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The Concept of the Citizen in the Early-Modern  
Netherlands, 1400 – 1700.

Karin Tilmans

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**EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE**  
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## **Abstract**

Impressed and inspired by the results of German, but increasingly also of international research in the field of conceptual history, a group of Dutch scholars in the 1990s decided to initiate a research project in Dutch conceptual history. In this initiative they were much aided by the award of a research group at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIAS) during the academic year 1994-1995 and which resulted in the pilot study 'History of Concepts; Comparative Perspective's edited by Iain Hampsher-Monk, Karin Tilmans and Frank van Vree in 1998. The Dutch project, which now is part of the research program of the Huizinga Institute, the Netherlands Graduate school for Cultural History, as it has developed since then is, certainly in comparison to the existing German projects, relatively modest in scale. The aim of this article is to explore the late-medieval and early-modern development of the concept of citizenship in the Netherlands in a comparative perspective. This also means that the paper seeks to transcend the hitherto dominant national framework for studying the history of concepts. There are two main ways to attempt this, both of which are explored in the paper. The first and most obvious one is systematically to compare conceptual histories, that is, to compare the history of the key concept of citizenship in different European countries over a longer period of time in the hope of illuminating the parallels and differences in national conceptual development. To compare the history of the Dutch concept of citizenship with that of the same concept in Germany, England or France, for example, is to derive important insights into both national peculiarities and shared patterns of development. But although such cross-national comparisons may be crucial, they cannot capture the entire story of the international dimensions that are involved in conceptual development, as part of a normative discourse on citizenship. In order to bring this latter aspect out in all its richness and complexity, it is necessary to go beyond the comparison of various national patterns of conceptual development, and to attempt to study also the processes of international interaction and diffusion over time.

## **Keywords**

Citizen(ship), history of concepts, patriotism, Batavian myth, Begriffsgeschichte, Respublica, Burger.



*The Concept of the Citizen in the Early-Modern Netherlands, 1400-1700*

KARIN TILMANS

**Introduction**

Welcome to San Domenico di Fiesole and the EUI, and in particular to Villa la Fonte. Compared to other universities on Italian soil, the EUI looks back on a very recent foundation in 1976. But unlike other modern institutions, its main buildings are venerable and time-honoured as the rest of Florence, and the concept of citizenship is at its core. Allegedly, the Badia Fiesolana served for some of the meetings of the Florentine neo-Platonists around Marsilio Ficino, and a statue of Plato watches over the Badia's Upper Loggia. The Villa Schifanoia, seat of the EUI's History Department, is said to have been the place in which Boccaccio laid the scene for the *Decamerone*. Recently a new gem has been added to the EUI's reputedly famous buildings: the Villa la Fonte, now housing the world's largest postdoctoral training programme, was in the 1400s the proud possession and summer dwelling of the Bruni family, as appears in the cadastral archives, and one of the most famous Florentine citizens, the humanist, orator and Chancellor of the Florentine Republic, Leonardo Bruni (1369-1444) lived here. His grandson sold it for a thousand 'fiorini' to Francesco di Nerone in 1460, who, after falling out with the Medici, saw his house and grounds being confiscated by the same Medici. As with so many Tuscan villa's, this one was also later acquired by wealthy Americans, the Smyths, owners of the Vermont railway, who lived here until after World War II. Twice a day the local electrician, still alive today, brought blocks of ice here on hot days like this. For him this was the epitome of bourgeois wealth. Mark Twain was a guest of the Smyths and read from his work in the garden theatre.

In this historical and beautiful setting, it feels slightly odd to move the gaze up north of the Alps in an attempt to get a northern focussed comparative perspective on the concept of citizenship, starting with an overview of the results found in the Dutch project, published six years ago. After all, this comparative workshop on the "*Burger*" was originally planned

for Göttingen, in the former Max Planck Institut für Geschichte, where at least in the language there seems to be a greater familiarity between “*der Bürger*” and “*de burger*”. But fate decided otherwise and it is our good fortune to be in the Tuscan hills for our concluding workshop of the project “Dutch Conceptual History in Comparative Perspective” - this means that you have turned up in larger numbers than you would have in Göttingen.

As Richard Bellamy argues in his forthcoming *Citizenship* (Bellamy 2008), theories of citizenship fall into two types: normative theories that attempt to set out what the rights and duties of a citizen ideally ought to be, and empirical theories that seek to describe and explain those rights and duties that citizens actually possess. In different but related ways, both types of theory appeal to conceptual history. Normative theories look to history to explore the ideal of the good citizen and normative conceptions of citizenship vary over time. Past accounts of citizenship have inevitably shaped how we think about what it is to be a citizen. They provide a sort of scrap book of ideas about the attributes and advantages of citizenship: who is a citizen, the kind of contribution the state and other citizens can expect of him or her and under which circumstances, and what he or she can expect of them and when. Accordingly, contemporary normative theories of citizenship tend to elaborate upon and test themselves against older views. They point out their logical inconsistencies, drop certain elements on the grounds of their outdatedness or undesirability, and embellish or add others as more appropriate to present conditions in order to come up with what they believe is the best possible account of citizenship today. For example, military service was an integral part of older views of citizenship, but has gradually been dropped in most recent accounts. But some of the reasons that made a willingness to die for one’s country an important part of past theories of the good citizen, such as patriotism and a strong identification with one’s co-nationals, figure as desirable qualities of citizenship in many early-modern accounts, as we shall see.

By contrast, empirical theories explore the social, economic and political processes that have fashioned the concept of citizenship in different times and places, and the ways this status has been granted to different groups of people. They also explore the changing empirical reality of citizenship – citizenship as it really was – and hence give an awareness of conceptual change over time, or at least a change in the real-world meanings attached to the concept of citizenship. These theories seek to understand how and why citizenship arose in given circumstances and took the forms it did. However, it would be wrong to regard these accounts as purely explanatory. Implicitly or explicitly, they are invariably motivated by a particular normative ideal and focus on identifying the ways certain normative possibilities were foreclosed or opened up. Indeed, normative theories themselves play an independent role within any explanatory theory of citizenship by legitimising and shaping the demands and actions of the various social and political actors who make citizenship (Bellamy 2008). Doing the comparative conceptual history we are doing today, we are actually following both theoretical paths, as I hope to show. In the following sections of this paper I will first look at the evolution of the normative conception of citizenship during the early-modern period in the Netherlands, roughly from 1400 to 1700, and then look at the evidence about the changing empirical reality. In the conclusion I will try to connect both elements and see how one type of discussion is connected to the other.

