

Cambridge University Press

0521843529 - The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century: The Golden Age

Maarten Prak

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

## The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century

The Dutch are ‘the envy of some, the fear of others, and the wonder of all their neighbours’. So wrote the English ambassador to the Dutch Republic, Sir William Temple, in 1673. Maarten Prak offers a lively and innovative history of the Dutch Golden Age, charting its political, social, economic and cultural history through chapters that range from the introduction of the tulip to the experiences of immigrants and Jews in Dutch society, the paintings of Vermeer and Rembrandt, and the ideas of Spinoza. He places the Dutch ‘miracle’ in a European context, examining the Golden Age both as the product of its own past and as the harbinger of a more modern, industrialised and enlightened society. A fascinating and accessible study, this book will prove invaluable reading to anyone interested in Dutch history.

MAARTEN PRAK is Professor of Social and Economic History at Utrecht University. He is the author and editor of a number of books, including *Early Modern Capitalism* (2000).

DIANE WEBB is a translator specialising in the fields of history and art.

Cambridge University Press

0521843529 - The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century: The Golden Age

Maarten Prak

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

# The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century

*The Golden Age*

---

Maarten Prak

*Translated by*

Diane Webb



**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press  
0521843529 - The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century: The Golden Age  
Maarten Prak  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge, CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press,  
New York

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521604604](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521604604)

Originally published in Dutch as *Gouden eeuw. Het raadsel van de Republiek* by  
Uitgeverij SUN, Nijmegen, 2002 and © Uitgeverij SUN, Nijmegen, 2002.  
First published in English by Cambridge University Press as *The Dutch Republic  
in the Seventeenth Century: The Golden Age*.

English translation © Maarten Prak 2005

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception  
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,  
no reproduction of any part may take place without  
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

*Typeset in Plantin 10/12pt. System Advent 3B2 8.07f [PND]*

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

ISBN-13 978-0-521-84352-2 hardback  
ISBN-10 0-521-84352-9 hardback  
ISBN-13 978-0-521-60460-4 paperback  
ISBN-10 0-521-60460-5 paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for  
the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or  
third-party internet websites referred to in this publication,  
and does not guarantee that any content on such  
websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press

0521843529 - The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century: The Golden Age

Maarten Prak

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Contents

---

<i>List of illustrations</i>	<i>page</i> vii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
<i>Chronology</i>	xi
Introduction: The enigma of the Republic	1
1 A turbulent beginning	7
<b>Part I: War without end</b>	
2 An independent state (1609–1650)	27
3 A world power (1650–1713)	45
4 The armed forces	61
5 Financial might	75
<b>Part II: Golden Age: economy and society</b>	
6 A market economy	87
7 A worldwide trading network	111
8 Riches	122
9 Toil and trouble	135
<b>Part III: Unity and discord: politics and governance</b>	
10 Community	153
11 The authorities	166
12 A dissonant chorus	186

Cambridge University Press

0521843529 - The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century: The Golden Age

Maarten Prak

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

vi Contents

**Part IV: An urban society**

13	Religious pluralism	201
14	A new approach to science and philosophy	222
15	The Dutch school of painting	234
16	The urban landscape	250
	Conclusion: The end of the Golden Age	263
	<i>Further reading</i>	274
	<i>Index</i>	303

## Illustrations

---

1	Abdication of Charles V. Frans Hogenberg; Printroom, Rijksmuseum fm 412	page 8
2	The plundering of Naarden by Spanish troops after they conquered the city on 30 November 1572. Amsterdam Municipal Archives d 7920	18
3	The end of the Truce in 1621. Atlas van Stolck 1529	38
4	The peace negotiations in Münster. Atlas van Stolck 1948	43
5	The murder of the De Witt brothers in The Hague on 20 August 1672. Romeyn de Hooghe; Atlas van Stolck 2456: 2	54
6	The landing of William III near Torbay in southern England on 15 November 1688. J. Luiken; Atlas van Stolck 2744: 2	58
7	Soldiers relax during the siege of 's-Hertogenbosch in the summer of 1629. C. J. Visscher; <i>Atlas van Stolck</i> 1701: 1	67
8	Maurits of Nassau (1567–1625). C. van de Passe, 1600; Atlas van Stolck 1099	72
9	The siege of Breda in 1637. Jan van Hilten, 1637; Atlas van Stolck 1803	76
10	The naval battle off Dunkirk (11–14 June 1666). Atlas van Stolck 2337	81
11	'Floraes Gecks-kap', a print satirising the tulip mania of 1637. Atlas van Stolck 1787	88
12	The oil mill in Wormer on fire, after being struck by lightning on 5 May 1699. Atlas van Stolck 2832: 68	102
13	Map of New Netherland. 1655; Royal Library, The Hague	113
14	The island of Ternate in the Moluccas. J. Kip 1676; Printroom, Rijksmuseum rp-p-ob-47-595)	118
15	House of the Trip family in Amsterdam. Amsterdam Municipal Archives n 34855	124
16	The rear façade of the mansion Goudestein in Maarsseveen. I. Leupenius, 1690; The Utrecht Archives	129
17	Lek Dyke near Vianen. Esaias van de Velde; Atlas van Stolck S.1620/105	136

