"Having No Other Paintings than Their Shields": The Germanic Origins of Art in the Seventeenth Century
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“Knowing No Other Paintings than Their Shields”: The Germanic Origins of Art in the Seventeenth Century

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Some of the first expressions of the desire to find a common origin for the civilizations of Western Europe resulted from exchanges between the seventeenth-century Netherlands and Britain. The migration of craftsmen and scholars across the North Sea fostered the awareness that the ancient Anglo-Saxon language was closely related to the Dutch and Frisian tongues. What is more, this linguistic discussion inspired a broader antiquarian search for objects and artworks that testified to a shared cultural background. Artists and writers who wanted to reconstruct Germanic antiquity as a counterweight to the Roman past were unable to refer to ruins or monuments comparable to those that testified to the Eternal City’s greatness. They therefore called attention to the ancient language that united the inhabitants of the “the World here in our Northern Climates,” to quote the art theorist William Aglionby (†1705).2 Ultimately, the desire to reconstruct Germanic art was accompanied by the endeavor to develop the Germanic vernaculars into adequate ‘languages of art’.

Focusing on three authors with Dutch roots, working in England, we shall explore how linguistic concerns inspired Teutonic imagery. Our analysis, combining aspects of iconography and style, will extend from full-fledged descriptions of local deities to a theory of art that emphasized simplicity above affectation.

One of the first authors to argue for an integrated approach to Germanic history, art, and language was Richard Verstegan (1548–1640). He also gave the first illustrated account of the Germanic pantheon. One of its readers was

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Rembrandt’s pupil Samuel van Hoogstraten (1627–1678), who connected Verste- 
gan’s ideas to explicit recommendations for artists in the Netherlands. Measured 
in terms of scholarly impact, however, these two authors were eclipsed by the ‘father of 
Germanic studies,’ Franciscus Junius (1591–1677). A well-known fig-
ure to historians of the Germanic languages, Junius’ monumental book on paint-
ing also grants him a place in the history of art. When he exchanged the visual 
arts for etymological research in the 1640s, the scholar expected that a compar-
ison between various languages would reveal that Germanic civilization was the 
purest continuation of classical antiquity. After all, modern Romance culture 
had been too corrupted by the Dark Ages. The “comparison of most ancient dia-
lects” would shed light on those “most noble peoples”: “the triumphant Goths, 
Huns, Vandals and Longobards when the glory of the Roman Empire was in 
decline.”3

Anglo-Dutch exchanges in art and language

In early seventeenth-century London, craftsmen from the Low Countries formed 
the largest immigrant community. The figurative arts were their main contribu-
tion to British society.4 Richard Verstegan’s work demonstrates how this exchange 
gave rise to thinking about common properties and a broader cultural movement 
propagating Germanic origins. He himself probably did the illustrations for his 
book English Antiquities (1605), which contains an inquiry into the common root 
of Dutch and English civilizations. Although he was born in London, Verste-
gan’s activities as a Catholic printmaker brought him to Antwerp where he fre-
quented circles of important Dutch and Flemish artists, such as Otto Vaenius 
(1556–1629), Jan Wierix (1549–c.1618), Ambrosius Francken (1544–1618), and 
Anthony van Dyck (1599–1641).5 So it is not surprising that artists in the Low

3 Junius to Bouchorst, Schaap and Van Beveren, 30 January 1655; translation from 
S. van Romburgh, ‘For my worthy freind Mr Franciscus Junius: An Edition of the Complete 
Correspondence of Francis Junius F.F. (1591–1677) (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2004), 859, 
nr. 189c. Important earlier works addressing Germanic (art) history in a Dutch con-
text are H. van de Waal, Drie eeuwen vaderlandsche geschied-uitbeelding, 1500–1800: een 
iconologische studie, 2 vols. (The Hague, 1952), and K. Dekker, The 
Origins of Old Germanic 

Dutch and Flemish Artists in Britain 1550–1800 (Leids Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek 13) 
(Leiden, 2003), 11–30.

5 Verstegan dedicated his Recreative Beschryvinge (1630) to Van Dyck and he wrote 
epitaphs for Frans Floris and Peter Paul Rubens; see P. Arblaster, Antwerp and the World: 
Richard Verstegan and the International Culture of Catholic Reformation (Leuven, 2004), 
114–15.
Countries grew familiar with the book and it proved more popular there than in England; a first Dutch edition of 1613 incorporated additional images.6

Verstegan’s plea for Germanic culture was biased towards the Netherlands. His main argument was the idea, borrowed from the Antwerp scholar Johannes Becanus (1519–1573), that Dutch was the purest of all Germanic languages, as the direct descendant of ancient ‘Teutonic’. This ancient language was originally spoken in “Highduitsland, Eastland, Scandinavia” and “Thule, otherwise called Island, yt not the rest of the northern Iles beyond it.”7 To the author, English appeared more “swarved from the original Teutonic” than Dutch, as the British are “by the sea sequestred from the main continent where moste it is in use.”8 He also presented modern German as a newer derivation, because the original language first developed in maritime regions and only later more inland and eventually in Scandinavia.9

Verstegan deplored the many loanwords in English and expressed the hope that it would please the British to use their native vocabulary, “in it self beeing sufficient and copious enough, without this daily borrowing from somany as take scorne to borrow any from us.”10 He thus identified a characteristic of English when it comes to the visual arts in particular. In the seventeenth century, English discussions borrowed liberally from Italian terms to judge architecture, while the vocabulary for painting was based on Dutch. Remnants of this influence survive in terms such as ‘landscape’ (from landschap), ‘easel’ (from ezel), and ‘picturesque’ (the equivalent of schilderachtig).

