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Wyger R.E. Velema

The Dutch, the French and Napoleon: Historiographical Reflections on a Troubled Relationship

How does a small country with a heroic past retrospectively cope with its humiliating incorporation into an immense empire? The short and unsurprising answer is: not with a great deal of enthusiasm. I am, of course, referring here to the demise of the once so glorious Dutch Republic in the decades around 1800, culminating in the entire loss of national independence during the full incorporation of the country into the Napoleonic Empire between 1810 and 1813. It is no exaggeration to say that Dutch historians have found it exceedingly difficult to integrate the so-called «French period» – a designation to which I shall return – into the various grand narratives they have successively written and are still writing about their national past. They worship their Golden Age (a term significantly first used for the Dutch seventeenth century in 1808), they lavish attention upon the gradual growth of modern Dutch society, culture and politics during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but to many the period around 1800 remains a strangely gray and vaguely repugnant area[1]. The most recent synthesis of the period even – and be assured that this is not meant as a joke by its learned authors – describes the whole late eighteenth-century revolution in the Netherlands as «a disastrous mistake»[2]. The tradition that originated in the nineteenth century, that of denying the decades around 1800, up to and including the period of incorporation into the Napoleonic Empire, any positive or even significant role in the history of the Dutch, therefore occasionally surfaces even today. It will be my aim in this article to investigate, albeit far from exhaustively, the ways in which Dutch commentators, often but not always historians,

[1] On the first use of the term Golden Age see Evert M. WISKERKE, *De waardering voor de zeventiende-eeuwse literatuur tussen 1780 en 1813*, Hilversum 1995, p. 11.

[2] Joost KLOEK - Wijnand MIJNHARDT, *1800. Blauwdrukken voor een samenleving*, The Hague 2001, p. 570.

have dealt with this apparently traumatic episode in the history of their country, particularly during the nineteenth century. Before I proceed to do so, however, let me first remind you of some of the more salient aspects of the history of the Netherlands in the years around 1800[3].

During the second half of the eighteenth century it became obvious to many Dutchmen that the Republic of the Seven United Provinces, the country that had played a leading role in Europe during its so-called Golden Age of the seventeenth century, was gradually dwindling into insignificance. To most contemporary observers, unaware of the structural causes and dimensions of this development, Dutch decline appeared above all to be a problem of morals. It was, so they thought, simply to be blamed on the loss, partly caused by the increasing and regrettable imitation of French culture, of the virtues of the heroic forefathers who had founded the country and had subsequently brought it to greatness. The catalogue of these old Dutch virtues, now increasingly hard to discern in a climate of French frivolity and conspicuous consumption, included sobriety, frugality, civic egalitarianism, honesty, economic initiative and love of liberty. During the 1750s and 1760s it was generally held by commentators critical of Dutch decline that a return to these virtues, preferably fortified with a dose of Enlightenment, would set the country back on the road to greatness[4]. When decades of moral exhortation remained without noticeable effect, however, a more directly political approach to the problems of the Republic began to attract an ever larger following. The total military impotence and humiliation of the country during the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780-1784), combined with the international growth of a radical discourse of liberty, produced the Dutch Patriot movement of the 1780s. Its ideology was an explosive mix of classical republicanism, radical natural rights doctrine and outraged national pride. Its central message was that Dutch greatness could only be restored through political reforms that would increase popular participation in politics at the cost of the power of both the Orange Stadholder and the republican regents. Although the Patriot movement had a considerable following and succeeded in gaining power in significant parts of the country during what may be termed a quasi civil war, it ultimately failed. It certainly is true, as has been argued repeatedly, that the particularistic political structure of the United Provinces made concerted Patriot political action hard to achieve. Yet in the end it was foreign intervention – a full scale Prussian invasion in 1787, backed by British diplomacy and Orangist planning – that proved to be the undoing of the

[3] The most comprehensive introduction to this period remains Simon SCHAMA, *Patriots and Liberators. Revolution in the Netherlands, 1780-1813*, New York 1977. Indispensable is also Nicolaas C.F. VAN SAS, *De metamorfose van Nederland. Van oude orde naar moderniteit 1750-1900*, Amsterdam 2004.

[4] On Dutch Enlightenment thought see J. KLOEK - W. MIJNHARDT, *1800* cit.

Patriot movement[5]. The years after 1787 saw the restoration of a vindictive Orangist regime. Many former Patriots were forced into exile in the Austrian Netherlands and in France. It was in this last country, so one influential theory goes, that they underwent a successful training in «the school of the French Revolution»[6].

