



Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) KONINKLIJKE NEDERLANDSE AKADEMIE VAN WETENSCHAPPEN

"Shining comet, falling meteor"

Nijenhuis, I.J.A.

published in

Anthonie Heinsius and the Dutch Republic 1688-1720. Politics, War, and Finance (The Hague 2002) 115-129.
2002

document version

Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication in KNAW Research Portal](#)

citation for published version (APA)

Nijenhuis, I. J. A. (2002). "Shining comet, falling meteor": Reflections on the Dutch Republic as a Commercial Power during the Second Stadholderless Era. In J. de Jongste, & A. J. Veenendaal jr. (Eds.), *Anthonie Heinsius and the Dutch Republic 1688-1720. Politics, War, and Finance (The Hague 2002)* 115-129. (pp. 115-129). Huygens Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis.
http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/retroboeken/cb_aheinsius/#page=0&accessor=toc&view=imagePane

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the KNAW public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain.
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the KNAW public portal.

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

E-mail address:

pure@knaw.nl

‘SHINING COMET, FALLING METEOR’: REFLECTIONS ON THE DUTCH REPUBLIC AS
A COMMERCIAL POWER DURING THE SECOND STADHOLDERLESS ERA

Ida J.A. Nijenhuis

As we can tell from the reports on the fall of the MIR in March 2001 and the press coverage of the terrorist attacks on the 11th of September 2001, even in our age of reason and common sense the fall of a major power, be it the Soviet Union or the United States, is still associated with signs from heaven. In general, until approximately 1650 in Christian Europe the appearance of comets was interpreted as an indication of misfortune. The comet was seen as one of Gods instruments of wrath: shining, but in a sinister way. During the second half of the seventeenth century, however, the evolution of scientific research and the impact of scepticism both promoted the rise of alternative and more rational explanations. Comets came to be understood also as signs of fortune in stead of disaster while meteors, falling stars, were invariably seen to point to decline.¹ Within this context we must read William Temple’s portrayal of the Dutch Republic in 1672:

“It must be avowed, That as This State in the course and progress of its
Greatness for so many years past, Has shined like a Comet; So in the
Revolutions of this last Summer, It seem’d to fall like a Meteor, and has
equally amazed the World by the one and the other”.²

Thus this former ambassador of England stated the unparalleled revolution that had taken place in the United Provinces in the so-called Year of Disaster (*Rampjaar*). According to Temple commerce had made the Dutch Republic great, but vulnerable at the same time. Their extensive trade had diverted the Dutch from their former bravery and military virtues, which were

indispensable to national defence, thereby “leaving the whole fortune of their later wars to be managed by foreign and mercenary troops”.³

Temple’s foresight

Temple made these remarks in his *Observations upon the United Provinces of the Netherlands*, published in 1673, but often reprinted, translated and even in modern historiography frequently quoted for its analysis of the Republic as a political, economic and social phenomenon. The *Observations* included many more or less pointed descriptions of our ancestors, but at the same time attempted to explain the sudden fall in 1672 from a wider perspective than the one prevailing among contemporary moralists, which was full of denouncements as to loss of Christian commercial virtues and wrong leadership. Temple, though not impervious to this moral mode of thinking, looked further and was one of the first to anticipate that the Dutch Republic would not survive the change in international trade relations.⁴ He understood that what had happened in 1672 was no incident and he indicated structural reasons for the near decline of what we nowadays use to describe as the Dutch primacy in world-trade.⁵

According to Temple, the United Provinces owed this primacy in world trade to its tradition of ingenious diligence, ‘industry’ being the source of all trade. This ‘industry’ had been forced upon the Dutch because they lacked means of existence on their populous and narrow territory. Though Temple stated that the military virtues of the Dutch seemed to have faded away after eighty years of recurring warfare, he did not think this was the case with their ‘industry’. Constant repetition had engraved this industrious and frugal attitude so much that it even remained to exist after ‘necessity’, which had forced the Dutch to be inventive and seek their livelihood outside the state's territory, had gone. Apart from its favourable location on the coast, in particular the legality of its government and legal security of its trading inhabitants had a positive

effect on the economic success of the Republic. If there was anything destructive to civilian enterprise, it was certainly arbitrary and oppressive power. The republican constitution of the Dutch, however, guaranteed private property and permitted them freedom of conscience, two attractive features promoting immigration of those working or persecuted elsewhere.⁶

