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Wrestling with Neptune: The Political Consequences of the Military Inundations during the Dutch Revolt

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WRESTLING WITH NEPTUNE: THE POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE MILITARY
INUNDATIONS DURING THE DUTCH REVOLT

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of History

by
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To Jenn and the twins.

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Every dissertation and work of research is a journey. Although less dangerous than recovering stolen gold or destroying a magic ring, the task is similarly daunting. Just like Frodo, I could not have completed my quest without the help and support of a strong fellowship of advisors, family, and friends. At different times in my journey all of them have provided me with the aid and encouragement which I required.

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became my home. My wife (Jenn) and I moved there to begin a new quest, that of starting a family, knowing it would complicate the pursuit of my PhD. It was the right decision for us. My academic quest is now drawing to a close and our family is going to double this year with a set of twins. Yet I could not have finished my first task without the loving support of so many family and friends. Jenn has provided constant encouragement, and believed in me even when I doubted myself. As Frodo tells Samwise, “I would not have gotten very far without you.” My parents-in-law, Doug and Athina, also deserve mentioning as they helped us settle into life in Canada. To my friends, Jami, Craig, and all the rest, thank you for all that did you to help me along in my journey. I am happy to announce that with everyone’s support I have reached the end of my quest; I am a doctor now.

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ABSTRACT

Over the course of several centuries during the Middle Ages the people of Holland developed a vast water-management infrastructure to protect themselves against flooding. They found that the best way to maintain these defenses was through cooperation and consensus forming at the local and regional level. Those who would be affected by an inundation were given the chance to participate in the decision-making process over flood prevention. These environmental influences led those in Holland to develop the poldermodel, a culture based on discussion, debate, compromise, and consensus forming.

In the late sixteenth century a series of natural and human-made floods would test the limits of the poldermodel in Holland. In November 1570 the All Saints Day Flood struck the province (arguably the worst flood ever) devastating its flood defenses. Before they had time to repair all the damages, war erupted in 1572 as those in Holland revolted against their Spanish Habsburg sovereign. Outmatched by the Habsburg forces, the Holland rebels frequently used floods for strategic ends. They carried out these military inundations almost indiscriminately and with little regard for the long-term consequences. That the rebels adopted the motto “better broken lands than lost lands” demonstrates how far they were willing to go with the use of the military inundations.

These floods broke the poldermodel in Holland, as many of the different cities represented in the provincial assembly, the States of Holland placed civic priorities above all else. The city of Gouda simply refused to send delegates to the meetings until a nearby dike was repaired which had been during a siege. This civic particularism prevented discussion, debate, and the ability to form consensus. It was the individuals with water-management experience which ultimately repaired the poldermodel. They developed a number of ways to satisfy the

civic interests and rebuild the discussion culture in the province. When the war resumed following a short truce from 1576 to 1579 known as the Pacification of Ghent, the States of Holland maintained the poldermodel by shifting the burden of the inundations onto neighboring provinces, and constructing fortifications to keep the enemy out of Holland.

INTRODUCTION

Did the Hollanders flood their lands through foolishness or in an act of madness questioned the Maas river. To which the Ocean responded, “Not through foolishness, nor madness, but from great need,” as the Spanish Habsburg government wanted them dead. The chronicler Pieter Bor included this imagined dialogue in his compendious account of the Dutch Revolt (1572-1648). The point of this conversation was to make sense of the epic relief of the siege of Leiden in 1574, in which the Dutch military purposefully flooded roughly half of the province of southern Holland to save the city.¹ The two bodies of water were right to question the practice; intentional floods were anathema to Dutch historical experience of tirelessly working to protect the land from inundations.

For centuries, those in Holland and the other low-lying provinces of the Low Countries had protected the landscape from floods only through great effort and determination. In the Middle Ages local communities built polders, stretches of land enclosed by a dike or embankment in which the water level could be artificially controlled through sluices, and later in the fifteenth century with water-lifting mills. In the process of building these flood defenses the Dutch developed a unique form of social organization and cooperation known as the poldermodel. The underlying premise of this theory is that the construction and maintenance of dikes and other water-management technologies required individuals in a community to work together and collaborate. Any single breach in an individual’s section of the dike meant disaster for the whole community. In short, as the Dutch navigated the challenges of living in low-lying lands they developed a social and political culture based on consensus-forming and compromise.

¹ Pieter Bor, *Oorsprong, Begin, en Vervolgh der Historie der Nederlandsche Oorlogen* (Amsterdam, Abraham Wolfgangh, Hendrick Boom, and Dirck Boom, 1679), 549.

This dissertation asks the question: What happened to the poldermodel when polders were intentionally destroyed by military inundations during the Dutch Revolt? Although tactical floods occurred in many provinces, the research here is largely restricted to the province of Holland. There is good justification for this focus. The first round of fighting associated with the Revolt began in 1568, but it was largely suppressed and confined to the southern provinces of Flanders and Brabant. The Revolt kicked off anew in 1572, and from this point forward the province of Holland would take a leading role. Thus Holland became not only the most important province in the Revolt against the Spanish Habsburg state, but it was also the site of the most military inundations during the course of the war. In addition to this study's geographic confines, there are temporal ones as well. The Dutch Revolt dragged out over the course of roughly eighty years, but since the majority of tactical floods occurred within the first two decades, the focus here is on the period from 1570 to 1590. The answer to the research question is as follows: the inundations, both natural and man-made, broke the poldermodel, which was then repaired by individuals with water-management experience, after which, the poldermodel was maintained by pushing military inundations onto adjacent provinces and systematizing the floods closer to home. In short, the age old struggle against the water in Holland brought the Dutch together; using the water as a weapon during the Revolt nearly tore them apart.

Chapter one discusses the poldermodel theory in greater detail. It focuses on the geological development of the province of Holland and how the watery conditions there impacted social development. The chapter discusses the salient components of the poldermodel, specifically the ability of interested parties to debate and a venue where they can hold the debate. In short, these sections examine how environmental influences helped the Dutch develop a consensus-forming culture. The final section of the chapter examines the militarization of the

landscape, looking at the historiography concerning the relationship between environmental history and military history.

The second chapter examines the All Saints Day Flood in 1570 and its political consequences. The flood is arguably *the* worst in the history of the Netherlands. All the provinces along the North Sea coast suffered incredible devastation. In response to this natural disaster the States of Holland engaged in a prolonged debate with the Habsburg monarch Philip II and his advisors in the Low Countries about possible tax exemptions in Holland. The States wished to secure tax reductions so that money could be used for dike repairs across the province. The Habsburg response, however, was uncompromising as the central government desperately needed Holland's revenue. This issue was one of many that drove a wedge between the Habsburg government and the States of Holland. The States ended these talks with the eerily prophetic warning that the Habsburg policies left them with no *legal* recourse.

Attention then turns towards the military inundations during the first years of the Dutch Revolt, from the capture of Brill in Holland in 1572 to the temporary truce secured in the Pacification of Ghent in 1576. The rebel forces under the command of Prince William of Orange were outmatched by the numerically superior and more experienced Spanish forces. In light of this reality, the Prince and the States of Holland continually employed military inundations as a means of achieving their strategic objectives. The relief of Leiden in 1574 was by the far the largest tactical flood, yet it was only one of numerous inundations across the province. Before each of these inundations the States made a promise to repair the damages which resulted from these maneuvers.

Chapter four examines what happened when the States of Holland failed to honor these promises. It appears there was an honest desire on the part of the States to repair the damages,

but a lack of money and shifting priorities meant that many of the repairs went unfinished. The temporary peace during the Pacification of Ghent, from 1576 to 1579, seemed to offer the States of Holland the opportunity to finally carry through with their promises. Nevertheless, the opportunity went begging, as different cities in Holland began looking after their own interests at the expense of the provincial priorities and comprehensive repairs. The city of Gouda in particular, simply stopped sending representatives to the States of Holland until the breach in the Leidschendam was repaired. The military inundations had broken the poldermodel.

The next chapter examines three individuals and their role in repairing the poldermodel. Abraham van Almonde, Johan van Oldenbernevelt, and Paulus Buys all had experience in water management before the outbreak of the Revolt. The tactical floods during the first years of the fighting created a distinct need for individuals such as them with expertise in dike repair and other water-management matters. In different ways each of these three men found solutions to the lingering problems from the floods, and in the process advanced their political careers.

Chapter six discusses the States of Holland's attempts to maintain the poldermodel after the war resumed in 1579. They pursued two strategies simultaneously to achieve this end. First, they ensured that the most destructive military practices, inundations and scorched-earth campaigns, occurred on the "foreign soils" of Brabant and Flanders. This strategy is evident during the siege of Antwerp in which the States Army decimated the northern coast of Flanders with repeated floods in an effort to relieve the city. The States Army was equally destructive in the Meierij district around the town of 's-Hertogenbosch in Brabant, where it systematically burnt and plundered the area. The second strategy involved efforts to integrate fortifications within existing water-management systems. This tactic helped improve a town's fortification by harmonizing flood defenses with military defenses. This integration also led to the development

of waterlines, a string of fortifications which could systematically inundate entire regions in order to prevent the passage of enemy troops.

CHAPTER ONE - THE POLDERMODEL AND THE MILITARIZATION OF THE LANDSCAPE

Introduction

This chapter discusses the geological development of the province of Holland before the Revolt, and how the water conditions there affected the development of local communities. In order to prevent floods the Dutch developed polders, small areas surrounded by dikes in which the water level could be artificially maintained. At the same time they created a number of organizations tasked with overseeing these water-management infrastructures. These unique developments helped to create a society which valued discussion, debate, and consensus-forming, known as the poldermodel. The influence of the poldermodel was not confined to environmental practices, but was pervasive throughout society as is evident in the political events in the Low Countries throughout the Middle Ages and up to the break out of the Dutch Revolt in 1572.

The last section of this chapter discusses the militarization of the landscape, and the historiography regarding the relationship between environmental history and military history. The focus is on issues relating to tactical and resource management consideration relating to warfare. It discusses the complex ways in which environmental matters can influence war and also wars effect on the natural world. The case of Holland offers a unique situation in which the water that was used as a weapon was also an important resource to be managed.

Forming the Polder

The most important aspect of Holland's environment was the predominance of peat swamps. During prehistoric times the land of Holland was periodically underwater for extended periods. The abundance of water resting on the surface slowed and prevented the complete decay of organic material, creating peat. This created fen peats, or wetland areas, which stretched across large portions of Holland. This base of fen peat and generally water-logged conditions created an environment which favored plant life that required fewer nutrients, such as peat moss. The proliferation and subsequent partial decay of this plant led to the formation of peat bogs across Holland, which had important ramifications on the landscape. As the peat moss decayed, a capillary action took place, which actually artificially raised the elevation of the peat bog. Some of these peat bogs stretched as far as ten to fifteen kilometers in diameter, and could have been artificially elevated as much as four to ten meters.¹ This inhospitable environment limited settlements to the higher elevated areas along river banks and the dunes.

During the eleventh and twelfth centuries an intense wave of land reclamation occurred in Holland. The impetus for this escalation in reclamation, from avoiding the wet peat areas towards one of colonizing them, is consonant with similar trends throughout Europe. The High Middle Ages in Europe witnessed a surge in population, increasing sixfold between the mid-seventh and mid-fourteenth centuries.² Areas throughout Europe that had once been considered frontier or wilderness, such as central Holland, became colonized during this period. The

¹ William TeBrake, "Taming the Waterwolf: Hydraulic Engineering and Water Management in the Netherlands during the Middle Ages," *Technology and Culture* 43 (2002): 480.

² William TeBrake, *Medieval Frontier: Culture and Ecology in Rijnland* (College Station, TX: Texas A & M University Press, 1985), 21-52.

technology and methods required were simple. The colonists simply dug a drainage canal to collect the excess water and connect it to another waterway. As the peat bogs were artificially elevated, gravity provided the energy needed for drainage. The colonists also built a dike along the water ways to protect against flooding and developed sluices to regulate water flow.

During this period the Count of Holland acquired rights to the wastelands portions in the interior of the province. Up to this point, settlements had been confined to the higher-lying areas along the dunes or dikes and adjoining lands. In order to turn the wastelands into productive areas the Count entered into agreements with individuals or groups willing to reclaim the land. In addition to laying down terms for the reclamation area, these contracts helped to normalize the agreement between the count and the settlers. These functioned as a sort of “constitution” for the community, where “everything that needed to be regulated between authorities and subjects was laid down in it.” The reclaimers had full control over their lands. Furthermore, they could administer low justice and oversee the local government in conjunction with the sheriff, who was appointed by the Count. In exchange the Count received taxation and soldiers in times of war.³

The agreement allowed the self-governing villages to oversee the construction, maintenance, and repair of dikes, dams, canals, and sluices within their localities. The maintenance regulations developed in an ad-hoc fashion with little uniformity, but there were some common practices. In general, individuals were assigned a maintenance pledge, a section of the dike which was their responsibility to look after. In order to ensure the individual took adequate care of their dike section, and to prevent flooding, the villages formed a special administrative organization. The village members elected representatives known as *heemraden*

³ G.P. van de Ven, *Man-Made Lowlands: History of Water management and reclamation in the Netherlands*. 4th ed. (Utrecht: Stichting Matrijs, 2004), 71.

who were tasked with carrying out inspections on the different water works.⁴ The connection with local works is evidenced with the name, as *heem* in this regard means living place, while *raad* means councilor, so the term literally translates as a counselor for local affairs.⁵

For issues which transcended local boundaries, organizations known as water boards developed. Similar to the *heemraden* at the local level, these were administrative bodies tasked with overseeing specific dikes, sluices, or other hydraulic implements. In some cases the Count of Holland distributed the privilege of caring for these structures to local villages or water boards, depending on their significance. In other cases local communities took it upon themselves to arrange for the care of regionally important structures. In these first centuries of sustained water-management activities the jurisdictional boundaries were rather porous. A single area might contain several water boards depending on a number of geographic factors and its relations with neighboring communities. Over time the numerous waterboards coalesced into a single regional water board, known as *hoogheemraadschappen*, or literally association of superior *heemraden*.

The history of the regional water board of Rijnland provides a good example of how this process could occur. In the eleventh century fifteen self-governing villages took the initiative to improve the water conditions in the area north of Leiden, by closing off several rivers, digging several drainage canals, and constructing seven sluices. The villages agreed to the formation of the Rijnland water board. The permanent members of the board were tasked with coordinating sluice management with villages in the province of Utrecht which were affected by the drainage.

⁴ Van de Ven, *Man-Made Lowlands*, 68-82; Carla de Wilt, *Landlieden en Hoogheemraden: De bestuurlijke ontwikkeling van het waterbeheer en de participatiecultuur in Delfland in de zestiende eeuw* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2015), 96.

⁵ De Wilt, *Landlieden*, 103.

In the thirteenth century the Rijnland water board expanded to the north, adding a number of villages to its jurisdiction along with the oversight of dikes along the IJ river and the Spaarndam dike and its sluices. In 1255 the *heemraden* of the village of Spaarndam received a formal written privilege from the Count of Holland William II to oversee the Spaarndam dike. This agreement is known as the Magna Carta of the Rijnland water board.⁶ This example showcases the importance of local initiatives for coordinating and overseeing water-management concerns, while also highlighting the authoritative role of the Count of Holland.

In the thirteenth century and later, regional water boards like that of Rijnland developed throughout Holland. The cause of this growth lies in widespread land subsidence and the strain it put on the water-management systems across the province. As the countless villages which sprung up earlier began draining the land, the peat upon which they were situated began compacting. This meant that the villages fell in elevation relative to the water level. In response, the villages began working together to organize the region's flood protections, securing their safety first and asking for a charter from the Count later. At the same time, the Count also provided charters for specific water works. In other words, the impetus for regional water boards came from below, at the village level, and from above, from the Count.

The land subsidence also led to the creation of polders. These were essentially small independent water territories, each with its own ring dike, sluices, and discharge canals. The individuals living in a polder could thus artificially maintain the water level inside the ring dike. In order to oversee these new water management structures, the residents inside the polder formed an organization known as a polder board. These polders did not follow village boundaries, but were dependent on the local water situation.

⁶ Van de Ven, *Man-Made Lowlands*, 80-81; Milja Tielhof and Petra J.E.M. van Dam. *Waterstaat in Stedenland: Het Hoogheemraadschap van Rijnland voor 1857* (Utrecht: Matrijs, 2006), 7.

The proliferation of regional water boards and polder boards across Holland did not take away rights and powers from local communities. The charters which established the regional water boards were akin to those for towns, laying down specific rights and responsibilities for the organization. Everything outside of those responsibilities remained in the purview of the village. There was also considerable overlap between the regional water boards and local governments in terms of how specific tasks were carried out. Similarly, the polder boards were only responsible for maintaining the water-management structures within the polder. In other words, the organization of water management was decentralized, with a significant amount of power retained at the local level.⁷

The history of the Delfland water board in the southwest corner of Holland offers a good example of these developments. The Delfland water board formed in the thirteenth century, tasked with the responsibility of overseeing the “common land water works.” These were dikes and other embankments which transcended local importance and required coordination with neighboring villages. It is not clear whether the initiative came from below, with the seven shires represented in the water board, or from above with the count. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the practices and rules of the water board were formalized and codified like many of the other regional water boards. Similarly, Delfland occupied an intermediate position in the political structure of Holland, just like the other water boards. It operated on the same level as the sheriff, between the Count of Holland and the local governments.

Several times per year the members of the Delfland water board would carry out a *schouw* or inspection of the “common land water works” in conjunction with the Dike Count, which served as the Count’s representative. The villages also selected their own officials to

⁷ Van de Ven, *Man-made Lowlands*, 114-116.

accompany the *heemraden* and Dike Count as they carried out their assessments. The *heemraden* could assess fines or penalties for faulty maintenance work or other transgressions, but it was up to the local sheriff to carry out the punishments. The water board officials also set a cost for the maintenance of a given dike or sluice and it was up to the village governments to decide how best to raise those funds.⁸

The preceding discussion provides a clear indication of the social and political impact of living in polders and other low lying areas. Local communities found solutions to prevent the risks of flooding. Sometimes this required working together with neighboring villages, other times it necessitated negotiations with the Count. What is most important for this study, is that the individuals affected by the water-management system were involved in the decision making process in one form or another.

Forming the poldermodel theory

The term “poldermodel” originated in the field of economics during the 1990s to describe situations in which different parties become invested in a particular organization. Specifically, the theory focused on generating synergy among the government, companies, and employees through open discussions and consensus forming.⁹ As the name implies, the model originated in the unique ecological circumstances of polder life. The dikes, embankments, and sluices which surrounded a polder and protected it from flooding required a form of communal cooperation.

⁸ De Wilt, *Landlieden*, 10-16, 103-112.

⁹ Maarten Prak and J.L. van Zanden. *Nederland en het Poldermodel: Social-Economische Geschiedenis van Nederland, 1000-2000* (Amsterdam: Bakker, 2013), 11; Tim Soens, “Polders zonder Poldermodel? Een onderzoek naar de rol van inspraak en overleg in de Waterstaat van de laatmiddeleeuwse Vlaamse Kustvlakte,” *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis* 3 (2006): 3-36.

The underlying premise of the poldermodel is that in the process of forming a polder and maintaining the water management infrastructure to prevent flooding, all the inhabitants of the polder had a vested interest to work together.¹⁰

While the term poldermodel originated in economics in the 1990s, this line of thinking had antecedents. The early twentieth-century Dutch historian Johan Huizinga used the term “polder thinking.”¹¹ An important part of the early debate centered on the democratic character of polder politics. The premise of this school of thought was that Holland and other coastal areas formed an early democratic and participatory society as a result of the unique ecological influences. In the process of selecting *heemraden*, village representatives took part in a form of self-government. Local residents of all statuses assumed responsibility for dike inspections and other water-management initiatives. Living in the polders led to “small scale, autonomous, and democratic forms of government,” or stated differently, an “experiment in democracy.”¹²

This ambitious argument has not withstood historical scrutiny, but in the process of critiquing the democratic character of the poldermodel a general consensus has emerged which focuses on the idea of participation culture. This approach discards the underlying assumption of equality and examines which parties had a voice in the decision-making process. Tim Soens’ research on several polders in the province of Flanders during the Middle Ages provides an

¹⁰ For an excellent description of the current debates surrounding the poldermodel see the 2011 KNAW grant application by M.R. Prak, Petra J.E.M. van Dam, and P. Sigmond titled: “In search of the *poldermodel*. Participation and representation in Dutch Water-boards in the pre-democratic era” available at: www.huygens.knaw.nl/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/project-Poldermodel.pdf .

¹¹ Soens, “Polders zonder Poldermodel,” 4

¹² Tim Soens, “Het Waterschap en de Mythe van Democratie in het Ancien Regime. Het voorbeeld van de Vlaamse Kustvlakte in de later Middeleeuwen,” *Jaarboek voor Ecologische Geschiedenis* (2001): 39-56; Soens, “Polder zonder poldermodel,” 4.

excellent example of this corrective in the historiography. His research confirmed the existence of the poldermodel in the area, with active participation from below and consensus-forming tendencies, but with some caveats. In the polders which Soens examined, he found that local communities set the tax levels, kept yearly account logs, and appointed two to five “sluice masters” to oversee daily tasks such as the opening and closing of the sluice doors. Nonetheless, he also found that the decision-making process was skewed towards important individuals and institutions in the area. In other words, the local nobility and church representatives had more of a say in the decision-making process than other local individuals. Consensus-based decision making remained, but like other medieval organizations, there was a hierarchy.¹³

At the local level and polder level decision-making policies, the participation culture could vary greatly. Carla de Wilt’s work on Delfland demonstrated the presence of great variation between individual *ambachten*, or shires, in the water board. She developed a qualitative means of assessing participation rates based on *burenraadpleging* (local decision making committees), accessibility of local offices, and land ownership patterns. In the three shires she examined, the level of participation ran the gamut, from the elitist Berkel shire, which often selected great land owners to the more open Maasland shire. De Wilt found that the more elitist shires brought fewer cases before the Delfland tribunal, the judiciary branch of the water board which adjudicated water management cases.¹⁴

What do these local differences in participation culture mean for politics at the provincial level? In other words, did the very ethos or belief in the importance participatory forms of government influence politics in Holland or was there something more concrete? De Wilt’s focus on the tribunal is suggestive, as it corresponds with Maarten Prak and J.L. van Zanden’s

¹³ Soens, “Polder zonder poldermodel,” 11-34.

¹⁴ De Wilt, *Landlieden*. 396-401.

work which examines the poldermodel at higher levels of government. They argue that the two constituent parts of the poldermodel are distinguishable parties that are able to negotiate, along with a place where negotiation can occur. At the local level, village governments and polder boards provided these requirements, the tribunal operated at the regional level, and the States of Holland worked at the provincial level. Prak and van Zanden's understanding is not some allusion to "national character" but rather a society that is based on "compromise and consensus" which can change over time. Conflict is a common part of the process, but the focus is on people's ability to meet and discuss issues.

Prak and van Zanden selected the Great Assembly of 1651 as the best examples of the poldermodel in action. This event was a spontaneous meeting of the States General (the governing body of the Dutch Republic) to discuss the condition of the Republic following the unexpected death of the stadholder and leader of the military William II of Orange. These historians noted how this gathering was informal and typical of a community focused on debate and conversation.¹⁵ Other scholars not specifically involved in the poldermodel debate also point to the importance of this gathering in terms of participation and debate. Willem Frijhoff and Marijke Spies demonstrated this meeting exemplified the "discussion culture" of the Republic. They note, "The Great Assembly of 1651 was in fact the first great fraternizing ritual of the independent Republic, in which the intention of unity was rediscovered and harmony celebrated."¹⁶

The unity noted by Frijhoff and Spies was a result of the lived experiences in Holland going back centuries. In the process of building polders and establishing flood defenses the

¹⁵ Prak and van Zanden, *Poldermodel*, 7-11.

¹⁶ Willem Frijhoff and Marijke Spies, *Dutch Culture in a European Perspective: 1650, hard-won unity* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 77.

people of Holland developed a social and political culture based on consensus forming. Any individual who did not properly care for his/her section of the dike could spell disaster for the whole community. In order to avoid catastrophe, local communities ensured that those who maintained the dike were invested in the decision making process. What was required to make the poldermodel function? The affected parties had to be willing and able to talk, and there had to be a venue for discussion to take place.

Poldermodel politics before the Revolt

Traditionally scholars have viewed the decentralized political machinery of Dutch politics as largely inefficient compared to other European states. They argued that the economic and social achievements of the Dutch Republic during its Golden Age in the seventeenth century occurred *in spite* of the extremely decentralized state. More recent scholarship, however, has turned this interpretation on its head and demonstrated that these achievements probably occurred *because of* the bottom-up style of government.¹⁷ This sort of pragmatic, consensus-forming approach to rule is evident throughout the Middle Ages in the Low Countries. The material that follows traces the practice of consensus, polder-style politics during the Middle Ages and its subsequent breakdown during the sixteenth century.

Throughout the Middle Ages the area known as the Netherlands or Low Countries was little more than a geographic expression. Over the course of several centuries the Burgundians, and later Habsburg rulers, attempted to form the area into a coherent polity. The goal of the former was to enhance their power within France, the latter to help pay for costly wars.