Seven years after the Orangist restoration of 1787, the exiled Patriots, now backed by French military might, returned in triumph to their country, soon to become the Batavian Republic. The Orange Stadholder William V fled to England, while his supporters were banned from participation in public life. Meanwhile the revolutionaries energetically proceeded to build a new political order. The institutions of the Dutch old regime were dismantled at a rapid pace, the rights of man and citizen were proclaimed and, from March 1796, a broadly elected national assembly met in The Hague. The hugely important task facing this assembly was the creation of a written constitution for the new and revolutionary Dutch state. This, however, proved to be immensely difficult. For even though the French left the deliberations over the new constitution largely to the Dutch themselves, they were unable to reach any agreement. So deep were the divisions between Federalists and Unitarians and liberal and radical republicans in the national assembly and in the various constitutional committees that a compromise acceptable to all was never reached. In the end, the matter had to be decided by a French backed radical *coup d'état* in January 1798. The constitution that was adopted soon after – by means of a heavily rigged election process – definitively decided one of the most contested issues: the Dutch would have a unitary state[7]. The year 1798 also constituted a turning point in another crucial respect. The endless struggle over the new constitution, combined with the ruthless way in which the issue was ultimately settled, led to a widespread disillusionment with revolutionary politics. This tendency was further reinforced by a growing awareness that the French were not just disinterested and cosmopolitan liberators, but were above all out to dispense, in Simon Schama's felicitous phrase, «fraternity on the terms of the biggest brother»[8]. The story of the fifteen years after 1798 may largely be told in terms of an

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[5] An excellent synthesis of recent research on the Patriot period is Stephan R.E. KLEIN, *Patriots Republikanisme. Politieke cultuur in Nederland (1766-1787)*, Amsterdam 1995.

[6] On the Patriot exile there is now Joost ROSENDAAL, *Bataven! Nederlandse vluchtelingen in Frankrijk, 1787-1795*, Nijmegen 2003.

[7] On the political and ideological developments in the Batavian Republic up to the adoption of the constitution of 1798 see N.C.F. VAN SAS, *Metamorfose van Nederland* cit., pp. 277-292 and Wyger R.E. VELEMA, *Revolutie, Republiek en Constitutie. De ideologische context van de eerste Nederlandse grondwet* in *De eeuw van de Grondwet. Grondwet en politiek in Nederland, 1798-1917*, hrsg. von N.C.F. van Sas - H. te Velde, Deventer 1998, pp. 20-46.

[8] S. SCHAMA, *Patriots and Liberators* cit., p. 8.

ever increasing and ever more authoritarian French influence in the Batavian Republic. Starting from 1801, when the former adherents of the Orangist party were allowed back into public service, each successive new constitution further reduced both popular participation in politics and Dutch independence. In 1806, in one of the great ironies of history, the French, who had arrived in 1795 as republican liberators, transformed the country that had been a republic for over two centuries into the Kingdom of Holland, ruled by Napoleon's brother Louis. Since Louis, however, was unwilling to implement the Continental System with all the rigor demanded by his brother, Napoleon decided to incorporate the Kingdom of Holland into the Empire. Thus, in 1810, Dutch national independence finally came to an end[9].

There was no love lost between Napoleon and the Dutch. As early as 1804 an anonymous memorandum had warned the soon to be Emperor that the Dutch and the French national characters were entirely incompatible and that the Dutch had much more in common with the English than with the French[10]. Yet Napoleon could not be bothered with such subtleties. He explicitly stated that he regarded the Netherlands as no more than the alluvium formed by the great rivers of his empire and that, should the Dutch cause him too much trouble, he would simply cut the dikes and give the country back to the ocean[11]. In the meantime, he proceeded to enforce the Continental System with great vigor, to tax his new Dutch departments heavily, to introduce the much hated military conscription and to forcefully suppress

[9] For a recent overview of the years between 1806 and 1813 see Johan JOOR, *De Adelaar en het Lam. Onrust, opruiing en onwilligheid in Nederland ten tijde van het Koninkrijk Holland en de Inlijving bij het Franse Keizerrijk (1806-1813)*, Amsterdam 2000, pp. 59-117.