In short, these ingredients made the Republic a kind of seventeenth-century ‘polder model’ for other countries and Temple found indeed that after the Munster Peace of 1648 the Dutch example had urged to imitation: “not only Sweden and Denmark, but France and England, have more particularly than ever before, busied the thoughts and counsels of their several governments, as well as the humours of their people, about the matters of trade”.⁷ What made these countries such powerful competitors of the United Provinces, was the circumstance that every single one of them disposed of far more natural advantages. At the same time, Temple, who had no notion yet of a free economic expansion, foresaw that an accumulation of competitors would prevent that any of them would ever experience the same level of commercial success as the Dutch had done. However, once the big territorial states started to consider commerce a ‘reason of state’,⁸ the Republic would necessarily get passed its prime as a commercial power. In Temple’s opinion, a decrease in profits due to oversupply in the corn and spice trade already announced this fate. This structural change in the world trade system was the fundamental reason for the near removal of Dutch hegemony, and in due time would relegate the Dutch Republic to its proper place in the European politico-economic order.⁹ On top of this, however, Temple, like some of his Dutch contemporaries, regretted having to observe a change in behaviour that harmed the basis of Dutch trade likewise. Numerous rich Amsterdam merchants seemed to have swapped their ‘habitual industry, parsimony and simplicity’ for a life of ‘luxury, idleness and excess’.¹⁰

Historiography

Economic-historical research by Jonathan Israel and others, has demonstrated how the collapse of the seventeenth-century trade system came about in several stages from 1672 up to 1740.¹¹ Politico-historical researchers like Johan Aalbers, Guus Veenendaal and – again - Israel have mapped the course of political decline to some extent. They showed that starting from 1702 and still more so after the peace of Utrecht (1713), the Republic as a major power was clearly on its way down and making itself more and more dependent on English policy, notwithstanding the pro-French lobby that saw its chances multiply after the death of *raadpensionaris* Anthonie Heinsius in 1720.¹² During the ensuing years of peace, attempts to increase the Republic's financial capability as well as its decision making power remained unsuccessful. Heinsius's successors in the office of *raadpensionaris* in their dissimilar ways tried to solve the problems he left behind. Isaac van Hoornbeeck concentrated on the restructuring of finances and Simon van Slingelandt focussed on constitutional reforms. Both were doomed to failure, either because of the lack of threats from abroad that earlier had forced the provinces into unanimity, or by the unpopularity of reforms that would spoil their recently regained '*ware vrijheid*', 'true liberty'.¹³ Also, on account of the miraculous recovery made under William III, even after the 1713 peace political leaders and observers were not convinced of the permanence of the decline of Dutch power. Several diplomatic reports have indeed indicated that the honour and reputation of the Republic were at issue more and more often, but on the other hand they also stated that European coalitions without participation of the Republic were still considered inconceivable. Besides, England - at that time being the strongest naval power but not yet the strongest qua merchant fleet¹⁴ - was convinced it benefited from a prolonged alliance with the Republic. After all, a neutral Republic might gain a commercial profit from possible British war involvement. For these

reasons, according to Israel, until the 1750s the Dutch Republic should still be viewed as a “middle-ranking power of considerable importance in European and world affairs”.¹⁵

But were contemporaries also wondering about the long-term economic performance of the Republic as early as the first decades of the eighteenth-century, and if so, did they find any connection to its political order? The changes in the nature of commerce as well as the very real decline of Holland as a specialised commercial state amongst territorial military states that took to trade themselves, increasingly led to worried comments. The growing competition from England and France gradually undermined the *stapelmarkt*, the entrepôt function of the Dutch commercial system, and occasionally, like in 1725 and again in 1751, this challenge was met with a limited reform of tariffs.¹⁶ Especially during the second half of the eighteenth century, when the Dutch became obsessed more and more by the loss of their political and economic prominence, they tried to evaluate their situation using the insights of French, English and German Enlightenment authors.¹⁷ Increasingly their books, periodicals and pamphlets concentrated on the causes of economic decline and loss of power of the United Provinces and they analysed these mainly by referring to the lack of moral fibre and growing foreign competition. In this respect Temple’s analysis of 1673 and the standard explanation for the Republic’s political and economic decline after 1750 appear very similar. Halfway through the eighteenth century it had become public knowledge, though at that time not yet digested by the Dutch themselves, to look upon the Dutch Republic as a case of ‘admired, imitated and outpaced’. So far however, we have hardly any idea of the evolution of this standard explanation. Below, on the basis of a very first and definitely less than exhaustive exploration of mostly non-Dutch publications from the first decades of the eighteenth century, a few characteristic judgments of this period concerning the position of the former miracle of the world will be examined. Authors have been selected for what at their time counted as expert knowledge of the historical, political and economic status of the Republic. First of all, we will

examine to what extent in the beginning of the eighteenth century commercial success was still considered to materialize exclusively in republics, and subsequently, to what extent commerce incarnate, the Dutch Republic, was still regarded as a serious competitor.