¹⁷ J.L. Price, *Holland and the Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century: The Politics of Particularism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 3.

Nevertheless, there was considerable diversity among the various provinces. The western provinces of Flanders, Brabant, and Holland were more urbanized and oriented towards maritime commerce, while the eastern provinces tended to be more rural and agrarian. This polyglot provincial system proved difficult to unify and centralize, and the Habsburg process of state-making in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was never completely successful. In fact, political power in some of the provinces, such as Holland, actually underwent considerable devolution.¹⁸

In the Middle Ages power was negotiated in a seemingly endless process of revolution and repression between local powers (such as civic magistrates and nobility) and ruling dukes, duchesses, and monarchs. A number of factors influenced the process, such as the degree of urbanization. In general the ruling power would grant privileges and exemptions in return for revenue, remove those same privileges in case of opposition or revolt, and then later re-grant them when they need money, essentially creating a convoluted panoply of legal rights and charters.¹⁹ These privileges formed the basis of later particularistic politics, as each city became bitterly defensive over the protection of its customary rights. As J.J. Woltjer succinctly stated, “In most cases these privileges were real, but here too the literal text was less important than the vague feeling that positive privileges and ancient rights were the crystallization of a more comprehensive equity, a more profound justice, as flexible as the heart’s desires.”²⁰ More than

¹⁸ James Tracy, *Holland under Habsburg Rule, 1506-1566: The Formation of a Body Politic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); James Tracy, *The Founding of the Dutch Republic: War, Finance, and Politics in Holland, 1572-1588* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹⁹ Wim Blockmans, “The Impact of Cities on State Formation: Three Contrasting Territories in the Low Countries, 1300-1500” in *Resistance, Representation, and Community* ed. Peter Blickle (New York: Clarendon Press, 1997), 269.

²⁰ J.J. Woltjer, “Dutch Privileges, Real and Imaginary,” in *Britain and the Netherlands* Vol. 5, eds. E.H. Kossmann and J.S. Bromley (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), 35.

anything, however, these cities were fighting for the right and ability to participate in the decision-making process.

The year 1477 serves as one of the most important turns in this regard, marking a foundational event in the evolution of particularism in the politics of Low Countries. This date marks the unexpected death of the Burgundian ruler Charles the Bold. Before his untimely passing he had begun a program of military expansion with the aim of uniting his possessions in the Low Countries and France, which served to stiffen resentment to his rule. As Charles lay dead in the snow outside of the besieged city of Nancy in France, his daughter Mary of Burgundy accepted the role of Regent of the Low Countries, but only after she acquiesced to a number of limitations on her power. The official proclamation of this agreement, known as the Great Privilege or the *Joyous Entrée*, came to be seen as a pivotal event in civic and provincial relations with their Burgundian, and later, Habsburg rulers.²¹

The Dutch political historian Martin van Gelderen noted that this event created a “normative, implicit constitution” in addition to the number of privileges which consisted of “a diversity of charters acquired or extorted by cities, guilds, crafts, clergy and nobility from imperial princes, vassals, dukes and counts, who had ruled the Netherlands during the late medieval period.”²² The importance of these privileges lies in the fact that they gave local powers the legal ability to debate issues which they believed affected them.

The Burgundian rulers attempted to get around these privileges and subvert them through the creation of the States General and the provincial assemblies, such as the States of Holland.

²¹ Wim Blockmans and Walter Prevenier, *The Promised Lands: The Low Countries Under Burgundian Rule, 1369-1530*. trans. Elizabeth Fackelman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 174-206.

²² Martin van Gelderen, *The Political Thought of the Dutch Revolt 1555-1590* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), xii, and 29.

During the fifteenth century the Burgundian rulers created the States General as a means to forge the multiple provinces into a unified whole. This representative body included members from the polyglot collection of provinces under Burgundian control in the Low Countries. According to Jonathan Israel, the Burgundian ruler Philip the Good only created the institution to streamline communications with the individual provincial assemblies and stabilize provincial currencies. While the States General did provide a location for debate, the different provincial assemblies had been coordinating and meeting on their own volition for decades prior. For instance, the States of Holland and Zeeland often held joint meetings. Furthermore, in special circumstances, such as when trading relations with England for wool and cloth became strained, the affected provinces called a meeting on their own volition to discuss the matter.²³

The Habsburgs would eventually acquire the Low Countries through a complex set of marriage alliances and wars, but there was still no king of the Low Countries. Instead, while the Habsburgs served as the King of Spain, they only held titles of nobility in the various provinces such as the Count of Holland and Flanders or the Duke of Brabant. In truth, the Low Countries fell under the umbrella of the composite monarchy of the Habsburgs, which proved difficult for them to implement universal and consistent policies across their territories. It was a *Dominium Politicum et Regale*, in which the Habsburg monarchies had to work with representatives assemblies like the States General and the States of Holland. In this organization, problems could only be overcome through negotiation and discussion, not through strong arm tactics.²⁴

²³ Jonathan Israel, *Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477-1806* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 39; H.G. Koenigsberger, *Monarchies, States Generals, and Parliaments: The Netherlands in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 16-27.

²⁴ See Koenigsberger, *Monarchies, States Generals, and Parliaments*.

The major breakdown of this consensus-style government came in the form of financial pressure and religious conflict. The Habsburg ruler Charles V (1500-1558) engaged in a number of costly dynastic wars against the French Valois kings which stretched across Europe. Additionally, the Habsburg rulers were defenders of the faith for the Catholic Church, which also involved them in a number of religious conflicts. At different points in Charles' reign he fought against the Ottomans, the French, Protestants in Germany, passing along a daunting debt to his son and successor Philip II (1527-1598). All of these activities put a tremendous strain on the Habsburg treasury.

Initially the Habsburg rulers and their subjects in the Netherlands found amicable ways to solve the financial issues. In Holland, Charles V granted the States of Holland assembly considerable authority over its taxation policy in return for more revenue. After much debate and discussion the provincial assembly then granted the cities considerable latitude and autonomy in tax collection. In short, the power over taxation underwent a process of devolution from the Habsburg monarch down to the cities of Holland.²⁵ In this way, those who were being taxed could participate in the discussion over taxation policy. Essentially this is the poldermodel in action.

It was the Habsburg ruler's staunch pro-Catholic policy which disrupted the political consensus. In their attempt to root out what they perceived as heresy they issued strict placards prohibiting Protestant worship and practices. These only served to push Protestant sympathizers and churches underground. Nevertheless, given the geographic location of the Low Countries and its strong commercial activities, trading hubs such as Antwerp and other cities were able to maintain active contacts with international Protestant movement. In this way, the Calvinist

²⁵ See Tracy, *Holland under Habsburg rule*.

church in particular developed a significant following in the Low Countries, even if in terms of sheer numbers it remained in the minority.²⁶

The religious differences drove a wedge between the ruler and those he ruled. Charles V, and later Philip II, had to take a broader view and support the Catholic Church while the magistrates were focused on local matters and had to pursue social harmony.²⁷ At first, the opposition chiefly flowed along the lines of the non-implementation of the divisive heresy placards. Local magistrates argued it was their customary right not to enforce the placards on the grounds that it created local unrest and it violated their privileges. In a relatively short period of time, however, segments of the nobility and religious groups became much more vocal in their opposition, culminating in the Iconoclastic Fury in 1566 in which Protestant groups engaged in open-air sermons, so-called hedge preaching, and the destruction of religious imagery within Catholic churches. Philip II's response was both quick and severe, sending the authoritarian Fernando Toledo, the Duke of Alva. Alva set up a secret tribunal to track down and punish those who took part in the iconoclasm, earning it the ominous title of the "Council of Blood."

The best representation of Alva's heavy-handed rule came in the form of the citadels which he built in cities in order to awe and pressure the inhabitants into submission. The citadel in Antwerp serves as the most striking example. Here Alva named four of the five bastions of the citadel after himself, Duke, Fernando, Toledo, Alva, and the fifth after the engineer who designed the fortification. In front of the defensive structure he commissioned a statue to be

²⁶ Andrew Pettegree, *Emden and the Dutch Revolt: Exile and the Development of Reformed Protestantism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Guido Marnef, *Antwerp in the Age of Reformation: Underground Protestantism in a Commercial Metropolis, 1550-1577*. translated by J.C. Grayson (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1996).

²⁷ Alastair Duke, *Reformation and Revolt in the Low Countries* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1990), 74.

built, constructed from melted-down cannons captured from rebellious forces. The statue depicted him literally stomping out the heresy, with his foot resting on a figure representing the personification of unorthodox religious views.²⁸

Alva's employed this uncompromising approach beyond religious issues. He captured and executed Lamoraal, the Count of Egmont and Philip de Montmorency, the Count of Hoorn. These two deaths sent shockwaves throughout the Low Countries since they had been ardent supporters of the Catholic Church and seemingly had nothing to fear from Alva's arrival. These were high-profile executions, but were part of a wide-spread program by Alva. Over a quarter of the nobility of Holland were charged with heresy by the Council of Blood.²⁹ This repressive style of rule engendered wide spread resistance, creating a major wedge, essentially providing the final breakdown of consensus-style government between the Spanish Habsburg monarch and his subjects in Holland and the other provinces.

The hammer fell on that wedge on 1 April 1572, when the Sea Beggars captured the town of Brill, sparking the Holland phase of the Dutch Revolt. In the two decades that followed the rebels in Holland had to develop new ways to reach consensus without the influence of a central power in the form of the Habsburgs. The States of Holland resolved this matter by being more inclusive. Before the Revolt only the nobility and the six "big cities" of Dordrecht, Haarlem, Leiden, Amsterdam, Delft and Gouda were represented. The first meeting of the States of Holland in 1572, which met illegally without a summons from Philip II, included no less than eight more "small cities." Within a short time the final number would be set on sixteen cities with representation along with the nobility. This expansion of voting rights is a great example of

²⁸ Peter Arnade, *Beggars, Iconoclasts & Civic Patriots: The Political Culture of the Dutch Revolt* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 201.

²⁹ Israel, *Dutch Republic*, 155-157.

the poldermodel in practice; it brought in other cities to the discussion and involved them in the decision-making process.

Many of the pre-Revolt political offices and bodies were simply modified to meet the pressing needs of the time. This is clearly evident in the development of the role of the stadholder. This term literally translates as “city holder” and originally functioned as a representative of the monarch, liaising between the sovereign ruler and his/her local subjects. At the outset of the Revolt, the current stadholder of Holland Prince William of Orange, was the central figure of opposition to the Spanish monarch Philip II. As the fighting wore on this office came to be a sort of de facto executive position in charge of military operations. The fact that the provincial body of the States of Holland “acknowledged and accepted” him as stadholder, rather than being selected, meant that power was shared between the two bodies, but the legal underpinning of this arrangement was never made clear.³⁰ The later extensive “stadholderless” periods during the Republic point towards this conclusion as well.

As the well-known Dutch scholar Henk van Nierop noted, “Many historians regard the modern state as a device somehow imposed from above upon a hapless community...This approach, however, neglects the part played by the ordinary subjects of the state. The Dutch Republic presents an interesting case for studying the various patterns in which local communities and common citizens contributed to state formation.”³¹ Widespread opposition to Habsburg religious and financial policies were the motivations for the Revolt. At the outset the rebels never established concretely their long term goals and priorities. As such the course of the war often lacked clear direction and took unexpected turns. At certain times, it appeared as

³⁰ Herbert Rowen, *The Princes of Orange: Stadholders in the Dutch Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 20.

³¹ Henk van Nierop, “Popular participation in politics in the Dutch Republic” in *Resistance, Representation, and Community*, ed Peter Blicke (New York: Clarendon Press, 1997), 272-274.

though the Revolt was on the verge of collapse, such as during the siege of Leiden in 1574, and at other times it looked like the entire Low Countries would unite, following the Pacification of Ghent in 1576.

What is important to note during the various twists and turns of the wars is that the poldermodel continued to function. An explicit part of Prak and van Zanden's analysis is that the poldermodel or consensus-style of organization remained intact during the Revolt. As evidence they cited specifically the case of the city of Vlissingen when the regents asked for advice and assistance from the civic guilds and militia. They argue that poldermodel politics were dominant in the conflict between the absolutist policies of Philip II and Alva on the one hand, and the old style of local power formation based on privileges on the other.³²

The Militarization of the Landscape

How did the numerous military inundations during the Revolt that damaged and destroyed countless polders affect the poldermodel? That is the research question for this dissertation, but unfortunately there is a lacuna in the historiography where military inundations are concerned. Fortunately there is a growing literature in environmental history which focuses on warfare that can provide a framework. The two principal ways in which humans interact with the environment in terms of warfare are tactics and resource management. Both of these categories fall under the umbrella term "the militarization of the landscape," meaning human attempts to mobilize the environment for military purposes. The tactical issues involve the manipulation of geographical features to secure specific ends, such digging trenches or the

³² Prak and van Zanden, *Poldermodel*, 20 and 113.

building forts on higher elevations. The resource-management component centers on a society's ability to mobilize resources to pursue war. The fighting in Holland during the Dutch Revolt offers a unique opportunity to treat these two topics in unison by focusing on water-management practices. As noted, the inhabitants of Holland had an established tradition of managing water to prevent flooding with the widespread construction of dikes and waterways since the Middle Ages.³³ In response to the ecological conditions of Holland and the continual threat of flooding, the Dutch developed an "amphibious culture" which helped them cope with their watery landscape.³⁴

It is only rather recently that environmental historians have begun examining the militarization of the landscape, meaning attempts to utilize the environment to secure military objectives. This includes the manipulation of given geographies for strategic purposes, the impact of warfare on the natural world, and the natural world's impact on the course of war. For the most part these examinations have centered on modern warfare, no doubt growing out of the fear of the degree to which modern weaponry and tactics can alter the landscape and destroy entire ecosystems. Military historians have yet to latch onto this new trend, but fortunately environmental historians have offered a number of insightful avenues for investigation.³⁵ The

³³ See TeBrake, *Medieval Frontier*. In this work TeBrake argues that through the creation of a widespread water management infrastructure full of dikes, canals, and sluices the Dutch had essentially replaced the natural landscape with a cultural one.

³⁴ Petra J.E.M. van Dam, "Denken over natuurrampen, overstromingen en de amfibische cultuur," *Tijdschrift voor waterstaatgeschiedenis* 21 (2012): 1-10. Van Dam discusses four coping mechanisms in particular: compartmentalization in the form of polders which helped prevent larger flood disasters, having cities located at higher elevations which served as a refuge during floods, using water transport, and focusing on livestock which can be transported and saved during floods rather than planted agricultural goods.

³⁵ Charles Clossman, *War and the Environment: Military Destruction in the Modern Age* (College Station, TX: Texas A & M University Press, 2009), 2.

few examples discussed here are suggestive of the myriad of approaches to the militarization of the landscape and its usefulness as an analytical approach. They demonstrate that human attempts to militarize the environment can have unforeseen consequences, and environmental factors can greatly affect the outcome of a given conflict.

Rachel Woodward took a broad approach examining how the ethos and organizing principles of militarism exert an influence on the configuration of location and space. She argues that, “military geographies are everywhere” and are formed through a process in which “militarism and military activities create spaces, places, environments and landscapes with reference to a distinct moral order.”³⁶ Everything from weapon factories to battlefields and testing grounds fall within the scope of her work. Although she focuses on modern examples, the same understanding can be applied to historical examples. Sieges, battles, defenses and outfitting the military all left their own impression on the landscape in the same way tanks, bombs, and military bases do today.

The influence of these military activities and ideals on the landscape, however, is often ambiguous and never complete or final. In spite of advanced technologies, well developed institutions and bureaucracies, and scrupulous planning humans have never been total masters of their environment. While human abilities to transform the environment are considerable, environmental agency in the form of weather and other natural processes still influence and affect the outcome. Chris Pearson provides insight into this process in his study of modern France noting:

This process of engagement with, and mobilization of, nature has not been a smooth process. Nature’s unpredictability, dynamism, and indifference to human suffering have raised repeated problems for the military. From mud, rats, and lice in the trenches to the Allies difficulties in overcoming Normandy’s *bocage*

³⁶ Rachel Woodward, *Military Geographies* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2011), 3.

landscape after the D-Day landings, environmental conditions have raised a series of problems and obstacles to be tolerated, overcome, or bypassed. Outcomes therefore arose as products of the emerging relationship between human design and the unintentional vibrancy of nature.³⁷

In other words, the landscape is anything but a blank canvas awaiting human agency but rather a dynamic interaction between human actions and natural forces.³⁸

This approach offers a useful lens because civilian and military activities often interact with environmental trends in a myriad of complex and sometimes contradictory ways, as evidenced by Timothy Mitchell's *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-politics, Modernity*. This work focuses on a series of disasters which struck Egypt between 1942 and 1944. He provides an excellent example of how military matters, state-making initiatives, and the development of "natural" forces intertwined. In this period Egypt began the construction of the Aswan Dam, intending to showcase the power of the state. The associated irrigation and flood control measures created habitats for mosquitos, which brought malaria. The disease struck a population suffering from malnutrition, since farmers focused on sugar cane production and exported

³⁷ Chris Pearson, *The Mobilization of Nature: The Environmental History of War and Militarization of Modern France* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 5; Chris Pearson and Tim Cole and Peter Coates, *Militarized Landscapes: From Gettysburg to Salisbury Plain* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 4.

³⁸ Linda Nash provided the most succinct summary of this relationship; noting how historians have often viewed agency as the physical manifestation of an idea. In this regard, an architect building a house has agency, but a bee building a hive does not. This understanding obfuscates the true process, however, as natural forces do have agency in affecting the course of events, even if a bee does not imagine the beehive before it builds it. She argues that the concentration on the "intentional" and "rational" aspects of human agency diminishes the role of the environment. Nash worries that studies which focus too much on the rational aspects of agency are simply another iteration of the all too familiar narrative of the triumph of reason in the west. She proposes that historical works should foreground natural agency to highlight their effect on human and societal development. In her words, "It is worth considering how our stories might be different if human beings appeared not as the motor of history but as partners in a conversation with a larger world, both animate and inanimate, about the possibilities of existence." See Linda Nash, "The Agency of Nature or the Nature of Agency," *Environmental History* 10 (2005): 67-69.

fertilizer needed elsewhere during World War II, leaving behind a soil bereft of nutrients. At the same time, the war provided the opportunity for relief. The US entry into the war in the Mediterranean brought with it philanthropic organizations with experience combating misquotes during the construction of the Panama Canal. Mitchell remarks that the mosquito could not speak but its emergence led to huge debates over public health, the war, and state-making in Egypt.³⁹ His work highlights the complex and complicated manner in which warfare and environmental developments interacted.

Many scholars have blurred the lines between military domination and environmental domination. Military historians have long understood the importance of geographic factors in determining the course of a battle, but their analysis has perhaps been too superficial.⁴⁰ Works such as J.R. McNeil's *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean* demonstrate the relationship is more than just capturing and holding the high ground. Here he demonstrates how disease played a partisan role in warfare, decimating European armies and settler populations. Malaria and other diseases effectively served as a better defense than any military fortification. Meanwhile the local residents escaped largely unharmed as a by-product of inhabiting the area for generations and building up resistances.⁴¹

Lisa Brady offers another approach by examining the intentional actions of military in terms of ecological militarism. She observed that one of the strategies employed by the Union forces during the United States Civil War was an ecological war as much as a military one. They

³⁹ Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 19-51.

⁴⁰ Clossman, *War and the Environment*, 2-5.

⁴¹ See J.R. McNeill, *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Great Caribbean, 1620-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

employed scorched-earth tactics to turn the “civilized” southern landscape into wilderness, in order to cut off the Confederate’s ability to wage war. This attack on their agricultural base also served to instill fear among the southerners. She explains, “Faced with a return to chaos, and paired with physical destruction of once productive landscapes, southern support for the Confederacy weakened and Union victory was attained.” In short, the environmental component of the fighting struck a deep-seated fear of wilderness in the American psyche.⁴²

In terms of resource management, scholars focusing on the early modern period have produced a number of works highlighting the relationship between warfare and the environment. The majority of these studies focus on trees and timber reserves, as the preindustrial era was “the age of wood.”⁴³ Some of them focus on the impact of deforestation. Thorkild Kjærgaard’s work provides an excellent example, demonstrating how Danish attempts to maintain “Europe’s best navy” led to severe timber shortages and sand storms. The situation was so dire that Danish foresters actually attempted to grow trees in the shape of ship hulls to eliminate wasted material!⁴⁴

Other works highlight the role of the control of resources in state formation. For instance, Karl Appuhn’s *A Forest on the Sea* critiques the idea that strong centralized states

⁴² Lisa Brady, “The wilderness of war: nature and strategy in the American Civil War,” *Environmental History* 10, no. 3 (2005), 425-440.

⁴³ Karl Appuhn, *A Forest on the Sea: Environmental Expertise in Renaissance Venice* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2009), 5; Rauno Lahtinen and Timo Vuorisalo, “‘It’s War and Everyone can do as they Please!’ An Environmental History of a Finnish City in Wartime” *Environmental History* 9 (2004): 679-700; Joseph Hupy, “The Environmental Footprint of War” *Environment and History* 14 (2008): 405-421; Gary Machlis and Thor Hansen, “Warfare Ecology” *Bioscience* 58 (2008): 729-736.; J.R. McNeill, “Woods and Warfare in World History” *Environmental History* 9 (2004): 388-410.

⁴⁴ Thorkild Kjærgaard, *The Danish Revolution, 1500-1800: An Ecohistorical Interpretation*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 107.

supporting market economies were the hallmark of European advancement in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. He shows how a more traditional policy of “managerial organicism” undergirded the Venetian forest management policies as opposed to more profit-driven initiatives. Venice still developed an impressive bureaucracy for overseeing its timber resources, but it was the only European state to implement large-scale forest conservation programs.⁴⁵ Thus control of the forests was an important component of the Venetian state even if they did not approach its management from a strictly profit-seeking perspective.

Paul Warde’s *Ecology, Economy, and State Formation in Early Modern Germany* examines how local duchies in Germany maintained a stable and viable forest policy in spite of the dynamic shifts in society, most notably in the form of the Thirty Years War. He remarked, “State formation and any mode of production have for their fundamental condition the integrity or disturbance of the ecologies which deliver their most basic resources.”⁴⁶ The state and other institutions’ abilities to manage forest reserves were vital.

In the Low Countries water is the resource which has received the most scholarly attention in terms of its impact on society and the state.⁴⁷ Over the past few decades the field has received much more scholarly interest and undergone considerable change. Early works tended to be myopic, focusing on the origin and institutional arrangements of water boards. These bodies largely developed in the Middle Ages and were responsible for drainage and dike or sluice repair issues in a given locality. Over time many of these water boards changed

⁴⁵ Appuhn, *A Forest on the Sea*, 9.

⁴⁶ Paul Warde, *Ecology, Economy, and State Formation in Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 358.

⁴⁷ For a short overview of the multiple ways in which water management may have affected the history of the Netherlands see Erik van der Vleuten and Cornelis Disco, “Water Wizards: Reshaping Wet Nature and Society” *History and Technology* 20 (2004): 291-309.

dramatically in terms of power, territory, duties, and amalgamation. The early works traced the first charters of these water boards and internal changes, but largely treated them as self-contained units of analysis rather than placing them in their historical milieu.⁴⁸ In the second half of the twentieth century historians began incorporating the importance of ecological factors such as subsidence into their analysis, but the scope of the field has changed the most in the last twenty years.

The Dutch scholar Petra J.E.M. van Dam has been at the forefront of these developments, helping guide the historiography. In a 2004 article she noted that new hydraulic histories of Holland begun to have a “green edge,” incorporating new methodologies and source materials, while also focusing explicitly on ecological, economic, social and political developments. Emphasizing water-management issues, historians would highlight the multiple ways in which environmental factors affected, and were affected by, other historical developments. As one scholar noted, “The new hydraulic history sees water boards, both great and small, as products not only of their own internal rules and actions but also shaped to a large degree by the larger world of economy, society, and politics.”⁴⁹

This approach is evident in her collaborative work *Waterstaat in Stedenland: Het hoogheemraadschap van Rijnland voor 1857* (“Water administration in an urban land: The regional water board of Rijnland before 1857”), which offers an authoritative analysis of the Rijnland regional water board. As the title implies, the economic and social influence of the major cities in Rijnland, such as Haarlem and Leiden, are key to understanding environmental

⁴⁸ William TeBrake, “Managing Water in an Urban Land. A New History of Rijnland,” *BMGN* 123 (2008): 1-3; Arne Kaijser “System Building from Below: Institutional Change in Dutch Water Control Systems,” *Technology and Culture* 43 (2002): 521-548.

