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Windvanen : Napoleontische bestuurders in de Nederlandse en Franse restauratie (1813-1820)

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Summary

Weathervanes. Napoleonic officials in the service of the Dutch and French Restoration monarchies (1813-1820)

The European Restoration (1814-1830) is often described in the traditional historiography as a failed attempt to reconstruct the pre-Revolutionary system of the Ancien Régime. In this comparative study the establishment of the Restoration monarchies between 1813 and 1820 in France and the Netherlands, following the collapse of the Napoleonic Empire, is viewed not from the point of view of nobles and kings returning from exile, but rather through the eyes of Napoleonic officials like Cornelis Felix van Maanen (1769-1846) and Etienne-Denis Pasquier (1767-1862). These servants of the old imperial administration were critically referred to in public debate in 1815 as ‘weathervanes’ (*girouettes* in French and *windvanen* in Dutch), for changing their loyalty to suit every new political wind. Through extensive research in French and Dutch libraries and archives, it is demonstrated that the Restoration monarchies of William I and Louis XVIII were, to a large extent, the construction of the former Napoleonic elites. Prosopographical and institutional research is combined with the study of pamphlets, memoirs and political writings.

A comparison between early Restoration France and the Netherlands is not a self-evident line of approach. France was politically and culturally the dominant power in Europe in the age of Revolution. The Netherlands was politically and economically in decline in the eighteenth century and it had lost its seventeenth-century status as a great power. Furthermore, France had known a long tradition of monarchical state centralisation, whereas the Dutch political system under the Ancien Régime Republic was characterised by particularism and federalism. In Chapter 11, ‘Transition’, however, it is argued that many parallels between the two countries in the years 1813-1820 can be discerned. Both countries had experienced a revolution in the preceding years. Although the Batavian Revolution was less radical than its French counterpart, it made a formidable impression on contemporaries. The collapse of the Napoleonic Empire gave rise to a power vacuum in both countries. This ‘vacance de pouvoir’ was quickly filled by two strong-willed men, Gijsbert Karel van Hogendorp in the Netherlands and Charles-Mau-

rice de Talleyrand in France, who acted mainly on their own initiative. In France, the provisional government was dominated by the Napoleonic elite aiming to safeguard their power and possessions under the new order. In the Netherlands, the provisional government originally consisted of pre-Revolutionary regents. Only when it became clear that ancien regime rulers were no longer willing or able to govern, did the political influence of the Dutch Napoleonic administrative elites grow. They were able to dominate the committee that drew up the constitution for the new Kingdom of the Netherlands, and shape it into a centralist mould in the Napoleonic tradition. After the return of the pre-Revolutionary rulers Louis xviii and William I, the aristocratic phase of the transition dominated by Van Hogendorp and Talleyrand ended, and the Restoration acquired a more monarchical character.

Chapter III, 'Napoleon's bed', examines the extent to which Louis xviii and William I adopted the Napoleonic administrative legacy in the construction of their new regimes. On the basis of an in-depth comparative study of the centrally placed institutions of the French and Dutch Council of State and the office of the Secretary of State (the *Secrétairerie d'Etat* and the *Staatssecretarie*), it is argued that Louis xviii did not blindly copy the Napoleonic institutions, as is implied in Joseph Fouché's well known and oft-repeated statement that the French restoration kings 'slept in the bed of Napoleon'. William I did not create his institutions out of nothing, as is stated in the traditional, nationally orientated Dutch historiography, but based his new state to a large extent on the Napoleonic administrative legacy. As the political system under the Restoration was more determined by persons than by formal structures, attention is turned to the people who ran the institutions. The political background of the Restoration elite is examined through a prosopographical analysis of the Dutch and French councillors of state and ministers. On the basis of this research, it is concluded that both monarchies can be described as 'kingdoms of turncoats'. In the Netherlands, for example, two thirds of the councillors of state had served under the rule of King Louis Napoleon (1806-1810), and half under the imperial rule (1810-1813). In France, ten of the eighteen presidents of the sections of the Council of State had also served in Napoleon's Council. In France, however, the percentage of the administrators with a Napoleonic background fluctuated more as the result of the political changes in that country.

Chapter IV, 'The politics of forgetting', focuses on the legitimacy of the administrative continuity between the Napoleonic Empire and the Restoration monarchies. A noticeable difference between the French and the Dutch policy of forgetting past political behaviour is that the French *oubli* was written into the Constitution (the *Charte*), whereas the Dutch policy was not formalised and remained more implicit. In the Netherlands, a black

Napoleonic legend was constructed in public opinion, building on an older tradition of the so-called French and Spanish tyrannies. As a result of this creation, the Napoleonic era could be situated outside Dutch national history. The French officials were blamed for the perceived misdeeds of the preceding Annexation regime. The large-scale participation of Dutch nationals in the Napoleonic bureaucracy was either ignored or glossed over. In France, the creation of a black Napoleonic legend by Chateaubriand and other reactionary writers increased the internal polarisation. As a result of the unexpected return of Napoleon during the 'Hundred Days', the French policy of *oubli* was increasingly criticised by ultra-royalists. From the summer of 1815 onwards, a moderate policy of reconciliation and forgetting, defended by Louis XVIII and ministers like Etienne-Denis Pasquier, competed with the ultra-royalist proponents of a repressive stance towards the revolutionary and Napoleonic past. In the post-Napoleonic Netherlands, no systematic purges took place, but several important Napoleonic officials did not return to office after the regime change of 1813. Contrary to the French case, the Hundred Days and the victory at Waterloo facilitated unity and reconciliation in the United Kingdom of the Netherlands.