Before coming to that, however, let me refer to the work of Reinhart Koselleck, Ulrike Spree and Willibald Steinmetz, since, when dealing with the concept of citizenship, comparatively and while at the same time trying to get a better perspective of its development in the Netherlands, we seem to be at an advantage thanks to their work and observations in their collective article ‘Drei bürgerliche Welten. Zur Vergleichenden Semantik der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft in Deutschland, England und Frankreich’. (Puhle 1991) As they have shown us in this article dealing with France, Germany and England, there seems to be a strong continuity in the development of the concept of citizenship when referring to civil society/*société civile/societas civilis*, going back in part to Cicero and Aristotle. Civil society is equally traditional and modern. (Cf Kocka 2007, 85-86) Also the legal meaning of citizenship, as the legal class between nobility and the *populus*, the people, goes back to Aristotle. The normative continuity does not exclude changes in the concept’s building, as it were, which were defined very specifically and politically.

Three moments or shifts in history are apparently crucial in this conceptual development, according to Koselleck *et al.*:

1. from the 1<sup>st</sup> century onwards Roman citizenship was gradually extended, till in 212, to all free citizens of the *Imperium Romanum* - this implied double citizenship of the home community as well as of the political federation – and it recurs after that time and time again.
2. then Augustine introduced his two *civitates*, the *civitas terrena* and the *civitas Dei*, opening up the possibility of dual citizenship in a vertical sense, being a citizen of your community here and later in heaven. The last one entailed of course every Christian human being, regardless of sex, age, race, social or political status. This concept fed into the Erasmian ideal of the ‘*civis Christianus*’, and the German concept of ‘Bildungsbürger’ also came out of this same spiritual tradition.
3. then Koselleck notes an important political and legal shift in the early-modern period from the *cives* or *Bürger* as a social class with property, and as such having *dominium* and *territorium*, to gradually, even before the French Revolution, citizens becoming more and more subjects of a king and state. In other words, the *societas civilis sine imperio* emerged.

With the French Revolution all personal *dominium* and estates lost legal ground in favour of the sovereignty of the state, represented by ruler and parliament. Aristocracy kept rights in the house of Lords, and had social prestige. In terms of economic citizenship, there is also here a continuity in thought from the antique “*koininia politike*”, the autonomous civil community; the same concept applies to the Roman Republic, and later in the French revolution and with the German idealists, and Scottish moral philosophers. Whatever we have as a common European theory tradition with the early-modern period the *societas civilis* becomes different within the different national traditions and languages. Therefore the article carries the title ‘Drei bürgerliche Welten’. With some social differentiation between the three countries, England (*middle classes*), Germany (*Bürgertum*) and France (*bourgeoisie*) they give the general framework for nineteenth-century civil society as a transitional society whose estates’s past and democratic future would have put it under constant changing pressure. Let’s try and see if the Dutch concept of “*Burger*” allows for

“eine vierte Bürgerliche Welt”. I shall start this comparative exploration with an overview of the Dutch concept of the citizen and citizenship before 1700 as found in our collective volume, focussing on both the normative and real world conceptions. At the end I shall try and come back to our comparative aim.

### **The long medieval legacy of the ‘Poorter’**

The concept of citizenship in the Netherlands was, from its first occurrence, closely connected to the city-space, and it remained locally defined until 1795. The very idea of citizenship transcending a single city was inconceivable during the Middle Ages and Early Modern period, and to stay in Koselleckian terms, lay beyond the horizon of Dutch conceptual thought. The term ‘burgher’ and the Dutch synonym *poorter*, which was more widely used into the fifteenth century, were the equivalent of the Latin concept *civis*. A burgher was a member of the *civitas*, the established political community. This community, however, was not circumscribed by the territory of the sovereign. Even the oldest sources from the Netherlands, both those in Latin and those in the local vernacular, associate burghers with cities. Burghers were regarded first of all as members of the municipal community. This membership was not yet legally defined, let alone established in an administrative context. It did, however, carry a political-legal claim to a certain measure of sovereignty, meaning property and *dominium*. The status and legitimacy of the cities and its burghers were no cause for philosophical contemplation at the time. Any understanding of the ideas about burghers and cities requires a digressive approach. As such the design of the city seals reveals how such cities viewed themselves and wished to be perceived. This idea has a long tradition and goes back to the Etruscan ideal representation of a city, having three gates, three streets and three temples. The early-medieval cities often featured a fortification on their seal: a gate, a citadel and a surrounding wall. The image did not necessarily depict an existing reinforcement, and many of the cities featuring them did not even have fortifications at all. Fortifications were not, especially not primarily, intended to represent reality but symbolized awareness of an individual identity. Cities chose the symbol of a gate or a citadel to indicate their claim to autonomy despite legal subordination to the sovereign. The interests of the sovereign did not prevail, as the city had concerns of its own. The seal symbolized a legitimacy of the *civitas* outside the feudal order in a Weberian sense of legitimizing ‘non-legitimate rule’. (Hildermeier 2007, 23)

This metaphor, in which an enclosed fortification symbolized the claim to autonomy, obviously reflected a very established practice. In addition to serving a strategic objective, an impressive citadel conveyed the owner’s sense of independence. And when the members of the emerging elite in the initially homogeneous cities claimed control, they built city castles as spatial embodiments of their special status. With time and demographic expansion we see social differentiation within the group of city ‘poorters’ or citizens. Two different city groups became increasingly pronounced: on the one hand an elite that usually owned the land in the old city centre, traded across vast distances and ran the city industry; and on the other hand the manual craftsmen. This made for a semantic differentiation in the *poorter* concept, which henceforth not only denoted the city population in general but specified the elite as well. Around 1300, when the guildsmen became more powerful in cities in the Southern Netherlands, the two groups rivalled for recognition as the purest personifications of citizenship. This formation of identity thrived when both groups formed

supra-municipal alliances against the ruler on the one hand and against economic intruders on the other hand, which in turn gave rise to socially differentiated national awareness. (Arnade 1996)