⁴⁹ TeBrake, “Managing Water,” 6.

trends. Along with an insightful overview of the history of Rijnland Water Board urban rivalries, van Dam and Tielhof give significant attention to civic demand for peat, and land reclamation financed by urban investors.⁵⁰

A number of works have helped fill in the gaps between hydraulic history and other historical disciplines, making important connections between the two. English works such as G.P. van de Ven's *Man Made Lowlands* and Audrey Lambert's earlier monograph *The Making of the Dutch Landscape* both offer detailed surveys of the long-term economic and social developments throughout Holland and the rest of the Netherlands.⁵¹

Perhaps the strongest ties have been between water management and economic history, such as Jan de Vries' early pioneering work *The Dutch Rural Economy in the Golden Age, 1500-1700*, which demonstrates how the watery landscape affected agricultural development in the rural sectors of the Holland economy.⁵² More recently, Diederik Aten's *Als het geweld comt* details how lake reclamation affected water transportation and led to considerable economic competition and political conflict in northern Holland.⁵³ Similarly, Han van Zwet's *Lofwaerdighe dijkagies en miserable polders* offers great insights into the practice and financing of lake reclamation in seventeenth-century Holland.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ See Tielhof and van Dam, *Waterstaat*.

⁵¹ See van de Ven, *Man-Made Lowlands*; Audrey Lambert, *The Making of the Dutch Landscape: An Historical Geography of the Netherlands*, 2nd ed. (London: Orlando, 1985).

⁵² See, Jan de Vries, *The Dutch Rural Economy in the Golden Age 1500-1700* (New Haven, MA: Yale University Press, 1974).

⁵³ See Diederik Aten, "*Als Het Gewelt Comt*": *Politiek En Economie in Holland Benoorden Het Ij, 1500-1800* (Hilversum, Verloren, 1995).

⁵⁴ See Han van Zwet, *Lofwaerdighe Dijkagies En Miserabele Polders : Een Financiële Analyse Van Landaanwinningsprojecten in Hollands Noorderkwartier, 1597-1643* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2009).

One area which still remains largely unexplored, however, is the impact and influence of military inundations on the economic, social, and political developments in Holland. Many of the works on water management generally focus on longer-term processes, such as the ecological crises created by turf extraction. As such it is not surprising that they do not treat the short-term issues which military inundations might have caused. Furthermore, the many books which cover the Revolt usually only treat the intentional flooding as a temporary setback to the longer social and economic trends they are examining. Numerous works mention military inundations in passing and hint at their importance, but in general the topic has not yet received any substantial scholarly consideration.

To date, there are only a few articles and book chapters that treat military inundations specifically. D.J.B. Trim's chapter in *Amphibious Warfare* offers some insightful approaches to treating "inshore, estuarine, riverine, and lacustrine" military strategy in general in the early modern period, but military inundations are rarely mentioned.⁵⁵ Other works tend to be more descriptive than analytical. They either cover very long periods of time or discuss them in relationship to the waterline, a series of defensive fortifications built to intentionally flood tracts of land for defensive purposes.⁵⁶ Not surprisingly the siege of Leiden in 1574 has received the deepest analysis, as it was one of the pivotal moments of rebel opposition to Habsburg rule.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ See, D.J.B. Trim, "Medieval and Early-Modern Inshore, Estuarine, Riverine and Lacustrine Warfare" in *Amphibious Warfare, 1000-1700*, eds. D.J.B. Trim and Mark Charles Fissel (Boston: Brill, 2005), 357-419.

⁵⁶ B. Arentz, "Schadevergoeding bij militaire inundaties: van het ontzet van Leiden tot de Tweede Wereldoorlog" *Tijdschrift voor Waterstaatgeschiedenis* 9 (2000), 67-76; Wim Klinkert, "Water in oorlog: de rol van het water in de Militaire Geschiedenis van Holland na 1550" in *Hollanders en Het Water: Twintig Eeuwen Strijd en Profijt*, ed. Eelco and Aten Beukers (Hilversum: Verloren, 2007), 451-504.

⁵⁷ See G. 't Hart, "Rijnlands bestuur en het waterstaat omtrent het beleg en ontzet van Leiden" *Leidse Jaarboekje* 66 (1974), 13-33; Simon Groenveld, *'Van Vyanden und Vrienden Bedroevet'*

James Tracy has written about the lack of compensation for farmers and rural dwellers in Holland whose land was flooded in order to save the city from defeat.⁵⁸ Marjolein 't Hart's recent work *Dutch Wars of Independence: Warfare and Commerce in the Netherlands 1570-1580* devotes three pages to the "lasting burdens of inundations" and probably provides the best overview of their impact. But the lack of an established historiography on the subject is noticeable in her references.⁵⁹

The areas of Zeeland-Flanders have received the most attention in terms of military flooding and its connection with the so-called *verdrongen landen* (drowned lands). One scholar estimates that nearly 90 percent of the coastal area lay under water after fighting in the area in the mid-1580s and was not repaired until three years after the war ended in 1648.⁶⁰ Adriaan de Kraker has probably written the most expansively on this topic. In his article on Axel in North Flanders he demonstrates how the sea dikes around the town were already in disrepair at the outset of the Dutch Revolt, a situation which became exacerbated by depopulation caused by looting and plundering. As the sea dikes were already in a poor condition the rebel factions began cutting them in order to open up an all-water passage to towns which lay further inland in Flanders. In the process Axel became a veritable island. He notes that resurgence which historians argue occurred in Axel after the inundations only appear as growth and prosperity

De gevolgen van het beleg van Leiden voor de Omgeving van de Stad (Den Haag: Sdu uitgevers, 2001).

⁵⁸ James Tracy, "Holland's New Fiscal Regime" in *The Political Economy of the Dutch Republic*, ed. Oscar Gelderblom (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 41-54.

⁵⁹ Marjolein 't Hart, *Dutch Wars of Independence: Warfare and Commerce in the Netherlands 1570-1580* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 105-108.

⁶⁰ P.J. van Cruyningen, *Behoudend maar buigzaam: boeren in West-Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, 1650-1850*, (PhD diss., Wageningen Universiteit, 2000), 17.

because the military flooding had been such a nadir.⁶¹ De Kraker contextualized the military inundations, showing how they fit within the broader politics before and during the Revolt, but the same issues have not been studied for water management in Holland.

David Blackbourn probably provides the most salient description of the relationship between humans and their environment in terms of water management and the military in the making of modern Germany. He notes how the conquest of nature of also implied the conquest of people. He traced the various ways in which military developments and ideology affected the landscape and served to justify the domination of different populations. He examined how the draining of the Oder Marshes, the straightening of the Rhine, and the creation of a harbor at Jade Bay in German lands generated a dramatic loss of biodiversity and a great deal of human suffering and death.⁶² In other words, Blackbourn's examples detail how Germans negotiated with their environment at the same time that they negotiated amongst themselves. The environmental winners were the most adaptable flora and fauna. The human winners were those in power, as the poorest people or at the margins of society lost out in the form of forced removals, forced labor on environmental projects, or having to live in flood-prone areas.

⁶¹ Adriaan M.J. de Kraker, "De Overgang van Axel, Een Herwaardering van de Gebeuternissen tussen 1565 en 1590" *Zeeuws Tijdschrift* 36 (1986): 161-171; Kraker, Adriaan M.J. *Landschap uit balans. De invloed van de natuur, de economie en de politiek ontwikkeling van het landschap in de Vier Ambachten en het Land van Saeftinghe tussen 1488 en 1609* (Utrecht, Uitgeverij Matrijs, 1997); Kraker, Arie de. "Dijkaanleg en dijkherstel in noordoost-Vlaanderen tijdens de zestiende eeuw," *Tijdschrift voor Waterstaatsgeschiedenis* 2 (1993): 26-37.

⁶² David Blackbourn, *The Conquest of Nature: Water, Landscape, and the Making of Modern Germany* (New York: Norton, 2006), 2-19.

Conclusion

The struggle against water in the Low Countries undoubtedly had a lingering effect, as Petra J.E.M. van Dam alluded to in her description of the “amphibious culture” in Dutch society. The motto on the Zeeland coats of arms probably states it most forcefully: *Luctor et emergo*, “I fight to emerge.” The underlying premise is that the struggle serves as a unifying agent against the common enemy of water and flooding. This understanding is the fundamental principle of the poldermodel. In spite of appropriate criticisms over the egalitarian or democratic character of its representation, the poldermodel serves a useful paradigm for explaining the consensus and discussion style organization which emerged in the Low Countries in general and Holland in particular.

As earlier discussion makes clear, the process of the mobilizing nature for military purposes is a complex one. Tactical and resource management considerations could greatly impact the course and outcome of conflicts while also influencing power relations within a given state. The historiography of water management in Holland is well established, but there still exists a lacuna regarding the impact of military inundations.

In many cases the strategic floods in Holland did secure some tactical victories, but they also created considerable collateral damage. Land, houses, possessions, and lives were all lost in the process of military conquest. How did the States of Holland handle these issues? How did they manage the most important resource in the area after the dike breaches and intentional floods? How much damage did the flooding cause, and how successful were the water management infrastructure repairs? James Tracy has demonstrated that the local residents did

not receive any form of financial reimbursement for their losses, so how did they exercise their agency?⁶³ That is the focus of the following chapters.

⁶³ Tracy, "Holland's New Fiscal Regime," 54.

CHAPTER TWO - HOLLAND'S LANDSCAPE PRIOR TO THE REVOLT

Introduction

The sixteenth century was a difficult period for the water boards of Holland. The water-management infrastructure across the province had to handle increasing quantities of water as a result of turf mining. The resulting need for repair and replacement led to widespread disputes in the regional water boards and between cities over finances and the best courses of action. In the meantime the maintenance of upkeep of the many dikes and sluices fell into disrepair. Many people in Holland feared the possibility of a major storm and the long-term damage it might cause.

That major storm did strike Holland, with important environmental and political ramifications. The All Saints Day Flood occurred on 1 November 1570 and is arguably the *worst* flooding disaster to ever hit the Netherlands. It ravaged Holland and the other provinces along the North Sea coast, leaving devastation in its wake. The States of Holland struggled to come to terms with the disaster and coordinate relief and repair and repeatedly asked Philip II and Alva for a remission or deferment on some of their taxes. Their pleas fell on deaf ears, as the Habsburg state needed all the money it could get. The fallout from the All Saints Day Flood highlights the differing priorities of Holland and the Habsburg and was an important, yet understudied, cause of the Revolt.

Pre-Revolt Issues

Throughout the sixteenth century Hollanders conducted serious negotiations with their environment to halt the deteriorating condition of their water management infrastructure. The Dutch historian S.J. Fockema Andreae termed this period the “century of conflict” in Rijnland, as there were numerous disputes over taxation, representation, jurisdiction, and repair costs.¹ The flood defenses in Holland had been deteriorating for some time because of extensive peat (turf) mining. The partially decayed vegetation served as an important fuel after it had been cut and dried. Throughout the Middle Ages this industry supported a sizeable population in the Low Countries. Many households in Holland relied on the fuel, while exporting the material to nearby provinces also offered steady profits.

In southern Holland the water board of Schieland demonstrates the serious ecological damage from turf mining. The turf-mining industry largely provided the economic foundation for the town of Gouda. This city commanded roughly one-third of the entire turf-shipping traffic in Holland, with around 218,000 tons passing through the city annually. The Dike Counts and other water-management officials saw the destruction which this practice caused, but were largely unable to slow down the deterioration. According to one survey completed in 1514, roughly two-thirds of the available land around the town of Zevenhuizen in the center of the water board was mined out and thus agriculturally unproductive.²

¹ M.H.V. van Amstel-Horák, “Nieuwbouw van twee sluizen in een benauwde tijd: Halfweg 1556-1558,” in *Zeven eeuwen Rijnlandse uitwatering in Spaarndam en Halfweg: van bevelingen naar beheersing* (Leiden: Hoogheemraadschap van Rijnland, 1994), 74.

² Willem van der Ham, *Hoge dijken, diepe gronden: land en water tussen Rotterdam en Gouda: een geschiedenis van Schieland* (Utrecht: Matrijs, 2004), 81-6. Van der Ham notes that in some cases the officials who were supposed to enforce peat mining restrictions were the same ones who depended on its profit. Tielhof and van Dam provide another explanation, showing how the

As peat harvesters dug up the earth and collected the abundant fuel source, lakes began to enlarge as their banks were washed away. Throughout the sixteenth century officials in Schieland worried about the creation of a “great inner lake.”³ In nearby Rijnland, this fear proved justified as several smaller lakes combined to form the great Haarlemmermeer, a small sea in the center of Holland. It was only with slight hyperbole that Hollanders termed it the “waterwolf,” because its waters were always clawing away and swallowing up entire sections of land along the shore.⁴

The turf mining and the Haarlemmermeer put a tremendous strain on the water board of Rijnland to maintain the dikes and sluices and find an agreeable solution to discharging increasing quantities of water. Repairing and improving the Spaarndam dike was always one of the top priorities for Rijnland, as this was the main drainage point for the waters from the Haarlemmermeer into the IJ river, and eventually the Zuiderzee. In fact, the foundation of the Rijnland water board, and its so-called ‘Magna Carta,’ can be traced back to a 1255 privilege granted by William II for the care of the dike.⁵ Maintaining the Spaarndam was a communal responsibility for the cities and residents of Rijnland and as such there was ample discussion over the best policies for its care and maintenance.

In the sixteenth century there were some very public disputes over the Spaarndam in terms of dike repair and sluice replacement. Around 1510 there were serious worries that

power structures in Holland were horizontal, between the water boards and other governing bodies, and as such they lacked the necessary power to enforce the laws. Tielhof and van Dam, *Waterstaat*, 65.

³ Van der Ham, *Hoge dijken*, 86.

⁴ Tielhof and van Dam, *Waterstaat*, 53-74.

⁵ Tielhof and van Dam, *Waterstaat*, 7.

flooding north of the IJ would spread south, which were justified when the dike broke only a few years later. After this disaster struck representatives from the Rijnland water board, Amsterdam, Haarlem, and Leiden proceeded to fight over how to pay for the repair work. The situation became so critical that Charles V intervened and appointed a negotiator to settle the matter. When no internal solution was forthcoming, Charles V dismissed the entire water board and replaced them, while the negotiator brought in an expert from northern Holland to improve the dike.⁶

Two decades later the situation had not improved, as the water board noted that “the common land stood in great peril” which began a heated debate over the construction of new sluices in the Spaarndam.⁷ In general wooden sluices only lasted about twenty-five years and needed regular replacement.⁸ This recurring expense, coupled with the costly dike repair, meant that the Rijnland water board ran up a debt. This situation further deteriorated when several villages along the Spaarndam stuck the spade in the dike, a symbolic act in which a community abandons its dike pledge duties because it can no longer fulfill upkeep responsibilities. This created a unique situation in which those villages protected by the Spaarndam actually paid little if any taxes on its upkeep and in particular the construction of the new sluices. That the water board was forced to accept this spade sticking showed a nadir for the power of Rijnland.⁹

⁶ Tielhof and van Dam, *Waterstaat*, 95-7.

⁷ Archieven van het Hoogheemraadschap van Rijnland, Oude Archieven van het Hoogheemraadschap van Rijnland (OAR) (12-55-1857), Gesplitste Registratie, Bestuur, Register van resoluties van dijkgraaf, hoogheemraaden en hoofdingelanden, 21, 15 April 1543. Hereafter: OAR, Gesplitste, date.

⁸ OAR Gesplitste, August 1565.

⁹ Amstel-Horak, “Twee Sluizen,” 54.

Over the course of the sixteenth century there were eight different sluices built in the Spaarndam, all of which the cities in Rijnland contentiously debated. Leiden and Haarlem in particular engaged in protracted arguments over drainage and finance. The installation of a few stone sluices alleviated some of the concerns as they were more durable. At the same time neither city wanted to pay the bulk of construction costs, which complicated matters. At the same time Haarlem wanted to increase its ship traffic by improving the navigability of the river Spaarn, a branch of the IJ, while also looking to open up access to the nearby river Leid. The end goal was to divert ships towards the city to increase its toll revenue. Haarlem would return to this issue during and after the Revolt as well.¹⁰

There were problems in the southern portions of Rijnland as well. The important *landscheiding* dike was in disrepair and in need of attention. As the name implies, this dike served as a boundary separating Rijnland from the other water boards of Schieland and Delfland. In the early sixteenth century the water boards conducted a number of inspections and attempted to broaden and improve the dike. However, these improvements proved illusory.¹¹ In 1561 there were serious concerns that if a powerful storm occurred widespread flooding would ensue. Apparently, over the course of the previous twenty years several individuals had dug turf too close to the dike, or made small cuts to improve their water access.¹² Other parts of the *landscheiding* dike, such as the Leidschendam, suffered from overuse. This dam controlled passage along the Vliet river between Leiden and Delft. In 1562 the water board of Rijnland complained that the adjoining oortoom where goods from ships were loaded and unloaded had

¹⁰ OAR, Gesplitste, 15 April 1543; OAR, Gesplitste, 20 April 1569.

¹¹ C. Postma, *Het Hoogheemraadschap van Delfland in de middeleeuwen, 1289-1589* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1989), 251.

¹² OAR Gesplitste, 20 April 1560; Van der Ham, *Hoge dijken*, 86-7.

compacted because of excess use and was becoming a flood threat. There were apparently talks between the Rijnland and Delfland water boards over making special keys to the lock, which each would possess, and would only use when both parties were in agreement.¹³ Clearly the Hollanders' negotiations with their landscape were yielding mixed results.

The All Saints Day Flood

The major storm that many feared would lead to widespread flooding and devastation occurred on 1 November 1570. In the preceding decades the members of the water board of Rijnland had continually stressed that *if* a major storm should occur then there would be serious repercussions. This particular flood, however, was monumental, arguably the worst North Sea flood of all time. Research places the flood levels at 4m above the sea level in most places, but as high as 4.7m in east Friesland, higher even than the great flood which hit the Netherlands in 1953.¹⁴ The destruction spread from Denmark as far south as Flanders with incalculable destruction. Contemporary chronicles pegged the death toll at 20,000, although more recent research places the number of deaths within the range of 3,000-4,000.

Along the northern coast of Flanders there were apparently dike breaches large enough that ships could sail through them. The local water boards estimated the damage at 91,511 guilders to repair the area.¹⁵ Situated along the coast, the land of Saefthinghe had been constantly

¹³ OAR, Gesplitste, December 1559.

¹⁴ Frans Beekman and Bert van der Valk, "Merkttekens van stormvloed en aan de Nederlandse kust," *Tijdschrift voor Waterstaatgeschiedenis* 7 (1998): 1-6.

¹⁵ C. Dekker, *Geld in het water: Antwerps en Mechels kapitaal in Zuid-Beveland na de stormvloed in de 16e eeuw* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2010), 190-217.

threatened by flooding, but following the All Saints Flood the majority of the area was flooded for good. The last dikes which remained intact were flooded for strategic reasons in 1584 as part of rebel attempts to capture the town of Axel.¹⁶ The damage was so absolute that the land is still currently un-reclaimed, serving as an important wetland environment for bird and fish life.

Holland likewise suffered considerable losses and damage from the All Saint's inundations. The town of Dordrecht was completely flooded as barrels of wine and beer floated down the street. Two-thirds of the polders to the southwest of the city were inundated, as the water rose so high that it overflowed over the dikes rather than breaching them. There was enough flooding in Rijnland to take a boat directly from Leiden to Amsterdam. Fortunately the dike along the Rijn held strong, which prevented even further devastation. In Delfland it took a concerted effort to reinforce the dikes, as the church bells rang all day to call people to action. The town of Scheveningen on the coast could not be spared, losing no fewer than ninety houses, which were washed away. Those houses which remained were largely unusable. Schieland required similar vigilance to prevent complete ruin, as residents worked for ten days to repair and strengthen the threatened dikes.¹⁷ As one contemporary chronicler stated, "the suffering and the damages are so immense that words cannot describe them."¹⁸

The political fallout of the All Saints Flood was felt throughout the Low Countries. Historians often overlook its importance because it occurred just a little over a year before the Revolt began in Holland. As such, it is usually ignored, with focus on other aspects of Dutch

¹⁶ De Kraker, "De overgang van Axel," 161-171.

¹⁷ Raingard Eber, "Fear of water and floods in the Low Countries" in *Fear in Early Modern Society*, eds. William G. Naphy and Penny Roberts (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 62-65.

¹⁸ Eber, "Fear of Water," 65.

discontent with Habsburg policy, or was eclipsed by the major events of the Revolt which followed. Nevertheless, the All Saints Flood opened up a divisive debate between the States of Holland and their regent, the Duke of Alva, and their king, Philip II.

The critical issue was financial, which was an ongoing source of friction. For decades Holland had been paying an ever-increasing amount of taxation to the Spanish monarchy. This money mainly came in two forms: *beden* and “penny” taxes. The *beden* were essentially subsidies which the States of Holland supplied to their sovereign. Ever since the fourteenth century the province supplied a yearly ordinary *beden* and periodically would supply an extraordinary *beden* because of special circumstances, such as crusades or wars. During the Habsburg-Valois Wars (1494-1559), Holland was able to leverage Charles V’s need for money into a degree of provincial autonomy. In exchange for raising a number of extraordinary *beden*, the States of Holland gained the right to raise the revenue as they saw fit.¹⁹ While the *beden* raised a tremendous amount of money for the Habsburg state, they were collected in a way that was less onerous to population of Holland and raised less opposition.

The “penny” taxes were widely criticized because they were directed at commerce but Philip II refused to do away with them. The penny taxes never raised anything near the sums of the *beden*. For the years 1543-1555 the penny taxes in Holland only amounted to 1.8 percent of those of the *beden*.²⁰ Yet the Habsburg financial needs were pressing, especially after 1568 when a Spanish ship containing 80,000-pounds destined for Brussels had to take refuge in an English port and was subsequently confiscated by Elizabeth I. As Alva needed money to pay for defense and administration following the Iconoclastic Fury, in 1569 he asked the States General

¹⁹ Tracy, *Holland under Habsburg Rule*, 115-6.

²⁰ Tracy, *Holland under Habsburg Rule*, 140.

for their permission to collect three new taxes: the 10th, 20th, and 100th Pennies. The first two were essentially a permanent sales tax on moveable and landed property amounting to ten and five percent respectively, while the last tax was a one-time tax on capital of one percent.

The 100th penny tax was carried out immediately and raised a significant amount of revenue for Alva, while the 10th and 20th penny taxes remained an open question. In place of the last two taxes the individual provinces offered a one-time payment of four million florins over the next two years. Alva accepted the offer, but continued to push for the collection of the 10th and 20th penny taxes. The provincial states saw the offer as a way out of the penny taxes, Alva saw it as a financial alleviative, something to keep the government functioning smoothly until the States consented to the other taxes. When it became clear the States of Holland would not consent, Alva began collecting the taxes against the wishes of the States General and the individual provinces.²¹

The split between provincial priorities and the broader Habsburg concerns could not have been starker. The fact that the penny taxes would be permanent meant, in theory, they could be used support a standing army to force the unpopular policies (such as the religious placards) onto the inhabitants of the Low Countries. More importantly these taxes subverted the power of the purse strings from the States of Holland. For decades the representatives of Holland had bartered and negotiated with their Habsburg rulers over the right to collect taxes using their own procedures. On 31 July 1571 when Alva called for the collection of the 10th and 20th pennies he attempted to browbeat the city magistrates of Holland into submission. He ordered officials from the Court of Holland to make sure his plans were implemented and decreed an enormous

²¹ Peter Limm, *The Dutch Revolt 1559-1648* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 34-35.

1,000 guilder fine on city burgomasters if they did not carry out the collection.²² The States of Holland and the city magistrates were attempting to keep their place at the negotiation table while Alva was doing his best to limit their voice. It is against this larger fiscal background that the debates occurred regarding funding the repairs from the All Saints Day Flood.

When the States of Holland requested money for the necessary dike repair work, the Habsburg response was for them unsatisfactory. In spite of the fact that Alva himself believed that as much as five-sixths of Holland might be flooded, he and Philip II refused to grant any exemptions regarding the collection of the contentious penny taxes. The States of Holland complained that paying the taxes *and* the repairs put the province in a “poor, miserable, and calamitous state,” which would leave the land desolate.²³ Even before the All Saints Day Flood hit, the States complained to Alva that collecting the 100th penny affected their ability to maintain dikes. Alva’s intentions were quite clear, however, the States would have to find a way to collect both. The States complained that they did not know whether they would be a kingdom or a pauper once everything was paid.²⁴

Immediately following the All Saints Day Flood, the States of Holland pleaded directly with Philip II, requesting clemency because of the “desolation caused by God Almighty.” In their letter, they not only noted the widespread damage, but also hinted at their dissatisfaction with Habsburg rule, specifically Philip’s inability to protect Dutch ships from piracy. They went on to discuss the difficulty of raising taxes, arguing that the cities were already paying too much,

²² Israel, *Dutch Republic*, 166-167.

²³ Staten van Holland, *Generaale index on de registers der Resolutien van de Heeren Staaten van Holland en West Vriesland* (278 vols., The Hague, 1524/43-1793), 1570, 100, 12 December 1570. Hereafter: RSH year, page, date.

²⁴ RSH 1570, 93, 2 January 1570; RSH, 1570, 11, 4 April 1570.

while the rural areas were decimated from the flooding. They concluded that the whole process of tax collection needed to be postponed in order to funnel money towards the costly repairs. While they awaited Philip's response, the States also began discussing postponement of one of their *beden*, noting how all these issues made payment impossible.²⁵ In the end, they believed that their "great hope" lay in a possible tax exemption from Philip or Alva.