Commercial republicanism

Historiography generally discusses commercial republicanism as an eighteenth-century phenomenon inspired by Montesquieu who, according to Judith Shklar, did for the latter half of the eighteenth century what Machiavelli had done for his century by setting the terms in which republicanism was to be discussed.¹⁸ The examination of commercial republicanism is often connected with the analysis of its presumed counterpart, civic or classical republicanism, as for example in the debate on court versus country, politeness or civilisation versus virtue in eighteenth-century England and North America. In a comprehensive overview of the republican tradition in historiography, David Wootton mentions the scholarly problems arising from clinging to a strict dichotomy of civic and commercial republicanism. According to him, in this way neither the link between the progress of Lockean values and the advance of commerce, nor the importance of the rule of law, of civil next to political liberty in the Anglo-American world of the eighteenth century can be treated in a satisfying manner.¹⁹ Neither, one might add, does this approach succeed in explaining the Dutch case in which commerce and a republican form of government were combined from the late sixteenth century onwards. What then, by and large, is commercial republicanism understood to mean in the Dutch case?²⁰

As already mentioned above, Temple also linked the Dutch form of government with achievements in the field of commerce. Not without reason, successful trading nations in the past often appeared to operate a republican form of government. Nevertheless, Temple emphasized that commerce was also possible for kingdoms. In 1673, this opinion was not yet quite

undisputed because commercial actions were still thought to yield less success in monarchies, as they were looked upon as dishonourable.²¹ The United Provinces, not being gifted with many natural advantages, had in fact had no alternative but to offer their inhabitants the space and legal security to cash in on profitable activities. This mild regime of republican freedom stood out against the arbitrariness and tyranny of absolutist monarchs. Already around the middle of the seventeenth century, Dutch economic success and political power had become associated with the absence of constraint and coercion. Contemporaries defined Dutch liberty as consisting of independence, provincial autonomy, religious toleration and a republican form of government. This fortunate mixture had produced a thriving society and in case one of its ingredients was at risk, warnings about the ruinous effects this might entail for the Republic's prosperity were a matter of course.²² The salutary trinity of commerce, liberty and republican rule was backed by a Christian humanist system of values in which God-fearing merchants took care their souls were not endangered by love of gain, idleness, untrustworthiness and other sins. They knew in trade to be dependent on others, and that, because it was very difficult to know a person's trustworthiness, one had to go by reputation.²³ Clearly, in such circumstances one needed as much reassurance as was available. Because it took care of the basic security of property and person, civil liberty - the rule of law - became an essential feature of commercial society. This is the reason why liberty became a major topic in the writings on the commercial republic during the seventeenth century, the concept covering civil liberty and free trade but certainly not yet free competition or free labour.²⁴

Radical authors like Pieter de la Court (1616-1685), who in his *Interest of Holland* argued against guilds or protection by monopoly and in favour of an amoral, non-expansionist commercial republic to be defended by a citizen-army, were exceptional.²⁵ The Leyden textile entrepreneur and political theorist assumed that a republic led by merchants would make for the welfare of all, whereas government by one supreme head (a monarch or a stadholder) would only lead to undue

preferences and riches for himself, his courtiers and soldiers. As maintained by De la Court and other Dutch anti-Orangists, “the conquering spirit was one of the main and one of the most disastrous characteristics of monarchies”.²⁶ Their longing for territorial aggrandisement resulted in wars of ambition, which jeopardised trade. Therefore, commercial republics must be peaceful without being pacifistic, fighting only wars with a view to maintaining its national power.²⁷ In De la Court’s view, the interest of republican rulers was to procure rich and populous cities, which explains why republics prospered far more in commerce, arts and industry than the dominions and cities of monarchs, and exceeded them in power and population. Republican liberty, “true liberty”, in short, encouraged wealth and numbers. Merchant rulers were clear about their goals: they sought their own interest by promoting freedom in trade and industry but because mercantile prosperity could not benefit a few without benefiting all, their private interest led to public welfare in stead of corruption.²⁸

After the death of William III, when Dutch Republic found itself in less promising conditions, most Dutch authors concerned with matters of state and economy still supposed that commerce, liberty and republican rule were interrelated and they did not yet reconsider this specific connection. In a publication on the Utrecht peace treaty of 1713 the quarrelsome ink-slinger Pieter Burman I (1668-1741), for instance, did not rise above the clichés of commercial republicanism by contrasting dry, sparsely populated kingdoms with the prospering and virtuous republics of populous cities, markets and roads. His objective was mainly to confirm the classical republican position that republics should not expand.²⁹ Recurrences of De la Court’s radical thoughts on the indispensability of ‘total freedom’ to a commercial republic were also noticeable at that time, but not of great consequence. As already implied, the number of said advocates of this type of an undiluted merchants’ republic was never substantial during either the First or the Second Stadholderless Era, even though around 1720 his suggestions to keep out of international