These claims to essential citizenship, were determined by the contribution to the well-being of the community, the *bien publique*, or the *res publica*. What was deemed more important, however: the initiatives and investments by the upper crust or the skillfulness and diligence of the manual craftsmen? The association of the *poorter* concept with the notion of the interest of the city as a whole was probably not new but did become explicit in the course of the fourteenth century. This change was of major conceptual-historical significance. First, it added a moral connotation to the political-historical one of the burgher concept. Citizenship – or the status of *burgher* – entailed obligations in addition to rights. Second, this connotation legitimised the *burgher* concept with the highly respected writings of the classical republican *burgher* ideals from Antiquity. This rediscovered tradition would long dominate ideas about burghers and citizenship and was obviously especially appealing to the representatives of the urban patriciate: the classical ideal was designed for the ruling elite. On the other hand, manual craftsmen rightly argued that their thrift, careful management and moderation were more illustrative of the public interest than royal and aristocratic squandering. These associations were also to become embedded in the burgher concept.

The link with the classical tradition thus reflected an economically oriented perspective of the public interest that hardly figured in the classical burgher ideal. This is not so surprising: unlike the Roman aristocracy, the Medieval citizens who resolved their legitimacy quandaries by invoking the classical tradition subsisted on the economically-based networks of the trading and industrial cities. This economy required a measure of flexibility in the stipulations for admission to citizenship. Sometimes promoting arrivals from outside was desirable, while at other times the general interest demanded their exclusion. Therefore the requirements for citizenship were rarely formulated in ironclad legal terms. The tendency to ascribe citizenship to heritage, however, illustrates that becoming a citizen meant assuming obligations.

The individual legitimacy that city life demanded thus gave rise to a specific bourgeois ideology. Literature, especially following the invention of the printing press around the middle of the fifteenth century, did much to widen the scope of this ideology. First, we can observe a shift in vernacular terminology. In the literature, like in non-literary texts, the terms *poorter* and *burger* were long used interchangeably, although *poorter* prevailed at first. In the fifteenth century, the term *burger* became far more widely used in literary contexts and gained the upper hand in the sixteenth century. At the time, the conventional term was in fact *borger* rather than *burger*. This change can be ascribed to the general impression that residents of the city were *merchants*, that is people who *borgden*, meaning extended credit. Likewise, the term *poorter* might have dominated as long as living within the city gates was regarded as the distinguishing characteristic of burghers. Admittedly, burghers in late medieval literature were invariably merchants; guildsmen, though not entirely absent, were not very much depicted as burghers.

The message conveyed in the vernacular literary burgher texts is therefore perfectly compatible with the new ideology that can be identified for the upper social groups. On the

one hand, in the majority of cases, the literature continuously warned about the corrupting power of money and property. The awareness that citizenship entailed an obligation to serve the public interest was all too easily suppressed whenever an opportunity arose to serve personal interest, and this danger increased where merchants adopted royal airs. This moral admonition was historically legitimised with the statement that all large cities in antiquity did succumb to avarice and opulence. Other texts presented burghers in a more favourable light. Merchants were praised for their rational conduct, emotional restraint and pragmatism. In this respect, they even served as role models – in the literature! – for aristocratic circles. Up to this point, the depiction of the burghers in the literature was similar to that in non-fictional texts. In addition, however, another type of literary city resident can be identified. These shrewd adventurers, often of humble origins, baited society by claiming a rigid individual autonomy. They applied the virtues of planning, economy and undaunted entrepreneurial spirit solely to serve their personal interest. Unlike the reprehensible merchants, however, these burghers were merely struggling to survive in a cruel world. These rogue stories were justified within the contemporary moral standards as warnings. The style in which these pamphlets were written and their popularity, however, suggest that they were also welcomed as a challenge to the established burgher ideals. While adventurers did not necessarily reside in the city, cities did offer the variegated, dynamic surroundings for their kind to thrive. In this respect, immoral and rogue stories are as relevant as the moralizing texts about merchants to the need of the expanding cities for adapted ideological standards.

### **The humanist ideal: from *Poorter* to *Civis Batavus***

Up to the second half of the fifteenth century, the history of the burgher concept can be inferred only from its use in practice; no definitions of or observations about citizenship circulated in the Netherlands yet. With the Renaissance in the Italian city states, political philosophy started to thrive and led to an ongoing interest in the role of burghers in society. These observations derived great inspiration from the republican civic ideals of the classical Roman writers (Bradshaw 1991). This made for a strong moral component in the burgher concept: the *civis* participated in the government of the city, and the *res publica* (the public interest) took precedence over personal interest. The *civis* was receptive to the needs of the community and prevented the potentates from abusing their power; finally, he led a life of virtue and was a role model to the surrounding society. This ideal presumed a social independence, both ideally and materially. The concept of the Roman citizen was therefore by definition an aristocratic one.

Classical views took root in the Netherlands as well. As a result, the concept of *poorter* or burgher had already acquired comparable connotations prior to theorization here. However, a well-formulated, transparent conception of such citizenship was not forthcoming until the final decades of the fifteenth century, when civic humanism gained ground in the Netherlands. These early political thinkers, about whom – except for Erasmus – very little research has been conducted, were explored in our volume. They expressed their ideas in learned, humanist treatises, often guidelines for rulers and governors and especially in chronicles. All these texts are written in Latin; and with the exception of Simon Stevin's treatise, no philosophical discourses about burghers were yet

written in the vernacular. Nor had the Ciceronian burgher surfaced in the vernacular literature discussed earlier.