Unsurprisingly, one of the key figures in the development of British art theory was a Dutchman. Junius’ book The Painting of the Ancients (1637–1641), written in England in the service of the Earl of Arundel, appeared in Latin, Dutch, and English; it remained influential up to Shaftesbury, Reynolds, and Turner. Essentially, however, the author’s interests were geared towards the elevation of his mother tongue. As Sophie van Romburgh has recently demonstrated, Junius’ work in translating his own treatise simultaneously into Dutch and English was the trigger for his subsequent interest in Germanic linguistics and, more

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7 Verstegan, Antiquities, 194. The precise relationship between Verstegan and Becanus merits additional research.
8 Verstegan, Antiquities, 194.
9 “The Netherland & Eastland speech draweth neerer to the Old Teutonic then the Hightduitsch”: Verstegan, Antiquities, 196.
10 Verstegan, Antiquities, 206.
specifically, in the emancipation of the Dutch language. As he set out to “bur- 
nish and demarcate” Dutch as an adequate language of art and to “reassemble” 
the “poor remainders of [his] vernacular tongue,” the scholar made explicit that 
he translated his treatise into Dutch for the sake of painters. This should not be 
interpreted as a strategy to popularize his work, but rather as a desire to prove 
that Dutch was equal to the Romance languages in the task of describing the art 
of painting.

Working in British libraries, Junius began to collect manuscripts in various 
ancient Germanic languages that would occupy him during his further career. He also corresponded with scholars in the Netherlands interested in a Germanic ‘Renaissance’, such as Martinus Smetius (1525–c.1578) and Janus Vlitius (1622– 
1666). Junius’ works came to include an edition of an Old High German ver-
sion of the Song of Songs and an Anglo-Saxon dictionary; both texts made refer-
ence to his painting treatise, the seminal work at the outset of his career.

Junius’ artistic and linguistic efforts were motivated by a project of cul-
tural emancipation shared by his Dutch contemporaries. Verstegan’s idea that 
Dutch was the purest Germanic language became increasingly popular. It 
attracted scholars such as as Vlitius who, inspired by Junius’ scholarship, traced 
Dutch back to Scythian, and Abraham Mylius (1563–1637), who saw Dutch as 
direct derivation from Hebrew or Greek. These scholars were native Dutch-
men; when Junius cited “foreigners” who had praised the age and purity of his

12 Introduction to F. Junius, De schilderkonst der oude (Middelburg, 1641), unpagina-
ted; Junius to Vossius, 2 July 1639; Van Romburgh, Franciscus Junius, nr. 129e.
13 “Urgent admodum artefices, et quotquot artes illas delicatas amant”: Van Rom-
burgh, Franciscus Junius, nr. 102c.
14 One of his first acquisitions was the so-called “Caedmon manuscript”; see F. Junius, Caedmonis monachi Paraphrasis poetica [. . ] abhinc annos M.LXX Anglo-saxonice conscripta & nunc primum edita [à Francisco Junio], ed. P.J. Lucas (Amsterdam, 2000).
15 Van Romburgh, Franciscus Junius, nr. 155; Dekker, Old Germanic Studies, 92–104.
16 Bodleian Library, MS. Junius 5, vol. 2, leaf 126, refers to “de Pictura Veterum lib. II, cap. 8, § 12.” A reference to the same passage occurs in F. Junius, Observationes in Willerami Abbatis Francicam paraphrasin cantici canticorum, ed. N. Voorwinden (Amster-
dam, 1992), 68.
17 On these authors cf. M.J. van der Wal, De moedertaal centraal: standaardisatie-
aspecten in de Nederlanden omstreeks 1650 (The Hague, 1995), 43–48; T. van Hal, ’Moedertalen en taalmoeders’: methodologie, epistemologie en ideologie van het taalvergelijks onder-
zoek in de renaissance, met bijzondere aandacht voor de bijdrage van de humanisten uit de Lage Landen (Leuven, 2008); Dekker, Old Germanic Studies; and the website De tuin der talen, URL: http://tuin-der-talen.wik.is [last accessed 1 September 2010].
native language as the most direct descendant of ancient Teutonic, he apparently alluded to Verstegan:

Such a great splendour overflowed the ancient Teutonic language everywhere that foreigners of great name in our century have willingly granted it the primacy because of the extraordinary richness of an idiom spread far and wide, the splendour, the magnificence, and the remarkable pre-eminence of authentic elegance.\(^18\)

In his praise for the geographical reach of ancient Dutch, Verstegan was not unbiased. His grandfather had been a native of Guelders and Richard spoke Dutch, which enabled him to move freely in Flemish and Dutch literary and diplomatic circles. He has even been called “the most prolific vernacular writer in the Habsburg Netherlands” in the period 1617–1630.\(^19\) To evaluate their mutual interest in Anglo-Saxon it is essential to note that Verstegan and Junius, both descendants of refugees (although from different religious sides), repeatedly crossed the North Sea. They apparently observed that many words and elements from Anglo-Saxon are more easily understood by comparison with Dutch than with modern English. Hence the two authors developed their lasting interest in the origins of the Germanic languages. Moreover, they both rubbed shoulders with Netherlandish artists and counted the most esteemed master of their time, Van Dyck, among their contacts; their pride in Teutonic culture may be related to their appreciation of the sophistication and particular characteristics of the figurative arts of the Netherlands.

Both Verstegan’s *English Antiquities* and Junius’ treatise were probably read in artists’ circles in Holland; Samuel van Hoogstraten, for one, quotes repeatedly from both books.\(^20\) Although Van Hoogstraten belonged to a younger generation, he led a comparably itinerant lifestyle that brought him to London during the 1660s.\(^21\) He wrote that for a successful life in the Dutch Republic it was useful to know not only Latin and French, but also English.\(^22\) His treatise on painting, *Introduction to the Academy of Painting* (1678), referred to texts in Latin,

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\(^18\) Junius to Magnus Gabriel de la Gardie, undated; Van Romburgh, *Franciscus Junius*, nr. 211a.


