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**Classical Antiquity Contested: The Dutch Eighteenth Century and Ancient Politics**

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WYGER R.E. VELEMA

CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY CONTESTED:  
THE DUTCH EIGHTEENTH CENTURY  
AND ANCIENT POLITICS

INTRODUCTION

The year 1795 saw the definitive end of the Dutch *ancien régime*. The republic of the Seven United Provinces, that strange political anomaly in the largely monarchical Europe of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was dismantled and replaced by the Batavian Republic<sup>1</sup>. The revolution was greeted with great enthusiasm. Soon declarations of the rights of man and of the citizen were proclaimed throughout the country<sup>2</sup>. In many towns and villages the excited population gathered around hastily erected liberty trees, the political symbols of the new order. This was the year of the triumph of an entirely new and revolutionary way of thinking. A streamlined new state was to replace what many contemporaries had come to regard as the bizarre and Gothic old republican political order. The political inspiration for this new state did not come from the past, but exclusively from the timeless natural and inalienable rights of man as formulated by the Enlightenment. The past had definitively lost its political relevance. History was reduced to the sad and dreary tale of the suffering of oppressed humanity until the advent of the liberating revolutions of the late eighteenth century. Such, in a nutshell, is the current interpretation of the ideology of the Batavian revolutionaries. The Batavians, Thomas von der Dunk recently maintained echoing a long line of predecessors, «did not base themselves on

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<sup>1</sup> Despite numerous shortcomings, the best general treatment of the first years of the Batavian revolution is still *Schama S. Patriots and Liberators. Revolution in the Netherlands 1780–1813*. New York, 1977. P. 178–353. The Batavian revolution is discussed from a comparative perspective in *Jourdan A. La Révolution batave entre la France et l'Amérique (1795–1806)*. Rennes, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Tweehonderd jaar rechten van de mens in Nederland. De verklaring van de rechten van de mens en van de burger van 31 januari 1795 toegelicht en vergeleken met Franse en Amerikaanse voorgangers / Samenst. F.H. van der Burg, H. Boels. Leiden, 1994.

history, but tried to create a new political ideal from nothing, solely on the basis of reason». It would seem, however, that this broadly accepted interpretation of the intellectual universe of the Batavian revolutionaries as exclusively based on «ahistorical rationality» is quite one-sided and therefore seriously misleading<sup>3</sup>. Indeed, it can only be sustained by ignoring what the historical actors of 1795 were actually talking and writing about. Let us take a closer look at the preoccupations of literate Dutchmen in the year 1795.

On February 21, 1795, Johan Luzac, known throughout Europe for his prestigious *Gazette de Leyde*, ended his rectorate at the University of Leiden with a farewell speech<sup>4</sup>. The theme this moderate reformer addressed was highly topical during these hectic first weeks of the Batavian revolution: it was the meaning of citizenship. Luzac thought he could best approach his complex subject through a concrete historical example and therefore devoted his entire speech to Socrates. From the very start, he made it clear that knowledge of abstract and timeless natural rights was absolutely insufficient for an adequate understanding of his theme. It was at least as important «constantly to study the Greek and Roman Historians, Orators, and Philosophers»<sup>5</sup>. That he should think so was hardly surprising, since Johan Luzac not only was a professor of Greek, but he was also a classical republican. Already in 1785, during the so-called Patriot Era, he had emphatically told an audience he suspected of containing many «fanatical devotees of Popular Government» that a pure democracy was an abomination. True liberty, the study of classical antiquity had taught him, could only exist in a mixed form of government, in a so-called «moderate Aristo-Democracy»<sup>6</sup>. Luzac was still of the

<sup>3</sup> *Dunk T.H. von der. Een Hollands heiligdom. De moeizame architectonische eenwording van Nederland. Amsterdam, 2007. P. 15, 17. The locus classicus of this interpretation is Leeb I.L. The Ideological Origins of the Batavian Revolution. History and Politics in the Dutch Republic 1747–1800. The Hague, 1973.*

<sup>4</sup> On Johan Luzac see *Popkin J.D. News and Politics in the Age of Revolution. Jean Luzac's Gazette de Leyde. Ithaca; London, 1989; Schöffner I. Een Leids hoogleraar in politieke moeilijkheden. Het ontslag van Johan Luzac in 1796 // Geen schepsel wordt vergeten. Liber amicorum voor Jan Willem Schulte Nordholt ter gelegenheid van zijn vijfenzestigste verjaardag / Onder red. van J.F. Heijbroek, A. Lammers, A.P.G. Jos van der Linde. Amsterdam; Zutphen, 1985. P. 61–80.*

<sup>5</sup> *Luzac J. Socrates als burger beschouwd, in eene plechtige redevoering, uitgesproken op den 21. Februari 1795, bij het nederleggen van 't Rectoraat der Hollandsche universiteit, etc. Leiden: A. and J. Honkoop, 1796. P. 7–8. Cf. the original edition of the speech: Idem. Oratio de Socrate cive: publice habita, die 21 Februarii MDCCXCV, quum magistratu academico abiret: probatione & adnotationes de Socrate ac de republica Attica, praesertim disquisitio de epistas ac proedris Atheniensium, et de Socrate epistate, ad calcem adjectae reperiuntur. Lugduni Batavorum: apud A. et J. Honkoop, 1796.*