The first text where we find observations about citizenship reflecting classical views is the *Dialogus de Solitudine*, a dialogue on loneliness by the humanist Jacobus Canter of Groningen from 1491. The text was not an appeal for solitude in the end: in fact, Canter defended civilized city life. He was particularly interested in burghers who ran their city judiciously, educated as they were in the *studia humanitatis*, the pedagogical humanist curriculum inspired by the values of Antiquity. Canter does not appear to have been very influential and was definitely less so than Erasmus, whose impressive stature dwarfed all other humanists soon afterwards. Moreover, Erasmus's observations about burghers were directed more toward the wise ruler, who felt privileged to rule over free subjects with their consent – he described the mythical Batavian king Baeto as such a ruler – rather than toward the burghers themselves.

From the outset, however, the Batavian myth starting with Erasmus' *Auris Batava* was a potent factor in building a new and at the same time broader sense of civic identification with Holland as a political, moral and cultural entity. (Tracy 2008) We are following here Maurizio Viroli's argument, to be found in the volume *Demands of Citizenship*, that early-modern patriotism - the love of one's *patria* - was understood entirely in political terms, with no ethnic undertone, and as such was capable of generating huge commitment on the part of the citizens to whom it appealed. (McKinnon/Hampsher-Monk 2000, 7-8, 267 ff.) Reading Tacitus today, however, it is difficult to imagine the vast importance his short mention of the mysterious Batavians was going to win in subsequent Dutch political thought (*Germania* 29; *Historiae* 4.12 and *Annales* 2.6) Mysterious indeed, for contemporary archeology agrees on the fact that nothing specific about this tribe can be found and that therefore their original location remains a riddle. Rhetorical humanism and narrative fiction, as it were, went hand in hand to build a civic myth in the sixteenth century. But the degree of truth is not of primary importance here. Rather what can be exemplary for community thinking and civic acting is of the greatest interest. Erasmus was the first Dutchman to publish about it. In the very final proverb of his *Adagia* published by Aldus Manutius in 1508, Erasmus wrote about *Auris Batava*, the Batavian ear. This expression was used by Martial in his *Epigrammata* as a synonym for lack of taste. In his commentary Erasmus cited Tacitus's *Historiae* on how the Batavians, a brave German tribe of the *Chatti*, had been driven from their original home to settle in the Low Countries, where their exceptional military virtues made them useful allies to the Roman conquerors. Erasmus stressed that the 'very noble island of the Batavians' mentioned by Tacitus was in fact Holland, his birthplace. In a *laus patriae* similar to Virgil's *Georgica* writing in honour of his fatherland from a far-off Venice, he turned the jibe of *auris Batava* into a positive virtue. Thus although the Batavians were not as learned or as cultivated as other people, they were honest and serious, their country was rich in terms of farming and fishing, and their cities were morally upright.

Although the lack of civilisation of their fellow citizens compared to other societies weighed heavily upon the shoulders of 16th century Dutch humanists, the fact that Erasmus identified the Tacitean *nobilissima insula Batavorum* with Holland was a major factor in the take-off of the Batavian myth in the early sixteenth century. The keyfigure in the full development of the myth was Erasmus's teacher, the historian Aurelius, and key-

work to set the myth in the mental belief of the *cives Batavi* was a vernacular chronicle of Holland which appeared in the heart of Batavia, in *Lugdunum Batavorum*, or Leiden, in 1517 and which is commonly known as the *Divisiiekroniek*. This work was for Dutch historical consciousness what Guicciardini was for Italy, or Robert Gaguin for France, or Hartmann Schedel for Germany, or Polydore Vergil for England. (Burke 2004) The fact that it remained the schoolbook of history till the end of the eighteenth century, in its complete and abbreviated form, made its influence even more lasting. The importance of the full-scale Batavian myth which it contains cannot therefore be overestimated. But which components constituted part of the myth as early as 1517? There is first the invention of a new name for the country, *Batavia*, and its founding father, the German exiled prince Baeto. Then there is the elaborate identification, with the help of philology, archeology and history, of the classical Batavians with the present Dutch citizens. The story is lifted above antiquarianism when the author depicts the morally utopian society of the former Batavians. It is the chapter 'concerning the ancient customs, morals, traditions and dress of the Hollanders, their garments, clothes, food and drink' which Aurelius holds up to his fellow burghers.

Let's look in more detail at this Batavian society. What sort of political ideal does it entail? The Batavians were originally free fishermen and farmers, and divorce and adultery were unknown. Strict monogamy prevailed and women were inseparable from their husbands, in peace and war. The young men were raised as brave soldiers who were only allowed to shave their beards after they had killed their first enemy in battle. The men carried their weapons at all times, at festivals and even at their monthly meetings: 'They held meetings every month, their council was open to all. Everyone could speak freely and say what they felt without fear of repercussions'. Then the prince and his noble and elder governors came to a conclusion. But they did not dictate decisions, their rule was the rule of educators. If the assembly was satisfied they showed this by raising their swords above their heads and clashing their weapons against each other. And if they were not pleased they shouted their disapproval with loud cries. ' In wartime the whole nation was mobilised, women and children included - the latter encouraging the men in battle and nursing those who returned wounded.'

It is also interesting to note that Aurelius considered the Dutch economy to be totally based on fishery and cattle farming, and that he ignored the growing contribution to its prosperity of urban industry and trade:

It is true that some countries have mines producing gold, silver, iron... But Holland has three mines of gold which are better than all the industries of the world, and they produce an incalculable amount of money. Firstly, there is the tremendously profitable herring fishery, and the export of dried fish to many different countries. The other lucrative industry is the sale of horses, oxen, cow and sheep... And thirdly, the huge amount of butter, cheese and other dairy produce found in Holland and exported throughout the world, even to those new islands they seem to be finding almost every day.