\(^20\) Junius is Van Hoogstraten’s main source; he refers to Verstegan in S. van Hoogstraten, *Inleyding tot de hooge schoole der schilderkonst* (Rotterdam, 1678), 96, 146, 151.

\(^21\) Van Hoogstraten stayed in London from 1662 to 1667.

Italian, French, and English and constituted a major step in the development of Dutch as a language of art. Tellingly, it included a citation in Anglo-Saxon.  

Following Junius’ lead, Van Hoogstraten wished to develop equivalents in the vernacular for the language of international humanism. His book, that had the explicit aim of raising the status of painting as an intellectual activity, referred to Germanic antiquity, to the Saxons and Longobards, to Scandinavian and even Anglo-Saxon civilizations. In the following, we shall examine Junius’ text (1641) in combination with those by Verstegan (1605) and Van Hoogstraten (1678) to explore in more detail how ‘Germanic art’ could serve as a model for modern Dutch painting.

Germanic iconography

As early as 1604, Karel van Mander (1548–1606), the first art theorist writing in Dutch, had shown his awareness of the importance of Germanic art. He referred to the artist Lambert Lombard’s (1505/6–1566) interest in “Frankish” or “Teutonic antiquities.” These ancient works had been made “when Art, in Italy, through uprisings and civil war had declined and was almost destroyed.” The characterization appeared partly inspired by the painter’s name, which identified him as a descendant of the ancient Longobards.

Reports like this did not give rise to a true revival of Teutonic art. When, in the Dutch Republic, scholars such as Smetius and Hugo Grotius (1583–1645) wrote about the indigenous ancestors, their texts referred to the visual arts chiefly in the context of incipient archaeological scholarship; one example is the former’s The Nijmegen Antiquities (1678). As a result of the Dutch Republic’s need for a...
founding myth after its nominal independence from the Habsburg Empire, the Batavians attracted attention in particular, for Tacitus had portrayed them as the bravest among those that fought the Romans. The tribe was first portrayed in print by Antonio Tempesta (1555–1630), in *The War of the Batavians and the Romans* (1612). This book rendered the Batavians as civilized ancients in elegant, Roman-style clothing.²⁸ By contrast, Simon Frisius’ (1580–1629) illustrations of Philippus Cluverius’ (1580–1622) book *Ancient Germany* (1616) presented them as half-naked barbarians.²⁹

In dealing with this myth, Van Hoogstraten’s treatise drew from Tacitus’ *The Origin and Land of the Germans*, praising the Batavians as a martial tribe; it had been translated into Dutch in 1616.³⁰ According to Tacitus’ account, Julius Civilis (or Claudius Civilis according to the Dutch humanists, due to faulty copying of the source text), one of the Batavians’ leaders, had staged a revolt. Van Hoogstraten recalled him fondly as “our Batavian”; his description of Civilis as a bearded warrior matched Tempesta’s depictions.³¹ Van Hoogstraten’s interest in Germanic civilization may shed light on the nickname he adopted upon joining the Dutch painters’ community in Rome: *den Batavier*, the Batavian.³²

To reconstruct or rather ‘reinvent’ Batavian civilization in word and image one apparently needed a great imagination. Cluverius’ success was in this respect a remarkable feat; in the words of one contemporary, “like Athena was born from the head of Zeus, thus [Cluverius], with great effort, appears to have given birth to his fatherland.”³³ A picture of Germanic idolatry is included in Abraham Ortelius’ (1527–1598) book *An Image of the Golden Age or the Life, Manners, Rites, and Religion of the Ancient Germans* (1596). The etching, possibly by Pieter van der Borcht (1545–1608), shows the ancient tribe venerating the sun, the moon, and statues apparently imported by the Romans, representing Mercury and Minerva [Fig. 3.1].

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³¹ Van Hoogstraten, *Inleyding*, 144.
³² This *bentnaam* is mentioned by Dirk van Hoogstraten in one of the liminary poems in Van Hoogstraten, *Inleyding* (no page number). It was probably related to the artist’s hometown, Dordrecht, known as the oldest city in the Netherlands (ancient Dorestad).
³³ Nicolaas Heinsius, *In obitum clarissimi viri Philippipi Cluverii, geographi celeberrimi oratio* (Leiden, 1623).
It was Richard Verstegan who made the most detailed and systematic attempt to reconstruct the artistic world of the ancient Germanic tribes. After outlines the “exorsismes and sundry ceremonies” of pagan priests in Germany and the Netherlands, his book proceeds to discuss image worship in pre-Christian times. Verstegan was generally positive about the religion of his ancestors and, in spite of their primitive forms of worship, described them as virtuous pagans. They allegedly “lived according to the law of nature and reason, wanting nothing but the knowledge of the true God, for they adored Idoles, and unto them offered sacrifices, yea they worshiped planets, woods and trees.” He discussed in detail the appearance, iconography, and function of various deities purportedly venerated by the Teutons, idols that were, in his view, markedly dissimilar to the Roman pantheon. Verstegan also included images, probably engraved by himself, showing seven statues on pedestals in various landscape and interior settings. He wanted to “satisfy the curious reader . . . both in portraiture,

35 Verstegan, Antiquities, 67.
and otherwise.” The artist based three images of Germanic idols loosely on an image by Hans Holbein (c.1497–1543); the iconography of the other four seems inspired by emblem literature, without, however, concretely borrowing from it. The only literary source that Verstegan himself mentioned is Olaus Magnus’ (1490–1557) history of Scandinavia of 1555, which was also one of Junius’ and Van Hoogstraten’s sources.