conflicts and multi-state alliances and to defend Holland and Utrecht by digging a canal surrounding these provinces, underwent a limited revival.³⁰ In a pamphlet celebrating the end of the costly War of the Spanish Succession, also De la Court's arguments for freedom of trade and production were restated.³¹ Its author predicted the recovery of Dutch primacy in trade now, during the Second Stadholderless era, the maxims of 'true liberty' could be applied again. The lukewarm response this treatise met with, must be explained by both its radical political economy and its firm anti-English disposition, though, as a result of the English performance at the Utrecht peace negotiations the Dutch rapidly became more wary with respect to their former ally. According to the *Korte Schets*, Holland did not handle the growing competition from that nation effectively. It enabled England to import its goods without adequate restrictions and failed to retaliate the high duties on manufactures the Dutch tried to sell in that country.³² For the rest the anonymous author decreed more in stead of less economic freedom, assisted by open political and religious conditions, in order to regain Dutch mercantile supremacy.

At the same time a few observers from abroad, matching Temple's earlier comments, emphasized that trading was also possible for kingdoms. Providing its inhabitants were safe by law from arbitrary and armed power and as long as both public and private security were guaranteed by the government, large territorial monarchies like France or Sweden were admirably suited for commerce.³³ In the autumn of 1705, the political economist Charles Davenant, who was, as Heinsius' correspondent Willem Buys reported: "so very famous for his writings", visited Amsterdam to exchange ideas on trade restrictions with a few merchants. On that occasion, he made it clear that any sovereign should be able to judge of the kind of trade and shipping that would be most profitable to his state.³⁴ Herewith he confirmed his publication of a few years earlier, stating that republics as well as monarchies benefited from a 'master-genius' (like cardinal Richelieu for instance), who was able to promote the public interest: "Commonwealths

are rarely negligent, but even in those constitutions things would often go to wreck if some single person in a particular manner did not take the care of government upon him; and prosperous states have all along had such a one among them, who, obliged to no more than others, has yet minded the whole, and directed with his superior wisdom”.³⁵ Monarchies and republics could not prosper unless under a government conducive to commerce. The case of Spain demonstrated that even a country having the Potosi mines under its trust, could be burdened with gold and silver shortage due to the underdevelopment of commerce. The learned bishop Pierre Daniël Huet (1630-1721), indicated in his account of Dutch trade of 1717, that he had changed his opinion concerning the old adage that trade was impossible unless in a free republic. If the French monarchy would realize that tyranny would spell a certain death of commerce, if it would go by the Dutch example and, like the English, would provide some encouragement, it could be the most powerful commercial state in the near future.³⁶

The statements of Davenant and Huet must on the one hand be seen as a powerful recommendation to absolute monarchs of that time to grant their trading subjects more freedom and on the other hand as an indication that commerce had more than ever before become an affair of the state. However, if commerce was no longer reserved to republics, how did monarchies intend to cope with the Republic for a rival? Rulers of commercial states had to abide by a number of rules; they should not get involved in wars, they had to forsake territorial expansion and they should maintain a strict observance of agreements. But in England as well as France there had been opposite voices since the 1660s: conviction of the fixed and limited scope of world trade fed the urge of countries to conquer preferably the largest possible part of it. Roughly there were two ways to go about this: in the first place by mercantilism or economic warfare as manifested after 1672 by the ‘*guerre de commerce*’ between France and the Republic, and in the second place by acting according to politico-economic insights derived from the Dutch practice.³⁷

Introduction of the greatest possible freedom of trade, learning to sell more cheaply and accomplishing a lower interest rate were included in the latter policy. It will be clear that in the end this approach would be decisive in the eighteenth-century struggle for hegemony in the world trade system.

Still a formidable competitor

After the Nine Years' War, the balance of power among the Republic, England and France became more and more the issue in analyses and descriptions of European trade relations. Striking of the commentaries gone through was the absence of any mention of irretrievable, structural decline in Dutch trade and the fact that the authors continued to contribute positive economic results to the political order of the Republic. When Adrianus Engelhard Helvetius (1662-1727), French secret agent during the War of the Spanish Succession, thought he ought to state that "the commerce of the United Provinces has never been in a worse condition than today" (=1706), he actually blamed that situation mainly on the effects of the war. At the moment peace opened the way for trade again, the financially still opulent Hollanders would be ready to put their money again in the hands of merchants to make a profit. Helvetius argued very correctly that in the present situation the English took most advantage of the war, so it might not be a bad idea for the Dutch Republic to resume trade with France.³⁸

