that period in a lifetime. But these were turbulent years. The list of events is long and dramatic: the continuing campaigns of the emperor in Italy, Germany and France, fought with the help and partly at the expense of his subjects in the Netherlands; the concentration of administrative responsibility in Brussels, the reduction of provincial privileges and the resistance of the States; the Reformation and the religious and social unrest that it produced, the Anabaptist revolts in Münster, Amsterdam and elsewhere; the draconian persecution of heretics, the burning stakes and protests against them, not only by Protestants, but also by moderate Catholic elements who thought that the heretics were perhaps misled, but that they did not therefore deserve the punishment of death; the explosive growth of population, the rise of prices and wages, the growth of cities, of trade and industry, developments that brought wealth to some, but seemed to produce poverty elsewhere; and, finally, the Dutch Revolt against the king of Spain, a civil war that shook the state to its foundations, a guerrilla war that laid waste towns and countryside; a revolt, indeed, that the nobles themselves had helped to unleash by their 'Compromise' of 1565, by which they, in a sort of dialectical somersault, became the founders of a bourgeois merchants' republic, where money seemed to be more important than social origin. Step by step, these developments could not leave undisturbed the position of the nobility of Holland.

Was the transition from the middle ages to the modern period marked by a change of elites, in which the regent-patricians and merchants replaced the old feudal nobility? And if that occurred, what happened to the nobles? Did they simply die out, as did the main branch of the house of Wassenaer in 1523, or were they, much more dramatically, 'rooted out by the people', as our English traveller maintained? Were the nobles impoverished because their incomes remained constant while prices rose? Or did they disappear as a result of the Revolt and the abolition of monarchy? 'Point de monarque, point de noblesse; point de noblesse, point de monarque', as Montesquieu later remarked.¹²

The appearance in 1965 of Lawrence Stone's book on the crisis of the English aristocracy in the period between the accession of Elizabeth I and the outbreak of the English civil war¹³ has inspired historians to do research on crises of the nobility in many countries and regions between 1550 and 1650.¹⁴ Admittedly the concept of 'crisis' is hardly applicable to a period lasting a

¹² Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des lois*, ed. Gonzague Truc, 2 vols. (Paris, 1956), I, p. 20.

¹³ Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558-1641* (Oxford, 1965).

¹⁴ A survey of the literature appears in F. Billacoix, 'La crise de la noblesse Européenne (1550-1650). Une mise au point', *RHMC* 23 (1976): 258-77.

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hundred years. But, apart from that, it cannot be denied that nobles everywhere in the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth centuries encountered specific problems, to which they formulated different solutions. In some countries the nobles were better able to maintain themselves than in others, but in all countries by the middle of the seventeenth century the concept 'noble' meant something different from what it had a hundred or a hundred and fifty years earlier. The nobles did not disappear from the stage, but the role that they played had changed. In the Netherlands this process of change has not previously been the subject of historical research.

This study covers a century and a half. Its beginning is marked by the birth of Emperor Charles V in 1500, and its end by the death of Stadholder William II in 1650. These dynastic milestones, however, are not very relevant to our subject. It is better to begin around the year 1492, when the factional struggles in Holland between the *Hoeken* (Hooks) and *Kabeljouwen* (Cods) came to an end. This civil war supposedly decimated the nobility, which formed the backbone of the struggling parties, and caused them to lose their influence. Afterwards, it has been argued, markedly different relations prevailed in the county of Holland.¹⁵ As for the end of our study, it is appropriate to choose 1648, when the bourgeois republic received international recognition in the Peace of Westphalia.

This century and a half is important for the study of the nobility of Holland for two reasons. In the first place it coincides with a period of demographic and economic expansion, which has been called 'the long sixteenth century', a rising phase in the secular trend of prices and wages.¹⁶ The period is also significant for political history, for the beginning of the Revolt against the king of Spain falls right in the middle. A distinction can be made between changes in the position of the nobility that were caused by the Revolt, and changes that took place over a longer term. We can divide the age into three parts: the time of Habsburg rule (ca. 1500–72); the beginning of the Revolt in 1565 with the formation of the Compromise or League of the Low Nobility; and finally the time of the Republic between circa 1585 and 1648 (Peace of Westphalia).

The spatial boundaries of this study will be the frontiers of the sixteenth-century county of Holland, partly in order to keep the research within manageable proportions, and partly because the province of Holland may be considered exemplary for the 'bourgeois' Dutch Republic. By studying the changed place of the nobility of Holland we can, in an inverse way, examine the meaning of that shopworn term 'the rise of the bourgeoisie'.

Holland in that period roughly corresponded to the territory of the present-day provinces of North and South Holland. The western boundary was formed

¹⁵ H. P. H. Jansen, *Hoekse en Kabeljauwse twisten* (Bussum, 1966), p. 110.

¹⁶ J. A. Faber, 'De Noordelijke Nederlanden van 1480 tot 1780. Structuren in beweging', *NAGN*, v, pp. 196–250, at 207.