The idols described by Verstegan were “placed in a Temple and there adored and sacrificed unto.” The first image represents a flaming wheel in front of a hexagonal shape representing one half of a human body: “lyke half a naked man set upon a piller, his face as it were, brightened with gleames of fyre, and holding with both his armes stretched out, a burning wheel before his brest” [Fig. 3.2]. This is the idol of the sun god; the wheel allegedly signifies the course of the sun around the world, the flames referring to rays that light the objects in nature. Verstegan’s next figure is devoted to the moon god, whose statue, placed in the open air, is “very strange and ridiculous, for being made for a woman shee hath a short cote lyke a man: but more strange it is to see her hood,” a “chapron with long eares,” that Verstegan admits he cannot identify [Fig. 3.3]. His third image shows the statue of “the moste ancient and peculiar God of all the Germans.” This is “Tuysco,” depicted as a bearded man clad only in a rag, “according to the moste ancient manner of the Germans clothing” [Fig. 3.4]. From the name of this god the Germans had, he claimed, derived their name ‘Tuytschen’ as well as the name of the second day of the week. Tuysco also appears to personify the Germanic languages: the image shows a train of Germanic people, walking towards the statue from an edifice that represents the Tower of Babel [Fig. 3.5].

The image entitled “the idol Woden” shows a crowned figure, dressed in armor, brandishing a sword and shield [Fig. 3.6]. Prayers were directed to it in times of war, and prisoners would have been sacrificed in front of the image. Verstegan believed that Wodan was held in less esteem than Thor. “[T]here was no puissance comparable to his”: idols of Thor would have been venerated by “all the Teutonic people of the septentrional regions,” including those in Iceland and Greenland. As shown on the image, his statue was placed as if seated on a bed in a large hall, clutching a sceptre and crowned with “twelve bright burnished golden starres,” not identified by Verstegan [Fig. 3.7].

The Germans’ practice of venerating statues is the subject of the next print. Beside the pedestal supporting “the idol Freya” a praying figure kneels [Fig. 3.8].

36 Verstegan, Antiquities, 68–69.
38 Van Romburgh, Franciscus Junius, nr. 189c; Van Hoogstraten, Inleyding, 135, 342.
39 Verstegan, Antiquities, 70.
40 Verstegan, Antiquities, 71.
Figure 3.2: Richard Verstegan, *The Idol of the Sun* in Verstegan, *A Restitution of Decayed Intelligence in Antiquities; Concerning the Most Noble and Renowned [sic] English Nation*, Antwerp 1605, p. 69.
Figure 3.3: *The Idol of the Moon*, p. 70.
Figure 3.4: *The Idol Tivysco*, p. 71.
Figure 3.5: *The Idol Woden*, p. 72.
Figure 3.6: *The Idol Thor*, p. 74.
Figure 3.7: The Idol Freya, p. 76.
Figure 3.8: *The Idol Seater*, p. 78.
According to Verstegan, Freya should be represented as a hermaphrodite; her bow and sword signify “that women as wel as men should in tyme of need be ready to fight.” Finally, the last image shows Verstegan’s most enigmatic deity, called ‘Seater’, apparently a composite figure, created from various elements [Fig. 3.8]:

First on a piller was placed a pearche [perch], on the sharp prickled back whereof stood this Idol. Heee was lean of visage, having long haire and a long beard: and was bare-headed and bare-footed. In his left hand he held up a wheel, and in his right hee caryed a pail of water, wherein were flowers and frutes. His long cote was girded unto him with a towel of white linnen. His standing on the sharp finnes of this fish, was to signify that the Saxons for their serving him, should pas stedfastly and without harme in dangerous and difficil places. By the wheel was betokened the knit unitie and conioyned concord of the Saxons, and their concurring together in the running one cours [sic]. By the girdle which with the wynd streamed from him, was signified the Saxons freedome.  

We see, then, that art and language are complementary elements in Verstegan’s reconstruction of Germanic antiquity. His invention of a vernacular deity named ‘Seater’, to match the name of Saturday (in Dutch zaterdag), illustrates his great need for etymology to resuscitate the art of his forefathers. He deliberately ignored the obvious identification of Saturday with the Roman god Saturn and concocted an iconography far removed from the classical one.

The seven gods associated with the names of the weekdays, in English as well as in Dutch, are the only ones Verstegan depicted in his illustrations. In addition, the text described others who possess similarly remarkable attributes: ‘Ermensewl’ (from the Dutch armenzuil, pillar of the poor), with a staff and balance, a cock on his head, a bear carved on his breast; and ‘Flynt’, “lyke the Image of death,” with a torch in his hand and a lion as headgear. Although Verstegan explained that the veneration of these idols, and in particular the human sacrifices in their honor, were an expression of “grosse paganisme,” he stressed their vernacular character: they stood in no relation to the pantheon of Greek and Roman antiquity. In his view, the perceived similarities between Thor and Jupiter or Freya and Venus were merely the products of the Roman occupiers’ imagination.  

The Dutch edition of Verstegan’s book repeats almost verbatim these passages on the Germanic pantheon, including etymology and images. The context of the passage on idolatry, however, is different altogether, since one of the aims of the Dutch text was to explain the origins of Catholicism in the Low

41 Verstegan, Antiquities, 78–79.
42 Verstegan, Antiquities, 80.
43 In his view, also the Netherlands were inhabited by “the ancient Saxons” (“de oude Sassens in dese Nederlanden”): Verstegan, Antiquiteitien, 47.
Countries. This edition has an image of Saint Willibrord, who brought Christianity to the Netherlands from Friesland, on its title page and contains versions of the Lord’s Prayer in Anglo-Saxon, English, and Dutch, apparently in order to evoke an image of a coherent cultural sphere underlying early Christianity in Northern Europe.