By 1515, however, when this is written, quite a substantial amount of the Dutch population already lived in cities, and it was no longer the land of farmers and fishermen Aurelius pictured it as being. The urbanisation level by then was 15.8 percent for the Northern and 21.1 percent for the Southern Netherlands, figures which are high in comparison with neighbouring countries. (Prak 2000, 343) In fact, what had always struck foreign visitors was the predominance of the cities in the flat landscape. The Italian

humanist Chrysostomus of Naples wrote of Holland's 36 various cities that 'one can hardly turn in any direction without one's eye settling on a building of some sort'.

Aurelius' description of Dutch society is, without any doubt, inspired by foreign, and especially Italian descriptions of Holland. We find clear reminiscences of Luigi Marliani's *De Hollandiae sive Bataviae laudibus epistola*, written between 1504 and 1508 to his Antwerp patron Jerome Busleyden, a letter which was also of considerable influence on Erasmus' *Auris Batava*:

With wealth and Queen Cash horns of plenty filled with charms and loveliness came to happy Belgium, a perfect, joyous state which lacks nothing, apart from the fact that when poverty disappeared the people's morality also went. That is why, whomever you compare them with, the Belgians are well turned-out, clean and elegant, except when you place them beside the Batavians. For I cannot express my admiration for this island enough, whether for its extraordinary qualities, its beauties, or its prosperity.

And then he talks at length of this man-made Batavian country, facing the threatening sea with dykes, dunes and windmills, about ice-skating in winter when the Dutch move around on iron feet, 'so fast that you would think that teams of Icaruses and Deadaluses were flying around'; he talks about cities so rich and beautiful that 'there is nowhere ugly enough to spit, unless in some ugly face'; and he considers this Dutch nation 'more amphibian than terrestrial' richer and wealthier, through fishing, shipping and industry, than any other nation.

What is interesting about the reception of this foreign idea of Holland - apart from the already archetypal picture of the clog-shod and skating nation - is that Dutch humanists like Aurelius and many many after him, pick up the natural richness of their Batavian country, but at the same time, and always in the context of the Batavian myth, abhor the richness and wealth of the cities, and see these as a source of moral corruption and civic discord. It is also very clear from the depiction of ancient Batavia that the cities are considered as something invented and introduced, as founded obviously, by the Roman rulers, as something not authentically Batavian. In this 'country' variation of civic humanism, Batavia was a land of free, equal and arms-carrying citizens and virtuous women, led by an aristocracy and a prince-educator. Although the political role of the cities becomes of greater importance with the Revolt, e.g. in the work of Janus Dousa and Hadrianus Junius, the arcadian ideal of Batavia is very persistent, right into the seventeenth century, in historiography, rhetorical treatises for governors and pictorial representations of Holland.

As the picture of the rural and rather rough Batavians, ever so virtuous, persisted, it posed in itself the problem of civilisation, or rather uncivility, already touched upon by Erasmus in the Batavian ear. The Batavians were strong and brave and get even stronger and braver as the century moves on. The humanist and politician Daniel Heinsius, in his funerary lecture for Janus Dousa, poet, historian, but also politician and military commander in the Revolt, talked of Leiden as the New Athens. The inhabitants of Holland, his fellow Batavians, get the stature of supermen,

hardly born already used to the sea, fighting storms and wind, thunder and lightning. In short all that can cause death, they do ignore. They don't live at the sea, but, so to speak, in the sea, for they not

only are the best in shipping but also in rowing and Tacitus doesn't mention if they use their arms or oars. Ever since antiquity the Britons have fled their fleet!!!

But the fact remains that Tacitus had said already that they suffered from *gula*, gluttony, and that they lived in *frugalitas*, in sobriety, a thing which the liver- and kidney-tortured Erasmus, so much more the beneficiary of Italian wine and sun, could not deny. The Dutch are inclined to too much greasy eating and beer drinking, and that unfortunately not of the best sort. The Tacitean *gula* keeps bothering the Dutch humanists throughout the century. In the descriptions the Batavian citizens get a whole range of possible and mainly martial epithets - *Feroces, Truces, Animosi, Fortissimi, Veteres militiae magistri, Populi virtute praecipui, Fidelissimi, Statura proceri, Nobilissimi, Socii imperii Romani, A primevo aevo laudis et gloriae populus, Laudis et gloriae cupidi. Quondam duces Germaniae atque Galliae in bello quod gerebant contra Romanos, Audacissimi, Immetuentissimi, victoriosi, veteres multorum bellorum victores, validissimi artus exercitus tributorum expertes* - but never they reach the status of being civilised, *culti*. The Batavian ear keeps bothering them and there is a vast literature on how to turn this for the good through humanist education, also in a political sense. (Langereis 2004)

### **Republican citizenship: the surrounding theory**

The dominant notion or concept of the citizen as *homo politicus* during the seventeenth century becomes the republican one and a lot of work has been done on this. Quentin Skinner and Bo Strath draw a straight parallel between Italy, England and the Netherlands in their collective volume on *States and Citizens*, when they write: 'The outcome was the belief – crucial both to the republicanism of the Italian Renaissance and to that of the Dutch and English in the 17<sup>th</sup> century – that it is possible to enjoy individual liberty if and only if we live as citizens of self-governing republics. To live as subjects of a monarch is to live as slaves'. (Skinner/Strath 2003, 15)

The Netherlands's landscape of noteworthy theoreticians on the concept of citizenship from our period is very rich but I will choose here only three whom I find interesting for the normative discourse on citizenship: the Leiden engineer Simon Stevin, the Bruges lawyer and politician Franciscus Goethalsius, and the historian of State, Hugo Grotius.