Many pronouncements on the Republic as an international commercial power made during the first decades of the eighteenth century, suggest a persistent respect for former and current achievements. Historians like Jean Le Clerc (1657-1736), François-Marie Janiçon (1674-1730) and others were still wondering how such a small country, hemmed in by much larger powers, could have made such energetic efforts and had managed to do these giants so much damage that they were only too anxious to conclude the peace. Yet, the durability of the Republic

and the solidity of its commerce as the sinews of the state seemed to depend more than ever before on either neutrality or conscientious maintenance of treaties and by peaceable instead of the pre-1713 aggressive behaviour.³⁹

According to quite a few of the studied sources, though, in the beginning of the eighteenth century the Dutch were still believed to be up to the contest. Davenant, for example, established that “though the States of Holland seemed exhausted by their long expenses, yet, the body of the people was richer at that time, than it was before the war”.⁴⁰ In his view and that of others, the Republic owed this unexpected achievement to the already mentioned ingredients of Dutch commercial republicanism - its wise constitution, the frugal way of life of its industrious inhabitants, and its generally war avoiding policy – and also to the protection of its merchant navy, and large scale inland consumption. In amazement Davenant exclaimed:

“Our neighbouring common-wealth has not in territory about eight millions of acres, and perhaps not much above two millions two hundred thousand people, and yet what a figure have they made in Europe for these last hundred years? What wars have they maintained? What forces have they resisted? and to what a height of Power are they now come, and all by good Order and wise government?”⁴¹

Notwithstanding England’s favourable location, better ports, availability of more raw materials and many times more products, he still reckoned that the over-all situation was still in favour of the Republic: “It will be very difficult for us to contend with them in trade, because the struggle was hard enough between us, when both nations were upon a much more equal foot than they are at present”. If England really intended to become the greatest power in Europe, like the Republic,

it would have to make sure of “numbers of men well employed”.⁴² But, he continued, even then the Dutch “will endeavour to undermine us where they can, and they will try, with their great stock to undersell us, beat us out, and bear us down in all the foreign markets”. Especially the almost unassailable position of the Dutch in the East was a source of concern to Davenant. The Dutch investments over there guaranteed they had come to stay and formed a “sure foundation for their future greatness”. Davenant found the Dutch hold on the Netherlands East Indies no less threatening than the French pursuit of being a universal monarchy: “Whoever considers seriously what a strength they have formed in those parts, and how they increase it daily, must be apprehensive, that some time or other, they should attempt to engross the whole, and exclude England from that gainful traffick”.⁴³

The moment was near that Great Britain would oust the Dutch Republic from its position of the world’s most commanding commercial power, but observers at that time were not aware of this. Perhaps they were affected by ‘opinion’, which according to Davenant formed the principal support of power. In the end all great things seemed to subsist more by fame than any real strength. States were seldom any longer strong or wise, than while they were thought so by their neighbours.⁴⁴ Even in 1717 Huet still wrote that nowadays among all other European powers the Dutch were still holding the balance, though for sure nothing was comparable to their past achievements when, thanks to their commerce, they had been able to withstand and humiliate the ‘forbidding giant power of the Spanish monarchy’. As ever, the Republic was keen on holding the commercial balance, especially in Northern Europe and, according to Huet, this would not change as long as they were in a position to offer products at a lower price than other countries.⁴⁵ A decade later, around 1728, however, Onslow Burrish, an official of the Board of Trade and later British representative in Bavaria, acknowledged without reservations in his *Batavia Illustrata* that the ‘sameness of interests’, which had dominated the relations between England and the Dutch

Republic from 1688 up to 1713, did not exist anymore. Now the Dutch and the English were each other's greatest rivals in trade and merchant navy, but - though possible - destroying the Republic was inexpedient, according to Burrish. Following the old adage of the Country party, Burrish considered the Dutch still useful as they formed England's "outguard upon the continent".⁴⁶ The thing was not to work too much to their advantage.

Conclusion

At the start of the War of the Spanish Succession an anonymous Dutch author explained why the States General had to make an effort to save the Republic from the threatening universal monarchy that France had become: the Republic, its liberty, religion and commerce would otherwise go down the drain.⁴⁷ But barely fifty years later the Dutch translator of an English tract remarked that commerce, the source and safeguarding of liberty and religion, even needed care when no direct threats from belligerent nations had to be dealt with. Other nations were now in the first place viewed as rivals in the mercantile arena and the only way to handle this situation was to take legislative action. Times were changing, even in the commercial republic *par excellence*, commerce could not longer be left to its own devices, and it had to be protected by those in charge.⁴⁸ In their descriptions and analyses of commercial relations in Europe, authors of the first decades of the eighteenth century assigned the leading parts to the United Provinces, England and France. But as the century progressed, the Republic gradually dropped out of the picture and foreign authors concentrated more and more on the French-English contest. Foreign politicians, scholars and ambassadors continued to be interested in the inspiring history and political organization of the United Provinces which at the same time they tended to describe as 'that declining Republic'.⁴⁹ Many of the above mentioned and in the eyes of foreigners laudable elements in the Dutch commercial republic, on the other hand, retained their attraction and about 1750 David Hume and