The problematic attitude in the Calvinist Dutch Republic towards the veneration of images may explain Van Hoogstraten’s reluctance to discuss Verstegan’s imagery. He limits himself to commenting on the shoes worn by Verstegan’s figures, with their striking toes, “pointing sharply upwards.”44 By contrast, Van Hoogstraten gave substantial weight to a remark from Tacitus’ *Germania*, that the indigenous tribes refrained from depicting their gods in visible form: 45

The Ancient Teutons have deemed that one should not confine the Heav- enly Deities, because of their majesty, within the walls of Temples, and that one cannot make them in the likeness of a human being. Hence, [the Teutons] venerated forests and trees, whose most hidden qualities, which they could only behold with the awe of their hearts, they called with the names of Gods.46

We find this same argument among contemporaries who praised the ancient Dutch, for example Hugo Grotius, who added that the Batavians’ religion had been purer than Greek and Roman polytheism since they venerated only objects which they could see around them, the moon, the sun, and the earth.47 Interestingly, Tacitus’ remarks on this subject are not cited by Verstegan, whose Catholic background apparently inspired him to approve the veneration of idols.

That Van Hoogstraten dwelt in detail on the issue of idolatry reflects the overarching scope of his book to legitimize the art of his compatriots, that, in his view, is restricted to “the visible world,” preferring to “follow nature” over representing products of the imagination, and discouraging anyone from depicting God. Such a concern with Calvinist sensibilities is also visible in the Dutch edition of Junius’ book, which carefully omitted the various references to depictions of Christ present in the Latin and English versions. In this context, we may refer to Van Hoogstraten’s treatment of Calvin’s *Institutes*, one of the very few instances

45 Tacitus, *Germania* 9.3.
46 “d’Oude Duitschen zijn ook van meyninge geweest, datmen de Hemelsche Gooden, ten aenzien van haere heerlijkheit, in geen Tempelen en tusschen mueren beslui- ten kon, en datmen haer niet kon maeken nae de gelikenisse van eenig menschelijck wee- zen. Zy heyligden derhalve de bosschen en geboomten, en die hoogste verborgentheyt derzelver, die zy alleen met de eerbiedigheyt haerder harten aenschouden, noemden zy met de naemen der Gooden”: Van Hoogstraten, *Inleyding*, 246.
where seventeenth-century authors explicate their views on this theological text. The painter quoted Calvin’s adherence to the Second Commandment:

We think it unlawful to give a visible shape to God, because God himself has forbidden it, and because it cannot be done without tarnishing his glory. . . . And the majesty of God, which is beyond the reach of any eye, must not be dishonored by unbecoming representations. The only things, therefore, which ought to be sculpted or painted are things the eye may comprehend. 48

Germanic history could, then, furnish arguments for diverse and even contrary points of view. Verstegan’s text used the natives’ contacts with the early Christians to explain the roots of Netherlandish Catholicism, while Van Hoogstraten’s *Inleyding* deployed the Germanic attitude to images to give further authority to his Calvinist views on contemporary Dutch art.

**Germanic style**

Verstegan’s god ‘Seater’ is just one example of the fanciful use of language for the reconstruction of Germanic antiquity. The most popular etymological argument used by Dutch art theorists concerns the verb *schilderen* [to paint], that they interpret as developed from the word *schild* [shield]; Van Hoogstraten explained that “one will easily admit that the ancient Batavians have known no other paintings than their shields.” 49 Hence he stated that Teutons and Batavians should be represented wearing shields with painted images, and the Anglo-Saxons with chariots decorated in the same manner. 50 The source for this idea was probably a 1594 *Dutch–Latin Dictionary* by Cornelis Kilianus (c.1529–1607). Its entry for *schild* reads: “a painted shield, or the painting and image of a shield.” Likewise,


the verb *schilderen* is explained as "the construction or painting of a shield."\(^{51}\) Van Mander repeats this etymology and Junius makes special room for it in the Dutch version of his treatise,\(^{52}\) replacing a discussion of Christian imagery with an exploration of the origin of the Dutch verb "*Schilderen* . . . since it is probable that, for a long time, the ancient martial inhabitants of these lands have used Art only to ornament their shields."\(^{53}\) The suggestion seems to have been influential outside the Netherlands as well; even though the etymology was not applicable to the Scandinavian languages, the Swedish humanist Daniel Wallenius (1658–1689), apparently following Junius, argued that the ancient Goths provided their armor with symbols and emblems alluding to their characteristic virtues.\(^{54}\)

The reasoning that derived *schilderen* from *schilden* in fact reflects a fundamental attitude in the Dutch appreciation of their ancestors. Ultimately, the 'Golden Age' of Dutch painting—which, according to Van Hoogstraten, equalled that of ancient Greece\(^{55}\)—reflected the golden age of Germanic history when the Batavians were praised by Tacitus for their martial prowess and their noble simplicity. Verstegan stated that "Seneca doth exceedingly laud them, not letting to say, that here is no nation more coragious then the German";\(^{56}\) Van Hoogstraten praised the weaponry of the Rhinelanders in particular.\(^{57}\) Yet the Germanic tribes allegedly shared not only military values but also cultural ones. In the seventeenth century, those values became a model for judging Dutch art and literature. The seminal study by Hans van de Waal has shown how Dutch scholars reiterated a *topos* of Roman historiography for describing and appropriating foreign civilizations: the simplicity of the barbaric tribes was deemed a pos-

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\(^{53}\) "So magmen oock seer wel staende houden dat ons Nederlandsche woord *Schilderen* oorspronckelick van dese ghewoonte hervoord komt, want het waer schijnelick is dat d’oude strijdbaere inghesetene deser landen dese Konst voor eenen langhen tijd maer alleen tot op-pronckinge haerer schilden gebruyckten; . . . dit woord in’t eerste sijn benaeminghe ende eyghenschap uyt het schild-cieraet phenomen heeft": Junius, *Schilderkonst*, 143.


\(^{56}\) Verstegan, *Antiquities*, 46.

\(^{57}\) Van Hoogstraten, *Inleyding*, 96.
itive value which had been lost by Rome itself. More recently, Ernst Gombrich addressed this issue in a wider context of art criticism when he showed that the alleged simplicity of one’s forefathers is a returning theoretical concept for the figurative arts from Cicero onwards. Interestingly, artistic discourses present simplicity, and a corresponding inability to flatter, as particularly praiseworthy virtues. The preference for Germanic antiquity itself closely follows the ancient authors’ topical preference for the ‘roughness’ and ‘crudity’ of an earlier age. Ultimately, Gombrich’s book made Cicero’s formula famous (from *The Orator*): “How much more brilliant . . . in beauty and variety of coloring are new pictures compared to the old ones. But though they captivate us at first sight the pleasure does not last, while the very roughness and crudity of old paintings maintain their hold on us.”