[10] «Sans parler des religions à peu près semblables, du génie commercial, des habitudes maritimes, de la conformité de goûts qui doivent leur donner de l'inclination pour l'Angleterre, leur gravité, leur prudence, leur modération, leur entêtement, leur lenteur s'accommodent bien mieux de l'Anglais, taciturne, pensif et morose, que du Français vif, impétueux, ardent, souvent confiant, quelquefois présomptueux. Notre activité, notre ardeur leur paraissent de la précipitation, de la turbulence, ils en sont incommodés, fatigués, et s'ils aiment la nation française comme alliée, ils n'en aiment pas les individus ni dans leur société, ni dans leurs affaires». Cited in *Napoléon, le monde et les Anglais. Guerre des mots et des images*, edited by J.-P. Bertaud - A. Forrest - A. Jourdan, Paris 2004, p. 235. On the relations between the Dutch and the French during these years, the writings of Annie Jourdan are of fundamental importance. See, for example, Annie JOURDAN, *La République batave et le 18 Brumaire. La grande illusion*, dans «Annales historiques de la Révolution française», (1999), no. 318, pp. 755-772 and Annie JOURDAN, *Impossible fusion ou impossible réunion? Napoléon et la République batave* in *Voies nouvelles pour l'histoire du Premier Empire. Territoires. Pouvoirs. Identités. Colloque d'Avignon 9-10 mai 2000*, edited by N. Petiteau, Paris 2003, pp. 99-119.

[11] For the first remark see S. SCHAMA, *Patriots and Liberators* cit., p. 2; for the second Annie JOURDAN - Martijn VAN DEN BURG, *La Révolution, Napoléon et les elites néerlandaises*, unpublished paper, 2004, p. 17.

any signs of opposition. Of these last, there were relatively many. As Joris Joor has shown in his recent and revealing study *The Eagle and the Lamb*, the Dutch population became increasingly restless under Napoleonic rule and frequently resorted to violence to express its dissatisfaction[12]. These forms of popular resistance were primarily directed against particular French measures such as the introduction of military conscription and did not reveal any coherent message. At the same time, however, there were signs of a deeper shift in intellectual climate. Since 1798, the disillusionment with politics and the general feeling of helplessness in the face of the overwhelming military superiority of the French had increasingly led to a climate of apathy and resignation among the Dutch. Yet gradually, and particularly during the Napoleonic years, a new note was struck. The Dutch, who had been politically divided for so many decades in the recent past, slowly but surely – and greatly helped by their shared detestation of Napoleon – began to realize that much more important than these divisions were the ties that bound them together: those of a glorious history, a common language, in a word, those of a shared Fatherland. It was the work of the so-called resistance poets such as Jan Frederik Helmers, Cornelis Loots and Hendrik Tollens to give a voice to this renewed and powerful consciousness of a shared Dutch national identity. The implication of this wave of poetic national sentiment, although never fully stated in view of the existence of an efficient system of censorship, was nevertheless abundantly clear: the first and most pressing task that awaited the Dutch was the restoration of their once so glorious Fatherland to full independence[13].

The opportunity to do so came sooner than most had expected. In 1812, the very same year in which Jan Frederik Helmers long and nationalistic poem *The Nation of Holland,* generally regarded as the most powerful example of Dutch resistance poetry, was published, Napoleon's disastrous Russian campaign showed that he was far from invulnerable[14]. It was not until the Fall of 1813, however, that Napoleon's armed forces definitively collapsed. In the ensuing chaos, with French troops partly retreating from the Netherlands, Russian Cossacks entering the country from the East and the population on the brink of open rebellion, a number of former Dutch regents, with

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[12] J. JOOR, *De Adelaar en het Lam* cit. See also, by the same author, *Les Pays-Bas contre l'impérialisme napoléonien. Les soulèvements anti-français entre 1806 et 1813*, dans «*Annales historiques de la Révolution française*», (2001), no. 326, pp. 161-172.

[13] Cornelis Gerrit Nicolaas DE VOOYS, «Nederlandse letterkundigen tegenover de Franse overheersing», *Mededelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandsche Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afdeling Letterkunde. Nieuwe reeks, deel 8*, Amsterdam 1945, pp. 83-97; N.C.F. VAN SAS, *Metamorfose van Nederland* cit, pp. 86-96 and 122-126.

[14] On Jan Frederik Helmers and *The Nation of Holland* see Joost KLOEK, *16 december 1812*: «De Hollandsche Natie» passeert de Franse censuur – *Een groot verleden voor de boeg* in *Nederlandse Literatuur, een geschiedenis*, hrsg. von M.A. Schenkeveld-van der Dussen, Groningen 1993, pp. 419-425.