<sup>6</sup> *Luzac J. Redevoering ten betooge, dat de geleerdheid de voedster is der burgerdeugd, vooral in een vry gemeenebest, etc. Leiden: Hendrik Mostert, 1786. P. 48, 55. Cf. the original edition of this speech: Idem. Oratio de eruditione, altrice virtutis civilis praesertim in civitate libera. Publice habita a.d. XXIV. Septembris MDCCLXXXV. Quum ordinariam linguae Graecae... professionem in academia Lugduno-Batava... auspicaretur Lugduni Batavorum: apud Henricum Mostert, 1785.*

same opinion in 1795 and repeated his message, although in a form slightly adapted to the changed political circumstances. Socrates had been such an exemplary citizen because he had, in times of faction and political chaos in Athens, caused by the «license of the vulgar», not entirely turned away from politics<sup>7</sup>. Without aspiring to political office in those times of moral decay, he had given his fellow citizens a shining example of virtuous behavior and had constantly reminded them that there was nothing above the laws and above justice – even if this meant that he eventually had to pay the highest price<sup>8</sup>.

Such warnings about the excesses of popular government fell on deaf ears with Johan Luzac's cousin, the hot-blooded revolutionary Johan Valckenaer, son of the eminent classical philologist Lodewijk Caspar Valckenaer<sup>9</sup>. He had been appointed as professor of law at Leiden University in the spring of 1795 to replace the very learned, but also very conservative Friederich Wilhelm Pestel<sup>10</sup>. That he took his political appointment very seriously indeed became clear in his inaugural lecture in October of 1795. It discussed *The duties of a Batavian citizen, particularly in revolutionary times*<sup>11</sup>. To Johan Valckenaer, who belonged to the small group of Dutch revolutionaries desiring a ruthless suppression of all adherents of the *ancien régime*, any form of political moderation during the crucial early phase of a revolution was a grave mistake. That those still in favor of the old order needed to be persecuted with all available means was a lesson made perfectly clear by ancient history: «The Romans did not grant amnesty (...) to the followers of Tarquin. On the contrary, they chased them all away and beheaded both the sons of Brutus (...) and their Republic has flourished for more than four centuries»<sup>12</sup>. But it was not only the persecution of political opponents that had excellent classical

<sup>7</sup> Luzac J. Socrates als burger beschouwd... P. 35–41.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. P. 41–70.

<sup>9</sup> The best biography of Johan Valckenaer is still *Sillem J.A. Het leven van Mr. Johan Valckenaer (1759–1821)*. Amsterdam, 1883, 2 Vol. On Lodewijk Caspar Valckenaer see *Gerretzen J.G. Schola Hemsterhusiana. De herleving der Grieksche studieën aan de Nederlandse universiteiten in de achttiende eeuw van Perizonius tot en met Valckenaer*. Nijmegen; Utrecht, 1940.

<sup>10</sup> On Valckenaer's Leiden professorate see *Schöffner I. Een kortstondig hoogleraarschap. Johan Valckenaer in Leiden 1795–1796 // Bestuurders en geleerden. Opstellen over onderwerpen uit de Nederlandse geschiedenis van de zestiende, zeventiende en achttiende eeuw, aangeboden aan Prof. Dr. J.J. Woltjer bij zijn afscheid als hoogleraar aan de Rijksuniversiteit te Leiden / Oder red. van S. Groenveld, M.E.H.N. Mout, I. Schöffner*. Amsterdam, 1985. P. 193–208.

<sup>11</sup> *Valckenaer J. Redevoering over de plichten van een Bataavsch burger, vooral bij eene staatsomwenteling. Uitgesproken in de Academie van Leide op den X oktober 1795. Ter aanvaarding van zijnen post als gewoon hoog-leeraar in het algemeen, volken- en staats-recht. Uit het Latijn vertaald door G.C.C. Vatebender*. Gouda: H.L. van Buma & Comp., 1796. See the original publication: *Idem. Oratio de officio civis Batavi in republica turbata, habita in Academia Lugduno-Batava, die X. Octobris MDCCLXXXV. Lugduni Batavorum: apud A. et J. Honkoop, 1795.*

<sup>12</sup> *Schimmelpenninck G. Rutger Jan Schimmelpenninck en eenige gebeurtenissen van zijnen tijd. 's Gravenhage, Amsterdam, 1845. Bd. 1. P. 61.*

precedents, for Valckenaer emphasized that Batavian citizens could also learn a lot from classical politics in a more general way. They should cast off their habitual moderation, should imitate the ancient republicans in arming themselves, and should, as the great patriot Cicero had recommended, openly and actively choose the side of liberty. As for the new administrators of the country, they could do no better than to model their behavior on that of Lycurgus, Junius Brutus and Fabius Maximus<sup>13</sup>.