Writing about the Germanic tribes, Verstegan echoed the various elements of this positive judgment of primitive civilization: ‘uncorrupt nature’, simplicity, and masculinity in contrast to ‘whorish’ or ‘effeminate’ appearance. He recounts that according to Tacitus the Germanic tribes “were without fraud and subtiltie, yea one of Caesars own successors in the Roman Empyre saith plainly that hee had learned by experience, that this people could not flatter, but conversed simply and plainly with all other nations.”

Similarly, the notion of ‘virtuous primitives’ was relevant to various artistic concerns. Most obvious is the rhetorical concept of ‘brevity’, denoting plain and unadorned speech. *Brevitas* was connected, for example, to writing in the vernacular. Art theorists used this notion to legitimize their efforts in writing in Dutch; after all, “lessons are of more benefit . . . when they are presented concisely and clearly in a common language, without affected speech.” According to Verstegan, this also held true for the Christian missionaries: although they had preached in Anglo-Saxon, their speeches were understood by local tribes in the Netherlands. Verstegan and Junius thus deemed the Germanic languages less corrupted by stylistic affectation than modern Romance languages. Verstegan

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60 Cicero, *De oratore*, 3.35.98.
deemed the French and Spanish to speak a “broken and corrupt kind of Latin.”

Junius echoed this sentiment, speaking of “bastard Latin languages” that serve as a stark foil to the purity of the modern Germanic tongues. The virtue of brevity was also applied to art theory, for instance in Van Hoogstraten’s discussion of ‘shorthand’ brushwork, the rough, suggestive strokes that were especially relevant in Rembrandt’s studio practice.

Verstegan dwells at length on the Germans’ virtues, related to their simplicity and unaffected style of speaking: he praises their “honesty of lyf, a rare thing among pagan people”; Caesar had reported that “the youth of Germanie were not given to the lusts of the flesh” – the men refrained from intercourse with women younger than twenty and married only virgins. Verstegan repeats the Roman authors’ preference for the incorruptible masculinity of foreigners that mirrored the alleged decadence of their compatriots. This topos is also expressed in Ortelius’ representation of the Germans, specifying frugality as one of their chief virtues — even though the image also stresses their preference for huge quantities of food [Fig. 3.9].

Verstegan’s topical remarks on primitive virtues are echoed in Junius’ theory, where the appreciation of uncorrupt civilization and of an art which is ‘close to nature’ apparently overlap. For Junius, “a right lover of Art” must “preferre a plaine and honest worke agreeing with Nature before any other phantastically capricious devices.” Colette Nativel has even recently indicated that his moral standards were to a large extent derived from ancient Stoicism. This ideology was revived in the Dutch Republic, appealing to statesmen and philosophers as a doctrine of self-restraint. As an example one could single out a statement in Seneca’s Letters: “our principle is to live according to Nature . . . philosophy calls for frugality, not self-torture: frugality can still be in good taste . . . He is great who uses pottery dishes as if they were silver.”

64 Verstegan, Antiquities, 200.
65 Junius to Johann Clauberg, undated; Van Romburgh, Franciscus Junius, nr. 204d.
67 Verstegan, Antiquities, 49.
68 Junius, Painting of the Ancients, 41.
70 “[P]ropositum nostrum est secundum naturam vivere . . . frugalitatem exigit philosophia, non poenam: potest autem esse non incompta frugalitas . . . magnus ille est qui fictilibus sic utitur quemadmodum argento”: Seneca, Epistolae, 5.4–6.
In Junius’ treatise, masculine appearance and behavior are directly equated with the pictorial values of ‘natural coloring’ and ‘closeness to life’. He quotes Quintilian: “The dignitie belonging to a man must be stout and uncorrupted; it cannot abide an effeminate smoothnesse, nor such a colour as is procured by choice painting; seeing bloud and strength must make it goodly and faire.”

The Dutch text speaks of “healthy” colors. It is worth quoting a longer passage where Junius explains his vision of ideal antiquity, determined by the virtues of virile, martial simplicity.

Those who are taken with an outward shew of things . . . iudge sometimes that there is more beautie in them which are polled, shaved, smoothed, curled, and painted, than incorrupt Nature can give unto them: even as if pulchritude did proceed out of the corruption of manners. . . . [If] any man study to trim bodies with an effeminate kinde of polling and painting, the

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71 Junius, Painting of the Ancients, 284. The reference is to Lucian, Historia quomodo transcribenda, 8.

72 “De manhaftige schijn-staetelickheyd, ghelijckse voornaemelick in de recht-schaepene rustigheyd van een onverseerde kloekheyd bestaet; soo moet se haer meeste cieraet soeken in de ghesonde verwe van een onghekrenckte sterckte, sonder sich met de vertaerde glattigheyd van hoogh-verwijge blanketsels in’t minste te behelpen, seght Quintil[ianus] VIII.3”: Junius, Schilderkonst der oude, 273.
very labour and affectation of such a forced beauty shall make them most ill-favoured and ugly.