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behind the line of dunes by the North Sea; in the northeast it was the Texel channel and the Zuider Zee, the shipping route between Amsterdam and the open sea. South of the diluvial moors of Het Gooi, the ground was low and marshy. The boundary with the bishopric of Utrecht was freakish, the result of countless wars. In the south the islands of Goeree and Overflakkee formed the border with the county of Zeeland. A strip of land south of the Oude Maas and Biesbos, extending as far as Engelen, approximately one hour's walk northwest of 's-Hertogensbosch, formed the boundary with the duchy of Brabant. The arable surface of Holland in the middle of the sixteenth century covered about 309,000 *morgen* or roughly 689,000 acres.¹⁷ A large part of the area of the county, however, consisted of water. In the north the principal lakes (*meren*) were the Schermer, Wormer, Beemster and Purmer. The IJ ran west from Amsterdam through to Beverwijk; it was connected by locks with the Haarlemmermeer. In the south the estuaries of the Maas and Rhine rivers had many more branches than they do today, so that the country actually consisted of many small islands. During the late middle ages and the sixteenth century, large pieces of Holland disappeared under water. Three lakes that had a surface area of 22,500 acres in 1250 joined together in 1472 to form the Haarlemmermeer, a real inland sea of 28,900 acres. In 1544 the Haarlemmermeer covered 32,650 acres, and with each storm more land was lost.¹⁸ Thus the arable surface of the manor of Aalsmeer was reduced by more than two-thirds between 1544 and 1596.¹⁹ The simultaneous rise of the sea level, the imprudent digging of peat bogs for turf, and the subsidence of land as a result of drainage and cultivation all contributed to the increased water- nuisance.²⁰ But around 1600 the tide began to turn. In the sixteenth century a start had been made on pumping dry several smaller lakes north of the IJ; between 1600 and 1650, thanks to improved pumping techniques, nearly all of the lakes in this area were made into polders. By constructing dikes, the Hollanders were also able to win much land from the sea.²¹

The uneasy symbiosis with water was partly the reason that an unprecedentedly large number of people, more than half of the population, lived in the towns. Elsewhere in Europe at that time it was customary to find 70 to 90 per cent of the population working in the agricultural sector. Most foreign travellers devoted few words to the nobility, but without exception they praised the number, extent, power and prosperity of the towns. Around 1525 there were six cities in Holland with more than 10,000 inhabitants. By comparison, in the

¹⁷ J. C. Naber, *Een terugblik. Statistische verwerking van de resultaten van de informatie van 1514* (1885–90; reprint Haarlem, 1970), p. 18.

¹⁸ De Vries, *Dutch Rural Economy*, p. 31.

¹⁹ *Morgenboeken Aalsmeer 1544 and 1596*, AH Rijnland, Inv. no. 2891 and 2892.

²⁰ De Vries, *Dutch Rural Economy*, pp. 30–2.

²¹ J. D. H. Harten, 'Het sociaal-economische leven, geografie en demografie 1500–1800', *NAGN*, v, pp. 37–77, at 57–60.

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entire British Isles there were only three or four cities as large. Around 1675 Holland counted four cities with more than 25,000 inhabitants. Amsterdam with around 200,000 inhabitants towered above the others, followed by Leiden (65,000), Rotterdam (45,000) and Haarlem (37,000). Six Dutch cities in 1675 had populations of 15,000 to 25,000.²²

The prominent place of the cities in Holland was the reason that neither contemporaries nor later historians gave much thought to the question of what happened to the nobility. The nobles of Holland lived, literally and figuratively, under the smoke of the cities. Seventeenth-century scholars such as Wouter van Gouthoeven, Marcus Zuerius Boxhorn and Simon van Leeuwen indeed confirmed that the nobility of the region had previously been as numerous as in other lands, but they never studied the causes of its obvious decline.²³ In general, later historians overlooked the nobility entirely: when they did mention it, it was only to stress its small numbers as well as its politically and socially unimportant position. In his well-known essay on Dutch civilization in the seventeenth century, Johan Huizinga noted that the importance of the nobility in the Republic was relatively limited, precisely because the nobility in the core-province of Holland was so insignificant. 'As the power of the nobility waned and that of the old church collapsed, so the economic predominance of the merchant class was necessarily transformed into political and social predominance as well.'²⁴ Consequently the entire Dutch culture was less courtly or aristocratic in nature. It was bourgeois (*burgerlijk*), notably also where it was expressed by the landed nobility.²⁵ Jan and Annie Romein made the rise of the bourgeoisie virtually the central theme of all Netherlands history from the high middle ages to the present, by which the nobles, 'impoverished squires', disappeared from history: 'First supported by the monarch, later supporting him, still later, in Revolt against him and finally without the monarch, the Cods party, i.e., the urban aristocracy, developed into the ruling class of Holland, and would remain so, although in changed form, to the present day.'²⁶ All over Europe, according to the British historian Charles Wilson, the nobles preserved their privileges intact, except in the Dutch Republic, where 'the nobility faded

²² A. M. van der Woude, 'Demografische ontwikkeling van de Noordelijke Nederlanden 1500-1800', *NAGN*, v, pp. 102-68, at 135-7; cf. Geoffrey Parker, *The Dutch Revolt* (London, 1977), 23.

²³ Wouter van Gouthoeven, *D'oude chronyke ende historiën van Holland, Zeeland ende Utrecht* (2nd edn, The Hague, 1636), p. 119. Marcus Zuerius Boxhorn, *Toneel ofte beschryvinge der steden van Hollandt* (Amsterdam, 1634), p. 45. Simon van Leeuwen, *Redeningh over den oorspronck, recht, ende onderscheyt der edelen, ende wel-borenen in Hollandt; mitsgaders der selver voor-rechten, soo die nu zijn, ofte van aloude tijden zijn geweest* (Leiden, 1659), p. 23.

²⁴ J. Huizinga, 'Nederlands beschaving in de zeventiende eeuw', *VW*, 9 vols. (Haarlem, 1948-53), II, pp. 412-507, at 421-3.

²⁵ J. Huizinga, 'Engelschen en Nederlanders in Shakespeares tijd', *VW*, II, pp. 350-81, at 380.

²⁶ Jan and Annie Romein, *De lage landen bij de zee. Geïllustreerde geschiedenis van het Nederlandse volk* (3rd edn, Utrecht, 1949), p. 117.