Gijsbert Karel van Hogendorp in a leading role, appointed themselves, in the name of the Prince of Orange, as the temporary government of the country and issued a proclamation starting with the words «Long live Orange, Holland is free»[15]. On November 15, the Prince of Orange himself landed in Scheveningen, very close to the spot where his father, Stadholder William V, had fled the country in dismal defeat almost two decades earlier. The very next day the Prince was inaugurated in Amsterdam as William I, Sovereign King of the United Netherlands. The writing of a new constitution could begin and the «French period» in Dutch history had come to an end. It was during and in the immediate aftermath of these spectacular developments that the depth of hatred for the French, and particularly for Napoleon, was openly revealed in large numbers of occasional books and pamphlets. Among the more popular, successful and typical of these was a publication for the Dutch youth by Jan ten Brink, significantly entitled *The new French tyranny, particularly under the government of Napoleon Bonaparte, containing an account of the injustices and violence perpetrated by the French in the Netherlands, since the beginning of 1795 until the end of 1813, and above all during the last three years*. The author had simply taken a well-established genre that had originated with the *Spanish Tyranny* in 1610 and had continued with the frequently reprinted *French Tyranny* of 1674 and filled it with new content. His message was clear and simple: the French were frivolous, immoral, irreligious, cruel, inhuman and barbaric and all these less than desirable characteristics had reached their perverse perfection in the person of Napoleon. No wonder, then, that Ten Brink ended his book advising his countrymen «always to keep in mind that the French are a people with whom we want to have as little to do as possible and against whom we should always be on our guard»[16]. To illustrate his central message, Ten Brink provided his readers with a lengthy catalogue of Napoleon's misdeeds against the Dutch. It ranged from the utter destruction of Dutch national independence to the suppression of free trade, and from the horrors of conscription to the relentless assault on the liberty of the press. What, given such ruthless oppression, could be more desirable and glorious than the liberation of 1813? That the new Kingdom was headed for a bright future, Ten Brink did not doubt: with the Fatherland restored to independence, the old party divisions forgotten, the House of Orange on the throne as a symbol of national unity, and the benevolent protection of the Almighty in heaven assured, there was every reason to be optimistic. It was this same simple formula and combination of elements that

[15] The proclamation can be found in *Brieven en gedenkschriften van Gijsbert Karel van Hogendorp. Vierde deel*, edited by H. Graaf van Hogendorp, The Hague 1887, p. 236. For an English translation see S. SCHAMA, *Patriots and Liberators* cit., p. 641.

[16] Jan TEN BRINK, *Nieuwe Fransche tirannij, bijzonder onder de regering van Napoleon Bonaparte; behelzende eene opgave van de onregtvaardigheden en geweldenarijen. Door de Franschen in Nederland uitgeöefend, sedert het begin van 1795 tot op het einde van 1813, en vooral in de drie laatste jaren*, Amsterdam 1814, p. 100.

would resurface during the entire nineteenth century whenever the year 1813 was publicly remembered[17].

Much more sophisticated than such crudely propagandistic writings were the reflections on the fall of Napoleon published by Willem Anthonie Ockerse in the years 1814 and 1815 under the title *Napoleonic Speeches*. Ockerse's lectures, whose composition was interrupted by Napoleon's Hundred Days and taken up again after the final defeat of «the lunatic Corsican» at Waterloo, provide a fascinating glimpse of the great intellectual transitions of the early nineteenth century[18]. The author, who had started his long career as a religious minister and would ultimately also end it in that honorable occupation, had been one of the central figures in the radical politics of the Batavian revolution. Not only did he co-edit the by far most significant political journal of the early phase of the Batavian Republic, *The Democrats*, he was also the main architect of the first Dutch constitution of 1798. The end of the most radical phase in Batavian politics, however, put an abrupt halt to his spectacular political career[19]. When he sat down in 1814 and 1815 to reflect upon the meaning of the events of the day, Ockerse had – just as the overwhelming majority of his former fellow Dutch radicals – long since given up his republican and democratic political convictions. Yet what makes his thought so intriguing is the fact that he still seems to keep one foot in the intellectual universe of the late eighteenth century. His *Napoleonic Speeches* are a demonstration of his intensive search for a compromise, a *juste milieu*, between the cosmopolitanism of the Enlightenment and the new national sentiment of the Romantic era and between the political program of the late eighteenth-century revolutionary movement and the new respect for the institutions of monarchy that was so characteristic of the early nineteenth century. Contrary to most contemporary and later Dutch commentators, Ockerse was not primarily interested in the fate of The Netherlands under Napoleonic rule, but in the fate of Europe. And that fate, so he showed at length, was very grim. There was, he insisted in great flights of

[17] In the 1860s, for example, during the festivities surrounding the building in The Hague of a national monument commemorating the national liberation of 1813. See Pieter GEYL, *1813 herdacht in 1863* in Pieter GEYL, *Pennestrijd over staat en historie. Opstellen over de Vaderlandse Geschiedenis aangevuld met Geyl's Levensverhaal (tot 1945)*, Groningen 1971, pp. 274-312. On the monument itself see Jacques SCHIFERLI, *Een «Nationaal gedenkteeken voor November 1813», Den Haag 1863-1869*, in «Nederlands kunsthistorisch jaarboek», (1983), n. 34, pp. 73-131.