Junius continued this simile with a quote from Lucian, declaring that refined dress is not befitting to masculine strength, and concluded that painters should address the subject matter around them in an uncorrupted, simple painting style:

If any man should offer to adorne a lusty and stout wrestler . . . with purple cloaths and other whorish ornaments, disguising likewise and painting his face; would he not seeme to be very ridiculous, for shaming the man after this manner? Even so is it for the most part better to decke his worke in a rug[ged] gowne, than to adorne it with strumpet-like ornaments. . . . [W]e must not alwayes thinke that best which is most hidden; for the best things are ever at hand, inherent in the things themselves, and most easily discerned by their owne light, being the first things our eyes meet with if we winke not.\(^73\)

The topical train of thought attributing virtue to the simple and unaffected explains how Verstegan was able to conclude in regard to the Germanic costumes that “theire incivillitie appeereth to have bin such that it might have given great example of civillitie, to al the rest of the barbarous nations of the world byside.”\(^74\)

It does not seem an impossible train of thought to connect the simplicity in choice of subject, recommended by Junius, to the straightforward representation of everyday objects that determined the international acclaim of Dutch painters—their preference, according to Van Hoogstraten, “to follow the simplicity of nature”.\(^75\) Already in 1602 Grotius, analyzing the characteristics of the Dutch,

\(^73\) This and the preceding passage are from Junius, *Painting of the Ancients*, 254–255. Cf. the Dutch edition: “Indien yeman een van dese kloecke worstelaers die van weghen haere sterckte uyt eenen boom schijnen uytgehouwen te sijn, seght Lucianus, niet alleen met purpere kleederen ende allerley bordeelachtige verciersels bestond t’overladen, maar oock sijn aenghesicht met allerley blanketsels gingh overstrijken; de selvige soude nim-mermeer de schimpachtige hoon-spraeccke en spotwoorden der gantscher wereld mach-tigh sijn t’ontgaen, van sulcken welghemaecckten lustighen quant soo schandelick mis-handelt te hebben. Dus vernemen wy hoe het minigungmael gevoehlicker is, datmen sijn werck met eenen ruuyghen rock bekleede, dan datmen ’t met d’omhangsels van hoerach-tige cieraeten ontschoone. . . . Dies moghen wy niet dencken dat het altijt beter is het ghene sich als noch verborgen houdt: Het beste behoeft niet verde ghesocht te worden; het is dicht by der hand, en met de dinghen selver soo vermenght, datmen het door sijn eyghen licht ghemackelick kan uytvinden, ’t en sy datmen ghesint is het selvighe puer willens en met winckende ooghen voor by te gaen”: Junius, *Schilderkonst der oude*, 278.

\(^74\) Verstegan, *Antiquities*, 50.

harked back to the Batavian virtues of simplicity and purity and contrasted the “artificial” painting of the Italians with the works of his compatriots Maarten van Heemskerck (1498–1574) and Lucas van Leyden (c.1494–1533) who allegedly “followed Nature.”  

The aims formulated in Dutch art theory to imitate nature in a simple and uncorrupted manner, and the authors’ general disregard for products of the imagination, have recently been put into perspective by referring to the Stoic ethics prevalent in seventeenth-century Dutch moral philosophy. 

Junius’ remark that painters should realize that “the best things are ever at hand . . . being the first things our eyes meet with if we winke not” is well applicable to the focus of many artists on genre scenes, low-life figures, and the surface qualities of simple objects. Van Hoogstraten, for one, retains Junius’ preference for ‘nature’ above fantasy. Thus, he not only mentions the soberness in the attire of the Teutonic tribes, but also repeats Junius’ criticism of extravagance, quoting Vitruvius’ statement that “a ship should look like a ship, an image like a human being, or . . . a known or natural creature.”

**Rembrandt’s Batavians**

It is hard to establish whether the Stoic admonishment to “use pottery dishes as if they were silver” was relevant to the habitual use of simple pewter dishes for the Supper celebration in Dutch Protestant churches, including large congregations such as Amsterdam’s Westerkerk. Even more speculative is a connection between the Romans’ reported boasting about their humble origins as farmers and shepherds, that Van Hoogstraten repeats, and the Amsterdam Burgomasters’ pride in their pedigree from primitive but virtuous indigenous tribes. 

An example of this association was the decoration of the capital’s Town Hall, where the monumental painting of *Marcus Curius Dentatus Preferring Cabbage above Gold* by Govaert Flinck (1615–1660) expressed the ideal of Stoic constancy in the face of corruption and decadence. Originally, Flinck’s painting hung alongside scenes from Tacitus’ history of the Batavians, the most renowned of which is

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80 “d’Oude Romeynen, die van Harders en Boeren opquamen, pasten’t in vreede de ploeg te mennen, en van d’Akkers tot oppergezaghebbers verkoren te worden, of met gebrade rapen, na de gewoonte van haere opvoeding, vernoegt te zijn”: Van Hoogstraten, *Inleyding*, 142.
Rembrandt’s *Conspiracy of Claudius Civilis* (1662, now in Stockholm) [Fig. 3.10]. Rembrandt’s library does not mention Junius’ or Verstegan’s books, but Van Hoogstraten may still have developed his first interest in Germanic antiquity during his training in Rembrandt’s studio from 1641 to 1647: Rembrandt probably owned a copy of J.L. Gottfried’s *Historische Chronica* (1630–1635), an illustrated chronicle of world history also including copies after Tempesta’s portrayal of the Batavians.

Soon after its completion, Rembrandt’s *Conspiracy* fell out of favor with the Amsterdam Burgomasters: the painting was removed and eventually cut down. This may have been because of the artist’s wish to depict the vision of ‘incorrupt Nature’ evoked by Verstegan, Junius, and Van Hoogstraten. Not only does his painting demonstrate a stylistic ‘roughness’ of brushwork, it also represents the Batavians in ‘barbarian’ dress instead of the Roman garb that Jan Lievens (1607–1674) and Jacob Jordaens (1593–1678) preferred for their depictions of Batavian history in the Town Hall. This crude dress was, in Verstegan’s words, “the moste ancient manner of the Germans’ clothing.” It hardly seems accidental that Rembrandt’s imagery of Civilis is in keeping with Van Hoogstraten’s reference to the hero’s hirsute appearance, where he quoted directly from Verstegan that the Germans “did not shave their beards, before they killed, captured, or disarmed one of their enemies” as well as with Junius’ description of the ancients’ preference for “a rug[g]ed gowne” above “purple cloaths and other whorish ornaments.”