baron De Montesquieu assembled them into an Enlightened defence of the modern market society. Commerce both prospered through and promoted freedom and caused the advance of *moeurs douces*, arts and politeness.⁵⁰ In their view moneymaking and trade needed republican liberty and civil security but not necessarily republican rule. A moderate, mixed government would do the trick as well, perhaps even better: it combined the best of both worlds by giving its subjects enough independence to act without demanding civic virtue. The prominent position the Republic had occupied as a mercantile republic was gradually taken over by England, “that nation where the republic hides itself under the form of monarchy”, to quote Montesquieu.⁵¹ As Lord Bolingbroke said in 1739, nature had given England the most generous share and thus advantaged this country in comparison with both the Republic (which was situated less advantageous) and France (which country was deprived by its form of government).⁵² At that very moment, in the Republic itself the opinion began to take root that Dutch commerce was beginning to suffer too much under foreign competition. That is the reason why in the United Provinces the proposition that trade and industry should be as free as possible was past its prime. Control and protection became the basic concepts in Dutch politico-economic writings. Inadequate decision-making as a result of the complicated federal model, the issue put up for political discussion by Simon van Slingelandt during the Republic’s Second Stadholderless Era even then was not connected in a straight line with poorer commercial achievements of the Republic. Though much more research needs to be done to qualify this impression, the trend in texts from both abroad and inside the Republic up to around the middle of the eighteenth century was to contribute the Dutch economic decline chiefly to the reparable effects of the war. In the eyes of these beholders, characterizing the major commercial power as being past its prime would have been jumping to conclusions. At the time, the proper distance was still lacking for considerations à la Temple in which structural changes were brought forward.

¹ For the changing interpretation of various ‘signs of heaven’ see a.o. Florike Egmond, Eric Jorink en Rienk Vermij, red. *Kometen, monsters en muilezels. Het veranderende natuurbeeld en de natuurwetenschap in de zeventiende eeuw*. Haarlem, 1999 and Elisabeth Heitzer, *Das Bild des Kometen in der Kunst*. Berlin, 1995.

² Sir George Clark, ed. *Sir William Temple, Observations upon the United Provinces of The Netherlands* (Oxford, 1972) 133. Temple (1628-1699) had been an ambassador at The Hague from 1668-1670. He returned to the Netherlands after the Peace of Westminster (1674) and helped to negotiate the Peace of Nijmegen (1678-1679).

³ *Temple. Observations*, 134.

⁴ Cf. Istvan Hont, ‘Free trade and the economic limits to national politics: neo-Machiavellian political economy reconsidered’ in: J. Dunn, ed. *The economic limits to modern politics* (Cambridge, 1990) 41-42.

⁵ Following Jonathan I. Israel, *Dutch Primacy in World Trade 1585-1740*. Oxford, 1989.

⁶ *Temple. Observations*, 108 ff.

⁷ *Ibidem*, 123.

⁸ David Hume used these words to define the seventeenth-century transformation of commerce. Cf. Hont, ‘Free trade and the economic limits to national politics’, 42.

⁹ *Temple. Observations*, 125; Hont, ‘Free trade and the economic limits to national politics’, 55.

¹⁰ *Temple. Observations*, 126. This became a favourite premise in eighteenth-century Dutch analysis of the Republic’s decline, starting with Justus van Effen’s (1684-1735) periodical *De Hollandsche Spectator*. But see I. Nijenhuis, ‘De weelde als deugd?’, *Documentatieblad Werkgroep Achttiende Eeuw*, 24 (1992) 45-56.

¹¹ Israel, *Dutch Primacy in World Trade*, chapters 7-10. Jan de Vries & Ad van der Woude, *The First Modern Economy. Success, Failure, and Perseverance of the Dutch Economy, 1500-1815* (Cambridge, 1997) 673-683.

¹² J.I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic. Its rise, greatness, and fall 1477-1806* (Oxford, 1995) 985-986; A. J. Veenendaal jr., ‘De Republiek voor het laatst als grote mogendheid, 1702-1727’ in: *Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* (15 vols. Haarlem, 1977-1983) IX, 16-30; Johan Aalbers, *De Republiek en de vrede van Europa* (Groningen, 1980) 2; 26 ff. and J. Aalbers, ‘Het machtsverval van de Republiek der Verenigde Nederlanden 1713-1741’ in: J. Aalbers & A.P. van Goudoever, red. *Machtsverval in de internationale context* (Groningen, 1986) 7-36.