Cambridge University Press

0521843529 - The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century: The Golden Age

Maarten Prak

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

viii	List of illustrations	
18	'Woman washing dishes', an engraving made by a woman, namely Geertruyt Rogman (1625–51/57), Rijksmuseum rp-p-ob-4228/32–5	144
19	A gathering in Amsterdam's Dam Square during the Undertakers' Riot in the winter of 1696. Amsterdam Municipal Archives d 8916	154
20	Allegory of the inauguration of Ernst Casimir of Nassau (1573–1642). Printroom, Rijksmuseum fm 1423 b	179
21	Frederik Hendrik taking the oath in the States of Holland in September 1625. Atlas van Stolck 1933: 1	182
22	Print of the 'Manly Militia of Amsterdam'. Amsterdam Municipal Archives d 24220	190
23	The Synod of Dordrecht (1618–19). Atlas van Stolck 1365	207
24	The Portuguese synagogue in Amsterdam. Romeyn de Hooghe; Printroom, Rijksmuseum fm 2574 a	218
25	Gabriel Metsu, <i>Woman Reading a Letter</i> , c. 1662–5. National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin	235
26	Johannes Vermeer, <i>Woman in Blue Reading a Letter</i> , c. 1660–5. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam	246
27	The network of <i>trekvaarten</i> , or canals specially built for passenger barges, in 1665. Taken from Jan de Vries, <i>Barges and Capitalism</i> , Utrecht, 1981	253
28	The Amsterdam Town Hall in Dam Square. Amsterdam Municipal Archives d 6258	261
29	Utrecht's town hall at the time of the negotiations for the Peace of Utrecht (1713). I. Smit, 1712; Atlas van Stolck 3407	266
30	Details of engravings of Venice and Amsterdam. Royal Dutch Maritime Museum, Amsterdam	271

## Acknowledgements

---

It was Maarten van Rossem who first suggested I write this book. He thought that the Netherlands was in urgent need of a series of books, each treating one century of its history. I am a specialist on the eighteenth century, but that had already been given to someone else, so I was allotted the seventeenth. My initial trepidation gradually gave way to a feeling of excitement at having accepted the challenge.

That was more than ten years ago. I had promised to write another book first, and that took longer than expected. Though the series was slow in getting off the ground, the seventeenth century remained a stimulating prospect. In 1994 I first gave a course, together with Lex Heerma van Voss, on the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic at the University of Utrecht – in English, because the course was intended for foreign exchange students. After two years my colleague changed jobs and I was left to give the course on my own. Since that first year, I have given the course – in various guises, and in both English and Dutch – to students of history at the University of Utrecht and the University of Exeter in England, to the students of University College Utrecht and to the foreign exchange students for whom the course was originally intended, always in the hope of arousing the interest of all those American, Croatian, Danish, English, Finnish, French, German, Italian, Romanian, Slovakian, Spanish and indeed Dutch participants in the most fascinating period of Dutch history – a period, moreover, of crucial importance to the history of Europe as a whole. I am grateful to all those students, the good and the bad, the lazy and the diligent, the interested and even the not-so-interested, for their contribution – as unwitting guinea pigs – to this project.

In writing this book, I have incurred debts to numerous historians both in the Netherlands and abroad. Here and there I have relied on my own research, but many of the ideas and much of the information in this book have been shamelessly borrowed from others. In the list of sources to each chapter I have attempted to acknowledge that debt, but there is every reason to express my gratitude here as well. Looking back, it is amazing to see how much has been written in the last twenty years about the subject



Cambridge University Press

0521843529 - The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century: The Golden Age

Maarten Prak

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## x Acknowledgements

of this book. The literature is extremely engrossing, and I hope that the overpowering sense of excitement I often felt when writing this book will be felt by my readers as well.