The States of Holland had to wait several months for a reply as decision making and correspondence could take some time in the Spanish capital.²⁶ In the meantime Alva wrote back to the States of Holland by February 1571, stating that they could exempt part of the flooded lands from the third installment of the 100th penny and defer taxes on land until the end of the year. However, since Philip had already spent the majority of the taxes in advance, the States would still need to raise 100,000 guilders, which amounted to the bulk of the taxes promised before the flood. Alva's leniency on taxation was hardly lenient at all.

The States thanked Alva formally for his clemency but took the opportunity to remind him of the great damage still being repaired across Holland. They argued that the All Saints Day Flood had created an entirely new situation in the province. As such they would be unable to raise the 100,000 guilders, as the defense of the land against flooding was still in a perilous state. Furthermore, Alva's letter left unanswered the question of whether or not to collect rent on flooded lands, which was an important part of the State's initial complaint, since they expected little benefit from flooded lands.²⁷

²⁵ RSH 1570, 100, 12 December 1570.

²⁶ See Geoffrey Parker, *The Grand Strategy of Philip II* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

²⁷ RSH 1571-1574, 13-16, 2 March 1571.

After Alva's letter, the States decided that they wanted to hear the decisions directly from the king. They also began gathering detailed information regarding the condition of the lands in Holland, which they believed would help them secure some tax exemptions. Each city was to provide a report, while the water boards and dike counts would address the damage in the countryside. The issue of rents on flooded lands remained unsettled. After a prolonged debate among themselves, the States decided that they could raise the 100,000 guilders minus the revenue which they calculated has been lost because of the flood. They worried, however, that if they instructed the tax collectors to be rigorous with the collection of rent dues then it could lead to widespread arrests because of delinquent payments.

The States of Holland decided they should look after their own needs. Roughly a month later the States decided to withdraw the second payment of their 271,000-pound *beden* agreed to the previous year. Alva responded by reaffirming that the monarchy needed the revenue. The limits of his leniency amounted to a reduction or exemption on some taxes until August, but the full amount would still be due by the end of 1571.²⁸ Clearly both parties were at an impasse.

The States decided the best approach was to address the issue head on, so they sent a delegation to Brussels to negotiate with Alva directly. The meeting amounted to a full-blown examination of the benefits of Habsburg rule. In addition to the lingering grievances over the All Saints Day Flood, the representatives brought up a number of taxes, specifically the 10th and 20th penny, which they believed hurt Dutch trade and hindered Holland's economy. Alva recommended that the States put in writing their exact demands and what they wanted from Philip. Only a short time later he summoned the delegates and informed them that Philip had

²⁸ RSH, 1571-1574, 38-65, 18 May 1571 – 31 July 1571.

plans for the tax money from the 10th and 20th pennies. He told them that they should be good subjects like they had always been, and raise the money which they promised!²⁹

The States of Holland responded by noting that they were confused by their negotiations with Alva, arguing they had never attempted to get rid of the 10th and 20th pennies despite the fact that they were becoming increasingly burdensome. Rather, they had asked Philip to reconsider whether these taxes were damaging trade and fishing, which hurt their ability to raise taxes. They estimated that they had already raised 80,000 guilders from rents during the present year, but were unclear about how much of this money went to the Spanish government since some of the funds also went to dike repair. They argued that the “land must be won from the water with great cost” and the water management infrastructure was still in a poor condition following the All Saints Day Flood.³⁰

For his part, Alva appeared to be equally and genuinely confused over the State’s policies, stating that he expected to be thanked for his moderation regarding the 10th and 20th pennies. He asserted that the establishment and collection of these funds had always been done with the State’s consent, so he seemingly could not understand their current resistance. He believed that Philip would offer some moderation, but would generally carry out the tax in full.

Exasperated, the States decided to issue a placard protesting the 10th and 20th penny taxes which would be published across Holland, arguing that they were being pressured into defending their ancient liberties. They noted that they had tried to appease the King with another *beden*, and had asked him for leniency on the taxes, which they argued were leading to the ruin of the

²⁹ RSH 1571-1574, 78-83, 21 September 1571-20 October 1571.

³⁰ RSH 1571-1574, 83-87, 21 October 1571.

province. By November 1571, a full year after the flood had occurred; Alva was left wondering why the States still had not raised the 10th and 20th pennies given Philip's moderation.³¹

These negotiations highlight the disparate priorities of the States of Holland and their Habsburg rulers. The States repeatedly attempted to keep the lines of communication open and discuss how best to deal with the aftermath of the All Saints Day Flood. They wrote to directly Alva and Philip II, and when this failed they sent a delegation to Brussels to negotiate in person. From Holland's perspective, these attempts provided little satisfaction as Philip and Alva needed the revenue. Discussion and debate matter little when one party is either unwilling or unable to budge on its position. Stated differently, these debates only served to demonstrate to the States of Holland the futility of future negotiations. If Philip would not allow for remittances or tax reductions following one of the worst floods to ever strike Holland, then when would he?

Conclusion

Clearly, the All Saints Day Flood had caused a tremendous amount of damage, not only to the Holland landscape, but to the relationship between the province and its sovereign as well. The water-management infrastructure in Holland required attention even before the flood struck. That the All Saints Day Flood was one of the worst ever to strike the Netherlands just increased the level of devastation across the province. The debates between the States of Holland on one side and Philip and Alva on the other only delayed and complicated the repairs. These interruptions meant that the military inundations which hit Holland even harder.

³¹ RSH 1571-1574, 88-102, 20 October 1571-25 November 1571.

In terms of the relationship between the province and their sovereign the All Saints Day Flood was another example of the contrasting priorities of the two parties. Philip's territories stretched across Europe and into the Americas which pushed his finances to the limit. When the flood struck his coffers were nearly empty with his finances on life support. In such a position, Philip ordered Alva to cover the expenses for his soldiers and administration. Alva's attempts at fiscal self-sufficiency came about in the form of heavy-handed tax collection which created no small degree of discontent in the provinces. The States of Holland attempted to keep an open dialogue and negotiate an amicable solution but to no avail. The fact that both parties expressed their confusion with the other over the collection of the 10th and 20th pennies speaks volumes about the breakdown in communication.

The States of Holland ended their negotiations with Alva over the All Saints Day flood with the ominous conclusion that they had found no solution to their burdens, and had no *legal* way to give the king contentment.³² For them, every avenue appeared to be closed. The *illegal* remedy which the States of Holland found came in the form of open rebellion against the Spanish. The natural disaster further alienated the province from central regime. For decades the two parties had differing priorities, the debates surrounding the repairs laid bare this truth. The period following the disaster was Holland's hour of need, and in many ways their Habsburg rulers abandoned the Hollanders as they were distracted by other priorities. These events did not create the Revolt, but they made opposition and rebellion a more attractive choice for many.

³² RSH 1571-1574, 88-102, 20 October 1571-25 November 1571.

CHAPTER THREE - “BETTER BROKEN LAND THAN LOST LAND”: MILITARY INUNDATIONS DURING THE DUTCH REVOLT

Introduction

“Better broken land than lost land” became the unofficial motto of the rebel forces during the 1570s Holland campaigns of the Dutch Revolt. Contemporary and later chronicles of the war repeatedly noted that the Prince of Orange and his supporters took this approach when it came to the fighting in Holland.¹ The mantra suggest that he, the States of Holland, and the rebel forces were completely aware of the environmental damage they could cause in the form of seriously weakened water-management defenses. In their attempt to militarize the landscape they acknowledged that they could “break it” irreparably. The strength of the Spanish military reduced the likelihood of a victory through traditional modes of warfare. This fact made the destructive floods an appealing tactic for the rebels.

This chapter details the floods which hit Holland throughout the 1570s, both natural and military. The strategic floods for military goals were the most widespread, but natural floods also occurred, adding to the destruction and misery in the province. The Dutch landscape was not a pristine environment that was destroyed by the toils of war; that is not the narrative of this chapter. Rather there were already significant problems with water management systems in Holland throughout the sixteenth century that the Dutch were having difficulty addressing. For instance, the water board of Rijnland in the center of Holland endured a “century of conflict”

¹ Emanuel van Meteren, *Commentarien ofte memorien van-den Nederlandschen staet, handel, oorloghen ende gheschiedenissen van onsen tyden, etc: mede vervattende eenige haerder ghebueren handelighen* (1609), 82-3; Jan Fruytiers, *Corte Beschrijvinghe van de Strenghe Belegheringhe end Wondervaerlicke Verlossinge der Stadt Leyden in Hollandt* (Delft: Aelbrecht Hendricksz, 1577), 16.

over various legal, jurisdictional and water management issues. To add to the misery, Holland and territories all along the North Sea were hit with arguably the worst flood in their history, the All Saints Day Flood on 1 November 1570. Alva and Philip's response to this natural disaster was hardly accommodating, refusing to grant any significant tax relief for those affected. This grievance became one of the many local complaints against Spanish rule that led to the outbreak of the Revolt.

Once the fighting began, the rebel military forces routinely used flooding in order to secure their military objectives. The rebels often made attempts to control the flood waters, but with varying degrees of success. Environmental factors and local resistance often complicated the military plans. By the Pacification of Ghent in 1576 the rebels had flooded large sections of the land in Holland and secured their objectives, causing enormous amount of collateral damage. In some ways the Spanish were forced out of Holland on the back of a wave, beginning with the floods in Northern Holland at Alkmaar, then moving south to central Holland with the sieges of Haarlem and Leiden, before flowing east, towards Gouda, Oudewater, and the Alblasserwaard and then south towards Brill, Voorne, and Putten. Flooding, both natural and man-made, was an ever present feature of life in Holland in this period.

The Use of Military Inundations during the Revolt

In the early stages of fighting the rebel Dutch forces were seriously outnumbered and outmatched. Part of the reason that Alva took such a hard line on taxation is that he had had to support a standing army of 13,000 men ever since 1569. This swelled to an imposing 67,000 man army in response to the outbreak of hostilities in 1572, remaining around these levels for the

remainder of the war.² The rebels, for their part, struggled to organize the men and money necessary to resist the Spanish forces. William of Orange incurred tremendous debt paying for soldiers' wages before the States of Holland finally found a way to provide regular troop payments. Essentially outmatched, the Prince and the rebel forces consistently utilized guerilla-style tactics, most commonly with military inundations.

Siege warfare was the most common type of military engagement in the Dutch Revolt specifically and early modern warfare more generally. This type of fighting required a great deal of manpower, logistical support, and patience. The first step involved isolating the particular city one wanted to capture. This could be accomplished in a variety of ways, but generally the besieging army would construct two lines for attack and defense. The line of attack faced inward toward the city while the line of defense faced outward and was intended to protect from a rearguard attack. This step often involved the construction of temporary sconces, small defensive works which guarded bridges, roads, or other passes.

Once the besieging army surrounded and isolated the city they could either starve it into submission or attempt to create a breach in the defenses in order to gain entry. The two options were not mutually exclusive, so a city's defenders often had to fight hunger at the same time as they fought the besiegers. The attackers also had two options for opening a breach in a city's defenses. First, they could use their artillery to try to blast open a hole. The newly developed bastion style defenses and difficulties relating the artillery made this approach challenging. Second, they could dig trenches up to the walls and place explosives. This approach was slow and dangerous, yet it offered better chance of success if the attackers could reach the walls.

² Geoffrey Parker, *The Army of Flanders and the Spanish Road, 1567-1659: The Logistics of Spanish Victory and Defeat in the Low Countries' Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 21-23.

Sieges could last months, in some cases years, which made them a logistical headache and a financial heartache for rulers across Europe. Making arrangements for the necessary food, clothing, tents, shovels, artillery, gunpowder, wagons, horses, and all other supplies required for an army was difficult and costly work. In many cases army commanders contracted out these duties to private entrepreneurs, and the army never received everything it was promised, either in terms of supply or pay.³ Nevertheless, raising an army large enough to besiege a city and keeping it fed and paid well enough to continue with a siege required tremendous effort and application.

Military inundations, on the other hand, required much less coordination and preparation. For centuries the Dutch had been protecting the land from flooding with the construction of dikes and sluices. In order to carry out a military inundation an army simply needed to create a breach in the dike, or keep the sluice doors open, and let nature take its course. In place of a large army and wagon train full of supplies and weaponry a simple shovel could suffice. The sources consulted for this dissertation provide little description of the technical side of the operation, but it does not appear to have been overly complicated. The bigger issue was ensuring that somebody with experience in water-management practices was present to oversee the flooding and that he had enough pioneers (diggers) to carry out the necessary work. Henk den Heijer's work *Holland under water: the logistics behind the relief of Leiden* notes that the inundations were largely the responsibility of members of the water boards and that these individuals required "een legertje dijkgravers" (a small army of dike diggers).⁴

³ See Lauro Martines, *Furies: War in Europe 1450-1700* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013).

⁴ Henk den Heijer, *Holland onder water: De logistiek achter het ontzet van Leiden*, (Leiden: Primavera Pers, 2010), 7-10.

The use of intentional flooding was an ever-present feature of the early stages of the Revolt in Holland, from its outbreak in 1572 until the Pacification of Ghent in 1576. Both sides, the rebel and Habsburg forces, attempted to militarize the landscape in order to secure their objectives, but there were important differences in their approaches. For the rebels, floods became an important tactic to prevent troop movement and expel the Habsburg army from the province. The rebels also used inundations much more frequently. The Habsburg forces used the tactic more sporadically, for instance when they were upset following the relief of Leiden in 1574. For the most part, it appears as though Alva and subsequent Habsburg commanders preferred more traditional forms of war.

That is not to say that they did not see the appeal of military inundations. At one point it appears as though Alva seriously considered the possibility of flooding all of Holland. Logistically and technically flooding the entire province could have been accomplished without too much difficulty. In the end, Philip decided against it because it was still technically his property, and it would lead to considerable damage to the surrounding provinces. He noted, “For all things considered, one may say that Holland at present is a dike that protects all the other provinces, and that if Holland were flooded, the other provinces would be exposed to manifest danger and forced to build their own dikes; and before they are built their territory will undoubtedly be lost.” Ironically, Philip believed that the tactic would be too cruel, and that might damage Spanish reputations.⁵

⁵ Henk van Nierop, *Treason in the Northern Quarter: War, Terror, and the Rule of Law in the Dutch Revolt*. translated by J.C. Grayson. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 79-80. It is ironic because the Spanish would earn a very negative reputation from a Dutch perspective anyway, especially after Spanish Fury, when Spanish troops mutinied in Antwerp in 1576.

To complicate matters, the water boards and usual institutions which were responsible for the water-management infrastructure were hard hit by the fighting as well. The war essentially paralyzed the water boards and prevented them from limiting the damage from the floods and carrying out repairs. Still struggling to cope with the damage from the All Saints Day Flood, the Rijnland water board suspended all of its activities in June 1572 because of the “turbulent times.”⁶ Furthermore, many of the water board representatives were split in their loyalties. Some of them supported Philip II and the Habsburg government, while others sided with rebels. The rent master of the Schieland water board sided with the loyalists and fled when the fighting began, taking the privilege book (which recorded the organization’s decisions and policies) with him.⁷ The Delfland water board encountered similar split loyalties. The majority of those who sided with the king vacated their posts and fled to Utrecht.⁸ In other words, the lingering damage from the All Saints Day Flood, the prevalent use of military inundations, and the disorder among the water boards tasked with overseeing the water-management infrastructure would only increase the damage, delay the repairs, and prolong the suffering for those affected by the flood waters. All of this would put the poldermodel under considerable strain.

⁶ OAR, *Gesplitste*, 20 June 1572.

⁷ Van der Ham, *Hoge dijken*, 91. There is the possibility that the rent master, Wouter Dammasz de Hont, took the privilege book with him because he had been stealing money from the water board and intended to alter its contents.

⁸ Postma, *Delfland*, 390.

The Capture of Brill and Spread of the Revolt

Not surprisingly the capture of Brill on the island of Voorne, the first engagement of the Dutch Revolt, also witnessed the first recorded military inundation in Dutch history. The Sea Beggars, a band of Dutch privateers ostensibly under the command of the Prince of Orange, had been preying on Spanish shipping in the North Sea for several years, finding refuge in English ports. Eventually Queen Elizabeth I was faced with the possibility of hostilities with Spain if she continued to tacitly support the Dutch forces, and so decided to cut her ties and expel them from England. On 1 April 1572 they landed at Brill and captured the city with relative ease, as Alva was temporarily distracted by military events along the French border. He did leave behind some limited garrisons, specifically in the nearby town of Maassluis. Once the commander heard about events at Brill he marched all night. As the Spanish forces approached, the town carpenter Rochus Meeuwisse hurled himself into one of the town's canals and proceeded to chop at one of the sluices with a hatchet. The destruction of the sluice released the stored water and flooded the surrounding area, preventing a Spanish attack before it even began.⁹ This act and saved the city from possible recapture. It is also telling that on 2 April, the day after Brill fell, the Spanish Stadholder of Holland, Count Bossu, ordered a visual inspection of the Maas dike and had troops stationed there for he feared the beggars might attempt to put part of Delfland under water and carry their attacks to the Holland mainland.¹⁰

⁹ Wim Klinkert, "Water in Oorlog: De rol van het water in de militaire geschiedenis van Holland na 1550," in *Hollanders en het water: twintig eeuwen strijd en profijt* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2007), 455.

¹⁰ Postma, *Delfland*, 389.

The Sea Beggar capture of Brill signals a landmark event in Dutch history, although at the time its significance was far from clear. Over the next several months cities across the provinces of Holland and Zeeland would side with the Prince and the Revolt, but for a variety of reasons. In August 1572, there was still a lot of confusion, as expressed by one diarist who wrote that there were numerous “fables” about which cities had rebelled and which ones remained loyal.¹¹ Overall there had been general dissatisfaction with Habsburg policies, as evidenced with the discussion around the repair of the All Saints Flood damage. Like many revolts, however, the rebels had no clear plan program for what they wanted to achieve.

In these early days, support for the Revolt often came more in the form of a “protest vote” against Alva and Philip II, rather than a proactive vote for the policies of Orange.¹² In short, it was reactionary rather than visionary. Town governments faced pressure from a variety of sources, from outside forces like those of the Beggars, and the threat of internal civil unrest if they supported Alva and the collection of the 10th penny too vigorously. In this regard the civic militias proved vital as they often chose not to resist the Beggars.¹³ Once the town went over to the Revolt, many of the loyalists to the central government chose to leave rather than wait to see what might come next. Orange also helped secure support by replacing members of the town council, or *vroedschap*, with people he could trust. By the end of 1572 nearly all the towns in Holland and Zeeland had sworn allegiance to the Prince and the Revolt. The two notable cities

¹¹ Wouter Jacobsz, *Dagboek van broeder Wouter Jacobsz, 1572-1579: Het beleg van Amsterdam. De nasleep, 1578-1579, Verslag van een ooggetuige*, ed. H.de Kruif (Soesterberg: ASPEKT, 2008), 15.

¹² C.C. Hibben, *Gouda in Revolt: particularism and pacifism in the Revolt of the Netherlands 1572-1588* (Utrecht: HES, 1983), 55.

¹³ J.C. Grayson, “The Civic Militia in the County of Holland, 1560-81: Politics and Public Order in the Dutch Revolt,” *BGMN*, 95 (1981): 55-8.

which remained loyal were Middelburg in Zeeland, which withstood a nearly two-year siege before surrendering in and reconciling with the rebels in 1574, and Amsterdam which eventually made peace in 1578. This period represented the early and chaotic civil-war phase of the Revolt in Holland.

In these years the rebel leadership struggled to develop and articulate a coherent plan for the rebellion. The core areas of the Revolt, the provinces of Holland and Zeeland, were still divided amongst themselves. Most cities had sided with the rebels, while the countryside largely remained under Spanish control. At the higher levels of government and politics the core issues of the Revolt revolved around the issues of liberty and religion. These two terms, however, suggested different meanings to different people and the rebels were split among themselves which issue should take precedence. For many, however, the Revolt forced more basic questions. Henk van Nierop stated it most eloquently, “For most contemporaries the most urgent question was not how to win it [the war], but how to survive it.”¹⁴

On 19 July 1572 the States of Holland took the revolutionary step of meeting in Dordrecht on their own authority in an attempt to give the Revolt some direction. They met without being summoned by the monarch, actually ignoring a simultaneous summons by Bossu to meet at The Hague. At this meeting they formally invited Orange to act as Stadholder and captain general of Holland in order to oversee the military and the war.¹⁵ The task before Orange and the States was monumental: not only did they need to find a way to unite the various factions of opposition, but they also had to do so under extreme military duress. As Tracy noted, “Orange and the rebel states had to find a strategy for defending towns that were at times mere

¹⁴ Van Nierop, *Treason*, 2.

¹⁵ Israel, *Republic*, 175.

islands of rebellion in a Spanish sea.”¹⁶ It was with little exaggeration that Orange himself stated that he would probably find his death in Holland and the Revolt.¹⁷

In truth, it was probably the Spanish themselves who did the most to unite the opposition. Alva gave a clear reminder of why his nickname, “the iron duke,” was an appropriate moniker. When he returned from the French border in the fall of 1572, he set about trying to re-establish Habsburg authority in the northern Netherlands, mercilessly in many cases. In November the town of Zutphen in the eastern province of Gelderland surrendered to Alva’s son Don Frederick following a short siege, after which the inhabitants were brutally murdered. Alva made a similar example of the town of Naarden in central Holland only a month later. Alva intended for these sackings to send a clear message to the rebels: end this rebellion or else. Apparently the message got lost in translation. Instead of cowing into submission the rebel forces fought with renewed vigor. For the rebels, the meaning of these sackings was clear: surrender at your own peril.

It was in this phase of the war in Holland and Zeeland that the rebels used military inundations most frequently. Struggling for funds and largely united only in their opposition to Alva, while fearing the worst if they got caught, the rebels attempted to turn the landscape into a weapon for military use. Compared with raising an army large enough to face the Spanish forces in battle, flooding was a seemingly low cost alternative that offered immediate results. At the same time, however, the rebels clearly understood the possible long term consequences of this tactic.

The town of Flushing in Zeeland serves as a prime example. It had been one of the first towns to go over to the Revolt following the Sea Beggar capture of Brill, and for the next two

¹⁶ Tracy, *Founding*, 86-7.

¹⁷ Rowen, *Princes*, 14.

years the rebel forces waged a bitter struggle against the loyalists of nearby Middelburg. In this pitched battle the rebel forces repeatedly flooded the land in between the two towns. When Flushing was on the defensive awaiting reinforcements it “let the water course in.”¹⁸ Several months later, the town was on the offensive, flooding the landscape even further and bringing in ships in order to take Middelburg with a naval assault. The attack proved unsuccessful as Middelburg held out for over a year longer. As a result of these tactics Zeeland became “wasted and full of water” as one chronicler later attested.¹⁹ The devastation wrought by the use of flooding would not have been lost on the rebel forces. Nevertheless, given the choice between a defeat at the hands of the Spanish army and a trial by water, they chose the latter. For the rebels, it was better to break the land than to lose it.

The Sieges of Haarlem (1572-3), Alkmaar (1573) and Amsterdam (1572-8)

The next great siege of the Revolt occurred at Haarlem, just west of Amsterdam, beginning in December 1573, shortly after the massacres at nearby Naarden. Alva wanted to end the Revolt as quickly as possible, and the capture of Haarlem would serve to divide Holland in two along the IJ river (See figure 1). This strategy would separate southern Holland from the northern Quarter and sever rebel communications and troop movements between the two areas. The city was ill prepared to withstand the Alva’s forces, as it had only built impromptu defenses inside the existing medieval walls. This siege demonstrated just how much Alva’s goal of

¹⁸ Emanuel van Meteren, *Commentarien ofte memorien van-den Nederlandschen staet, handel, oorloghen ende gheschiedenissen van onsen tyden, etc: mede vervattende eenige haerder ghebueren handelinghen* (1609), 173.

¹⁹ Van Meteren, 200-4.

intimidating the Dutch into submission had backfired. Over the next six months the town's militia put up a determined resistance to the siege, but would ultimately succumb to the Spanish forces.

Nearby Amsterdam, on the other hand, remained loyal to the Spanish and bore the brunt of Beggar attacks. The city served as an important link in the Spanish supply lines, allowing them to bring in troops from the province of Utrecht for use in the siege of Haarlem (See Figure 1). This route allowed Alva to bypass the rebel controlled cities of southern Holland. The main passage entailed troop movements along the tops of dikes which ran along the Zuiderzee and the IJ river. One of these was the Spaarndam dike which separated these waters from the interior of lakes and rivers Holland, specifically the Haarlemmermeer. The strategic importance of controlling these dikes and water ways was clear to both sides, as evident from the fact that the Beggars began sinking ships around Amsterdam as early as October 1572 to prevent passage to the city.²⁰ In an effort to control access to the two cities, both armies cut dikes and flooded the land. Here the goal of the inundations was not to force out the opposing army, but rather to facilitate troop and ship movement. Nevertheless, the end results were no less destructive.