**Aftermath: Stowe’s pantheon**

Germanic antiquity figures as a remarkable sideline in seventeenth-century art theory that wished to promote a vernacular culture different from the dominant ideals of Southern Europe. By referring to the little-known remnants of this antiquity, painters and scholars could advocate the importance of Dutch art in the wider Germanic context. It is not surprising that this essentially cross-cultural discourse arose in a milieu of immigrant artists and art-lovers. The peripatetic lives of Junius, Verstegan, and Van Hoogstraten engendered a dual interest in art

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81 As quarto-sized publications they could have been among the “15 miscellaneous books” mentioned in the inventory of his bankruptcy of 1656, reprinted in A. Golahny, *Rembrandt’s Reading: The Artist’s Bookshelf of Ancient Poetry and History* (Amsterdam, 2003), 77–78.

82 As argued by Golahny, *Rembrandt’s Reading*, 135–47.

83 The view that the painting was rejected because of “Rembrandt’s rough style and the unpolished conception of the Batavians” is widely held; cf. M. Westermann, *Rembrandt* (London, 2000), 298.

84 G. Schwartz, *Rembrandt’s Universe* (Utrecht, 2006), 182.

85 Van Hoogstraten, *Inleyding*, 146, 144.
Figure 3.10: Rembrandt, *The Conspiracy of Claudius Civilis in the Schaker Forest* (1661–1662), oil on canvas, 196 × 309 cm, Stockholm, Nationalmuseum.
and language. The quality perceived as distinctly ‘Germanic’, linking artistic and linguistic concerns, was simplicity, the preference for an unaffected and ‘rough’ antiquity that was itself based on commonplaces from Roman historiography.

The remarks collected here only give an inkling of what might have been, had linguistic and artistic developments in Northern Europe taken a different course. As the Burgomasters’ rejection of Rembrandt’s rough-gowned Batavians shows, the momentum for a revival of Teutonic civilization was short-lived. The succession of naval wars between England and the Dutch Republic from 1652 onwards soon eliminated Dutch as a potential global language. The art market in the Netherlands, which had bloomed on a scale not previously seen in Europe, collapsed after the French invasion in 1672. And as it happened, the majority of Junius’ works on the origin of the Germanic languages were never published. 86 As for Van Hoogstraten, ‘The Batavian’, it is questionable whether the younger generation read his work at all—only one painter is reported to have owned a copy of his treatise. 87 Subsequently with the theories of his successor, the painter and writer Gérard de Lairesse (1640–1711), French academism and its terminology became the dominant model for Dutch treatises on painting.

For any lasting impact of the theory and practice of Germanic art, we therefore have to look outside the Netherlands. In 1671, a painting supposedly representing Thor, in Uppsala Cathedral, was the subject of scholarly scrutiny by one of Junius’ Swedish adepts, Johannes Schefferus (1621–1679). Noting that the work had been painted in oil, Schefferus concluded that it was of fairly modern making—a fraud, he said. 88 Was this image perhaps based on Verstegan’s example? Several decades afterwards, in Britain, the Antwerp-born sculptor Johannes Rysbrack (1693–1770) made a gallery of monumental statues for the estate of Stowe, honoring seven Germanic gods. The poet Gilbert West identified them in 1732. Calling on the “Gods of our renown’d Fore-Fathers,” he presented the idols as champions of national pride and freedom: “Protectors once of England’s Weal. / Gods, of a Nation, valiant, wise, and free, / Who conquer’d to establish Liberty!” The curious ensemble is little known, partly because the original works were sold and dispersed to other locations in the 1920s; there are modern copies on display in the estate’s fields. 89 The seven marble deities match Verstegan’s engravings in great detail. The accompanying poem suggests even more strongly

86 Junius’ manuscripts, including the material for the Etymologicon linguae Anglicanae, were offered to the Bodleian Library in Oxford immediately after his demise. Here they have remained.
87 Cf. A. Bredius, Künstler-Inventäre: Urkunden zur Geschichte der holländischen Kunst des XVIten, XVIIten und XVIIIten Jahrhunderts (The Hague, 1922), 1: 52.
88 Ellenius, De arte pingendi, 190.
89 The Victoria and Albert Museum holds the statues of the sun god and Thor; the sculptures of Freya and the moon god are in the Buckinghamshire County Museum, Aylesbury. Wodan and Seater are in private collections.
that *English Antiquities* was the inspiration for the sculpture group, identifying Tuysco as the god who “led from Babel’s Tow’rs the German Name”: this seems a description of Verstegan’s image rather than of the statue, which does not show Babel. The poem even includes the etymology of the word ‘Dutch’ [Figs. 3.12–3.14].

Another indication that West read Verstegan’s book is his description of the hermaphroditic qualities of Freya: “Array’d in female Stole and manly Arms / Expressive Image of that Double Soul” [Figs. 3.11–3.13].

The Stowe gallery’s most important iconographic addition to Verstegan’s images, and a testimony to the long-term impact of the early Germanic studies pioneered in the Anglo-Dutch context, is that the statues are placed on short pedestals inscribed with ‘Runic’ characters. What is more, an early instance of Neogothic architecture was also built on Stowe’s grounds a few years after the erection of the gallery. It is known as the Gothic Temple, Saxon Temple, or Temple of Liberty (1741–1744). Purportedly, this building signified the liberties of English law that were all believed to be Germanic in origin. Inscribed over the door is a quotation in French: “I thank the Gods I am not a Roman”!

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Figure 3.11: Johannes Rysbrack, *The Sun God*, Stowe Estate, Buckinghamshire, UK (modern copy).
Figure 3.12: Rysbrand (copy after), *Tuysco/Tyr.*
Figure 3.13: Rysbrack (copy after), Seater.