It was not only in Leiden, however, that the new political order was a topic of intense interest in 1795. Already on January 2 of that year, J.B. van der Meersch had thoroughly discussed the influence of the people on politics in the Amsterdam society *Felix Meritis*. Such popular influence, he had argued, was extremely desirable and generally led to great prosperity, yet only when it was arranged in the right way<sup>14</sup>. Those desirous to know what the right way was, should cast a «philosophical eye» on the causes of the decline of the Roman republic. For that republic had not only been ruined by «a harmful luxury», but even more by «the wrong arrangement of the influence of the people on government»<sup>15</sup>. In some respects, Van der Meersch maintained, the Romans had not allowed enough popular influence on politics. Thus the *Senatores* should have been popularly elected and the rigid division between *Patricii* and *Plebeji* should never have been tolerated, for it was incompatible with republican equality. In other areas, however, the Romans had done the opposite and had allowed too much popular influence on government. It was, for instance, quite evident «that the Romans decided many things in their popular assemblies that should have been left to their governors»<sup>16</sup>. The Batavian revolutionaries, Van der Meersch insisted, could and should learn valuable lessons from the Roman example. It was only by avoiding the mistakes the Romans had made that they could guarantee their own new republic a long and healthy life.

#### OMNIPRESENT AND CONTESTED ANTIQUITY

These three examples from the year 1795 make it abundantly clear that Dutchmen reflecting and commenting on their political revolution were not exclusively obsessed with «ahistorical rationality», but were, just as their American and French contemporaries, at least as much preoccupied with the heritage

<sup>13</sup> *Valckenaer J.* Redevoering over de plichten van een Bataafsche burger. The copy I consulted had no page numbers.

<sup>14</sup> *Meersch J.B. van der.* Verhandeling over den invloed van het volk op het bestuur. Voorgelezen te Amsterdam, in de maatschappij Felix Meritis. Op den 22 januarij 1795. Het eerste jaar van de Bataafsche vrijheid. Leiden: A. en J. Honkoop, 1795. P. 5–9.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* P. 1.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* P. 10–14.

of classical antiquity<sup>17</sup>. Such a preoccupation, moreover, was entirely in line with the political thought of their eighteenth-century Dutch predecessors, in which classical antiquity had played a prominent role. It is both remarkable and regrettable that this crucial element in eighteenth-century Dutch political discourse has either been neglected or declared irrelevant by subsequent historians<sup>18</sup>. It will be my aim in the present article to demonstrate that such neglect or condescension is entirely unjustified.

That the heritage of classical antiquity played such a prominent part in eighteenth-century Dutch political thought should not surprise us, for the classics were omnipresent in Dutch Enlightenment culture. To begin with, the classics – and particularly the Roman classics – continued to play a central role in Dutch education during the entire eighteenth century. Indeed, the heavily classical «School Order of the States of Holland and West-Frisia», originally adopted in 1625, remained essentially unchanged until the nineteenth century<sup>19</sup>. Despite significant intellectual innovations, the university curriculum, too, remained heavily oriented towards classical antiquity. Dutch eighteenth-century elites, in short, were steeped in the classics<sup>20</sup>. What was new and important in the eighteenth century was the spread of classical culture among much broader groups in Dutch society. As was the case in other European countries, the Age of the Enlightenment in the Dutch Republic witnessed the growth of a public sphere. Communication in this new public sphere, which was very different from the *respublica literaria*, no longer took place in Latin or even French, but in Dutch<sup>21</sup>. This development greatly affected the transmission of the classics: classical texts, histories of the ancient world and classical references increasingly became available in Dutch.

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<sup>17</sup> On America see e.g. *Richard C.J.* The Founders and the Classics. Greece, Rome, and the American Enlightenment. Cambridge; London, 1994; *Winterer C.* The Culture of Classicism: Ancient Greece and Rome in American Intellectual Life, 1780–1910. Baltimore, 2004, and *Bederman D.J.* The Classical Foundations of the American Constitution. Prevailing Wisdom. Cambridge, 2008. On France see e.g. *Parker H.T.* The Cult of Antiquity and the French Revolution. A Study in the Development of the Revolutionary Spirit. New York, 1965 (originally published in 1937); *Mossé C.* L'Antiquité dans la Révolution française. Paris, 1989, and *Grell C.* Le Dix-huitième siècle et l'antiquité en France 1680-1789. Oxford, 1995. 2 vol.

<sup>18</sup> Among the few exceptions are *Klein S.R.E.* Patriots republikenisme. Politieke cultuur in Nederland (1766–1787). Amsterdam, 1995, and *Sas N.C.F. van.* De metamorfose van Nederland. Van oude orde naar moderniteit, 1750-1900. Amsterdam, 2004. P. 129–143.

<sup>19</sup> *Kuiper E.J.* De Hollandse «Schoolordre» van 1625. Groningen, 1958.

<sup>20</sup> For a general discussion of the role of the classics in early modern Dutch culture see *Veenman R.* De klassieke traditie in de Lage Landen. Nijmegen, 2009.