Simon Stevin, born in Bruges in 1548, but employed by the city of Leiden from the 1580s, was already a very prolific scientific writer when he published in the vernacular his treatise *Vita politica. Het burgerlick leven* in 1590. (Stevin 2001) The very first chapter of the eight in this treatise contains a definition of what he calls *vita politica* or 'burgerlick leven', and as far as we know it is the first extensive definition of citizenship in Dutch vernacular in history. A citizen, or 'burgerlick persoen' is for him synonymous with *politicus*. Originally the word "Burcher" simply indicated the inhabitant of an enforced settlement, a 'Burgh'. To live together in peace they made legal arrangements, of three kinds or orders: one bound to the physical space, one to natural law and one bound to God. Civic laws bound to the space of human communities are given in by the place itself, by the persons living there and are bound to a certain time. Natural civic laws are universal, eternal and known to all rational human beings. Divine rules for citizens are simply religion, a non-Dutch word according to the language purist Stevin, and take effect for citizens in the institution of the church. (Stevin 2001, 35-37) The three orders combined form the structure of the society of citizens: he calls it ambivalently the '*de Staet der*

*Burgherie*, or the *Politeia*, as he indicates in the margin of the *editio princeps*. As such there is only one morally just way of behaviour, 'rechte oeffeninghe', being 'Burgherlick leven' or *Vita Politica*, again printed in the margin. According to this rule argues Stevin in the next chapter, just government is the government which rules the place where a citizen chooses to live. The history of how power was acquired doesn't enter the argument. (Stevin 2001, 41)

Shortly after the mid-sixteenth century, and contemporary with Stevin in Holland, the Brugian citizen Goethalsius picked up where Canter had left off, with an appeal for a state civic humanism. His ideal of the republic was a Venetian version of the free city-state, where freedom, free trade and civil self-administration guaranteed happiness and prosperity. He emphasized, however, that studying prudence and *humanitas* in the sense of civilization were indispensable to achieve this end and therefore recommended that Latin schools be established. The supreme objective should not be external glory but justice and virtue within the community. All humanist contemplation associated the idea of the burgher primarily with political freedom. The established order, where sovereignty remained the purview of the ruler, was not challenged as such, although the autonomy of the city was an axiom. This formulation embodies the restricted geographical dimension of ideas about the burgher republic. The idea of a supra-municipal citizenship was still well beyond contemporary ideological horizons. This traditional connection of burghers with the city may have become less self-evident in the new political reality, where 'the' Republic was definitely not a city state in its conventional manifestation. Pieter de la Court, one of the leading republican thinkers of the seventeenth century, for example, regarded burghers as members of any political community, be it a city or a state, a republic, or even a monarchy. More on him in the conclusion however.

The main concern for the famous Delft-born historiographer to the States of Holland, Hugo Grotius (1583-1647) is not the concept of citizenship but that of sociability, as Martin van Gelderen argued recently. (Van Gelderen 2008) The state of nature was not a state without justice, for Grotius. Whilst our 'rational faculty has been darkly beclouded by vice', according to Grotius, we have not fallen for eternity and our good judgement has not disappeared. Hence we are able, Grotius argues, to recognise that 'the regard of the other' leads to, what might be called, two basic rules of sociability and justice: no one should 'inflict injury upon the other' and no one should 'seize possession of that which others have taken into possession'. In elucidating these rules Grotius makes a number of key moves. First, he emphasises man's natural sense of justice, his knowledge of what it means to 'inflict injury'. Second, Grotius highlights man's natural capacity of the rational recognition of the other, and of what is good and evil for the other. This is the foundation of natural justice. Grotius aligns his concept of sociability explicitly with that of the Stoics. In *De Iure Belli ac Pacis* he takes up the concept of *appetitus societatis*, equating it with what 'the Stoics termed *Oikeiosis*'. In other words for Grotius citizenship seems synonymous with sociability. Of their own free-will the individuals of the *respublica* unite by way of civil contract - Grotius uses the term *foedus* - in a 'unified and permanent body' with its own set of laws. From *singuli* they turn themselves into *cives*, citizens and they do so in a pact. (Van Gelderen 2008)

### **Citizenship in practice: the Amsterdam case**

This was the surrounding theory. Meanwhile, citizenship had become an official status. This status was still reserved for city residents and would remain so until the end of the eighteenth century. Not all city residents were burghers; there were also established residents without civil rights, ‘inhabitants’ and temporary ‘strangers’ or ‘outsiders’. These categories dated back to the Middle Ages. As the cities grew, they became less cohesive and comprehensive. The same happened to the core of that community, the actual bourgeoisie. Prak and Kuijpers have investigated how the enlarged scale of Amsterdam, a growth city *par excellence*, affected the nature of citizenship and how, conversely, citizenship affected the different social groups. (Prak/Kuijpers 2002) As their study makes clear, the group with civil rights was more socially diverse than is often assumed. Citizenship entailed legal, economic, political and social privileges. Though officially the same for all burghers, they differed in practice. Holding office was among the political rights but was in fact restricted to prominent families. Still, the accessibility principle had some significance. As a civil right, it reminded the regent that he was a representative of the community. This symbolic legitimacy imposed obligations. Nor were all civil rights reserved exclusively for burghers. Ordinarily, practising a craft or trade required joining a guild, which in turn required civil rights. Substantial sectors of the economy, however, were not guild-based. In 1668 the official status of ‘inhabitant’ was introduced. This status did not signify citizenship but did allow holders to join a guild.

Unlike in England, legal citizen status was not explicitly reserved for independent householders, but could be acquired in a number of ways. The easiest way obviously was to inherit it, and every child of a male citizen automatically became a citizen by birth. Another way to rise to citizen status was to marry a citizen’s daughter who was automatically a citizen herself and could give her spouse the same status on the condition that his citizenship was registered within two weeks and a registration fee of 2 guilders was paid. Thirdly, citizenship could be bought by virtually anybody who could afford to do so, the only excluded group being citizens from cities that would not make *their* citizen rights accessible to citizens of Amsterdam. The only social group for which other rules of citizenship applied were Jews. They were allowed to purchase citizenship, but could not pass it on to the next generation and thus had to buy it again and again. Moreover, they were excluded from all incorporated crafts and only admitted to the citizenry on the grounds of ‘great merchantship’. Fees to acquire Amsterdam citizenship rose constantly in the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth century and were as follows: 15 to 21 guilders from 1413 to 1574; 8 guilders in the year of Amsterdam’s alteration in 1578; 14 guilders in 1624; 30 guilders in 1630; 40 guilders in 1634; and 50 guilders from 1650 till the end of the eighteenth century. Out of these 5 were reserved for the city treasury, 13 for the city orphanage, 22 for the poor orphanage, and 10 for the urban militia. (Kuijpers/Prak 2002, 112-115 and 123-124 on the exclusion of Jews).