[18] Willem Anthonie OCKERSE, *Napoleóntische redevoeringen*, 2 vols., Amsterdam 1814-1815. The quotation is from vol. I, p. 93. Ockerse would later also write a funeral oration for Napoleon: *Lijkrede aan het graf van Napoleon Buonaparte, ten vervolge der Napoleóntische redevoeringen*, Amsterdam 1821.

[19] On the life and career of Ockerse see Johanna STOUTEN, *Willem Antonie Ockerse (1760-1826). Leven en werk*, Amsterdam and Maarssen 1982, and N.C.F. VAN SAS, *Metamorfose van Nederland* cit., pp. 303-314.

rhetoric, literally nothing positive to be said about Napoleon, whom he described in turn as an Eastern despot, a monster and a deranged megalomaniac. Indeed, so Ockerse assured his readers, «had it been possible, he [Napoleon] would, having conquered the five continents, have ruined our entire planet, have dethroned God, and have crowned himself as despot of the universe»[20]. Fortunately, however, there was one crucial factor which prevented his evil designs from being realized: the European world had become so civilized and enlightened, that it could and would no longer tolerate such manifestations of despotism. As a true child of the Enlightenment, Ockerse showed enormous faith in the connection between the growth of knowledge, commerce and an enlightened public opinion on the on hand, and the triumph of political liberty on the other. Far from being an omen for the future in its ruthless and effective oppression, Napoleon's despotic regime was therefore a pathetic anachronism, inevitably doomed to failure[21]. The possibility that opened up for Europe after the final defeat of this remarkable eruption of ancient barbarism was that of a unique political rebirth. Such a rebirth, so Ockerse stressed, would only work if both the arbitrary power of the *ancien régime* and the excesses of revolutionary self-government were avoided[22]. But that was precisely what could now be accomplished, since the unintended consequence of the Napoleonic interlude had been to bring kings and people together in a new mutual relationship[23]. For both Europe and the Netherlands, Ockerse confidently concluded, the compromise of the constitutional monarchy was the way to a successful political future[24].

As the nineteenth century progressed, and particularly after the experiment of unification with the Southern Netherlands came to a disastrous end in the 1830s, the enlightened elements and the broad international perspective that had characterized Ockerse's early analysis of the historical meaning of the years around 1800 gradually disappeared from Dutch discourse. As the country shrank, its intellectual life turned inward. It became more and more preoccupied with defining the essential traits of the Dutch nation and preferably looked for these in the Golden Age of the seventeenth century[25]. One of the consequences of this intensified attempt to construct a solid Dutch national identity was that, even more than previously, the defining characteristic of the years between 1795 and 1813 became the fact that The Netherlands had been strongly dependent upon France. Whereas for Ockerse and his contemporaries the differences between the early phases of the

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[20] W.A. OCKERSE, *Napoleóntische redevoeringen* cit., I, p. 80.

[21] *Ivi*, pp. 90-98.

[22] *Ivi*, II, pp. 81-83.

[23] *Ivi*, pp. 74-75.

[24] On the *Napoleóntische redevoeringen* see also J. STOUTEN, *Willem Antonie Ockerse* cit., pp. 206-210 and N.C.F. VAN SAS, *Metamorfose van Nederland* cit., pp. 126-128.

[25] Piet B.M. BLAAS, *Geschiedenis en nostalgie. De historiografie van een kleine natie met een groot verleden. Verspreide historiografische opstellen*, Hilversum 2000, pp. 9-61.

Batavian revolution and the later incorporation of the country into the Napoleonic Empire had been obviously and crucially important, to later and ever more narrowly nationalistic generations the whole period became primarily one of French domination. It was the historian Th. Jorissen who in 1883 finally drew the logical conclusion from this development and introduced the term «the French period» for the entire time span from 1795 to 1813[26].