<sup>21</sup> *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* by Jürgen Habermas (Neuwied am Rhein, 1962) remains of fundamental importance for this theme. For critical comments on Habermas see: Habermas and the Public Sphere / Ed. by C. Calhoun. Cambridge (Mass.); London, 1992, and *Blanning T.C.W.* The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture. Old Regime Europe 1660–1789. Oxford, 1992. P. 5–14. The most authoritative general account of the Dutch Enlightenment is *Kloek J., Mijnhard W.* 1800. Blauwdrukken voor een samenleving. Den Haag, 2001.

Indeed, the Dutch eighteenth century for the first time saw the rise of a full-blown «vernacular classicism»<sup>22</sup>.

That these omnipresent classics were much more than intellectual window dressing to the eighteenth-century Dutch is apparent from, among other things, their philosophy of history. Throughout the Enlightenment the Dutch view of the past continued to bear a strongly humanist stamp<sup>23</sup>. This meant that the past was primarily analyzed from a political point of view and that it was supposed to furnish examples of appropriate or inappropriate political behavior. For this to be possible, it had to resemble the present. Indeed, it was widely held that «the world is a stage, on which the same plays, albeit by different players, are performed over and over again through the ages»<sup>24</sup>. The original and most powerful staging of these plays, the Dutch remained convinced, had taken place in the ancient and particularly in the Roman world. It was primarily Rome, as Martinus Stuart, the author of a multi-volume Roman history, remarked in 1793, which provided an inexhaustible source of political lessons for «true servants of the country»<sup>25</sup>. The gradual shift from a humanist to a ‘philosophical’ view of history in the course of the eighteenth century in no way diminished the continued relevance of classical antiquity. It just meant that the individual *exempla virtutis* were increasingly accompanied by general philosophical reflection.

Crucially important as these phenomena were, however, neither their educational system nor their pragmatic view of history made the Dutch exceptional within the broader European context of the eighteenth century. What *did* make them stand out from most other European countries were their political system and their political thought. The eighteenth-century Dutch were and remained fervent republicans in an increasingly monarchical Europe<sup>26</sup>. It was this rather exceptional situation that gave their views of classical antiquity a particular slant and a great sense of urgency. The most important examples of republican government, after all, were to be found in the ancient world. Whereas for most other eighteenth-century Europeans the classical republics remained at best a distant ideal, for the eighteenth-century Dutch they were of direct and permanent relevance<sup>27</sup>. Indeed, it is no exaggeration

<sup>22</sup> I have borrowed this most useful term from *Winterer C. The Mirror of Antiquity. American Women and the Classical Tradition, 1750–1900*. Ithaca; London, 2007.

<sup>23</sup> *Haitsma Mulier E.O.G. Between Humanism and Enlightenment: The Dutch Writing of History // The Dutch Republic in the Eighteenth Century. Decline, Enlightenment and Revolution / Ed. by M. Jacob and W. Mijnhardt*. Ithaca; London, 1992. P. 170–187.

<sup>24</sup> *Luzac J. Socrates als burger beschouwd*. P. 245.

<sup>25</sup> *Stuart M. Romeinsche geschiedenissen*. Utrecht, Amsterdam, 1793–1810, 30 bd.; here Bd. 1. P. 12. On Stuart see *Reinsma R. Martinus Stuart (1765–1825). Geschiedschrijver des Rijks // De Negentiende Eeuw*. 1981. N 5. P. 31–41, and *Vuyk S. Uitdovende Verlichting. Remonstranten als deftige vaderlanders (1800–1860)*. Amsterdam, 1998. P. 68–89.

<sup>26</sup> On the varieties of eighteenth-century Dutch republicanism see *Velema W.R.E. Republicans. Essays on Eighteenth-Century Dutch Political Thought*. Leiden; Boston, 2007.

<sup>27</sup> For general discussions of the historical reputation of the ancient republics see *Rawson E. The Spartan Tradition in European Thought*. Oxford, 1969; *Roberts J.T. Athens on Trial. The Antidemocratic Tradition in Western Thought*. Princeton, 1994; and *Millar F. The Roman Republic in Political Thought. The Menahim Stern Jerusalem Lectures*. Hannover; London, 2002.

to claim that, contrary to what most historians have maintained, eighteenth-century Dutch political thought to a very significant extent revolved around the interpretation and evaluation of classical republicanism. Dutch political conflicts very frequently took the form of a battle over the proper interpretation of classical republican politics. In the remainder of this article an attempt will be made to substantiate this claim by looking at three representative episodes. First of all, it will briefly be shown how the eighteenth-century Dutch regent oligarchy presented itself, by the use of classical examples, as an «oligarchy of virtue». Then the ways, in which the reformist Patriot movement of the 1780s appealed to classical antiquity to legitimate its ideal of the independent, armed and virtuous republican citizen will be explored. The final section of this article will discuss the question whether or not the classics retained their political relevance for the Dutch after the fall of their *ancien régime* in 1795.