¹³ I.L. Leeb, *The ideological origins of the Batavian revolution. History and Politics in the Dutch Republic 1747-1800* (Den Haag, 1973) 40 ff. and J. Aalbers, ‘Holland’s Financial problems (1713-1733) and the Wars against Louis XIV in:

A.C. Duke and C.A. Tamse, ed. *Britain and The Netherlands: War and Society. Papers Delivered to the 6th Anglo-Dutch Historical Conference* (The Hague, 1977) 91-93.

¹⁴ The British merchant marine started to outstrip the Dutch one in the years between 1730 and 1750; Aalbers, 'Machtsverval', 7, 16.

¹⁵ Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 985-986; cf. Aalbers, 'Machtsverval', 21-22, 26. Olaf van Nimwegen in his forthcoming *De Republiek der Verenigde Nederlanden als grote mogendheid* even proclaims we should regard the Republic as a major power until the fall of the Barrier during the War of the Austrian Succession.

¹⁶ J. Hovy, *Het voorstel van 1751 tot instelling van een beperkt vrijhavenstelsel in de Republiek (Propositie tot een gelimiteerd porto-franco)* (Groningen, 1966) 119 ff.

¹⁷ W.W. Mijnhardt, *Tot Heil van 't Menschdom. Culturele genootschappen in Nederland, 1750-1815* (Amsterdam, 1987) 113-115; I.J.A. Nijenhuis, *Een joodse filosofe. Isaac de Pinto (1717-1787) en de ontwikkeling van de politieke economie in de Europese Verlichting* (Amsterdam, 1992) 95-97.

¹⁸ Judith N. Shklar, 'Montesquieu and the new republicanism' in: Gisela Bock, Quentin Skinner and Maurizio Viroli, ed. *Machiavelli and Republicanism* (Cambridge, 1993) 265.

¹⁹ David Wootton, 'Introduction. The Republican Tradition: From Commonwealth to Common Sense' in: David Wootton, ed. *Republicanism, Liberty, and Commercial Society 1649-1776* (Stanford 1994) 13; 16-17.

²⁰ For a more detailed discussion see Ida Nijenhuis, 'Trends and transitions in Dutch commercial republicanism' (forthcoming).

²¹ L. Rothkrug, *Opposition to Louis XIV. The political and social origins of the French Enlightenment* (Princeton, 1965) 354-355. Paul A. Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern. Classical Republicanism and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill & London, 1992) 342.

²² E.H. Kossmann, 'Freedom in seventeenth-century Dutch thought and practice' in: Jonathan I. Israel, ed. *The Anglo-Dutch Moment. Essays on the Glorious Revolution and its World Impact* (Cambridge, 1991) 286, 291-292.

²³ Luuc Kooijmans, 'Risk and reputation. On the mentality of merchants in the early modern period' in: C. Lesger and L. Noordegraaf, ed. *Entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship in early modern times. Merchants and industrialists within the orbit of the Dutch staple market* (Den Haag, 1995) 26-27.

²⁴ Cf. Ida J.A. Nijenhuis, 'De ontwikkeling van het politiek-economische vrijheidsbegrip in de Republiek' in: E.O.G. Haitsma Mulier & W.R.E. Velema, red. *Vrijheid. Een geschiedenis van de vijftiende tot de twintigste eeuw* (Amsterdam, 1999) 233-253.

²⁵ Eco Haitsma Mulier, 'A controversial republican: Dutch views on Machiavelli in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries' in: Gisela Bock, Quentin Skinner & Maurizio Viroli, ed., *Machiavelli and Republicanism* (Cambridge, 1993) 256-257. Pieter de la Court's *Interest van Holland* was published in 1662 during the First Stadholderless Era and reprinted in 1669 as *Aanwysing der heilsame politike gronden en maximen van de Republike van Holland en West-Vriesland*.

²⁶ E.H. Kossmann, 'Dutch Republicanism' (1985) reprinted in: E.H. Kossmann, *Political thought in the Dutch Republic. Three Studies* (Amsterdam, 2000) 181.

²⁷ Cf. H. Caton, *The Politics of Progress. The Origins and Developments of the Commercial Republic, 1600-1835* (Gainesville, 1988) 242-243.

²⁸ De la Court, *Aanwysing der heilsame gronden en maximen*, 6-7, 45; cf. F. Driessen, ed., *Het welvaren van Leiden. Handschrift uit het jaar 1659* (Den Haag, 1911) chaps. 3-4; 61-64.