In his book *La République des Girouettes* (2005), the French historian Pierre Serna described the formation of a political discourse of the 'weathervane' in France during the Revolution, and especially during the transition from Empire to Restoration monarchy. It had long been generally agreed amongst Dutch historians that a similar discourse did not exist in the Netherlands. According to traditional historiography, the recent past was 'forgiven and forgotten' after 1813. In Chapter v, 'The invention of the weathervane', it is argued that this interpretation is no longer valid. Alongside those publications that supported William I's 'policy of forgetting', in the post-Napoleonic Dutch debate pamphlets were also published that were highly critical of the official *oubli* and demanded retribution for past political behaviour. In mainly anonymous pamphlets, the former Dutch servants of Napoleon were called such names as weathervanes, chameleons, turncoats and even 'Dutch Judas'. The fact that many former Napoleonic officials felt forced to publish an apology for their deeds under the previous regime is an indication that the Napoleonic past was not simply forgiven and forgotten after 1813.

In studies of the Napoleonic legacy in Restoration Europe, little attention is generally paid to the rituals of transition. In Chapter vi, 'Rites of passage', it is demonstrated that the rites of transition undergone by former Napoleonic officials consisted of three phases. The letter of adhesion was the first stage of the ritual. The adhesion was a unilateral act by the official at a moment when the new regime was not yet firmly established and legitimate authority was contested. The timing and wording of this letter of adhesion was crucial for its writer's chances of survival. In these letters a new past and

identity was created by officials to match the political culture of the new Restoration regime: the historical ties with the old dynasties were suddenly remembered, the suffering during the revolution was emphasised and the collaboration with Napoleon was justified by financial dire straits. The letters of adhesion to William I were usually less ideological and political than those to Louis XVIII. The taking of the oath of loyalty to the new regime was the next element in the rites of passage of 1814-1815. In the oath ceremony, a new relationship was ritually cemented between the official and the new head of state. The final phase of the administrative ritual of transition in both countries was the distribution of pensions, noble titles and memberships of orders of knighthood in an attempt to bind the officials to the new regime.

Chapter VII, 'Servants of the law', consists of an anatomy or microanalysis of the two key figures in this study: Etienne-Denis Pasquier and Cornelis van Maanen. Through the in-depth examination of these lesser known but influential figures a general insight into the phenomenon of the post-Napoleonic 'turncoat' is acquired. Van Maanen was President of the Imperial Court in The Hague during Napoleonic rule and, after the regime change, Minister of Justice until 1842. He survived by actively continuing the exercise of these duties during the transition, remaining in contact with both his imperial masters in Paris and the leaders of the Orangist insurrection of November 1813. Pasquier, Prefect of Police and Councillor of State before 1814, and Minister of Justice, Interior and Foreign Affairs under the early Restoration regime, changed political allegiances at a timely moment. He extensively justified his actions during March and April 1814 in his memoirs, demonstrating that he acted as a 'man of honour'. Van Maanen and Pasquier introduced the Napoleonic 'governmentality' in the administration of the Dutch and French Restoration monarchy. That governmentality can be described on the one hand as a firm commitment to the preservation of order, by repressive means if need be, and on the other as a belief in the rule of law. Repression had to be based on orderly juridical principles, according to both men. The return of the law in their eyes formed the most important legitimation for the establishment of royal authority after the revolutionary years. Both men defended themselves against accusations that their past behaviour was unpatriotic, and that they had turned their coat to suit every political wind, with the argument that they had first and foremost defended the interests of their country. 'Does real patriotism not demand from us that we, despite all personal hazards, should support that side that is able to restore the health and stability of the state?', Pasquier asked himself rhetorically in his memoirs.

In Chapter VIII, 'The absent statue', the modified interpretation of the early French and Dutch Restoration, as a result of the comparative study of

the two regimes from the point of view of the Napoleonic official is summed up. The construction of the discourse of the *girouette* in public debate in 1813-1815 in both countries is understood within the framework of a rise of the modern autonomous public administration at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In addition, the prevailing theme of 'weathervane' in 1813-1815 was a reflection of a more timeless 'mechanism of transitional politics', as studied by the Dutch historian and political scientist Ido de Haan. When the political system collapses, as happened after the fall of the Napoleonic Empire, the civil service is often the only political force left to represent the interests of the population. The study ends with a parallel between 1813-15 and 1945.