#### AN OLIGARCHY OF VIRTUE

The felicitous term «oligarchy of virtue», used by Philip Ayres to characterize the political classicism of the English governing elite during the eighteenth century, is equally applicable to the self-image cultivated by the Dutch regent elite during the Age of Enlightenment<sup>28</sup>. Although Dutch historians have long described the eighteenth-century Dutch regent elite as pragmatic and non-ideological, it in fact presented itself as the descendant of the virtuous rulers of the Roman republic. This may, for instance, be seen in the eighteenth-century decoration programs of various Dutch town halls. The Burgomasters room of the town hall of Enkhuizen, decorated with a wealth of Roman *exempla* during the first decade of the century, is one of the more striking examples of the political uses of the classics for urban regents<sup>29</sup>. The identification of the Dutch regent elites with the virtuous politics of classical antiquity may equally be seen in an abundance of political texts. Perhaps there is no better example of this widespread tendency than the voluminous *Treatise on Liberty in Civil Society*, first published in 1737. Indeed, the author of the *Treatise*, the Zeeland regent Lieven de Beaufort, may be regarded as the Dutch Cicero: he only wrote his work, so he assured his readers,

<sup>28</sup> Ayres P. *Classical Culture and the Idea of Rome in Eighteenth-Century England*. Cambridge, 1997.

<sup>29</sup> Bedaux J.B., Groot A., Hagen A. *Allegorieën van goed bestuur; het decoratieprogramma van het stadhuis van Enkhuizen (1687–1719) // Jaarboek Monumentenzorg. Deel 3*. Zwolle, Zeist, 1992. P. 142–180; Eikema Hommes M. van, Bakker P. *Hoogachtbaarheid en ontzaglijke grootheid. De burgemeesterskamer van het stadhuis van Enkhuizen // Romeyn de Hooghe. De verbeelding van de late Gouden Eeuw / Onder red. van H. van Nierop, E. Grabowsky a.o.* Zwolle; Amsterdam, 2008. P. 222–243.



because the largest part of Cicero's *De re publica* had been lost<sup>30</sup>. In his lengthy discussion of the various aspects of liberty, De Beaufort completely ignored the writings produced by the authors belonging to the Dutch radical Enlightenment of the second half of the seventeenth century<sup>31</sup>. Indeed, he claimed that very little of any worth had so far been written in the Dutch Republic on the topic of liberty, with the exception of the writings of the seventeenth-century classical republican Rabo Schele<sup>32</sup>. To reach a proper understanding of liberty, which consisted both of the rule of law and of the possibility for the citizen actively to participate in government, the best and indeed the only way to proceed was to study the works of Aristotle, Tacitus, Sallust, Plutarch and Cicero<sup>33</sup>.

From his reading of these classics, De Beaufort concluded that the government of the eighteenth-century Dutch Republic was remarkably similar to the mixed government of republican Rome<sup>34</sup>. This, however, also meant that it was vulnerable to exactly the same political diseases that had caused the decline and fall of the Roman republic. The most important of these was the slow and almost imperceptible growth of monarchical power within the republican system. This was a process that, once it had started, was almost impossible to reverse and that usually, as the example of August amply demonstrated, ended in disaster<sup>35</sup>. As the Greek historian Polybius had shown, the rise of monarchical power and the creeping introduction of political slavery were invariably preceded and accompanied by the emergence of two related evils: political ambition and luxury<sup>36</sup>. The best and in fact the only defence against such republican decline was to be found in the political virtue of the regents, who were urged by De Beaufort to take Demosthenes, Cicero, Marcus Brutus and particularly Cato Uticensis as their political examples<sup>37</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> [Beaufort *L.F. de*] *Verhandeling van de vryheit in den burgerstaet*. Leiden: S. Luchtmans; Middelburg: L. Bakker, 1737. P. 408. Large parts of Cicero's *De re publica* were unknown during the eighteenth century and only recovered in 1819. See: *Atkins E.M.* *Cicero // The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought* / Ed. by C. Rowe and M. Schofield. Cambridge, 2000. P. 490. Regrettably, not much has been written on De Beaufort. See, however, *Velema W.R.E.* *Republicans*. P. 44–49, 56–64.

<sup>31</sup> *Israel J.I.* *Radical Enlightenment. Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750*. Oxford, 2001; *Idem.* *Enlightenment Contested. Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1670–1752*. Oxford, 2006.

<sup>32</sup> [Beaufort *L.F. de*] *Op. cit.* P. 3. On Schelius see *Kossmann E.H.* *Politieke theorie in het zeventiende-eeuwse Nederland*. Amsterdam, 1960. P. 32–34, and *Streng J.C.* «O heerlijk Staatsjuweel van Overijssel». *Reacties op het werk en de persoon van Rabo Herman Schele (1622–1662)*, in *dicht en onzicht // Overijsselse Historische Bijdragen*. 1994. Bd. 109. P. 87–101.

<sup>33</sup> The authors most quoted by De Beaufort, in this order. Modern authors are largely absent from the *Treatise*.

<sup>34</sup> [Beaufort *L.F. de*] *Op. cit.* P. 52–60, 121–144.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* P. 276–291.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* P. 293, 304–382.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* P. 210–225.