Among the more remarkable and extreme interpretations the nineteenth-century Dutch developed of the revolutionary and Napoleonic period was no doubt that of the adherents of the protestant *Réveil* movement[27]. The leading lights of this movement in The Netherlands, such as Isaäc da Costa and Willem de Clercq, were disgusted with what Da Costa in his most famous publication called «the spirit of the century»[28]. Their orthodox Calvinism, deepened by an infusion of romantic feeling, led them to a total rejection of Enlightenment rationalism and all its disastrous consequences. The historiographical and political implications of these convictions were most clearly expressed in the works of the historian and founder of the so-called anti-revolutionary movement, Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer[29]. Groen devoted a substantial part of his rather dogmatic historical writings to an exposition of the ruinous results of what he called the «false philosophy» of the Enlightenment, a movement whose center he located in France, but whose influence had spread over and become dominant in the whole of Europe. «If one tries to order history not just according to chronology, but according to the development of ideas», Groen wrote in 1831, «it is clear that every period has a dominant characteristic. Since more than fifty years now, that characteristic has been *unbelief*»[30]. Unbelief, Groen never tired of explaining, meant that the sovereignty of God had been replaced with the sovereignty of man and that divine Revelation had been replaced with human reason. And from the idea of the sovereignty of reasonable man, there was a direct line to such notions as popular government, the social contract and liberty, equality and fraternity. There was, in other words, an evident and even necessary relationship between unbelief and revolution. Groen elaborated this simple but highly influential thesis in 1847 in what may be considered his most important work, a series of published lectures unsurprisingly entitled

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[26] J. JOOR, *De Adelaar en het Lam* cit., p. 29.

[27] The standard work on the *Réveil* movement remains M. Elisabeth KLUIT, *Het protestantse Réveil in Nederland en daarbuiten, 1815-1865*, Paris and Amsterdam 1970.

[28] Isaäc DA COSTA, *Bezwaren tegen den geest der Eeuw*, Leyden 1823.

[29] On Groen as a historian see Hendrik SMITSKAMP, *Groen van Prinsterer als historicus*, Amsterdam 1940, and P.B.M. BLAAS, *Geschiedenis en nostalgie* cit., pp. 49-50 and 69-73. For Groen's thought in international perspective see *Groen van Prinsterer in Europese context*, edited by J. de Bruijn - G. Harinck, Hilversum 2004.

[30] Guillaume GROEN VAN PRINSTERER, *Verspreide Geschriften*, Amsterdam 1859, p. 121.

Unbelief and Revolution[31]. In these, he presented his readers with a heady mix of political theory and analysis of recent history, in particular that of the French revolution and its aftermath. Groen made it abundantly clear that it was no use theoretically to distinguish between the various phases of the revolution. The initial overthrow of the *ancien régime*, the terror of Robespierre and the Napoleontic dictatorship were all equally the outcome of the false and dangerous secular philosophy of the Enlightenment. The same was true, so he observed at the very end of the work, for all the various political developments in The Netherlands since the late eighteenth century. The conclusion to be drawn from all this was evident: the only road to salvation lay in a concerted effort spiritually to return to the true protestant faith as it had existed in that pre-revolutionary paradise, the Dutch seventeenth century. As Groen had already remarked in 1831: «Revelation should once again be recognized in its full authority, and there is no other Revelation than that contained in Holy Scripture»[32].

Although its influence was far from insignificant, Groen's passionate rejection of enlightened and revolutionary modernity was not representative of mainstream Dutch historical discourse during the nineteenth century. Indeed the very reverse was true, for although the country was still deeply religious, its high culture increasingly came to be dominated by a relatively secular liberal elite in the second half of the century. That same period saw the professionalization of historical scholarship in the Netherlands. Leyden, the most important university, created a chair in general history in 1850 and added a chair in Dutch history in 1860[33]. The first incumbent of this latter chair was Robert Fruin, the most famous Dutch historian of the nineteenth century[34]. Fruin, who had sharply attacked *Unbelief and Revolution* in the 1850s, was in every respect the opposite of Groen: secular and liberal in his worldview, anti-metaphysical and positivist in his scholarship[35]. Here was a historian, so it would seem, who had all that was needed to do full justice to the important changes that Dutch history had witnessed during the years between 1795 and 1813. It would have been quite natural for him to follow the line of Johan Rudolf Thorbecke, the architect of the liberal Dutch constitution of 1848, who had unhesitatingly acknowledged the essential importance of

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[31] Guillaume GROEN VAN PRINSTERER, *Ongeloof en Revolutie. Eene reeks van historische voorlezingen*, Leyden 1847.

[32] G. GROEN, *Verspreide Geschriften* cit., p. 135.

[33] P.B.M. BLAAS, *Geschiedenis en nostalgie* cit., pp. 21-23.

