Geschiedenis als ambacht. Oudheidkunde in de Gouden Eeuw: Arnoldus Buchelius en Petrus Scriverius
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Summary

In the first half of the seventeenth century, historical research into the Dutch Antiquity and Middle Ages flourished. In the provinces of Utrecht and Holland the scholars Arnoldus Buchelius (1565-1641) and Petrus Scriverius (1576-1660) were two of the most distinguished representatives of this florescence of Dutch antiquarianism. Their fame for hunting down ancient myths and fables has been delivered well into the present era. The methodological merits of both antiquarians as well as their images of the past constitute the subject of this book. An examination of the letters, manuscripts and publications of both scholars is the starting-point for considering the contributions of early-modern antiquarian research to the formation of national, regional and local identities in the emergent Dutch Republic.

Scriverius is probably the better known because of the numerous publications he prepared in either Dutch or Latin: Batavia illustrata ('Batavia illustrated', 1609), a collection of early humanist texts on the Batavians and an inventory of archaeological finds from the Roman period; Beschrijvinghe van out Batavien ('Description of old Batavia', 1612), a critically revised edition of Cornelius Aurelius's chronicle from 1517, and Principes Hollandiae, et Westfrisiae ('The Counts of Holland and West-Friesland', 1650), an anthology of fragments from medieval chronicles and humanist histories). Lastly an edition of Het oude Goutsche chronycxken ('The old chronicle from Gouda') was published in 1663. Buchelius is widely known for his chronicle-like diaries, the 'Commentarius rerum quotidianarum' ('Journal of daily occurrences', published partly in 1907 as the Diarium) and the 'Notae quotidianae' ('Daily notes', published partly in 1940). Present-day genealogists and medievalists honour Buchelius in particular for his edition (1643) of the chronicles of Johannes Beka and Wilhelmus Heda, and for his collection of heraldic manuscripts.

These works of both Scriverius and Buchelius speak of a lifelong dedication to the study of Dutch antiquities. Buchelius was prepared to give up his career as lawyer after the death of his only son in 1611 in order to occupy himself as full time antiquarian for the remaining thirty years of his life. Scriverius was wealthy enough to devote time and money to letters and antiquities from the moment he left university. Both men belonged to the prosperous urban elite of the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic and were, by birth and personal competence, destined to follow a public career as either lawyer or governor. The two protagonists of this book, however, preferred to pass the days indoors, in their
library and study, devoting time and attention to handwritten archival documents, annals and chronicles from the Middle Ages and archaeological remains from the time of the Batavians and Romans. By collecting and examining ancient relics, Buchelius and Scrverius aspired to clear time-honoured images of the past from fancies and fabrications and put more reliable accounts in their place. Neither of the two antiquarians got round to write a new history of the Netherlands. Virtually all the antiquarian publications of Scrverius and Buchelius consisted of annotated sources. Instead of presenting a coherent view of the past by means of written narratives, it was the antiquarian’s objective to collect, document and critically comment on as many sources as possible. This objective was in agreement with the principal distinction in humanist history writing, that between historia and antiquitates.

The choice of Buchelius and Scrverius to put the more significant part of their working life in service of the study of Dutch antiquities was not an obvious one. The curriculum of the university concentrated on classical history and antiquities. History writing with a focus on the Dutch past was neither taught nor investigated institutionally. As a consequence most historians who developed an interest in the past of their own country were forced to restrict research and writing to the leisure time permitted by their regular occupations. In this setting the two antiquaries of independent means were the first to turn the historian’s craft into a full time profession. The correspondence of Buchelius and Scrverius demonstrates a steady increase in their reputation as authoritative experts. A growing number of leisure historians turned to Buchelius and Scrverius expecting to profit from their antiquarian knowledge. This in turn gave Buchelius and Scrverius the opportunity to distinguish themselves as scholarly patrons and to give publicity to their insights and viewpoints on history writing.