Alva and his commanders envisioned a quick capture of Haarlem as they enjoyed numerical superiority, with a fighting force of 17,000-18,000 soldiers versus only about 4,000 troops defending the town. The military historian Christopher Duffy noted that from a Spanish point of view, "the reduction of the town seemed more of an administrative than a military problem."²¹ On 20 December Alva ordered outright an assault of the city without taking the usual preparations. He had not counted on the resilience of the defenders, however, and his

²⁰ Jacobsz, *Dagboek*, 26-34.

²¹ Christopher Duffy, *Siege Warfare: The Fortress in the Early Modern World, 1494-1660* (New York: Routledge, 1979), 71.

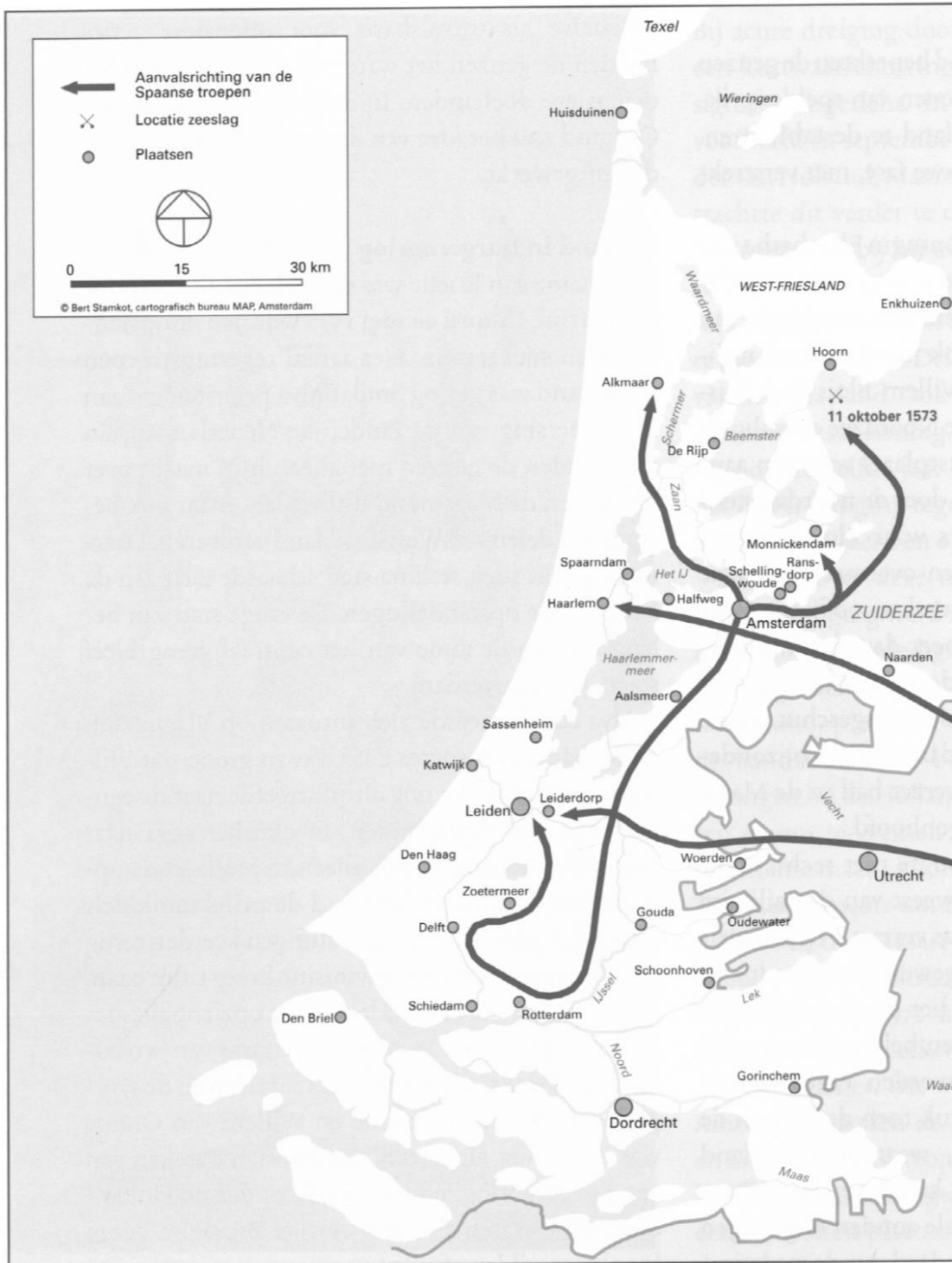


Figure 1: Spanish Lines of Attack and Resupply. Wim Klinkert, “Water in oorlog,” 456. The Spanish reinforcements from Utrecht followed a northern and southern approach. The northern one, via Amsterdam, could easily be disrupted with dike breaches. Note also the watery conditions in the Northern Quarter which

forces were roundly defeated. At this point the war settled into a more traditional siege, with Alva attempting to mine up to the walls and place explosives while simultaneously isolating the city. He was much more successful with the former than the latter, because Haarlem could keep open communication and resupply lines with the towns to the south via the nearby Haarlemmermeer allowed Sonoy to develop a waterline. Also note how Alva's capture of Haarlem served to separate southern Holland from the Northern Quarter along the IJ river.

In the early months of the siege when the Haarlemmermeer was frozen the rebels simply used skates and sleds to reach the town, followed by the more traditional use of ships once the water thawed.²² One of the few areas in which the rebels enjoyed an advantage was in the navy. At one point they may have had as many as thirty ships and three galleys stationed in the huge interior lake. The rebel forces were so effective in resupplying Haarlem that at one point the defenders actually had enough bread that they could taunt the Spanish forces by throwing out loaves to them.²³

The Spanish forces, for their part, did their best to limit rebel access to the Haarlemmermeer and eliminate this advantage. They were apparently successful enough that the rebels felt compelled to start cutting dikes as early as February 1573. An eyewitness in Amsterdam recorded that the Beggars had attempted to cut a dike near Amsterdam which separated the Zuiderzee and Haarlemmermeer.²⁴ The Beggars then breached the important Spaarndam dike in March to allow ships passage into the Haarlemmermeer. Afterwards they proceeded to protect the opening with a makeshift defensive fortification in order to prevent the

²² Jacobsz, *Dagboek*, 67.

²³ Duffy, *Siege*, 71.

²⁴ Jacobsz, *Dagboek*, 73.

Spanish from doing any repairs.²⁵ The situation reversed itself in May when Alva secured an unexpected naval victory over the rebel ships on the Haarlemmermeer. He followed this up with the capture of the fortification around Huis ter Hart, a stone house near the sluices which guarded the entrance to the lake from the IJ river. It is possible, but not entirely clear, that the Spanish may have created their own breach to circumvent Huis ter Hart to bring in their own ships to help secure their victory.²⁶ In any case, the Spanish ability to cut off Haarlem proved to be the key to success, for the town finally surrendered to them on 13 July 1573.

The Spanish victory was a qualified success, as their army was hard hit by the cold weather, disease, and low morale. Some of the Spanish commanders had even considered raising the siege.²⁷ It was a hard fought victory. In addition to the loss of human life the landscape bore the brunt of the hostilities. Nevertheless, Alva had reached his goal of dividing Holland in two. At this point he set about conquering the Northern Quarter, the portion of Holland north of the river IJ. In some ways his foray north was ill fated from the outset, as the geography there was even more water logged and perilous, which benefited the rebels. In other ways his hand was forced, for this area served as a base for attacks against Amsterdam and vital Spanish supply lines. This venture would ultimately end in failure and Alva's retirement as governor. He most likely welcomed his recall as he found administering the Netherlands an arduous and thankless task, which was exacerbated by his struggles with rheumatism.

In the same month that Alva captured Haarlem he began moving his forces north towards the city of Alkmaar. The city lay in the center of the Northern Quarter of Holland and offered

²⁵ Elisabeth Gottschalk, *Stormvloeden en rivieroverstromingen in Nederland* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1975), 725.

²⁶ Van Meteren, *Commentarien*, 202-4.

²⁷ Duffy, *Siege*, 71.

the Spanish the most convenient entrance point and best possibilities for further attacks. Alkmaar represented the best chance at subjugating the area, but it was still a perilous undertaking. At the outset Alva understood that transportation and logistics would be key. Even before the Revolt began he had considered the prospect of fighting in this area and concluded that the best approach would be along the sea dikes. This option was the best, but not without its own challenges as the sea dikes were so narrow that carts and wagons could only move along them in a single file line. Not surprisingly, he had struggled to bring all of his force to bear in the assault.²⁸

The rebels did their best to make his task even harder. Under direct commands from the Prince, the Beggar leader Diederick Sonoy began immediately flooding the fields around the city to prevent further Spanish movement. Sonoy opened the North Sea sluices at Krabbendam three times, but on the first two occasions farmers closed the sluices to protect their fields. In the end, Sonoy finally placed guards to ensure that the flooding would continue as planned. The rural inhabitants were ‘very unwilling’ to see their lands flooded, but Orange directed Sonoy to destroy as many dikes as necessary to secure the military objective.²⁹

The goal of these inundations was to create an impassible water barrier, or waterline, and prevent a Spanish attack. This particular waterline (arguably the first) was massive. Van Nierop argued that it stretched from Zijpe polder north of the city, along the nearby Rekere river, through the Schermer lake, extending through the Zaan river, before connecting with the Wormer and Purmer lakes, ending at the Zuiderzee near the town of Monnickendam. This inundation gave the Spanish a foothold south of the waterline, but never enough mount a

²⁸ Van Nierop, *Treason*, 78.

²⁹ Tracy, *Founding*, 90.

sustained or serious challenge to the Northern Quarter.³⁰ On 8 October 1573 the Spanish forces withdrew to deal with a more pressing military issue in the south.³¹

With the withdrawal of Spanish forces from the Northern Quarter Amsterdam became even more isolated as the rebels employed economic warfare against the city. The rebel forces had already targeted Amsterdam during the siege of Haarlem in an effort to divert Spanish forces and attention. As early as December 1572 the Sea Beggars had begun sinking ships to disrupt in the city's shipping routes. As the siege of Haarlem reached its climax in the summer of 1573 the rebel forces increasingly targeted the dikes around Amsterdam to interrupt Spanish supplies and communications. On 3 June 1573 Sonoy threatened the city by taking the St. Anthony's dike to the south of the city and building a sponce atop it. In response, the Spanish stadholder Maximilian de Henin, the Count of Bossu, cut part of the dike to bring his own ships through to confront the rebels. After a round of fierce combat the rebels withdrew. Three weeks later the Beggars cut the sea dike, forcing the rural residents to retreat into the city, bringing all their cows and food with them. In early July a small storm struck which pushed water through the breaches, causing one observer to remark that the area southwest of the city resembled a lake.³²

The fall of Haarlem in 1573 did little to relieve the pressure on Amsterdam. The Beggars controlled the Diemermeer southeast of the city, which left its inhabitants in continual fear. In August the Beggars put a sizeable breach in the Diemer dike, which separated the lake from the larger Zuiderzee. This inundation made the lake look like a "great wild sea," killing numerous

³⁰ Van Nierop, *Treason*, 82.

³¹ Tracy, *Founding*, 90.

³² Jacobsz, *Dagboek*, 44-119.

livestock and leading to “great misery everywhere” inside Amsterdam.³³ The Beggars completed their encirclement of the city in October when they destroyed the Amsterdam fleet at the Battle on the Zuiderzee. After this point the rebels could keep the city isolated with a small fleet, while periodically cutting the surrounding dikes to ensure the city remained an island unto itself.³⁴

Over the course of the next several years, Amsterdam could do little to repair any of the damaged dikes. The regents’ main priority was to keep the citizens fed. As early as 1573 they would only allow in refugees who could supply a *mud*, or hectoliter, of grain.³⁵ According to the monk Brother Wouter Jacobsz, who endured the siege of Amsterdam, on 9 February 1574 the St. Anthony’s dike was still in disrepair and further damaged by storms that night. Several months later in July, rebel forces decided to create more cuts in the Diemer dike to prevent Spanish movements associated with the siege of Leiden further to the south. In October once Leiden was dramatically saved with the use of military inundations (see below), the rebels again returned to breach the Diemer dike, presumably to taunt the loyalists in Amsterdam. As the Beggars had already cut this dike several times, it appeared to be their default tactic for intimidating the city. This time, however, the defenders were able to prevent further damage.³⁶

In 1576 several naturally occurring floods continued to pile the misery onto the people of Amsterdam. Throughout the year several heavy storms caused dike breaches along the Zuiderzee coast and the IJ river. The Court of Holland authorized the construction of new temporary embankments because many of the old ones could not be repaired, but this did not

³³ Jacobsz, *Dagboek*, 128-36.

³⁴ Van Nierop, *Treason*, 74.

³⁵ Van Nierop, *Treason*, 74.

³⁶ Jacobsz, *Dagboek*, 157-175.

begin until sometime into the next year.³⁷ One storm in particular, on 10 June brought bitter winds and a rise in water levels which set many areas around Amsterdam further under water. Apparently any northern wind threatened Amsterdam with another flood.³⁸

Amsterdam enjoyed a temporary respite towards the end of the year. The States of Holland decided to begin repair work on the Spaarndam sluice, stopping the damage caused by Spanish forces as they retreated from the siege of Leiden.³⁹ Amsterdam itself sent out some workers to begin work on the Diemer dike, which many interpreted as signs of forthcoming permanent peace, associated with the Pacification of Ghent. The reprieve was short lived, however, as Haarlem quickly reconciled with Prince, singling out Amsterdam as the lone site of loyalist support in Holland. Wouter Jacobsz noted that those in Amsterdam continued “to live in misery” now that all the other cities were united against them. On 9 January 1577 he found that the Beggars had again flooded the surrounding area and controlled all the water passages into and out of the city.⁴⁰

Amsterdam would finally make its own *satisfactie* (treaty) with Orange on 8 February 1578, but not before the rebels inflicted more suffering. On 25 January they had made inroads into capturing the city by force. The residents responded with their own military inundation, cutting the dike by the Haarlemspoort on the west side of the city and forcing the rebels to

³⁷ Gottschalk, *Stormvloeden*, 743.

³⁸ Jacobsz, *Dagboek*, 239.

³⁹ RSH 1576, 177, 17 October 1576; Gottschalk, *Stormvloeden*, 745.

⁴⁰ Wouter, *Dagboek*, 249-258.

retreat.⁴¹ The fact that one of the final acts in this area of hostilities involved yet another dike breach is telling, yet one more dike breach in an area already decimated by military activities.

The sieges of Haarlem, Alkmaar, and Amsterdam generated a great deal of environmental damage and suffering for all those involved. Both armies had directed several dike breaches to give passage for their ships, disrupt troop movements, and to pile on the misery in the case of Amsterdam. Several of the important dikes, such as the Spaarndam and the Diemer, had been broken in the name of military necessity. Throughout the sixteenth century the different water boards had done everything in their power to protect these vital flood defenses. In the span of a few years these initiatives were undone, and the ongoing war prevented repairs and restoration. The use of the waterline during the siege of Alkmaar pointed towards further possibilities for flooding, but these required a degree of planning, the right conditions, and they still entailed a great deal of destruction. At the same time, however, the successes of some of these inundations validated their continued use. In many ways the destruction during these sieges were just the opening salvos in the militarization of the landscape: a portent for further misery.

The Siege and Relief of Leiden (1573-4)

Leiden was the key strategic location in southern Holland, opening doors for attack towards the other major cities in the surrounding area, and as such it was probably *the* pivotal event of the civil war phase of the Revolt in Holland. According to Jonathan Israel, “The siege of Leiden, if not quite the longest – that of Middelburg was longer – was the costliest, hardest

⁴¹ Gottschalk, *Stormvloeden*, 753.

fought, and most decisive, as well as the most epic of the great sieges of the Revolt.”⁴² The siege and relief of the city is the best known case of military inundation during the Revolt. James Tracy estimates that between 1572 and 1576 roughly half of the farm and pasture land in Holland was under water, largely as a result of the relief of Leiden.⁴³ It is no coincidence that the most important siege of the Revolt also witnessed the largest example of military inundation, as well as the most well-known.

The Spanish forces began their siege of Leiden in late 1573 after the fall of Haarlem. Even in these early stages of the struggle Orange had considered using military inundations, but ultimately chose more traditional tactics. By March 1574, however, Spanish forces had gained the upper hand and controlled the surrounding countryside. The rebel attempts to break up the siege by force of arms ended disastrously with the battle of Mook in Gelderland, in which the Prince’s younger brother Louis of Nassau died. This battle offered a temporary reprieve for Leiden, as those in the city stored up supplies and prepared for the resumption of the siege. The Spanish duly obliged, and resumed their attempt to capture the city in May.

The States of Holland were well aware of the precariousness of the military situation.⁴⁴ With only 7,000-8,000 men the Spanish commander was able to secure all the surrounding villages and erect as many as sixty sconces, effectively isolating the city. By July the only way Orange could communicate with the people of Leiden was via carrier pigeon.⁴⁵ Predictably the

⁴² Israel, *Republic* 181.

⁴³ Tracy, *Founding*, 120.

⁴⁴ RSH, 1571-1574, 11, 30 July 1574.

⁴⁵ Tracy, *Founding*, 96.

food supplies began to dwindle and the defenders began to feel the pangs of hunger. By August Orange was pleading with the city to hold out a bit longer.

It was around this time that the rebels developed the motto, “Better broken land than lost land.” The eye-witness of the siege Jan Fruytiers clearly articulated the rebel’s intentions, noting that they were willing to let the land become a sea, rather than surrender it to the Spanish. So dire was their situation, that they felt these were their only two options.⁴⁶ The Prince and the States made their choice, deciding to “break the land,” using the same tactic that had already served them so well: military inundations. Although the rebels had made the difficult decision to flood a large portion of Holland, there was still considerable work to be done if Leiden was to be saved. Directing the floods waters toward the city was a massive undertaking, full of technical and logistical challenges.

The States were crystal clear about their intentions and possible repercussions in the formal act for relief of Leiden which they published on 30 July. It was their plan to inundate the lands in the water boards of Rijnland, Schieland, and Delfland and all adjacent areas by cutting dikes and opening sluices. In theory, this maneuver would drive out the Spanish, and the Beggars could reach the city with a flotilla of boats. They further noted that they would try to limit the damage to farm animals and crops. How they planned to do this is unclear, beyond just having the residents move to the higher elevated cities with whatever goods they could carry.⁴⁷ The plan entailed bringing in waters from the Maas and Ijssel rivers which stood roughly twenty kilometers from the city. It was an ambitious plan, but the Prince and the States of Holland had few alternatives.

⁴⁶ Jan Fruytiers, *Corte Beschrijvinghe van de Strenghe Belegheringhe end Wondervaerlicke Verlossinghe der Stadt Leyden in Hollandt* (Delft, Aelbrecht Hendricksz, 1577), 16.

⁴⁷ RSH, 1571-1574, 11, 30 July 1574; RSH 1571-1574, 44-45, 1574.

The rebel task was complicated by a number of problems. The water boards of Rijnland, Delfland, and Schieland were split in their loyalties. Some members retained their allegiance to Philip II and fled to Utrecht, while others had chosen to follow the Prince and the States.⁴⁸ This fact meant that some of the individuals most qualified to help with the flooding were absent. Furthermore, the Spanish had done well to secure the countryside and block off the important routes to the city. As early as October 1573 the regents of Leiden were complaining about the rebel failure to take the important Lammen sponce south of the city.⁴⁹ This meant that when the rebels began flooding southern Holland they essentially had to take their second-choice route to the city, which required several more dike breaches and even more damage to the landscape.⁵⁰

Contemporary chroniclers portrayed the relief as part of a carefully worked out master plan by Orange and his supporters, but the actual events were much more complex.⁵¹ On 14 August 1574 Orange sent a letter to two unnamed individuals authorizing them to begin opening up sluices and to break the “great dike” by Capelle, noting that the water could be brought to Leiden in a few short days.⁵² Roughly two weeks later, on 26 August, the first cuts were made at Capelle, about halfway between Rotterdam and Gouda, bringing in water from the IJssel. Orange personally attended these first cuts, which were carried out by Pieter van der Goes, the

⁴⁸ Den Heijer, *Holland onder water*, 5-9.

⁴⁹ Magistrates of Leiden to William of Orange, 31 October 1573, De correspondentie van Willem van Oranje nr. 4715.

⁵⁰ Klinkert, “Water in oorlog,” 462.

⁵¹ Den Heijer, *Holland onder water*, 7.

⁵² William of Orange to Anonymous, 14 August 1574, De correspondentie van Willem van Oranje nr. 2785. The letters most likely went to either Jacob or Gerard van Wijngaerden, two of Orange’s most trusted advisors, and Pieter van der Goes, the Dike Count of Delfland, as these were the individuals responsible for carrying out most of the inundations.

Dike Count of Delfland.⁵³ Over the course of the next month the States noted that these cuts were not bringing in the necessary water. As such they began authorizing officials such as the lawyer and advisor to the Prince, Gerard van Wijngaerden, to cut any dikes and destroy whichever sluices or mills they found necessary. If the plan was not “masterful” it was at the very least carried out with conviction.

According to an eyewitness account of the siege when the first cuts were made the people of Leiden went to the walls of the city to watch the water’s progress. Apparently they believed that the flood would lead to a quick resolution. After they discovered that the relief would be a much longer process they retreated from their perch, speaking “many words not worth writing.”⁵⁴ Three days after the first breaches were made the States of Holland began recruiting pioneers (diggers) from all over southern Holland to carry out more.⁵⁵ On 2 September the States wrote to Van der Goes to make additional cuts in the dikes near Delft and Nootdorp, fifteen or sixteen feet wide, and if necessary he was to make further breaches to keep the water flowing north.⁵⁶

Once it became clear that these initial cuts would not be sufficient, Orange and the members of the States of Holland began to get nervous. They sent letters to the Lands Advocate Paulus Buys and several others to begin inspecting the breaches, presumably to ensure they were not being interfered with and were continuing to let in the flood water. The same letters also directed the officials to make sure that the laborers were being diligent and working as they

⁵³ Den Heijer, *Holland onder water*, 8.

⁵⁴ Fruytiers, *Corte*, 17.

⁵⁵ RSH, 1571-1574, 65, 29 August 1574.

⁵⁶ RSH 1571-1574, 72, 2 September 1574.

promised. The fact that many of the pioneers were recruited locally and paid poorly, ostensibly to flood their own lands, did not help their motivation. Perhaps more troubling, the States began receiving reports of enemy movement in the Alblasserwaard to the east. They gave the inhabitants there three days to make preparations, after which they would open up another area for military inundations (see below).⁵⁷

While the vanguard of the rebel forces slowly made its way towards the city, in the rear of the action Orange and the States were busy monitoring the flooding and arranging a fleet of barges. The regents of Gouda were ordered to cut an embankment northwest of the city and have the mills keep pumping in order to better move water towards Leiden.⁵⁸ Throughout the month of September the States ordered the military to watch the sluices and make sure they remain open at the right times (at high tide) and to prevent the enemy from blocking them. They also consulted several people regarding creating yet another dike breach in the Havens dike by Rotterdam.⁵⁹ In the background of all this flooding the States and the Prince were making arrangements for the actual relief of Leiden. The cities of Gouda, Delft, and Rotterdam came to serve as staging areas for the laborers, ships, and supplies for the relief. By mid-September there were 640 pioneers and 320 ships stationed in the three cities awaiting instructions and further flooding.⁶⁰

The water appeared to move rather slowly since the outer dikes along the Maas and IJssel rivers were only partially broken and flooded at high tide. Initially the rebel forces probably

⁵⁷ RSH 1571-1574, 74-6, 4 September 1574. For a discussion of raising the pioneers and their pay see Postma, *Delfland*, 392.

⁵⁸ RSH 1571-1574, 269, 4 September 1574.

⁵⁹ RSH 1571-1574, 78-9, 7 September 1574; RSH 1571-1574, 108, 23 September 1574.

⁶⁰ Den Heijer, *Holland onder water*, 24.

only cut the inner dikes between polders selectively, but most likely abandoned this precaution as the situation became more dire.⁶¹ The Spanish defense of the *landscheiding* dike was one of the biggest hindrances to the rebel effort. This important embankment separated Schieland, Delfland and Rijnland and was well defended by the Spanish. By the end of August the eyewitness Jan Fruytiers observed that all the polders around Rotterdam and Gouda were flooded, so that once the *landscheiding* was captured the rebels could easily sail towards Leiden.⁶²

The rebel attempts to capture the important dike bore little fruit. On 4 September the States ordered the Delft regents to outfit the city militia and engage the enemy in order to capture the dike. The effort failed.⁶³ The following night the rebels launched a surprise attack further west in an attempt to outflank the Spanish. They partially succeeded and opened up a small breach in the *landscheiding*, but in spite of the attack's success, the path to Leiden was still not clear. Roughly a week later the rebels attempted another surprise attack. Under the cover of darkness the rebel forces set out from Rotterdam heading north. Apparently this foray was poorly planned as the forces arrived at the Groenweg dike which ran parallel to the *landscheiding*, and ended up cutting that dike instead of the *landscheiding*.⁶⁴

While the situation outside the city stalled, the situation inside remained perilous. Those inside the city were forced to mix vinegar with their beer and add slate to their wheat to make their provisions last longer. According to Fruytiers the three plagues of war, famine, and death

⁶¹ Den Heijer, *Holland onder water*, 8-9.