²⁹ *Pieter Burmans redevoering over den vrede gesloten tusschen den allermagtigsten koning van Vrankryk en de Hoogmogende Heren Staten der Verenigde Nederlanden* (Utrecht, 1713) 15-16; 25-26. [Knuttel 16179]

³⁰ Aalbers, *De Republiek en de vrede van Europa*, 29-31.

³¹ *Korte schets van 's lands welwezen door de laatste vrede. Nevens eenige aanmerkingen op het stuk van de commercie en barrière* (s.l., 1714). This pamphlet is to some extent a shortened version of De la Court's *Interest van Holland/Aanwysing der heilsame politike gronden en maximen*. Cf. Nijenhuis, 'Het politiek-economische vrijheidsbegrip in de Republiek', 244-247.

³² *Korte schets van 's lands welwezen door de laatste vrede*, 20-23.

³³ *Temple. Observations*, 110; Hont, 'Free trade and the economic limits to national politics', 53. See also Raimund Ottow, *Markt - Republik - Tugend. Probleme gesellschaftlicher Modernisierung im britischen politischen Denken 1670-1790* (Berlin, 1996) 105-109.

³⁴ A.J. Veenendaal, ed. *De briefwisseling van Anthonie Heinsius 1702-1720* (19 vols., The Hague 1976-2001) IV, 423-424. Charles Davenant (1656-1714) in 1705 was Inspector General of Exports and Imports. According to Hont, 'Free trade and the economic limits to national politics', 57 around 1700 Davenant was probably the most influential

English analyst of trade and its implications. In 1705 the later secretary of the States of Holland and *raadpensionaris* Willem Buys (1661-1749) was pensionary of Amsterdam and much involved in Holland's foreign policy.

³⁵ Charles Davenant, *Discourses on the publick revenues and on the trade of England* (London, 1698) 122-124.

³⁶ [Pierre Daniël Huet] *De Hollandsche koophandel staatkundig verhandelt* (Amsterdam, 1717; also published as *Mémoires sur le commerce des Hollandois*) 29-31; 42.

³⁷ Israel, *Dutch Primacy in World Trade*, 339 ff; J. Appleby, *Economic thought and ideology in seventeenth-century England* (Princeton, 1978), chapter 4 'The Dutch as a source of evidence'; Rahe, *Republics ancient and modern*, 341.

³⁸ *Adrianus Engelhard Helvetius, Mémoire sur l'état présent du Gouvernement des Provinces Unies*, ed. M. van der Bijl in: *Bijdragen en Mededelingen van het Historisch Genootschap*, 80 (1966) 173-174; 178.

³⁹ François Michel Janiçon, *État présent de la République des Provinces-Unies, et des païs qui en dependent* (2 vols., The Hague, 1729-1730) I, 49 ff. Jean Le Clerc, *Geschiedenissen der Verenigde Nederlanden* (3 vols., Amsterdam, 1730) III, 722.

⁴⁰ Davenant, *Discourses on the publick revenues*, 105.

⁴¹ [Charles Davenant] *An essay upon the probable methods of making a people gainers in the balance of trade* (London, 1700²) 24-27.

⁴² Davenant, *Discourses on the publick revenues*, 117.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, 120-122.

⁴⁴ [Charles Davenant] *Essays upon I. The Balance of Power II. The Right of Making War, Peace, and Alliances III. Universal Monarchy* (London, 1701) 31.

⁴⁵ [Huet], *De Hollandsche koophandel staatkundig verhandelt*, preface.

⁴⁶ Onslow Burrish, *Batavia Illustrata: Or a View of the Policy and Commerce of the United Provinces* (London, 1728²) 567-569.

⁴⁷ *Het waare Interest van Europa tot conservatie van haare Vryheit* (s.l., 1702) 73, 75, 83. Cf. Nijenhuis, 'Het politiek-economische vrijheidsbegrip', 247-248.

⁴⁸ *Zeedige consideratiën van den vertaelder van De Engelsche nationaele koopman ofte een redeneringe over koophandel en coloniën* (Amsterdam, s.a. [ca. 1750]) *6 ff.

⁴⁹ G.J. Schutte, ‘“A Subject of Admiration and Encomium”. The History of the Dutch Republic as Interpreted by Non-Dutch Authors in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century’, in: A.C. Duke and C.A. Tamse, ed. *Clio’s Mirror. Historiography in Britain and the Netherlands* (Zutphen, 1985) 110.

⁵⁰ Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests. Political Arguments for Capitalism before its Triumph* (Princeton, 1977) 56-66.

⁵¹ Charles de Secondat, baron de Montesquieu, *De l’Esprit des Lois*, book V, chapter 19.

⁵² Quoted in Rahe, *Republics ancient and modern*, 522.