[34] On Fruin see Jacobus Wilhelmus SMIT, *Fruin en de partijen tijdens de Republiek*, Groningen 1958; Jo TOLLEBEEK, *De toga van Fruin. Denken over geschiedenis in Nederland sinds 1860*, Amsterdam 1990, pp. 13-69 and P.B.M. BLAAS, *Geschiedenis en nostalgie*, pp. 22-28.

[35] On Fruin's polemic with Groen see Pieter GEYL, *Fruin contra Groen 1853-1854* in *Pieter Geyl, Verzamelde opstellen 3*, edited by P. van Hees, Utrecht and Antwerp 1978, pp. 135-181. The essay was originally published in 1951.

the Batavian and Napoleonic period for the genesis of the modern Dutch state[36]. At first sight, Fruin seemed to share this view. «There has perhaps not been not a single other state», he wrote in 1865, «that has been so radically changed by the great revolution [of the late eighteenth century] as the United Netherlands»[37]. Following Tocqueville, Fruin pointed out that in France it was possible to discern at least some political continuity between the *ancien régime* and post-revolutionary political arrangements. In the Netherlands this was not the case: the political system of the old Republic had been totally destroyed. Yet, Fruin surprisingly continued, this did in no way imply that the nineteenth-century Dutch constitutional monarchy was to be viewed as the direct result of the turbulent Batavian and Napoleonic years. It was at this point in his argument that he fell back on the historical thought of Gijbert Karel van Hogendorp, the central figure in the events of the November days of 1813 and the intellectual father of the Dutch constitutions of 1814 and 1815. It was Van Hogendorp who had put forward the ingenious thesis that the unitary and monarchical form the Dutch state acquired after the liberation from the French was not the result of political developments during the previous decades, but was, on the contrary, a logical and long overdue continuation of a trend in Dutch history that had been rudely interrupted by the Revolt of the sixteenth century. The new Dutch state that took shape in the years after 1813 was thus to be seen as the true heir of the centralizing monarchy of the old Burgundian Netherlands[38]. Fruin was, of course, aware of the fact that such an interpretation, while allowing him to depict nineteenth-century political arrangements as essentially Dutch rather than French, created an embarrassing problem in another area: it turned the more than two centuries of the Dutch Republic, by any standard the most glorious period in Dutch history, into a strange and almost irrelevant historical interlude. He seems to have paid the price gladly. The Dutch Republic, so he wrote in 1865, was to be regarded as no more than an interim period between two monarchies and had now fortunately vanished, leaving hardly any political trace[39].

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[36] Thorbecke's most important writings on this issue may be found in Cornelis Henricus Eligius DE WIT, *Thorbecke en de wording van de Nederlandse natie*, Nijmegen 1980.

[37] Robert FRUIN, *De drie tijdvakken der Nederlandsche geschiedenis (1865)* in *Robert Fruin's verspreide geschriften, met aanteekeningen, toevoegsels en verbeteringen uit des schrijvers nalatenschap. Deel I*, hrsg. von P.J. Blok - P.L. Muller - S. Muller Fz., The Hague 1900, p. 25.

[38] On van Hogendorp see Hans VAN DER HOEVEN, *Gijsbert Karel van Hogendorp. Conservatief of liberaal?*, Groningen 1976, and Wyger R.E. VELEMA, *Gijsbert Karel van Hogendorp. Wegbereider voor de monarchie* in *Nederlanders van het eerste uur. Het ontstaan van het moderne Nederland 1780-1830*, hrsg. von H.M. Beliën - D. van der Horst - G. J. van Setten, Amsterdam 1996, pp. 204-213.

[39] R. FRUIN, *De drie tijdvakken* cit., p. 46.