De Beaufort's classical republican defence of the existing political order in the Dutch Republic would be increasingly undermined as the eighteenth century progressed. Some critics simply denied the relevance of his classical frame of reference. Many others, however, argued that De Beaufort had failed to apply the lessons of classical republican politics in the proper way. The first phase of this latter – and for our purposes most interesting – form of criticism already emerged at the time of the publication of De Beaufort's work, but reached its apogee in the third quarter of the century. More and more writers came to the conclusion that the twin dangers of political ambition and luxury no longer, as De Beaufort had suggested, constituted a potential threat to the Dutch Republic, but were in fact already omnipresent. This deeply pessimistic analysis, in which comparisons with the decline of the Roman republic abounded, could be found with particular frequency in the new genre of spectatorial writings<sup>38</sup>. The authors of these periodicals never tired of explaining how Dutch republican virtue and sobriety were increasingly being undermined by the predominantly French imports of decadence, luxury and effeminacy<sup>39</sup>. Where De Beaufort had primarily appealed to the regent elite, these new spectatorial writings stressed the need for the entire citizenry to return to republican virtue and to do so by, among other things, absorbing the wisdom of the ancients.

#### A REVOLUTION OF REPUBLICAN VIRTUE

Decades of spectatorial discourse on the loss of Dutch republican virtue and on the ominous parallels between the decline of the Dutch Republic and the decline of republican Rome paved the way for the next phase in the Dutch dialogue with the ancients. The cultural criticism voiced in the ubiquitous spectatorial writings prepared the ground for the definitive demise of the conventional classicist legitimization of the established republican order that was to be found in the writings of such theorists as De Beaufort. By the early 1780s, many Dutch citizens had become convinced that republican liberty was on the brink of extinction. They therefore decided to take their political fate into their own hands: the Patriot movement was born. Dutch Patriotism no doubt derived from many different sources. The movement was triggered by the disastrous Fourth Anglo-Dutch War. It was inspired by the example of the American Revolution<sup>40</sup>. Yet it would have been unthinkable without the classics. Indeed, the revolution of the Dutch Patriots was primarily a revolu-

<sup>38</sup> A brief introduction to the genre may be found in *Buijsters P.J. Spectatoriale geschriften*. Utrecht, 1991.

<sup>39</sup> The eighteenth-century Dutch debate on luxury is discussed in *Nijenhuis I.J.A. De weelde als deugd? // Documentatieblad Werkgroep Achttiende Eeuw*. 1992. N 24. P. 45–56.

<sup>40</sup> The influence of the American revolution in the Dutch Republic is discussed in *Schulte Nordholt J.W. The Dutch Republic and American Independence*. Chapel Hill; London, 1982.

tion of classical republican virtue. It rejected the traditional classicist defence of the Dutch republican *ancien régime* in the name of a radical reinterpretation of the meaning of classical republican citizenship. What exactly was it that the Patriots wanted?

It is a question to which there is no simple answer. One of the key elements in Patriot political thought was a radical (re-) interpretation of the ultimately Aristotelian notion that the citizen can only express his virtue by direct and permanent participation in politics.<sup>41</sup> In the work of De Beaufort, this idea had been reduced to the theoretical accessibility of political offices to all deserving and virtuous citizens. For the Patriots, on the contrary, it came to mean that the Dutch citizens should permanently exercise their sovereignty, just as the citizens of the classical republics were deemed to have done. Indeed, citizens without permanent sovereignty were held to be no better than slaves. This revolutionary reinterpretation of the classical political heritage obviously owed much to enlightened theories concerning the inalienable nature of popular sovereignty, but it was also inspired by some of the more radical texts from the British classical republican or Commonwealth tradition. Thus Marchamont Nedham's explosive *The Excellency of a Free State*, originally published in the 1650s, was translated into Dutch in 1783<sup>42</sup>. The new Patriot reading of the classical heritage had far reaching consequences. It meant, first of all, that the citizen should be allowed and was obliged to protect his liberty and independence through the bearing of arms. It also meant that the distance between governors and governed should be minimal. Republican citizen participation was incompatible with a territorially extended state, as the history of the ancient republics amply confirmed. It finally meant that the citizen should never entirely transfer his political power to representatives, for that would mean the end of his existence as a virtuous political being<sup>43</sup>.

Yet to conclude from all this that the Patriots simply wished to revive the politics of the ancient city states in all respects would be a mistake, for they were certainly aware of the substantial differences between the ancient

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<sup>41</sup> A still unsurpassed history of this mode of thought is *Pocock J.G.A. The Machiavellian Moment. Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*. Princeton, 1975.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. *Millar F. Op. cit.* P. 84: «Nedham's work must represent the most emphatic statement of the proposition that both sovereignty and effective power must reside in the people and that the best model for that state of affairs was the Roman Republic». On Nedham see *Worden B. Marchamont Nedham and the Beginnings of English Republicanism, 1649–1656 // Republicanism, Liberty, and Commercial Society 1649–1776 / Ed. by D. Wootton. Stanford, 1994. P. 45–81*. The classic work on the Commonwealth tradition is *Robbins C. The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman. Studies in the Transmission, Development, and Circumstances of English Liberal Thought from the Restoration of Charles II until the War with the Thirteen Colonies. Cambridge (Mass.), 1959*.