⁶² Fruytiers, *Corte*, 19.

⁶³ RSH 1571-1574, 75, 4 September 1574.

⁶⁴ Den Heijer, *Holland onder water*, 9-24.

were present, “and not having had enough a further [plague] was coming,” specifically in the form of discord as religious disputes began to add tension to an already nervous situation. At the end of September Fruytiers wrote dramatically, “Finally the misery here is so great, that I did not have the power to keep writing.”⁶⁵ He recommended himself to God for his and the city’s safety.

By late September the rebels had made progress but the Spanish still held key defenses on the Zeewardsweg dike, in the town of Zoeterwoude south of the city, and with the Lammen sconce. The Prince got lucky with the first obstacle when the Spanish commander unexpectedly withdrew his forces from their outer defense. The rebels wasted no time in breaching the Zeewardsweg dike once they claimed it.⁶⁶ The second and third obstacles, however, remained in Spanish hands and were a barrier to saving the city. The Lammen sconce, in particular, commanded the area south of Leiden and was well-garrisoned, which prevented the rebels from saving the city through outright assault.

Military inundation remained the only route for saving the city. On the 23 September the States ordered Pieter vander Goes to inspect the sluices along the Maas river and ensure they were open and in good order, to make sure the river water was coursing into Holland. Three days later they authorized him to make any additional dike breaches necessary. Simultaneously they ordered Gerard van Wijngaerden to make additional cuts along the Ijssel dike to the east and to open all the sluices in Gouda.⁶⁷ By the end of September the inundations offered the only chance for the rebels, and they devoted all their efforts to it.

⁶⁵ Fruytiers, *Corte*, 27.

⁶⁶ Den Heijer, *Holland onder water*, 25.

⁶⁷ RSH 1571-1574, 108-122, 23 September 1574 – 1 October 1574.

Yet on the first day of October the situation still looked critical from the rebel perspective. In total they had made no less than sixteen different major dike breaches, not counting the numerous smaller ones in the interior polders. Simultaneously they monitored the various sluices to ensure they brought in enough flood water to save the city by ship. Nevertheless, despite their best efforts to militarize the landscape, they had failed. The flood water had largely come to a halt and they were not able to capture the Lammen sconce or Zoeterwoude by force. In the course of three days, however, the situation would reverse itself and the Prince would sail triumphantly into the city.

In the end it was only when military *and* natural forces combined that the city could be saved. In the first days of the month of October a heavy rain began to fall. This process was then followed by sudden shift in wind direction that blew extra water northward towards the city. Fruytiers believed that the water level may have risen from nine inches up to twenty-eight. He noted that God “let the winds blow...and wonderfully spread out the water.”⁶⁸ The rebels capitalized on the opportunity and sent out their ships from the nearby cities. Along the way they breached several more dikes to keep water flowing northward and engaged the Spanish forces at Zoeterwoude and the Lammen sconce. Fruytiers recorded that the Spanish now had the fear of the Philistines in them.⁶⁹

Apparently the flood waters around Leiden were still fairly shallow and the attackers had to portage the barges at some points. Nevertheless they were resolute. At this point the tide of the battle – and flooding – turned in favor of the rebels. The Spanish commander withdrew his forces, which allowed Orange to capture and break the Zegwardsweg dike. By 3 October the

⁶⁸ Fruytiers, *Corte*, 27.

⁶⁹ Fruytiers, *Corte*, 29.

continual rain and wind deposited enough water in the canals leading to Leiden that Orange and his forces could engage the Lammen sconce and capture it. This feat finally allowed for the relief of the city. The prince personally sailed into the city, distributing bread to the beleaguered citizens and thanking them for their bravery. Fruytiers mentioned that Louis Boissot, the admiral of the Dutch fleet, went to the church in Leiden and gave thanks to God, for wonderfully bringing in the sea, and keeping it the desired places.⁷⁰ The city was saved, but at a tremendous cost.

There is some scholarly debate over how much damage the relief of Leiden actually caused to southern Holland. S.J. Fockema Andreae did not believe that the relief had the characteristics of a great flood. As evidence he notes that in the final charge towards the city the rebel forces had to portage their barges at some points. Nevertheless, while certain areas around Leiden might have escaped with less damage, other parts were greatly affected.⁷¹ Recent research has suggested the floods generated a tremendous amount of destruction. One historian convincingly depicted the damage, noting that all of Schieland and Delfland were flooded, with the streets of Rotterdam and Delft completely under water. Rijnland was only a little better off, with the flooding stopping at the Rijn, Gouwe, and Vliet rivers. The damage proved lasting however, and the repair process was complicated by the ongoing war. According to a 1576 report taken on Alphen-on-the-Rijn, a town just east of Leiden, only seven percent of the land was available for harvesting with the rest being “desolate and unusable.” A year later some

⁷⁰ Fruytiers, *Corte*, 30.

⁷¹ S.J. Fockema Andreae, “De militaire inundatie van het vasteland van Holland in het jaar 1574,” *Tijdschrift van het Koninklijk Nederlandsch Aardrijkundig Genootschap*, 6 (1953), 309-315.

reports noted that the majority of land was still under water.⁷² Many feared the Maas dike would be irreparably damaged and would waste away, leaving Schieland completely under water. The water board of Rijnland worried that the flood waters might mix with the Haarlemmermeer, obstructing ship traffic and possibly leading to further damage to the Spaarndam dike. Cities such as Delft and Leiden were considered “water cities” (sea-side towns).⁷³ Furthermore, as the Spanish retreated out of Holland they targeted and damaged numerous dikes and sluices, such as the Mallegat, Huis ter Hart and the Rijn dike.⁷⁴

The relief of Leiden entailed a degree of directed flooding that was unprecedented in Dutch history. Over the course of about two months the military inundations put around half of the province of Holland under water. In many ways the rebel loss of Leiden would have spelled the end of the Revolt in general, since the outnumbered and outmatched forces could not dislodge the Spanish army through traditional maneuvers. The inundations offered the Prince the best possibility for success so he devoted all of his efforts to them. The majority of the important military encounters between the rebels and the Spanish in Holland were over control of dikes. Once the dikes were captured, the rebels wasted no time breaching them and releasing the flood waters further north toward the city. Nevertheless, in spite of all the man-made flooding, it was only with the changes in weather that the city was saved. The rains and wind provided the final drops that filled up the container that was southern Holland. The city was saved through human and natural agency, but at an extraordinary cost. The bill for the safety of the city was not

⁷² Groenveld, *Vyanden*, 18-24.

⁷³ Postma, *Delfland*, 392-393.

⁷⁴ Gottschalk, *Stormvloeden*, 732.

calculated by guilders or the loss of human life as are so many military encounters, but rather through environmental ruin.

Flooding in the Southeast (Scheiland, the Alblasserwaard, and the Krimpenerwaard)

At the same time that Orange and the rebels were busy flooding the lands around Leiden they were also worried about a rearguard attack by the Spanish. During the middle of the siege of Leiden the States of Holland got wind that the Spanish were taking refuge in the Alblasserwaard. This water board stretched across the southern border of Holland. The region stood far enough away from Leiden not to pose a direct threat. Yet the rivers which surrounded every side of this region offered the Spanish forces easy troop movement. The Krimpenerwaard lay directly across the Lek River from the Alblasserwaard, and offered the Spanish possible access to Schieland and the interior of southern Holland. At the same time, however, these locations also afforded the rebels ample opportunity to continue with their military inundations to keep the Spanish from gaining a foothold along the borders of southern Holland.

Even before the siege of Leiden the area had been hard hit by naturally occurring floods. According to M. Gottschalk's compendium of floods in the Netherlands, the Alblasserwaard made for a "disastrous tale" during late sixteenth century. Like many other places in the Holland, it had been hard hit by the All Saints Flood in 1570. The damage to the water-management infrastructure made it more vulnerable to further disasters in 1571 and 1573, when ice floes floating down the rivers broke dikes and led to further inundations. Some of these floods were especially catastrophic, such as the one in 1573 which resulted in as much as twelve to fourteen feet of water standing on the land. The next year military flooding took the place of

natural disasters. In total, from 1570 until 1577 the area only enjoyed periodic dry spells, but was otherwise under water for the majority of the time.⁷⁵

Although the military flooding in this area was less spectacular compared with that of Leiden, intentional flooding in this area was more constant. For over a year the rebel forces consistently flooded this rural area. On 4 September 1574 the States of Holland had intercepted enemy dispatches which discussed the possibility of Spanish forces wintering in the Alblasserwaard, and they also suspected that the enemy may have been receiving support from the area. The States subsequently renounced their protection of the area effective within three days. The same day their protection ended, the States “thoughtfully advised” the Land’s Advocate Paulus Buys and another official to begin cutting dikes in the area. A week later they ordered the regents of Dordrecht and Gorinchem to have their militias begin cutting dikes immediately. The States directed them to spare no expense with their dike breaches, noting that they would help pay for the cuts and repair. The next day they wrote again to the Dordrecht regents, telling them to cut the dikes for the safety of the land and cities, and to damage the enemy.⁷⁶

By 26 September, just days before the rebel forces saved Leiden, the States had to cut more dikes in order to relieve Gorinchem. The initial inundations appear to have slowed the Spanish but did not force them to relinquish their siege. Additional breaches by the rebels to the nearby Wolferse dike in October finally forced the enemy to abandon their fortifications by 12

⁷⁵ Gottschalk, *Stormvloed*, 725-738.

⁷⁶ RSH 1571-1574, 79-97, 8-17 September 1574.

November 1574. While this saved the city of Gorinchem, Spanish forces nevertheless remained in the area.⁷⁷

The military inundations to save Gorinchem were not as intricate or involved as those of Leiden, but they still inflicted considerable suffering on the local residents. By February of the next year the town of Dalem, which adjoined Gorinchem, complained about its situation, noting it was still in “great peril” from the floods. The two large breaches in the Dalem dike, a result of cuts by both the rebel and Spanish forces, remained unrepaired and were causing great misery, poverty and affliction in the town.⁷⁸ Over the next few months Orange and the States attempted to reduce the suffering in the area, but they could only provide partial respite as the enemy remained a threat. The States authorized a one stuiver per morgen tax to raise money to repair the Wolferse dike, and decided to provide full funding for a new sluice in Gorinchem which they believed would offer some relief.⁷⁹

By the summer of 1575, however, a Spanish invasion halted repairs and witnessed several more inundations in southern Holland. The Spanish plan involved a two-pronged attack through Zeeland from the south-west and through the Ablasserwaard and adjoining Krimpenerwaard from the southeast. In late May the States wrote to representatives of Schieland, Delfland, and Rijnland that the Spanish could be launching an assault, and so they

⁷⁷ G. Vermeesch, “Oorlog, steden, en staatsvorming: de grenssteden Gorinchem en Doesburg tijdens de begoorte-eeuw van de Republiek (1570-1680)” (PhD diss., University of Amsterdam, 2006), 46. A stuiver amounted to 1/20 a guilder, and a morgen equated to .85 hectares of land. It is difficult to approximate the average size of landownership during this period, but the taxation does not appear to have been too onerous. An unskilled laborer in Holland earned around 5 stuivers per day. See de Vries and van der Woude, *First Modern Economy*, 81, 610.

⁷⁸ RSH 1575, 58, 12 February 1575.

⁷⁹ RSH 1575, 98, 28 February 1575; RSH 1575, 254, 23 April 1575.

were ordered to begin storing supplies in their cities within twenty four hours.⁸⁰ On 16 June Orange had serious fears about a Spanish incursion coming through the Alblasserwaard. The next day the magistrates of Dordrecht feared an imminent Spanish attack on Oostendam. The village lay just north of Dordrecht and was only separated the town from the Alblasserwaard by a small river. The Spanish capture of Oostendam would drive a wedge between Dordrecht and the rest of southern Holland. The States responded by authorizing a ten stuiver per morgen tax to construct a fortification at nearby Zwijndrecht, but the residents had trouble raising the funds and deciding exactly where to place the defenses. The situation appeared so threatening that the Prince requested *all* available people to fight for the fatherland!⁸¹

Dordrecht was spared when the Habsburg forces turned their attentions further northeast, bypassing the defenses of Zwijndrecht (if they were ever built), setting out directly for interior of southern Holland. They set their sights on Gouda, Oudewater, and Woerden in Schieland and the Krimpenerwaard. Over the next two months, the Spanish scored a number of victories. On 19 July the Spanish commander, Gilles de Berlaymont, Lord of Hierges, began setting up his forces around Oudewater. The Prince had seen this attack coming and had already ordered the magistrates of Oudewater to use all their resources to prevent the Spanish advance. He specifically noted the need to cut the nearby dikes and open the sluices. The magistrates, however, refused to use flood their land, possibly because of the damage it would do to the

⁸⁰ RSH 1575, 343, 31 May 1575.

⁸¹ RSH 1575 399-402, 16 June 1575-17 June 1575.

harvests.⁸² Orange had also directed the regents of Woerden to carry out inundations, but it is unclear whether they followed his orders.⁸³

In any case, Hierges began his siege of Oudewater on 6 August, and within two days had captured the poorly defended town. Like Alva, Hierges wanted to send a message with the treatment of captured towns. Several hundred of the roughly 3000 inhabitants, men women, and children, were brutally murdered. According to some sources the only remaining structures in the city after the Spanish moved on were the church and eight houses.⁸⁴

After this victory the Spanish commander turned south towards the town of Schoonhoven and began setting up their siege works. A victory here would give the Spanish control over both sides of the Lek river and footholds in the both the Krimpenerwaard and Alblasserwaard. In order to relieve the city the Prince ordered a breach in the Lek dike, but city regents refused to obey, because some of them had not wanted to destroy the harvests. Throughout the siege Orange and the States continued to implore the city to carry out military inundations, but it is unclear which ones actually occurred, if any.

On 12 and 13 August 1575 the States of Holland gave orders to breach the Wolferse dike by Gorinchem and to flood the Alblasserwaard. The States wanted to bring the area under water, and keep it that way. They began organizing laborers in Zwijndrecht to carry out the cuts, and the dike officials were ordered to arrest, fine, or deport any residents unwilling to help the

⁸² RSH 1575, 493, 13 July 1575; Gottschalk, *Stormvloeden*, 738; Tracy, *Founding*, 99.

⁸³ William of Orange to Magistrates of Woerden, 7 July 1575, De correspondentie van Willem van Oranje nr. 12321.

⁸⁴ Erika Kuijpers, "The creation and development of social memories of traumatic events: the Oudewater Massacre in 1575" in *Hurting Memories and Beneficial Forgetting: Posttraumatic Stress Disorders, Biographical Developments and Social Conflicts*, eds. Michael Linden and Krzysztof Rutkowski (London: Elsevier, 2013), 190-204.

cause.⁸⁵ The flooding served little tactical use as Schoonhoven surrendered to the Spanish on 24 August after their cannons opened up a three hundred foot gap in the city walls.⁸⁶ After the siege the receiver of Dordrecht was ordered to pay 400 pounds for laborers used in dike breaches all across the Alblasserwaard at Papendrecht, 't Elshout (Kinderdike), Oudekerk, Krimpen, and Lekkerkerk.⁸⁷ The floods had not saved the Schoonhoven, they had only added to the misery for the residents of the Alblasserwaard and Krimpenerwaard.

After taking Oudewater and Schoonhoven, Hierges directed his attention towards Woerden, which could serve as a stepping stone for Gouda. When it appeared that the siege of Schoonhoven might be lost Orange arranged a commission including the magistrates of Gouda to have villages in Schieland prepare for upcoming inundations. On 24 August the States ordered Dirck Jansz Lonck, one of Orange's most trusted officials in Gouda, to take personal command of dike breaches around the city.⁸⁸ This time the Prince wanted to ensure that his orders were followed.

Following the string of Spanish victories rebel support in Holland appeared to be at a nadir, but Orange and the States slowly began to turn the tide at the Siege of Woerden.⁸⁹ On 29 August 1575 the States wrote to the city that they would do all they could to help relieve it. Hierges began his siege on 8 September, and again the rebels did not have the military strength

⁸⁵ RSH 1575, 568-594, 12-24 August 1575.

⁸⁶ Tracy, *Founding*, 99-100; van Nierop, *Treason*, 161.

⁸⁷ RSH 1575, 593, 24 August 1575.

⁸⁸ RSH 1575, 525-593, 21 July 1575- 24 August 1575.

⁸⁹ Several towns had become weary of further war and debated about allying themselves. The town of Zierikzee in Zeeland in particular only remained loyal to the rebels after a commander in the town arrested several prominent citizens who were going to allow the town to surrender. See van Nierop, *Treason*, 161.

to force out the Spanish through an outright assault. The States said they would continue to do what they could to help the city, and would reimburse their payments for the militia just like they did at Leiden, but otherwise they must trust in their ally Orange, as he tried to preserve their freedom.⁹⁰ Over the next several months, however, there was little change as both combatants sought a breakthrough.

In spring 1576 the Prince had finally made some progress towards securing the city's safety. The States of Holland provided Orange money for a much stronger army, totaling a hundred companies of 150 men plus a hundred warships. Furthermore, he made sure that his dike breaches would be carried out as he intended, unlike some of the previous ones. These began with breaches along the Ijssel River at the village of Oudekerk which cut off supplies to the Spanish from their defenses at Krimpen. These inundations proved effective as the Krimpen garrison surrendered on 26 February 1576.⁹¹

The Spanish would keep up their siege to Woerden for another several months, prompting several more rebel inundations. In late July 1576 representatives from Leiden, Gouda, and Alkmaar were ordered to begin organizing provisions for the relief and to coordinate their efforts with the admiralty. In an effort to break up the siege the States ordered cuts to the Ijssel dike on 8 August. When Gouda dragged its feet and stalled, the States wrote to them demanding that they help with the cuts and assist the water board officials already working on the task. Two days later the city responded that the Ijssel dike stood "open" and that east embankment of Gouda was cut as well. Apparently these breaches were enough to force the Spanish to begin pulling up their siege. By 25 August the States ordered members of the

⁹⁰ RSH 1575, 632, 14 September 1575.

⁹¹ Tracy, *Founding*, 100.

Delfland water board to begin repairing the Ijssel dike and the east embankment, and to conduct a report on their condition. By the end of the month representatives from Woerden were writing to the States asking for advice over which of the abandoned Spanish fortifications could be demolished and used for material.⁹²

The inundations in the Alblasserwaard, Krimpenerwaard, and Schieland stalled and then reversed the Spanish invasion from the southeast. The States and the Prince came to rely on the floods as a military expedient, but perhaps became too dependent on the maneuver. The floods related to the siege of Schoonhoven did nothing to save the city, but only brought in yet more water to three different water boards which had already experienced widespread inundations. It is no wonder then that the military inundations during the siege of Woerden, while successful, encountered significant resistance from local populations. After the massive inundations for the relief of Leiden the people of Holland were growing tired of further calls for dike breaches and open sluices.

Brill, Voorne and Putten

At the same time that Hierges was putting pressure on the southeastern flank of Holland the Spanish attempted an attack from the southwest. Although the major battle in this theater came to settle on Zierikzee in Zeeland, the city of Brill and the islands of southern Holland suffered heavy damage as well. The timing was unfortunate for the local residents because the area had already been suffering from flooding issues and was enduring a severe financial crisis.

⁹² RSH, 1576, 127-146, 31 July – 31 August 1576.

As early as July 1573 the area of Putten on the island of Voornne complained about the condition of its dikes and the flooding in the area. Whether this was a result of military inundations or lingering damage from the All Saints Flood is difficult to tell. The States of Holland's resolutions mention a tax exemption for the village of Korendijk, south of Putten, granted by the Prince in 1573, but it made no mention about the causes of the damage to the dikes. In any case, the repair and upkeep for the sea dikes there were proving too expensive for the local residents. They estimated the cost of repair and rebuilding in the area at 16,000-18,000 pounds. The Prince's exemption was to last six years, but within two years the island was already asking for an extension. The States apparently added four years to the exemption, on the condition that they build a less expensive earth dam in the area as a stopgap measure to help protect the land from further flooding.⁹³ In August 1575 the States exempted the island from the collection of a ten stuiver tax.

Other areas nearby were experiencing difficulties as well. After Brill and the lands of Voornne and Putten fell short of their tax dues, the States authorized the tax collectors to increase their demands on any areas not flooded or in enemy hands. The fact that the States had to add this caveat suggests widespread flooding and enemy encroachment. If anyone resisted, officials were allowed to arrest them or confiscate property as necessary.⁹⁴ The town of Brill attempted to ensure that the money would be used for a local fortification, which would help secure the safety of the island of Voornne, but even that proved unsuccessful.⁹⁵ Apparently there was little money to go around, even for local needs and projects.

⁹³ RSH 1575, 333-336, 28 May 1575.

⁹⁴ RSH, 1575, 194, 31 March 1575.

⁹⁵ RSH 1575, 341, 29 May 1575. On this date representatives of the polders of Guldeland, Honderhoock, Stompaarden, and 't Noordelandeke were to meet with Gerrit van Roon, a tax

Over the course of the summer and fall of 1575, this area would be put under further pressure as Spanish forces drew near. At the same time that Hierges had opened up a southeastern front, the Spanish Commander Cristóbal de Mondragón began advancing from the southwest. The two-pronged approach enjoyed some initial successes. By September 1575 Mondragón had captured the islands of Klundert, Rugenhil, and Fijnaart along the coast of Flanders. These locations offered him a launching point for his famous crossing of the Zijpe channel in which his army waded between islands at low tide to capture the islands of Schouwen and Duiveland. These victories essentially drove a wedge between Holland and Zeeland. As Geoffrey Parker noted, at this point, “The fate of the Dutch Revolt hung in the balance.”⁹⁶

In response, the Prince again militarized the landscape in an attempt to have the flood waters make up for the rebel deficiency in manpower. On 1 October 1575 Orange wrote to the water board of Voorne ordering them to survey the dikes around Brill because he intended to breach them for the defense of the city.⁹⁷ Three days later the States wrote the magistrates of Brill that they intended to flood the island of Overflakkee and Schouwen along with the area around Zwijndrecht. If the Spanish were going to drive a wedge between Holland and Zeeland, then the rebels would do likewise and make sure that the Spanish could not combine their forces. The States wrote that with the help of Almighty God the lands and cities of Holland would be protected. In the same letter, however, they authorized the regents of Brill to make any dike cuts

collector for the States regarding an exemption from the 3rd penny tax. This tax was the same one which the States authorized the arrest and/or confiscation of property if not collected. RSH 1575, 462, 2 July 1575. On this date the States declared they could not afford to be lenient with the collection of a ten stuiver per morgen tax for fortifications in Voorne and Putten, because they were “highly needed.”

⁹⁶ Parker, *Army of Flanders*, 199.

⁹⁷ William of Orange to Heemraaden of Voorne, 1 October 1575, *De correspondentie van Willem van Oranje* nr. 2052.

necessary.⁹⁸ God helps those who help themselves. Two days later Orange appointed a commission for the defense of the town charged with organizing the local inhabitants to help build a sponce and arrange the breaches in the Maas dike. By 3 November Orange had ordered other officials to Brill to help carry out the dike cuts.⁹⁹ The next year would bring little relief for the area, as storms throughout 1576 led to further damage to the islands.¹⁰⁰

The military inundations in the islands of southern Holland did just enough to prevent a Spanish attack on the mainland. The islands were already in disrepair which only added to the already costly repair. Even before the floods local residents had little money to spare for the astronomical costs of the necessary dike repairs. In short, these floods struck a population that could least afford it.

Conclusion

The mantra “better broken land than lost land” was not simply a token catchphrase used by the rebels to highlight the need to remove the Spanish military from Holland. Contemporaries genuinely felt these were largely the only two options available to them. They were fully aware of the possible repercussions of military inundations. During the relief of Leiden some people feared, perhaps unrealistically, that the floods might bring in salt water and make the land

⁹⁸ RSH 1575, 673-5, 4 October 1575.

⁹⁹ RSH 1575, 725, 3 November 1575.

¹⁰⁰ Gottschalk, *Stormvloed*, 742.

unusable for years to come.¹⁰¹ The rebels were quite willing to break their land rather than lose it.

The great sixteenth-century hydraulic engineer Andries Vierlingh clearly understood the possible ramifications. He believed that the military inundations carried out on the island of Walcheren in Zeeland in 1574 would affect currents along the coast of Flanders, resulting in the silting and closure of rivers. In his view, this would ultimately lead to cities such as Antwerp and Bergen op Zoom becoming landlocked. During the war he proposed allowing for trade in dike materials between the rebel and Habsburg territories as a sort of truce or peace-keeping mission to help limit the damage. The proposal went nowhere as the Habsburg government in Brussels never approved it. There was little Vierlingh could do to prevent these intentional dike breaches other than appeal to water board officials' sense of duty. When this failed in Zeeland, he labeled the water board officials "heretics!" He argued that they had turned their back on their responsibility to protect the land from flooding.¹⁰² The intentional flooding of the landscape was antithetical to centuries of experience directed towards preventing inundations. In many ways military inundations were truly heretical in the Low Countries. They were a sin against the doctrine of the poldermodel and flood prevention; they were imposed on local populations without any discussion or debate and flew in the face of the accepted wisdom of the day that understood floods as something to be avoided.