The sweeping theories about the significance, or rather the lack thereof, of the «French period» in the history of The Netherlands that we have so far discussed were espoused by authors possessed of very little factual knowledge of the years in question. Even Robert Fruin, who has been called the Dutch Ranke, was not intimately acquainted with the history of the Batavian and Napoleonic years. Ironically, his chosen field was the political history of the very early modern Dutch Republic he had elsewhere relegated to irrelevance. The simple truth is that at the end of the nineteenth century little serious research had been done on the history of the decades around 1800. It was around 1900 that this situation dramatically changed with the appearance on the scene of Herman Theodoor Colenbrander. This remarkable historian and archivist devoted his entire working life with a single minded energy to Dutch history between the late eighteenth and the mid nineteenth century. Not only did he publish dozens of monographs in that field, but he was also the editor of a massive ten volume collection of sources from the period that is still unsurpassed[40]. Unfortunately, however, Colenbrander's passion for archival research remained unmatched by great interpretative originality. It is, indeed, no exaggeration to remark that the main function of his work was to put the finishing touches upon the notion that had gradually become stronger and stronger in the course of the nineteenth century: the notion, that is, of the decades around 1800 as an unfruitful and shameful period, in which the Dutch had been the helpless instruments of French domination. To Colenbrander, both the Patriots and the Batavians had been no more than puppets in the hands of their French masters, who could pull the strings as they wished. Colenbrander arrived at this conclusion not only because he largely adopted Fruin's views on the true roots of the nineteenth-century constitutional monarchy, but also because his archival research was mostly limited to the type of diplomatic sources that highlighted foreign interference in Dutch matters[41]. His bleak interpretation of the Patriot, Batavian and Napoleonic years would remain basically unchallenged for decades to come. It was no wonder then that even the brilliant Johan Huizinga, when

[40] *Gedenkstukken der algemeene geschiedenis van Nederland van 1795 tot 1840*, hrsg. von H.T. Colenbrander, 10 volumes in 22 parts, The Hague 1905-1922. Among Colenbrander's monographs relevant for the period under discussion in this article are *De Bataafsche Republiek*, Amsterdam 1908, *Schimmelpenninck en Koning Lodewijk*, Amsterdam 1911 and *Inlijving en Opstand*, Amsterdam 1913.

[41] On Colenbrander see Eco Oste Gaspard HAITSMA MULIER, *De geschiedschrijving over de Patriottentijd en de Bataafse tijd* in *Kantelend geschiedbeeld. Nederlandse historiografie sinds 1945*, hrsg. von W.W. Mijnhardt, Utrecht and Antwerp 1983, pp. 206-210; J. TOLLEBEEK, *De toga van Fruin* cit., pp. 174-179 and P.B.M. BLAAS, *Geschiedenis en nostalgie* cit., pp. 82-99.

asked to speak in 1913 about the meaning of 1813, was able to do little more than to repeat the *cliché* of the men of 1795 as characterless puppets[42].

With Colenbrander and Huizinga we are already well into the twentieth century. It is, therefore, time to bring this story to end. For as was the case in most other fields of historical scholarship, research on the years around 1800 became more intense and detailed in the course of the twentieth century, but also, and that is of crucial importance for the theme of the present article, more detached and less nationalistic. Twentieth century Dutch historians, certainly those working after 1950, have generally been much less inclined than their nineteenth-century predecessors to seek the function of historical scholarship in the definition of national identity. Although still unbeloved by both historians and the general public, the Batavian Republic and the brief incorporation of the country into the Napoleonic Empire have nonetheless become topics like any other: to be studied for their own sake, for their intrinsic historical interest, without reference to any larger nationalistic agenda. There was, however, one big exception to this general trend. It was in the years before, during and after the German occupation of the Netherlands, which lasted from 1940 to 1945, that the Napoleonic period in Dutch and European history suddenly once again became a theme of intense political relevance and importance to Dutch historians and that nationalistic themes re-emerged in historical scholarship. In the great twelve volume *General History of the Netherlands*, whose publication started in 1949, the historian Jan Haak explicitly discussed the years between 1810 and 1813 in terms that had acquired a heavily loaded meaning during the German occupation: collaboration and resistance[43]. Even more topical was Jacques Presser's *Napoleon. History and Legend*, completed in 1940, but not published before 1946. To Presser, there was not the slightest doubt that the study of the Napoleonic road to power threw a valuable light on the rise of the totalitarian regimes he and his contemporaries were witnessing[44]. Until deep into the twentieth century, therefore, and even with the existence of a now highly professional historical scholarship, it remained extremely difficult, as these examples clearly indicate, to keep contemporary political and national preoccupations from bursting upon he study of the Napoleonic era. But perhaps that is all to the good. Napoleon, after all, is too important to be declared of academic interest only.

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[42] Johan HUIZINGA, *De beteekenis van 1813 voor Nederland's geestelijke beschaving* in ID., *Verzamelde werken II*, Haarlem 1948, p. 529. For a similar statement see Huizinga's 1912 review of Colenbrander's *Schimmelpenninck en Koning Lodewijk* in the same volume, pp. 86-87.

[43] Jan HAAK, *Van Inlijving tot Bevrijding. Het Noorden van 1810-'14* in *Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden, Volume IX*, Zeist, etc., 1956, pp. 128-160, especially 133-141.

[44] Jacques PRESSER, *Napoleon. Historie en legende*, Amsterdam 1946.