Citizens enjoyed a number of privileges that made citizenship covetable, and many of them meant a considerable degree of social security. Next to the right to political participation in the city government and legal protection, citizenship opened the doors to trade and crafts guilds and entitled the use of the city’s social institutions. This latter was by far the most important incentive for inhabitants to become citizens, since it was the only privilege that could prove to make a life-changing difference. Only children of citizens would be admitted to the city orphanage in case both parents died, and chances were high that this was the best place for them to be. Male orphans would be trained as craftsmen and thus be

prepared for a future with some prospect of social mobility, whereas the standards of living in the orphanage were much better than those in the poor orphanage where children of non-citizens would be sent to. Considering this, and the fact that citizens could never lose more than half their property and, in case they had to take recourse to it, had the right to beg at any time, whereas non-citizens would have to prove that they had lived in the city for at least six years, citizenship brought not only social status but even more importantly social security. (Kuijpers/Prak 2002, 115-118)

As Maarten Prak has pointed out in his monograph on the Dutch Republic (Prak 2005, 105-106), the local authorities outside Amsterdam where pressure on civic institutions was clearly high, were happy to cooperate in the creation of a favourable business environment, especially for outsiders. In a manuscript circulated among the regents of Leiden in the 1660s, Pieter de la Court, a wealthy textile manufacturer, pointed out that their power and standing rose in equal proportion to their city's increase in population. The civic authorities, adhering to this principle, tried to entice entrepreneurs to set up businesses in the city by offering them attractive conditions. The city of Deventer, for example, waived citizenship fees for immigrants intending to set up business. No fewer than 83 of the 187 persons granted free citizenship in Deventer between 1591 and 1609, were active in this branch. These economically privileged citizens could also request exemption from civic guard duty. In Leiden, the civic authorities did a similar thing after the economically catastrophic siege of 1572. They succeeded in persuading a group of Flemish textile manufacturers, who had fled to Colchester in 1577, to leave England and move to Leiden, promising them free citizenship and the absence of guilds. Other cities subsequently attempted to lure these manufacturers away from Leiden. In the 1680s various cities offered favourable conditions to French Huguenots who had fled to Holland, even going as far as to advertise in French newspapers to attract the cream of these refugees. Town councils and governments were so understandably sympathetic to the needs of local trade and industry as in many cities the councillors came from those circles themselves: they were all local tradesmen and businessmen. Also at the higher level, the cities' delegates to both the provincial States and the States General persuaded these government bodies to take the economic interests of their cities' citizens seriously.

Nonetheless, citizenship retained its important symbolic meaning as the specific bond with the municipality. It instilled a sense of responsibility and thus conferred status. The fact that this system was not a mere formality is demonstrated by the practice of deleting individuals from the *poorter* register for conduct 'unworthy' of civil rights. Those who had not acquired civil rights by birth or by marriage therefore had reason to buy into it. Doing so also made them eligible for provisions for orphans and the elderly. Understandably, most purchases of citizenship were acquired by inhabitants who worked as artisans or were self-employed within the guild system. Still, the connection between guild membership and '*poorterhood*' was not exclusive. A substantial number of the new burghers practised occupations not organized in guilds. In fact, remarkably many came from the lower social echelons: seafaring journeymen, soldiers and all kinds of workers. This was a new, seventeenth-century phenomenon and should be considered in light of the rapidly growing labour market in Amsterdam, where wages were relatively high. Especially with seasonal and high-risk occupations outside the guild system, becoming a *poorter* must have been an attractive option because of the social insurance that came with it. The ensuing financial burden on the city moreover forced the government to raise the

*poorter* fees repeatedly, which probably reduced the number of requests accordingly. The image of burghers in the rapidly growing city of Amsterdam is rather paradoxical. The bourgeoisie probably accounted for little more than ten percent of the population and was therefore a small minority. Nonetheless, this minority exceeded 20,000 people by the end of the seventeenth century and was quite numerous from this perspective. The new burghers comprised people from all ranks and classes, from international merchants to labourers and sailors. The combination of a financial threshold and economic privileges appears to have interested the traditional middle groups of owners of small businesses and entrepreneurs in becoming *poorters* as well. Their prominent presence is probably why references to the bourgeoisie in texts from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries primarily concern this group.

### **Burghers, *societas civilis* and virtue**

Seventeenth-century views on the *societas civilis* presupposed the active role of its members in a range of ordered communities that together constituted the urban political space (Krüger 2007). The fundamental unit of this communal life was and remained the household. Full citizenship was in all aspects implicitly confined to men only and the dominant discourse remains that women were supposed to perform an exemplary role in taking care of their homes and families, so familiar to us from the ‘*huiskamer* paintings’ of the seventeenth century. The views on the centrality of the family in communal life and on male superiority and paternal rule reflected the patriarchal character of seventeenth-century Dutch society, all contributing to the establishment of the so-called “Familial State” (Adams 2005). Being a good ruler and citizen was about being a good father. The central aspect of such fatherhood entailed the duty of the male householder to represent his family outside the private realm of their home in the higher strata of the *societas civilis*, firstly in the larger units of urban life, the neighbourhoods, and then on the scale of the city itself. On a larger level, the cities in the Dutch republic were subdivided into a number of districts that took care of the security and maintenance of public order through the organization of the civic militia or *schutterijen* which consisted of good citizens and had to protect all good citizens (Knevel 1994, Weststeijn 2008, 128-131).

Placing the burghers of the sixteenth and seventeenth-century political thinkers in their social context requires examining the urban upper crust of the affluent entrepreneurs. Burghers or the burgher community have traditionally comprised artisans and tradespeople. Some have even suggested that this group was the backbone of society. In the seventeenth century, at least in the large cities of the northern Netherlands, individuals with *poorter* rights were more socially diverse than ever. Simultaneously, however, as described above, the notions embodied in the term ‘burgher’ and especially comprehensive designations such as ‘the burghers’ and ‘the bourgeoisie’ became more indicative of the middle class. The next question is whether this development carried over into art, particularly the art most accessible for conceptual history research: literature. Does the literature reflect the transformation of the medieval merchant into the modern small entrepreneur?