Vierlingh was not the only person who tried to prevent these inundations from occurring. Throughout the prolonged siege of Leiden several towns wrote to the States of Holland

¹⁰¹ Den Heijer, *Holland onder water*, 7.

¹⁰² C. Dekker. *Geld in het water: Antwerps en Mechels kapitaal in Zuid-Beveland na de stormvloed in de 16e eeuw* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2010), 205.

requesting they be allowed to close their sluices and stop flooding the land.¹⁰³ Orange had to place guards at some of the sluices and dike breaches to ensure that the flood waters continued to course into Holland. In Alkmaar as well the rural farmers attempted to prevent the flooding of their lands. The regents of Gouda and Schoonhoven simply chose to ignore the Prince's orders and left their dikes intact in order to protect their harvests. Clearly the militarization of the landscape was a controversial process. People's lives and livelihood were at stake.

As the war dragged on it did not seem that there was any end in sight to the military inundations. During the relief of Leiden, one of the Spanish commanders had intercepted a rebel letter that outlined which sluices and dikes were vital to protect Holland from *total* inundation. He forwarded the letter to the Spanish government at Brussels, which approved the proposal to flood the entire province. In the end, Philip II rejected the plan on practical grounds rather than moral ones, noting that the rebels deserved harsh punishment, but it would damage Spain's reputation and destroy one of his own possessions.¹⁰⁴ Orange himself apparently toyed with the idea of flooding the entire province in 1576 when he was having trouble finding foreign assistance for the Revolt. He supposedly wondered whether it might be better to cut all the dikes in the Netherlands, abandon it to the elements, and have the inhabitants put on ships and resettled across Europe.¹⁰⁵ It was not just leaders who held this bleak view however. When Wouter Jacobsz spoke with a woman from Gouda, she noted how one of the regents there had more love

¹⁰³ RSH 1571-1574, 68, 31 August 1574.

¹⁰⁴ Geoffrey Parker, "Early Modern Europe" in *The Laws of War: Constraints on Warfare in the Western World*, eds. by Michael Howard, George J. Andreopoulos and Mark R. Shulman (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 46-7.

¹⁰⁵ K. W. Swart et al, *William of Orange and the revolt of the Netherlands* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 102-3.

for the Ottoman Turks than for Philip II, and if she had her way, she would cut all the dikes in Holland and make it impossible to reconquer.¹⁰⁶

Another issue, which was not addressed in this chapter, was the damage to the infrastructure which would be needed for drainage and repair, namely the water lifting mills. Both sides targeted these important structures. While Philip II had reservations about the use of flooding as a weapon, he had no qualms about fire.¹⁰⁷ Houses, fields, and in particular mills were readily available targets for the Spanish forces. Conversely, the rebels saw them as a defensive liability and tore down countless mills around cities. They worried that they would either obstruct their line of fire or could be used by the Spanish besiegers. The widespread destruction of these important structures would only complicate the already complex and divisive repair work.

By 1576 the rebels had gotten their wish, the land was not lost, but it was broken. The militarization of the landscape had proven effective for the rebels in the short term. The dike breaches and flooding had driven the Spanish forces from Holland, yet at a tremendous cost. Half of the province lay under water for at least a small period of time, and the infrastructure required to drain and to protect the land laid in disrepair. Countless dikes, embankments, and sluices were damaged and destroyed in order to prevent Spanish victories. As one historian eloquently stated, the inundations, which should have been liberating, in fact had the opposite effect.¹⁰⁸ Following the strategic floods, the province of Holland appeared less as a crown for the rebel's head and more of a cross to be borne. The complicated and unpredictable process of

¹⁰⁶ Jacobsz, *Dagboek*, 205.

¹⁰⁷ Nierop, *Treason*, 80.

¹⁰⁸ Groenveld, *Vyanden*, 33.

how the Prince, the States of Holland, and the other interested parties handled the aftermath of militarization of the landscape is the focus of the next chapters.

CHAPTER FOUR - THE DIFFICULT JOURNEY: THE BREAKDOWN OF THE POLDERMODEL

Introduction

While flood waters still covered large sections of the province of Holland the leaders of the Revolt faced challenges forming a workable government. From the onset of the fighting in Holland in 1572 until the Union of Utrecht in 1579 the Prince of Orange and the States of Holland struggled to establish an effective form of administration and tax collection. As one historian aptly stated, “the Revolt ran out of money before it had really started.”¹ In these trying times, payments for the military received top priority, and many other pressing needs, such as dike repair and repayment fell through the administrative cracks.

The States clearly intended to compensate those who were affected by the inundations. For instance, the resolution for the relief of Leiden clearly specified that the States and cities of Holland would pay for all the necessary repairs. Yet by 1577 the States reversed this decision because of “pure lack of funds.”² The States experimented with other remedies but again with mixed success. Repairing the damages from the militarization of the landscape proved a challenging endeavor.

The tremendous debt from the inundations and financing the war put a considerable strain on nearly everyone. At various points several rebel leaders such as the Prince and the Land’s Advocate Paulus Buys threatened resignation because of all the difficulties financing the war.

¹ W. Fritschy, “‘A financial revolution’ reconsidered” Public finance in Holland during the Dutch Revolt, 1568-1648” *The Economic History Review* 56 (Feb., 2003): 59.

² Arentz, “Schadevergoeding bij militaire inundaties,” 69.

The States and Orange finally secured some respite from the war and financial burdens with the Pacification of Ghent in 1576. The Pacification forged the temporary unification of all the provinces in the Netherlands and Philip II's withdrawal of all Habsburg troops from the Low Countries after the soldiers had mutinied and sacked Antwerp. For a short three-year period those in Holland were safe from the threat of war.

Ironically, the conflicts surrounding the dike and sluice repairs came to a head around the same time as the Pacification and threatened the newfound unity within the States of Holland. Numerous cities simply decided to place their own interests above those of the province. The Prince himself clearly understood how divisive these issues could be, as evident in his negotiations with Gouda. He had urged Gouda to remain silent regarding the repair to the Leidschendam after the relief of Leiden. The city became increasingly intransigent, but the Prince implored the States of Holland to remain united, worrying that the enemy would interpret the internal conflicts as a sign of weakness.

This chapter describes the difficulties which the States of Holland encountered establishing a stable form of government and fulfilling their promise to repair the damage caused by the militarization of the landscape. It focuses on the difficulties which the inundations caused in tax collection and how the repairs for the water-management infrastructure fell through the administrative cracks. With no clear solution coming from the States of Holland, individual cities took it upon themselves to solve the problems which remained from the many tactical floods caused by the fighting in Holland in 1572-1576.

Establishing a fiscal and political order in Holland and coordinating with the other rebellious provinces

This section addresses some of the general difficulties the States of Holland and the Prince of Orange encountered as they tried to establish effective forms of rule and administration in the political and military arenas in the 1570s. As previously mentioned, the Dutch Revolt began as a protest *against* Habsburg policy rather than *for* the establishment of some new state or government. The resistance included a lot of improvisation in the first few years of fighting as the rebels tried to build a unified movement. A great deal of ambiguity marked this phase of the Revolt. The States of Holland may have taken the revolutionary act a meeting without a summons by Philip II in July 1572, but Orange would not officially condemn his sovereign until his “Apology” in February 1581, nine years later. Furthermore, the Prince’s proclamation only came after Philip condemned him as an outlaw. In the interim the Prince, the States of Holland, and the other rebellious provinces conducted countless debates over how to organize the military, form of government, finances, and other necessary state-making initiatives. Tracy quite rightly notes that States of Holland had undergone an “apprenticeship in self-government” under Habsburg rule in the early sixteenth century, but in the first decade or two of the Revolt they struggled once they were on their own.³

The States of Holland and the Prince were confronted with two simultaneous challenges, one internal and one external. They needed to establish a way to maintain order and governance within the province of Holland, while at the same time finding a way to coordinate their efforts with other insurgent provinces. The domestic and interprovincial issues were often intertwined,

³ Tracy, *Holland under Habsburg*, 6.

meaning that changes in in one arena affected the course of the other. In these difficult times, it is no wonder that the States of Holland struggled to develop an effective form of rule.

The rebels justified their actions with a defense of ancient liberties and privileges and thus tried to maintain established forms of governance as much as possible. The year 1572, however, was watershed moment which brought with it new circumstances. Old policies and procedures needed to be adapted to suit the new political landscape. An example is the expansion of the number of voting cities in the States of Holland from six to eighteen to make the States more representative. This development is an excellent case of the poldermodel in action. The States of Holland gave a voice to those cities affected by the war, inviting them into the discussion and decision making processes. The inclusion of these other voices did not necessarily bring harmony and consensus, but it did offer the newly included cities a formal platform to air their grievances. The poldermodel was functioning, but the war efforts put it under considerable strain.

Traditionally the power structure between the various government bodies in Holland was just like the landscape, rather flat.⁴ This fact meant that there was no clear organizational hierarchy or chain of command at the outset of the fighting; who was answerable to whom, was a fairly open ended question. Throughout the first years of fighting both parties attempted to give the regime a more stable structure and clarify the roles of the different bodies of government, but not without difficulty. Prior to the Revolt the States had very few written and formalized

⁴ Tielhof and van Dam point this fact to demonstrate why the Rijnland water board had difficulty enforcing their laws on turf mining limitations. Tielhof and van Dam, *Waterstaat*, 65. In fact part of the struggle against Spain stemmed from Habsburg attempts to make the political structure more vertical, and centralized. See Tom Mels, "The Low Countries' connection: landscape and the struggle over representation around 1600." *Journal of Historical Geography* 32 (2006): 712-730.

procedures and functioned according to generally accepted previous practices. This sort of relaxed procedure, however, could not endure the strains of paying for a costly war.⁵

One of the major issues that the rebels attempted to address straight away was the relationship between the Prince as the stadholder and the States of Holland.⁶ Orange considered the governance of the rebellion to be between “myself and the States,” but this understanding left considerable room for maneuver. Events in the early days of the Revolt did nothing to clear up the matter. The Prince was largely responsible for the first meeting of the revolutionary States of Holland in 1572, as he had suggested the idea of a meeting through one of his trusted advisors Philip van Marnix, lord of St. Aldegonde. This implies that Orange held authority over the States, but one of the representative body’s first acts was to “acknowledge” and “accept” Orange as their stadholder which suggests the power flowed the other way. In truth, the situation was rather fluid with both parties having relative equality and with each needing the other. It is clear that “the mutual dependence of States and Prince-Stadholder nonetheless remained virtually total.”⁷ The States needed Orange’s leadership to help direct the military and execute policy, while he needed the funds which only the States could provide.

⁵ See J.W. Koopmans, *De Staten van Holland en de Opstand. De ontwikkeling van hun functies en organisatie in de periode 1544-1588* (The Hague: Hollandse Historische Reeks, 1990).

⁶ In truth the relationship between Stadholder and the States of Holland or the States General was never completely formalized. This fact becomes strikingly evident during the two stadholderless periods of the Dutch Republic. It appears as though each generation found its own solution to this issue. For a good description of the changing relationship see Herbert Rowen, *The Princes of Orange: The Stadholders in the Dutch Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

⁷ Horst Lademacher, *Die Stellung des Prinzen van Oranien als Stathalter in den Niederlanden van 1572 bis 1584: Ein Beitrag zur Verfassungsgeschichte der Niederlande* (Bonn, 1958), 54; as quoted in Rowen, *Princes*, 17.

One of the fundamental issues was the intermediaries between Prince-stadholder and the States of Holland. At the start of the war in 1572 the States had created a committee to serve as “Commissioners in all matters of war” in order to advise the Prince. Later these were expanded to include a Council of State, Council of Finance, and Council of Admiralty through which Orange would carry out the daily work of administration and to help coordinate with the States.⁸ The relief of Leiden seems to have offered them the opportunity to reevaluate their relationship though, since the ambiguities and disarray which existed between the different offices of government often strained their mutual good will.⁹ On 20 October 1574, roughly two weeks after the siege ended, the Prince and the States began discussing the pressing need to arrange the political and military matters in Holland. In a letter from Orange he observed that confusion stemmed from three chief sources, the debts from paying for soldiers and garrisons, divisions among cities over how to arrange these payments for the war, and the organization of the “*gemene middelen*” or common funds. He urged the States to take control of the government more firmly, while they responded by noting they needed a strong leader to give the Revolt direction.¹⁰ Confusingly, both parties seemed to want the other to take the lead.

The issue concerning the establishment of the *Landraad*, or Provincial Council, and the formation of a union between Holland and Zeeland demonstrates the difficulty which the States and Orange encountered in establishing an effective form of government. The goal of the *Landraad* was improve the working relationship between the Prince and the States and do away with the different councils. In theory the *Landraad* was supposed to communicate more

⁸ Koenigsberger, *Monarchies*, 247-249.

⁹ Rowen, *Princes*, 18.

¹⁰ William of Orange to the States of Holland, 20 October 1574, De correspondentie van Willem van Oranje nr. 10440. And RSH 1571-1574, 178-182, 1 November 1574.

effectively with Orange, enforce the various resolutions passed by the States, and (perhaps most importantly) establish efficient tax collection. This body would comprise twenty nine individuals, four from the nobility, ten from Southern Holland, and seven each from North Holland and Zeeland. There were heated debates about it throughout 1575. The nobility were unhappy that only two nobles were actually chosen when the members were selected, not the four they were promised. By August the *Landraad* still had not met resulting in “great confusion and disorder.” Orange believed the whole idea was too unwieldy and thought a smaller Council of State would be more effective. The States responded that the land had always essentially had a *Landraad* in spirit, as its governance had comprised a lord, cities and the nobility. By October 1575 the *Landraad* was officially abolished even though many members had already taken their oaths. The council had accomplished nothing of note. Decision-making in Holland was proving to be a challenging affair.¹¹

¹¹ The debate concerning the *Landraad*, Union of Delft, and financing the war demonstrate the intricate, involved, and messy decision making process during the first years of the Revolt. RSH 1575, 75-77, 18 February 1575, the States continue to discuss paying for the military and “putting things in order.” RSH 1575, 107, 1 March 1575, Buys is order to address the conscription and arrangement of the government. RSH 1575, 228-229, 14 April 1575, Buys estimates that the States need to raise the 100,000 pounds from a Quota system between the various quarters of Holland. RSH 1575, 245-247, 20 April 1575, Articles are drawn up for the connection between the land and cities discussing the need to assist each other, prevent plundering and prevent trade or communication with the enemy. RSH 1575, 268, 10 May 1575, Buys wants his dismissal because of the difficulties of establishing the government. RSH 1575, 277-279, 13 May 1575, the States discuss the union with Zeeland and refer several points of confusion to Orange for advice. RSH 1575, 290-291, 16 May 1575, the States decide they need to resolve the lingering questions of the government within a few days, but are ultimately unsuccessful. RSH 1575, 295-298, 18 May 1575, the States read aloud the points of government and conclude that Orange will be responsible for the military and defending the liberties and privileges of the land, and further Orange will work with a council of qualified individuals from Holland and Zeeland. RSH 1575, 300-303, the States decide the *Landraad* (the Provincial Council) will have 29 members. RSH 1575, 356, 4 June 1575, the States agree to unite with Zeeland under Orange’s authority, with all the cities agreeing except Gouda (see below for Gouda’s complaints). RSH 1575, 516, 19 July 1575, the Union with Zeeland needs to get its resources sorted. RSH 1575, 520-524, 20 July 1575, the States have a lengthy debate about the

Establishing a formal relationship with the province of Zeeland proved to be a complicated affair as well, although it did bear more fruit in the end. By July 1575 the two provinces had formed a “Union” at the request of the Prince. This was not a merger, or a true unification between the two provinces, but rather two independent provinces agreeing to work together under the same “sovereign and supreme head” in the form of the Prince-Stadholder. The pressures of war required the two provinces to further clarify their arrangement over the next several months. By April 1576 they agreed to the “Closer Union,” in which the rights and responsibilities of each party was further clarified. The actual text of the Closer Union contained repeated references to a *bondgenootschap*, an alliance or confederacy, between the two provinces. In actuality, they were still a “dual government of States-with-stadholder.”¹²

The relationship between Holland, Zeeland, and their stadholder with the rest of the provinces of the Netherlands changed dramatically following a Spanish mutiny in the summer of 1576. The war had stretched Philip II’s finances to the brink. The new governor-general, Don Luis de Requesens, could keep the wheels of war turning because he had a good relationship with the Antwerp bankers and could borrow from them on his own credit. His death in March

government. RSH 1575, 536, 29 July 1575, the nobility are upset with their lack of representation in the *Landraad*. RSH 1575, 548, 5 August 1575, the States write to Buys regarding why the Land’s Council has not been called and the great confusion and disorder it has created. RSH 1575, 604, 27 August 1575, the States confirm that the *Landraad* will be responsible for communicating with Orange, enforcing the resolutions, and handling the “*gemene middelen*” (common funds) (see below). RSH 1575, 648-649, 19 September 1575, Orange believes the *Landraad* will only bring disorder and that a Council of State would function better, the States respond that Holland has always had a de facto Land’s Council, plus the members have already taken oaths. RSH 1576, 28-31, 23 March 1576, the States hold a lengthy debate over the debts and funding concerning the Union of Delft. RSH 1576, 41, 15 April, Buys will discuss with North Holland Zeeland about the Union, noting they will trust each other and assist with repairs, and funds can be transferred between provinces and quarters if necessary. RSH 1576, 54, 25 April 1576, the Union of Delft is formalized and signed.

¹² Rowen, *Princes*, 18-19; RSH 1576, 59-68, 28 April 1576.

1576 crippled the Spanish war effort. The first cracks appeared after Spanish soldiers captured Zierikzee in Zeeland on 2 July and abandoned the city within a few hours because of unpaid arrears. After the mutinous army captured several other towns, the States General, which represented the Spanish held provinces, opened up talks with the Prince and the provinces of Holland and Zeeland about working together to expel the Spanish. Before all the provinces could coordinate their efforts the mutinous Spanish forces captured Antwerp and raped, pillaged, and plundered the city for several days.¹³

The “Spanish Fury” as the event became known, had significant ramifications throughout the Netherlands. Shortly afterwards all the provinces of the Netherlands signed the Pacification of Ghent. This agreement served to unite the other provinces under the direction of the Prince and the States of Holland to finally remove the Spanish forces from the Netherlands. Furthermore, it called for a meeting of the States General in which the various provinces could settle matters on their own terms. Orange himself believed that the Revolt should encompass all the Low Countries, so it was no surprise that he became the de facto leader of the provinces.¹⁴

Religious differences cracked and then broke the fragile Pacification of Ghent, calling into question Holland’s relationship with the other provinces. War returned to the Netherlands in 1579, although many of the provinces had begun making preparations even earlier. At this point the provinces split into two different unions. The provinces which supported the Habsburgs, primarily the southern ones, joined the Union of Arras. In the northern provinces Holland took the lead in establishing the Union of Utrecht. Both of these unions were completed in 1579.¹⁵

¹³ Israel, *Dutch Republic*, 184-5

¹⁴ Israel, *Republic*, 185-6.

¹⁵ For an excellent discussion of the relationship between the complex changes of the various agreements (Union of Delft, Union of Utrecht, and Pacification of Ghent) see J.C. Boogman, “The Union of Utrecht: its Genesis and Consequences.” *BMGN* 94 (1979): 377-407.

The Prince and the States of Holland attempted to put the war effort on a better legal and financial footing by obtaining foreign aid. In 1581, the Prince published his Act of Abjuration, in which he argued that Philip II lost his authority in Holland and the other rebellious provinces. This argument paved the way for the States General, representing those provinces in the Union of Utrecht, to offer sovereignty to the Duke of Anjou, the French king's younger brother. Anjou was supposed to bring direction, unity, and financial support. None of these ever materialized and his sojourn in the Netherlands only lasted for two years, from 1581 until 1583. When this failed the States General looked west towards England and agreed to the Treaty of Nonsuch. Under this arrangement, Sir Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester, became the Governor General of the provinces in the Union of Utrecht. His rule was similarly short, lasting from 1585 until 1588. After this point the provinces of the newly formed Dutch Republic ruled on their own authority through the States General.

What impact did these events of high politics have on the course of local and regional dike repair and compensation for those affected by the military inundations in Holland? For the most part they served as a distraction, but they also diverted important resources (mostly financial) away from the repair efforts. For instance, a month before the States of Holland ratified the Pacification of Ghent on 26 November 1576, they passed a four-stuiver per ton of beer tax intended for dike repair across the province. Shortly afterwards the Prince sent a commission to Brussels to act on his behalf which included Paulus Buys and Gerard van Wijngaerden. These two men had years of water management experience but had also spent considerable amounts of time outside of the province. The Prince himself spent six years in Flanders and Brabant, from 1577 until 1583, in an effort to keep the Revolt alive in these

provinces. At the same time, he was needed in Holland to weigh in on important water management disputes, such as those in Gouda and Haarlem (see below).

Gemene Middelen and Receivers up to The Pacification of Ghent

The first years of the Revolt provided a formidable test for the financial apparatus of the States of Holland. For a majority of the sixteenth century Holland had demonstrated its financial strength through its subsidies, or *beden*, to the Habsburg monarchy. The States provided the Habsburg government a number of yearly and extraordinary *beden* which they raised via long-term, low-interest loans. The money for these loans came from bonds bought up by individuals across Holland. The money to repay these bonds came from land and excise taxes which increased over the course of the sixteenth century. The States found a way to make the purchase of bonds appealing by devolving the financial power to the cities. The idea was that individuals had more faith in their city repaying their bonds than the States of Holland or the central government in Brussels.

With the outbreak of hostilities, however, the States of Holland felt compelled to suspend the repayment of the previous loans, choosing instead to funnel all the available money into war effort. This decision damaged their credit worthiness. Before the war they were able to borrow with an interest rate of 12%, which increased to as high as 30-40% by 1575 for smaller amounts. This alteration meant that the States would initially have difficulty paying for the war with loans, and at the outset had to primarily rely on the cash which could be raised immediately via taxes.

These revenues were known as the *gemene middelen* or common funds, coming mainly from land and excise taxes.¹⁶

Reconstructing the public finances of Holland during the early years of the Revolt is difficult for a number of reasons. First, there is a dearth of primary sources for many of the records were either burned or recycled to make room for additional storage during the eighteenth century.¹⁷ Second, the war itself also created a number of difficulties in terms of tax collection and recording. In these early years the front lines of the fighting changed considerably so farmers were pressured to provide revenue and supplies to both sides of the fighting. For farmers, “every soldier was an enemy.”¹⁸ Many rural residents did not have the funds to pay their taxes, and the collection of unpaid rents and taxes could stretch on for years, making the documentation of payments challenging. Third, the style of fighting also caused problems and generated considerable confusion. For instance, then Brother Wouter Jacobsz spoke with a rural pastor, the latter noted that God had smote the land, and the majority of homes in his village were abandoned, to such a degree that it was not clear who owned which parcels of land.¹⁹ In July 1575 the States requested an official in Schieland to conduct a report on how long the land was flooded in the area, and how it was affecting the collection of taxes.²⁰ Finally, many church lands were confiscated by the state and later resold, using the funds for a variety of expenses.

¹⁶ Tracy, *Founding of the Dutch Republic*, 37-115.

¹⁷ Fritschy, “A ‘Financial Revolution’ reconsidered,” 157-189.

¹⁸ A. Th. van Deursen, “Holland’s Experience of War during the Revolt of the Netherlands” in *Britain and the Netherlands*. Vol 6: *War and Society*, eds. A. C. Duke and C.A. Tamse (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1977), 26.

¹⁹ Jacobsz, *Dagboek*, 191.

²⁰ RSH 1575, 388-390, 11 June 1575.

The exact process and revenue resulting from these sales are still poorly understood. Despite the “hazardous” character of historical research on Holland’s finances during the period, historians are in complete agreement that the province was critically short of funding.

The civil-war character of the struggle also meant that a number of loyalist supporters abandoned their offices, which were filled with junior personnel without the same experience. For instance, the chief receiver, or tax collector of Holland, Jacob Bol, had served for decades but sided with king and left his office. His replacement, Franchoys van Valkensteyn, struggled under the difficult conditions as he was forced to learn on the job. Valkensteyn was not the only tax collection official that needed replacing however, as there was a considerable turnover in personnel and procedure. Cornelis van Mierop became the receiver for Leiden and Rijnland in October 1574, followed two days later by Pieter Hanneman for the towns and cities in Schieland and Delfland.