<sup>43</sup> Patriot political thought is discussed in *Klein S.R.E. Op. cit.; Sas N.C.F. van. Op. cit. P. 173–274 and Velema W.R.E. Op. cit. P. 115–157*.

and the modern world. Virtually nobody therefore advocated the institutional imitation of Athenian direct democracy or the introduction of the legendary Spartan sobriety. Almost all Patriots agreed that some form of representation was necessary in a modern political system based on the sovereignty of the people. The big challenge for the Patriots, in short, was to find ways in which to combine classical virtuous citizenship with a modern representative political system. How intensely the Patriots wrestled with this problem may be seen in one of the most important texts of the 1780s, Rutger Jan Schimmelpenninck's *De imperio populari caute temperato*, first published in 1784 and translated into Dutch the next year. In this work the young Schimmelpenninck, later to become one of the key figures of the Batavian era, embraced the notion of representative popular government and went to great lengths to demonstrate that, contrary to what Rousseau had maintained, the notion of representation was not incompatible with the principle of permanent popular sovereignty. The *maiestas* remained with the people, whereas the *summum imperium* could be given to representatives<sup>44</sup>. Having made this fundamental point, Schimmelpenninck went on in an entirely classical republican vein. The sovereign citizens he described were, just as their classical predecessors, independent and virtuous bearers of arms<sup>45</sup>. They did choose representatives, but saw to it that they remained permanently responsible to the electorate and could be removed instantly<sup>46</sup>. More generally, they made sure that their free republic was constituted in such a way that 'the simplicity of manners and morals, the love of liberty and equality, and the hatred of domination and slavery are a constant presence in the minds of the citizens'<sup>47</sup>. Schimmelpenninck, in short, wished to establish a classical republic adapted to modern times<sup>48</sup>.

### THE END OF CLASSICAL POLITICS?

The Dutch Patriot revolution of the 1780s ended in defeat and counterrevolution. It was not until 1795, well after the start of the French revolution and with considerable help from the French armies, that the Dutch *ancien régime* finally and definitively fell and that the Batavian republic was founded. The question that needs to be answered in this final section is whether or not the

<sup>44</sup> Schimmelpenninck R.J. *Verhandeling over eene welingerichte Volksregeering*. Uit het Latyn vertaald, door Mr. A.B. Swart. Leiden: F. De Does, 1785. P. 3–8.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* P. 16–34, 84.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* P. 34–37.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* P. 76.

<sup>48</sup> On Schimmelpenninck in general see *Sas N.C.F. van*. *Op. cit.* P. 293–302; on *De imperio populari* in particular see *Klein S.R.E.* *Republikanisme en patriottisme*. Rutger Jan Schimmelpenninck en de klassieke wortels van het republikeinse denken (1784–1785) // *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis*. 1993. Bd. 106. P. 179–207.

fall of the Dutch *ancien régime* in 1795 also meant the end of the prominent role of classical antiquity in Dutch political thought. At the beginning of this article it has been pointed out that this was certainly not yet the case in the revolutionary year 1795 itself. It might however be supposed that the profound political changes of the following years brought about such a strong sense of living in an entirely new and unprecedented era among the Batavian revolutionaries, that the classics lost much of their relevance<sup>49</sup>. For a number of them, this was certainly the case. Rutger Jan Schimmelpenninck for instance, whom we have met as a classically inspired revolutionary during the 1780s, seems to have lost some of his youthful enthusiasm for the politics of antiquity after the establishment of the Batavian republic. On June 21, 1796, he discussed the perils of political faction in a speech for the new National Assembly. In the course of his argument, he observed that he could easily make his point by adducing examples from «the histories of Rome» or from those of «the Greek republics» and that he would certainly have done so, «had not the French Nation, in the course of her recent astonishing revolution, made all previous examples unnecessary or even misplaced»<sup>50</sup>. To many others Batavian revolutionaries, however, the ancient ideal of disinterested political virtue and direct citizen participation in politics lost nothing of its attraction.

That the classics remained immensely popular and important during the early years of the Batavian republic may be seen, among other things, from the wealth of Dutch language publications on antiquity. It was during these years that the most important volumes of Martinus Stuart's *Roman histories* were published and that Barthélemy's lengthy *Voyage du jeune Anacharsis en Grèce* was translated into Dutch<sup>51</sup>. There also appeared new Dutch editions of Plutarch, Sallust and Cicero, all with elaborate political commentaries<sup>52</sup>. The classical republican heroes, moreover, were constantly referred to as examples to be followed. Thus in 1798, the year of the first Dutch constitution, Adriaan Loosjes published a series of portraits of Roman republican heroes. He included Lucius Junius and Marcus Junius Brutus and Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi. They were, so he assured his readers, «excellent models of

<sup>49</sup> For some suggestive comments on this theme see *Fritzsche P.* Stranded in the Present. Modern Time and the Melancholy of History. Cambridge (Mass.); London, 2004.