Research reveals that the relation between burghers and literature in the seventeenth-century was far less obvious and straightforward than the standard designation *bourgeois* in the literature of historiography suggests (Hendrix and Meijer Drees 2001). First, the

word burgher and derivative terms appear rarely and if at all only in passing in literary texts and exclusively with the comprehensive meaning of city resident. The adjective bourgeois is similarly unspecific and refers to a structured community, the classical *societas civilis*. This community is depicted as being hierarchically structured in four *tiers*: at the top were the political potentates, next came the large merchants, then the manual craftsmen and shopkeepers and finally the uncivilized remainder, the ‘common folk’. The texts reveal very little about the divisions between the different tiers; nor do the few explicit social strata from this period indicate more rigid criteria. Clearly, however, cultural and moral factors were considered in addition to power and wealth. In fact, seventeenth-century literature is bourgeois only in that it serves explicitly to maintain and perfect the *societas civilis*. The values continuously emphasized are universally valid without restrictions: honesty, virtue and courteousness. The harmonious bourgeois society is based on order and rights and as such is diametrically opposed to the barbarian state of nature. This harmony is to be pursued within and among the social tiers and from the outer circle of society as a whole to the inner circle of miniature society: the family. This last setting and especially its emphasis is an element not encountered earlier.

This message was dedicated to maintaining the *status quo* and did not target a specific group. Nonetheless, the ongoing warning against trying to exceed one’s status was obviously directed more towards the lower than towards the upper classes. The frequency of this admonition was obviously associated with the opportunities for social advancement that the burgeoning seventeenth-century cities provided. The seventeenth-century burgher ideal was exclusive in that the element of the ‘common folk’ was viewed more as an external threat to bourgeois society than as a part of it. Only in the late eighteenth century would a national civilization ideal apparently arise that encompassed this group as well.

### **Conclusion: linking ideals with reality**

In linking the early-modern theory and practice of citizenship it is a matter of realizing that, on the one hand the early-modern theory of citizenship is not an *ens realissimum*, but rather a linguistic-conceptual construction, and that on the other hand, this theoretical construction has ‘functioned’ in relationship to a real community of power, an autonomous *respublica*. The literary patriotism of the humanists went hand in hand with a significant theorization of the republican ideal of citizenship, both based on Cicero’s *De Officiis* I.17.57 “But when with a rational spirit you have surveyed the whole field, there is no social relation among them all more close. None more dear than that which links each one of us with our country”.

The perfect case in the seventeenth-century Netherlands linking the normative ideals of citizenship with its practice is the aforementioned famous Leiden merchant Pieter de la Court (1618-1685). He never expressed any explicit philosophies or ideals about burghers but was first and foremost interested in their economic power and social standing of those in government. His interpretation of the concept is to be distilled implicitly from his political writings, and suggests that De la Court modernized classical-republican burghers into enterprising merchants. This association of burghers with merchants was by no means new, of course. The substantial merchants were traditionally regarded as the elite of the bourgeoisie. In medieval texts, burghers are almost always merchants. In the republican burgher ideal inspired by the classics, however, the commercial activity of burghers had

receded into the background, due to the emphasis on their selfless political role. Here, De la Court appears to have exchanged the classical ideal for the current reality, which was that of the bourgeois capitalism of the Dutch Republic. His remarks about burghers are therefore descriptive rather than normative.

De la Court's burghers were not principally different from other classes; the only essential contrast was with respect to 'strangers', those who did not form part of the community. The 'most excellent' among the burghers were obviously the ones in charge of the political organization, although De la Court also explicitly acknowledged the importance of the non-aristocratic, hardworking burghers, the 'common folk'. As the backbone of society, they personified the public interest in some respects. Here, too, we find the ideology already expressed in the Middle Ages. In De la Court's work, however, it was embedded in a modern political conception, in which the ideal of the virtuous republican burgher was dismissed as naive. First, lack of civic purpose figured in all layers of the bourgeoisie, including the circles of officials. Nor did virtue intrinsically guarantee prudent governance. This conclusion led him to a political philosophy embraced and elaborated only by thinkers in later periods, concerning a political order structured to ensure that it was in the interest of the governing individuals themselves to consider the well-being of the population. This did not mean leaving society at the mercy of prevailing interests. Both the power of the officials and their regulatory means were to be arranged through effective forms of organization. De la Court believed that political virtue meant the presence of virtuous institutions.

While these ideas appeared to herald the end of moral heritage, De la Court stopped short of this measure. Upon examining what constituted such well-being, he discovered that more was involved than material affluence alone: in addition to 'merchanthood' and 'wealth', 'erudition', 'arts' and 'virtues' also appeared on his list. Like the humanists, he deeply valued education as a source of knowledge and virtue. In his well-reasoned view, the burghers that benefited most from education and were consequently the best equipped to bring prosperity to the community were the affluent entrepreneurs. By situating this group at the centre of his social theory, De la Court transformed the 'classical' *cives* of humanism into the 'modern' burghers of the seventeenth-century trading nation.

So here we are, in this beautiful building with a centre for Humanities and Social Studies once owned by a famous civic humanist Leonardo Bruni who set the normative renaissance discourse on the concept of citizenship in motion. But we have to go to another centre for the social sciences when we go in search of Pieter de la Court. To his home town, in fact, and to Leiden University, where the building housing the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences was recently officially designated the Pieter de la Court Building. It's different from this Villa La Fonte. It is a modern and utilitarian building, and lies just around the corner from the busy Central Station. It is also perhaps less inspiring than Villa La Fonte, but it is probably more practical, just as Pieter de la Court's notion of citizenship was more practice-oriented than that of the humanists. For now, we can bask in the glories of the Florentine Renaissance. Next time, if we would meet in Leiden, we could perhaps return to Northern basics.

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