The contributions of Buchelius and Scrverius to the development of the historian’s craft should be understood as a feature of the antiquarian enterprise which, from the sixteenth century onwards, advocated a type of historical research that was based on primary sources more profoundly than ever before. Scrverius composed an archaeological thesaurus. In addition he and Buchelius delivered significant contributions to the edition of annals and chronicles by emendinging already available text editions and making handwritten texts available in print. The larger part of their attention went to the provision of a commentary on the reliability of these narrative sources.

This book addresses the question as to how the unparalleled knowledge of Buchelius and Scrverius relates to their representation of the past of the emergent Dutch Republic. The examination of their representation is subdivided into three topics: their views on the Batavian past of the Low Countries, Scrverius’s views on the medieval County of Holland and Buchelius’ view on the medieval Diocese of Utrecht.

The sixteenth- and seventeenth-century idealized image of the Batavians as a civilized and independent people is by now known as ‘the Batavian myth’. It has been argued that a historian like Hugo de Groot, in his Liber de Antiquitate Reripublicae Batavicae (‘The Antiquity of the Batavian Republic’, 1610), consciously
falsified the representation of the Batavian Antiquity. Did antiquarians with sufficient mastery over the sources adhere to a more reliable view of the ancient past? Scriverius – who was well informed in matters concerning the Batavian-Roman period – was involved in a new edition of De Groot’s work of in 1630 and even prepared a set of notes that substantiated the broad outline of De Groot’s thesis with antiquarian arguments. Moreover, it appears from his own work that Scriverius fully ascribed to the usual contemporary viewpoints on the Batavians. Taking a partisan pride in the cordial relationship between the Romans and the Batavians, Scriverius did not feel the need to perform independent fieldwork. In comparison, Buchelius depicted the political and military domination of the Romans in the Low Countries, on the basis of a critical reading of classical texts and Roman remains – collected on several archaeological expeditions. Buchelius was less concerned with the Batavian period than with the early Middle Ages. He was interested in the christianization of the Low Countries, arguing that from that period on town and Diocese of Utrecht featured as centre for government and civilization of the Low Countries.

In the field of medieval studies Scriverius delivered a series of remarkably structured text publications. The editions consisted of a string of textual fragments on the successive Counts of Holland, illustrated with portraits of all of them. This structure enabled Scriverius to put various sources for the lives of the Counts side by side, which made comparative study possible. The editorial structure furthermore reveals Scriverius’s high appreciation of the institute of government by Counts. Scriverius thus wished to present the early Counts as the founders of the territory of Holland. Following the example of late-medieval chronicles and portrait series, Scriverius represented the succession of Counts as an uninterrupted chain between the tenth-century Count Dirk I and the sixteenth-century Count Philip II. This accredited the province of Holland with an impressive past.

In his correspondence with fellow antiquarians and in his annotations to the chronicles of Beka and Heda, Buchelius intended to re-evaluate the role of the Bishops of Utrecht in the Middle Ages. He passed criticism on the prevailing historical view which, according to himself, overrated the importance of the County of Holland. He contested the claim that the territory and collective identity of the province of Holland was rooted in Batavian Antiquity and the early Middle Ages. Buchelius was able to retrace the origins of this claim back to the fourteenth-century chronicle of Johannes Beka. Buchelius assumed instead that originally the Emperor had invested the Bishops with sovereignty over the larger part of the Low Countries, including the territory that much later came to be incorporated in the County of Holland. Buchelius held the view that throughout the ages the Counts of Holland as well as neighbouring rulers had acted as usurpers in seizing more and more parts of the Bishop’s realm. Buchelius used several ancient documents to substantiate this assumption.

By marking out their province and hometown on historical grounds, Buchelius and Scriverius hoped to compel respect for their region within the new political context of the Republic of the United Provinces. Scriverius aimed to
demonstrate that the powerful yet contested position of the province of Holland was rooted in the supremacy of Holland in Batavian Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Buchelius wished to see the importance of the Diocese of Utrecht in the Middle Ages acknowledged, now that the political, cultural and economic weight of his province had radically declined since the Reformation and the Dutch Revolt. Both objectives turned their antiquarian studies of the sources into a politically motivated project. In this way, their antiquarianism compared strongly with the didactical political histories of the humanist historians.