<sup>50</sup> Dagverhaal der Handelingen van de Nationaale Vergadering representeerende het Volk van Nederland. 1796. Deel 2. P. 195.

<sup>51</sup> For Stuart see note 25. It was also Stuart who translated Barthélemy's work as *Reize van den jongen Anacharsis door Griekenland* (10 vols. Amsterdam, 1794–1801).

<sup>52</sup> *Plutarchus*. De levens van doorluchtige Grieken en Romeinen, onderling vergeleeken, door Plutarchus / Uit het oorspronkelyke Grieksch, geheel opnieuw vertaald, en met zeer veele aantekeningen opgehelderd door Ev. Wassenbergh en H. Bosscha. Amsterdam: J. Allart, 1789–1809. 13 vols.; *Sallustius*. Cajus Crispus Sallustius over de samenzwering van Lucius Sergius Catilina; Benevens vier Redevoeringen van Marcus Tullius Cicero / Over het zelfde onderwerp; uit het Latijn vertaald en met aanmerkingen en ophelderingen vermeerderd door Jan ten Brink. Amsterdam: J. ten Brink, 1798.

true moral greatness in Roman History, worthy of moral imitation by real Republicans»<sup>53</sup>. The members of the National Assembly were already familiar with this sort of message, for the citizen Webbers had told them in the very month they first met that, should they remain standing with republican courage in the «fierce political gales» surrounding them, they would be honored «as the Brutusses of our times» by posterity<sup>54</sup>.

Yet the Batavian debt to the classics went much deeper than an appeal to the familiar republican *exempla virtutis*. Just as their Patriot predecessors had done, the Batavian revolutionaries embraced a classical vision of politics in which the permanent participation in politics of the virtuous and independent citizen was of central importance. That they were fully aware of the classical origins of their revolutionary political thought is evident from, for instance, the pages of *The Republican*, one of the most important early revolutionary periodicals. In providing its readers with an intellectual genealogy of contemporary revolutionary thought, *The Republican* observed that the Greeks had discovered human dignity, the Romans had formulated the eternal principles of politics, and the late eighteenth-century revolutionaries, «mining the veins of antiquity», had perfected this heritage<sup>55</sup>. How deeply embedded the classical ideal of citizen participation in politics remained in Dutch revolutionary discourse after 1795 became particularly evident in the struggles over the adoption of a new constitution. When, in 1797, the first draft of the new constitution threatened to curtail the role of the citizen to little more than periodically casting his vote, a number of prominent revolutionaries decided to draw up a manifesto condemning this in their eyes pernicious development. Should the new constitution be adopted, they warned, «the Batavians will not become *Greeks* or *Romans*, whose disinterested virtue and self-sacrifice for the good of the Fatherland after so many centuries still brightly shines in our eyes»<sup>56</sup>. Clearly then, the classical political heritage kept its relevance for Dutch republicans until the very end of the eighteenth century.

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<sup>53</sup> *Loosjes A.* Romeinsche antiëken van vrijheids en vaderlands-liefde. Haarlem: A. Loosjes, 1798. P. IV–V.

<sup>54</sup> *Dagverhaal der Handelingen van de Nationaale Vergadering representeerende het Volk van Nederland.* 1796. Deel 1. P. 24.

<sup>55</sup> *De Republikein.* 1797. Deel 3. N 175, 521–523. On this periodical see *Vuyk S.* *De republikein van Jan Konijnenburg (februari 1795 – augustus 1797) // Stookschriften. Pers en politiek tussen 1780 en 1800 /* Red. P. van Wissing. Nijmegen, 2008. P. 217–229.

<sup>56</sup> *Beoordeling van het Ontwerp van Constitutie voor het Bataafsche Volk, door de Nationale Vergadering ter goed of afkeuring aan hetzelfde volk voorgedragen, door eenige burgers, zynde repraesentanten van het volk van Nederland.* Leiden: Pieter Hendrik Trap, 1797. P. 9–10.

*Вигер Велема*

**Споры вокруг классического наследия:  
голландский XVIII век и политическая  
мысль античности**

В работе исследуется использование античной традиции в политической мысли Нидерландов XVIII столетия. Поскольку голландцы, в отличие от большинства европейских народов, имели республиканскую форму правления, они не раз обращались к истории республиканского строя в Древней Греции и Древнем Риме, пытаясь извлечь из нее урок, полезный для их собственной страны. Приведя множество примеров присутствия античной традиции в Нидерландах XVIII в., автор показывает, как правящая олигархия, опираясь на классические образцы, позиционировала себя как «олигархия добродетели». Представители реформистского патриотического движения 1780-х годов искали в классической древности аргументы в пользу своего идеала – общества, состоящего из независимых, вооруженных и добродетельных граждан. В заключительной части статьи автор пытается выяснить, сохранили ли жители Нидерландов интерес к республиканским традициям Греции и Рима после падения своего *ancien régime* в 1795 г.