Jur van Goor, Peter Hecht, Christine Kooi, Koen Ottenheim, Judith Pollmann and Jan Luiten van Zanden read individual chapters and allowed me to benefit from their expertise. Boudewijn Bakker, Freek Heijbroek, Ger Luijten and Lina van der Wolde helped me to choose the illustrations. Guido de Bruin, Erika Kuijpers, Maarten van Rossem, Hans Wansink and my wife Annelies Bannink read the entire manuscript. Annelies Bannink pointed out, time and again, the needs of the average reader. Guido de Bruin earmarked places in the text where the description of the historical course of events was insufficiently precise or factually incorrect. Erika Kuijpers made considerable improvements to my writing style. I am extremely grateful to them all for their invaluable help, and naturally take the blame for the remaining shortcomings of this book.

I thank Annelies for her willingness to do more than her fair share of the work necessary to run our household while I was writing the bulk of this book, during the spring and summer of 2001, a period which was darkened by the loss of my sister, Agnes van der Burgt-Prak (\*8.8.1956–†24.6.2001), to whose memory this book is dedicated.

## NOTE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

This edition differs in a number of ways from the Dutch edition. First of all, it incorporates the improvements suggested by various readers of the Dutch edition, in particular Oscar Gelderblom. I have also clarified a number of things that may not be self-evident to non-Dutch readers. The list of sources has been updated, as well as expanded to include additional publications in English and pruned of the more inaccessible sources in Dutch. The English edition also benefits from an additional chapter on science and philosophy (chapter 14), and I am indebted to Klaas van Berkel, Lodewijk Palm, Theo Verbeek and especially Piet Steenbakkens for their advice on these subjects.

I should also like to take this opportunity to thank Diane Webb for her wonderful translation and her attention to detail, both of which have helped to make the English version superior in many ways to the original Dutch edition. I am grateful to Michael Watson, my editor at Cambridge University Press, for his help and support, and to the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) for its financial assistance. I dedicate the English edition to someone who would have been particularly proud, but sadly did not live to see its appearance: my father, Niels Prak (\*8.8.1926–†1.6.2002).

Cambridge University Press

0521843529 - The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century: The Golden Age

Maarten Prak

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Chronology

---

### DOMESTIC POLITICS

1579	Union of Utrecht
1584	William of Orange murdered
1585–1625	Stadholdership of Prince Maurits
1619	Johan van Oldenbarnevelt executed
1625–47	Stadholdership of Frederik Hendrik
1647–50	Stadholdership of William II
1653–72	Johan de Witt serves as Grand Pensionary
1672–1702	Stadholdership of William III

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1609	Truce with Spain
1621	End of Twelve Years' Truce
1648	Peace of Münster
1652–4	First Anglo-Dutch War
1665–7	Second Anglo-Dutch War
1672	'Year of Disaster', Third Anglo-Dutch War
1678	Peace of Nijmegen
1688	Invasion of England (William and Mary)
1689–98	Nine Years' War
1702–13	War of the Spanish Succession

### ECONOMY

1585	Antwerp falls to Spanish troops
1602	Establishment of the Dutch East India Company (VOC)
1611	Establishment of the Amsterdam Exchange Bank
1612–43	Polders drained in North-Holland
1621	Establishment of the Dutch West India Company (WIC)

Cambridge University Press

0521843529 - The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century: The Golden Age

Maarten Prak

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## xii      Chronology

- 1632–65      Inter-urban network of tow-boat canals built  
 1688          Zenith of East India Company shares

## OUTSIDE EUROPE

- 1595–7      First Dutch voyage to the East Indies  
 1614          New Netherland established  
 1618          Batavia becomes the Dutch headquarters in the East Indies  
 1628          Piet Heyn captures the Spanish silver fleet  
 1630–54      Dutch in Brazil  
 1639          Dutch become Japan's exclusive European trading partner  
 1652          Establishment of the Cape Colony in South Africa  
 1667          New Netherland becomes a British colony; Dutch acquire Surinam

## RELIGION

- 1572          First Calvinist synod in Holland  
 1579          Union of Utrecht establishes freedom of conscience  
 1612          Jewish synagogue opens in Amsterdam  
 1618–19      Synod of Dorcht splits Calvinist Church

## SCIENCE AND CULTURE

- 1575          First Dutch university established at Leiden  
 1637          Descartes' *Discours de la méthode*  
 1642          Rembrandt paints *The Night Watch*  
 1656          Christiaan Huygens builds first pendulum clock  
 c. 1660      Vermeer paints his *View of Delft*  
 1670          Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*

Cambridge University Press  
 0521843529 - The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century: The Golden Age  
 Maarten Prak  
 Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