At the outset, the role and collection processes for the various receivers were poorly defined, which only added to the confusion. When Jacob Muys became the new chief receiver after Valkensteyn in October 1574, the States asked that he clarify his powers and duties. Specifically the States wanted to know which issues fell under his prerogative, to establish travel costs and salary for officials, and to complete a full report of the condition of the coffers within three months.²¹ In June of the next year the States held a debate over the status and responsibilities of all the receivers. They noted that they had difficulty collecting funds every eight days, and there was general confusion about over what to do with confiscated goods and property. Several months later the Prince and the States authorized a much more rigorous tax

²¹ RSH 1571-1574, 172-174, 1 November 1574.

collection, allowing the receivers to arrest or confiscate goods from individuals who were behind on their payments.²²

At the same time that new officials were having difficulty settling into their new roles, the States began promising the Prince ever-increasing money for the war. In May 1574 they promised 30,000 guilders per month from the six major cities. When Orange threatened to resign in November this increased to 45,000. In March of the next year the States found that the actual revenues were considerably less than the amount promised to the Prince.²³ Nevertheless, because of the burdens of war the States consented to increase its payments to the Prince up to 55,000 guilder per month.²⁴ Additionally, many of the cities agreed to a one-time 60,000 crown payment for the relief of Leiden. When the States agreed to a new budget in December they essentially allowed the individual cities greater control over tax collecting in exchange for greater funds. In this regard the towns became fiscal intermediaries as they could borrow at significantly better rates from their own burghers. In this way the financial power devolved to the cities by 1576, but the spending power also remained local. Many of the receivers who were tasked with sending along the taxes were also residents of the city, meaning that funds often went towards local issues, like paying for soldiers in the town. Tracy again stated it best, noting “In these years [1572-1576], Holland could be defended against Spain only by holding the towns; the towns could only be held by professional garrisons; and the garrisons would not fight

²² RSH 1575, 618-620, 8 September 1575.

²³ RSH 1575, 149-156, 16 March 1575.

²⁴ Tracy, “Fiscal Regime,” 41-54.

unless paid more or less as they demanded to be paid.”²⁵ It was a system that worked well in Holland, because of the challenges of tax collection outside of the cities.

The devolution of financial power to the cities was also a result of the style of fighting. By 1575 the States were taxing at higher rates and collecting more revenue than before the outbreak of war, but there were still considerable gaps between income and expenses in the *gemene middelen* for a variety of reasons. First, the expenses associated with militarizing the landscape were tremendous. The eyewitness Fruytiers estimated the damages from the relief of Leiden alone to be around six million guilders.²⁶ While this figure has generally been accepted by historians as a good approximation of the damage, Tracy, who has probably conducted the most research on the subject, suggests that this figure is probably more representative of the damage from all the military inundations in Holland.²⁷ In either case, this figure represents an astronomical sum for the rebellious provinces. The six million guilders’ worth of destruction represented nearly double the yearly tax revenues for Holland.²⁸

Second, the receivers seemed to have had considerable difficulty collecting taxes from the rural sectors. At one point the States were willing to reduce the taxes on common lands from three years to one if the money could be readily supplied upfront. This sort of short-term sanction is hardly the type that would occur if the States had been regularly receiving their rent

²⁵ Tracy, “Fiscal Regime,” 54.

²⁶ Fruytiers, *Corte*, 16-19. He estimates the damage at 300,000 crowns, roughly 6,000,000 guilders.

²⁷ ‘t Hart, *Dutch Wars of Independence*, 106 ;Tracy, “Fiscal Regime,” 50.

²⁸ de Vries and van der Woude, *First Modern*, 97. The tax records for Holland during this period are scarce, but they estimate that in 1588 Holland raised 3.4 million guilders in revenue. The costs for repairs were clearly beyond the individual water boards as well. The area of Saeftinghe along the Flemish coast estimated that repairs for military inundations in the area amounted to twenty times the yearly water board income. See ‘t Hart, *Dutch Wars*, 106.

revenue.²⁹ Later that year they found that many people were either carrying enormous debts or arrested for lack of payment. In the same resolution, however, they note that they still needed to pay for garrisons, so they authorized a nine-stuiver per morgen tax on land not occupied by the enemy. Whether the land was in use and producing goods was a moot point.³⁰

A month later the States altered the process of collecting the tax, but not the amount. In the newer resolution, they noted that the tax would be collected whether the land was “above or under water” (flooded or not) and the burden would be split, with the owner paying two-thirds and the user of the land owing one-third of the tax. If the land was deemed to be completely desolate and unusable, only the owner would pay.³¹ The next year in Rijnland the States decided to lease out the rights to collect the nine-stuiver tax if the collector would provide money up front; furthermore, they decided that the areas still flooded would only have to pay four stuivers per morgen. This approach was hardly the most accommodating policy.³²

The difficulty with the *gemene middelen* and the new receiver system was that the military inundations created a nearly impossible situation for the financial system of Holland. On the demand side of the equation, the war and repair work created enormous debts that required quick repayment. On the supply side, the countryside was devastated which undermined the receivers’ ability to collect revenues from those areas. A lot of the land that was not flooded was often occupied or threatened by Spanish forces. As late as April 1576 the States observed that the situation was still deteriorating, as daily more lands continued to be

²⁹ RSH 1575, 269, 10 May 1575.

³⁰ RSH 1575, 645, 19 September 1575.

³¹ RSH 1575, 682, 8 October 1575.

³² RSH 1576, 34, 6 April 1576.

abandoned.³³ The States continued to attempt to collect from these areas, but mostly with mixed results. The fact that the States felt compelled to appoint Cornelis Dirksz van Coolwijk to the new position of receiver for uncollected funds in early 1575 speaks volumes about the financial situation of Holland.³⁴ The unpaid taxes were becoming so vast that the States created a special position just to keep track of the money which they were due. As Tracy observed, if it was not for the respite resulting from the Pacification of Ghent, it was not clear how Holland would have met its financial obligations.³⁵

Repair work up to 1576

According to Tracy, one of the largest portions of debt for the rebellious provinces was repairing the land and houses damaged by the military inundations. In actuality, however, these debts were never actually repaid. Tracy could not find any source which mentions compensation for property damage during his extensive research.³⁶ That does not mean, however, that the States of Holland did not attempt repayment. In fact, nearly every entry in the Resolutions of the States of Holland in which a military inundation was ordered, the States promised repayment from the *gemene middelen*. For instance, the act which ordered the flooding of Schieland, Delfland and Rijnland for the relief of Leiden in 1574 also mentioned that the expenses of the

³³ RSH 1576, 36, 7 April 1576.

³⁴ RSH 1575, 15, 8 January 1575.

³⁵ James Tracy, "Keeping the Wheels of War Turning: Revenues of the Province of Holland, 1572-1619" in *The Origins and Development of the Dutch Revolt* eds. Graham Darby (New York: Routledge, 2003), 136.

³⁶ Tracy, "Fiscal Regime," 50-54.

cuts, and the subsequent repair will be carried out “unanimously” (i.e. shared equally) by the common lands and the cities, and not less by the States.³⁷ Similarly, when the States flooded the Ablasserwaard in September 1574, they promised to bear the costs just like for the Leiden siege, which was still ongoing.³⁸ The fact that the States later passed specific taxes for dike and sluice repair suggests that these were not just pro forma promises. They did intend to make up for the damages from the inundations; financial realities however prevented them from carrying through on their pledge.

Numerous issues complicated the repairs, such as the continued presence of enemy troops, the confusion surrounding the form of government, and the lack of available funds and materials. It took years for land to be cultivated again after a military inundation. Rijnland only returned to any sense of normalcy after six years; the area around Gorinchem in southeast Holland took nine years. The rural communities could not pay their taxes and went in debt to cities, sometimes owing as much as 40,000 guilders, with an interest rate as high as 21 percent.³⁹ In most cases the repairs for the military inundations began rather quickly, but were only partial and most likely makeshift.

Clearly this was the case with the relief of Leiden and the repair of the Ijssel dike. In November, roughly a month after the relief, the residents of Schieland wrote to Orange requesting that they be allowed to begin repairing the dike.⁴⁰ The States authorized the repair work on the same day for all the cuts in the Ijssel dike, except for the one by Gouda, which they

³⁷ RSH 1571-1574, 10-11, 30 July 1574.

³⁸ RSH 1571-1574, 113, 26 September 1574.

³⁹ ‘t Hart, *Dutch Wars*, 106-118.

⁴⁰ Villages and residents of Schieland to William of Orange, 11 November 1574, De correspondentie van Willem van Oranje nr. 10165.

kept open to allow ships passage into central Holland.⁴¹ The States' resolution to repair the Ijssel dike instructed the Dike Count to carry it out with "the least damage and the least expense."

The funds for the repair work to be provided from the remainder of Rotterdam's 60,000-crown subsidy which it was supposed to raise for the relief of Leiden.⁴²

Rotterdam had trouble raising the funds, but not for lack of effort. Initially it attempted to have the States consent to lowering its subsidy.⁴³ When this failed the city attempted to raise money via less traditional means. In December the city proposed paying for the repairs by buying up grain with an interest-free loan and then reselling it at a profit.⁴⁴ Within a few months, however, Rotterdam complained about the condition of its grain supply, noting that its poor quality affected its resale value which led the citizens in the city to struggle under the burdens of their loan.⁴⁵ In May 1575 the States ordered the permanent repair of the Ijssel dike, but this effort stalled again because of Rotterdam's difficulties. By the end of the month, an official from Schieland requested that the States write to the city regarding its lack of payment. In place of the portion of its 60,000-crown subsidy the official requested that the city provide pioneers and laborers for the work.⁴⁶ The next month the same official wrote to the States again, this time requesting that he receive some form of a guarantee that Rotterdam would honor its promise to

⁴¹ RSH 1571-1574, 187, 11 November 1574.

⁴² RSH 1571-1574, 187, 11 November 1574.

⁴³ RSH 1571-1574, 154, 24 October 1574.

⁴⁴ RSH 1571-1574, 219, 1 December 1574.

⁴⁵ RSH 1575, 77-8, 19 February 1575.

⁴⁶ RSH 1575, 77-8, 338, 29 May 1575.

provide workers.⁴⁷ Later that summer the States sent the Lands Advocate to negotiate with Rotterdam over the issue, but with little resolution.⁴⁸ Six months after the relief of Leiden the Ijssel dike was still not fully repaired.

The area around the Ijssel dike was hardly a unique tale. Rijnland suffered serious challenges as well. The rebel-directed inundations were exacerbated by Spanish attacks on dikes and sluices near Katwijk, Huis ter Hart, and in the Rijn dike. As the Spanish forces retreated from the siege they took out their frustrations on the water-management infrastructure. This meant that the rebel inundations brought in water from the south while these Spanish action brought in water from the north and east.⁴⁹ A few months after the relief of Leiden the States passed a resolution forbidding digging up any clay in region, as the land was already “very dug up.” They worried that if another dike break should occur, specifically the Diemerdijk which was still under threat from the ongoing siege of Amsterdam, then they might not have enough material to carry out repairs.⁵⁰ 93 percent of the land of Alphen, to the east of Leiden, remained desolate and unusable as late as 1576.⁵¹ It does not appear until any sense of normalcy returned to Rijnland until 1580.⁵²

There were some possible positive consequences to the inundations which should be mentioned. Flood waters, in limited quantities, offered at least two opportunities for rural

⁴⁷ RSH 1575, 403-4, 17 June 1575.

⁴⁸ RSH 1575, 503, 16 July 1575.

⁴⁹ Gottschalk, *Stormvloeden*, 732.

⁵⁰ RSH, 1575, 17, 8 July 1575.

⁵¹ Groenveld, *Vyanden*, 14-22.

⁵² Klinkert, “Water in oorlog,” 462.

residents. First, there were numerous documented cases in which farmers would intentionally bring in flood waters as a method of fertilizing. In the winter they would create small breaches in the dike, or perhaps open sluices, to let in the nutrient-rich waters. This appears to have happened in the Northern Quarter and Rijnland.⁵³ Second, residents around Gouda had been purposefully flooding land to create peat for centuries.⁵⁴ It is unclear whether or not the rural residents could capitalize on these opportunities. In all likelihood the ad hoc repairs and the continued presence of soldiers made the task difficult. Some areas probably did profit from the military inundations, but on the whole, they were more destructive than beneficial.

Waivers, exemptions and pioneers up to 1576.

While the need for dike and sluice repairs was clear to everyone, developing solutions were much more challenging. For several years the States experimented with a variety of alternatives to carry out the necessary works. Two approaches were the most widespread. First, waivers and exemptions on specific taxes were the chief forms of relief for the countryside. But this strategy came less in the form of repair and reimbursement and more in the form of reduced tax burdens. In other words, the rural residents did not receive compensation from the States but were rather “awarded” the right to pay the States fewer taxes. The States often rejected the waivers as they tried to collect taxes anyway, although how much money they squeezed from the rural populations is unclear.

⁵³ Diederik Aten, “Drijven of drooghouding? Inundatie als landbouwmethode in Hollands Noorderkwartier, zestiende-negentiende eeuw” *Tijdschrift voor Waterstaatsgeschiedenis* 9 (2010): 1-14; Siger Zeischka, *Minerva in de polder: Waterstaat en techniek in het hoogheemraadschap van Rijnland (1500-1856)* (Hilversom: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2007), 131.

⁵⁴ De Vries, *Rural Economy*, 71.

Second, many cities attempted to reduce their tax burden by providing pioneers or laborers. This tactic in essence came from providing a form of Corvée labor tax in place of a monetary one. This initiative removed the costs and delays associated with the bureaucracy in the States of Holland. Laborers were in high demand, needed for fortification work, dike repairs, and other activities related to the war. In place of having the States pay for these laborers through tax revenues raised by cities, the cities could find a way to raise laborers on their own initiatives and receive a tax reduction.

The repair work for the relief of Leiden provides some detailed accounts of the waiver process in action. In January 1575, a few short months after the relief of Leiden, several towns in the area asked for a waiver or termination of their payments because of the damage they had suffered. The States promised to send out a commission to investigate and inform those responsible for collecting taxes of their decision.⁵⁵ The results of his findings are not known, or discussed in the resolutions of Holland, but in June some of the same towns requested further concessions.

This fact suggests that the commission's results did not satisfy the rural residents, as other towns began asking for waivers. The villages of Warmond and Oegstgeest near Leiden wanted a termination of the rent taxes because they considered the land unusable as a result of the floods.⁵⁶ Alphen wanted a break for taxes on its horned beasts, cattle and other farm animals, because of the desolation. The States requested that they remain patient as they promised to address the matter at the first opportunity.⁵⁷ Meanwhile, the villages of Valkenburg, Katwijk on

⁵⁵ RSH 1575, 24, 14 January 1575. The specific villages which requested waivers were Rijnburg, Valkenburg, Oegstgeest, Warmond, and Sasseneheim.

⁵⁶ RSH 1575, 365, 6 June 1575.

⁵⁷ RSH 1575, 398, 15 June 1575.

the Rijn, and Katwijk on the Sea requested waivers on unpaid taxes dating from as far back as October 1572. As a compromise the receiver suggested having rural residents pay half of their taxes immediately while granting the villages a three-week extension for the other half. The States decided to refer the case to the Court of Holland, seeking legal advice about what to do with the land owners in the area. The Court recommended sending out two commissions to conduct further reports.⁵⁸ It is not exactly clear what this report turned up, but in any case the whole process was slow moving.

Throughout the summer the States repeatedly made mention of the need to be more vigorous with their tax collections methods, for they needed money to defend the southern border of Holland from Spanish attacks. In any case, despite the official ruling on the waiver, it appears as though the States received very little, if any, income from these lands for several years.⁵⁹ By April 1576, the States appeared to be willing to get whatever it could from the rural areas of Rijnland. On this date it granted a six month waiver on several taxes on the condition that the villages contribute to the common cause as much as possible.⁶⁰

Villages in Schieland and Delfland were having difficulties with tax collection as well. Even before the relief of Leiden these areas had suffered during the war, but the inundations generated even further complications. In June 1575 the receiver for the area wrote to the States of Holland regarding no less than eight separate problems he was experiencing with tax collecting. He noted that in 1573 there were fires in the area and the following year the land was under water. Regarding a waiver, the States mentioned that the area will have to suffice with

⁵⁸ RSH 1575, 365, 6 June 1575 and RSH 1575, 497, 14 July 1575.

⁵⁹ 't Hart, *Dutch Wars*, 106.

⁶⁰ RSH 1756, 69, 28 April 1576.

one already in place, although it is not quite clear what this entailed. In the future, however, they would have to pay like other areas.⁶¹

The following month the water board of Delfland requested money from the States for sluice and mill repair. The States declined because at that point the Spanish were threatening Schoonhoven, Oudewater, and Woerden. For the moment, they recommended leaving the land uncultivated since the enemy threat was still present.⁶² In February 1576 the residents in Delfland requested that their burdens be reduced because of the inundations. The area was not completely abandoned, but the flood damage created considerable changes in the area resulting in a great confusion. The local residents pleaded with the States, noting that they needed to use the money for dike and sluice repair just so they could begin collecting taxes again.⁶³ There was simply not enough money in the rural sectors for dike repair and taxes.

The island of Goedereede in the southwest was one of the few success stories in terms of exemptions, but only because the States of Holland had little other choice. Since the mid-sixteenth century the city of Goedereede had difficulties maintaining its harbor, with several ships getting mired in the mud. The sea dikes were desolated and unable to protect the land, as evidenced by the fact that the fields had remained under water ever since the All Saints Day Flood in 1570. According to a report from 1575, the walls of the city were half burnt while the canals and harbors only held about a half foot of water, not nearly enough for sailing and navigation. There was too much water on the land for agriculture, not enough to support shipping. The local residents believed that in order to keep the land habitable they needed to

⁶¹ RSH 1575, 388-390, 11 June 1575.

⁶² RSH 1575, 519-520, 20 July 1575.

⁶³ RSH 1576, 7, 28 February 1576.

rebuild one of the main sluices in the St. Pieter's polder along with several embankments throughout the island. Because of this great desolation they requested an exemption for the majority of their taxes. The States decided to reduce half of their debt on land taxes and horned beasts, hold them exempt from one of the upcoming land taxes, and resolved to discuss further remissions in the future.⁶⁴ A few months later the bailiff of the island requested a further remission on all animal taxes, to which the States obliged for two years.⁶⁵ It received further exemptions in 1576 and 1577.⁶⁶ The island received a respite in the form of waivers and exemptions, but only because it had suffered so long from flooding. Even then, it was not until 1589 that the harbors and canals were finally made navigable and the city's defenses secured.

Waivers and exemptions were one avenue for tax reduction; the second alternative was for a water board, town, or city to supply workers or laborers for a specific project. There were numerous resolutions which discussed the possibility of lowering a particular city's or region's tax requirements, but none proved more popular than substituting pioneers, or laborers, for work on fortification. For several months the States debated over an allotment or quota for the numbers of workers a specific region would provide. By 10 February 1576 the quota system was finally agreed upon: Rijnland would provide one hundred and twenty five workers, Schieland fifty two, Delfland one hundred and eight, and Zwijndrechtwaard seventy six. These laborers were to help build the fortifications along Holland's southern and eastern borders.

The individuals drafted in these villages (perhaps unwillingly) would be paid ten stuivers a day for their four-month term by the region itself. Later that month the States expanded the

⁶⁴ RSH 1575, 415-417, 21 June 1575.

⁶⁵ RSH 1575, 485, 11 July 1575.

⁶⁶ RSH 1577-78, 12, 15 January 1577.

quota to allow cities to provide pioneers. It was understood that all cities across Holland would provide pioneers for fortification work. The one exception was Brill, which was in the process of strengthening its own defenses and needed the labor for local use. The States agreed that the money raised by the city to pay for the pioneers could be deducted from its tax burden.⁶⁷

This approach became a popular strategy for cities to lower their debts, but in the rural areas it seems to have been less effective. After some initial difficulties the cities of Dordrecht, Delft, Rotterdam, Schiedam, and Leiden found a way to arrange the payment of pioneers for work on fortifications at Krimpen.⁶⁸ Gouda effectively leveraged the collection of its pioneers for a reduction of garrison soldiers in the town. Using the city militia for its defense would cost the city less. In this regard Gouda emerged as a double winner, paying less in taxes and decreasing its defense bill.⁶⁹ It is also telling that when the States needed to quickly erect defenses around Brill, they requested pioneers from several cities in the area rather than money.⁷⁰ It was more expedient to arrange workers directly, rather than securing the money for the workers.

In the countryside, however, the States encountered much more opposition because of the need to look after local repairs. In June the receivers for several areas noted they were having trouble raising pioneers because it interfered with dike laws and other regulations concerning the maintenance of embankments. The islands in southern Holland, such as Strijen, Overflakee, and

⁶⁷ RSH 1576, 4, 10 February 1576.

⁶⁸ RSH 1576, 35, 7 April 1576; RSH 1576, 38, 12 April 1576; RSH 1576, 71, 5 May 1576. By May there were some unpaid wages which the States wanted to make sure were collected soon on penalty of being fined. Although given the comparable success of other tax collection, the fact that only “some wages” were unpaid qualifies as a general success.

⁶⁹ RSH 1576, 128-129, 7-8 August 1576.

⁷⁰ RSH 1576, 147, 3 September 1576.

Beverland, all requested exemption from drafting pioneers because they were needed for local dike repairs. The States responded in typical fashion that the receivers had to be more rigorous with the extraction, and collect in full.⁷¹

The waivers and pioneer labor initiatives served to impair the rural area's ability to repair the damages from the inundations. In terms of the waivers and exemptions, the States took a hard line on tax collection. Only Goedereede received any waivers of note, and this was only because the island was barely habitable. Commissions and Court cases slowed the States' attempts to collect taxes, but they almost always demanded full payment. The pioneer redemption policy also hurt the rural areas. It directed funds and labor away from the necessary repair work. The widespread emigration from the countryside to the city only exacerbated the problem. This process gave the cities an excess of labor while rural areas struggled.⁷² Some rural residents immigrated to the city, some were drafted into pioneer work elsewhere; those that remained were heavily taxed and forced to deal with the aftermath of the inundations.

Dike Repair Efforts during the Pacification of Ghent, 1576-1579

The rest and reprieve so desperately needed by the Hollanders came in the form of the Pacification of Ghent. Throughout the summer and winter of 1576 Spain had difficulty paying its soldier's wages. This failure resulted in a string of mutinies among Spanish troops across the Low Countries, culminating with the "Spanish Fury" in 1576, where Spanish soldiers burnt and

⁷¹ RSH 1576, 98, 21 June. The States reiterated the need for rigorous pioneer redemption again in July. RSH 1576, 125, 29 July 1576. For the issues in the islands see RSH 1576, 161, 21 September 1576; RSH 1576, 174-5, 16 October 1576.

⁷² 't Hart, *Dutch Wars*, 101-125

plundered Antwerp for days. In the aftermath, the various provinces united together briefly to expel the Spanish troops under the direction of the Orange and the States General. The Pacification of Ghent was a fragile peace lasting only until 1579, but it offered an important opportunity for the States of Holland. All the cities in the province finally declared for the Revolt, with Amsterdam being the last in 1578, and the peace gave them an opportunity to begin repairing the damage and repaying some of their debts.

Before the Pacification, the finances of the States of Holland were in little better shape than those of the Spanish. Tracy mentions that if not for this respite it was not clear how the States of Holland would have met its obligations.⁷³ They had already suspended the repayment of the interest on some of their major debts between 1572-1576 which seriously damaged their credit worthiness and ability to borrow. Simultaneously they promised Orange increasingly large sums of money for continuing the war. This policy brought them to the brink of financial collapse in 1576, but following the Pacification they were able to begin putting their financial house in order.

Following the Pacification of Ghent, the States found a variety of ways to restore its credit and keep money flowing into its coffers.⁷⁴ This development had important ramifications for the repair work to the damaged dikes and water-management infrastructure. On 17 October 1576, two weeks before the States of Holland officially ratified the Pacification, they passed their first resolution directed towards repair work for the inundations across the province. This act authorized a four-stuiver tax on each ton of beer poured in cities, to be used to rebuild the sluices

⁷³ Tracy, "Wheels of war," 136.

⁷⁴ There is some scholarly debate over whether Holland repaired its credit through a financial (borrowing) revolution, or a taxation revolution, but in any case, the States of Holland significantly improved its finances. See Fritschy, "'Financial Revolution.'" 157-189.

and dikes cut or opened for the war across the province.⁷⁵ The States were also more willing to give breaks to cities to help out with dike repairs. They gave the town of Schoonhoven a partial waiver on excise taxes for three months with the provision that the untaxed moneys go towards repair work.⁷⁶

On 27 February 1577 the States of Holland passed another important resolution relating to the reparations from the military inundations. Following the terms of the Pacification of Ghent, they declared that only water board officials who had served the Prince could now hold office. In short, the loyalists officially lost their seats on the water boards, although many had already fled from Holland anyway.⁷⁷ The officials who remained were instructed to carry out reports on the dikes and sluices over the next month in order to see which areas were most damaged and still in danger.⁷⁸ The results, however, were not promising.

In April the water board officials in Rijnland noted that Spaarndam dike needed “very necessary repairs” and that the area stood in great peril. Throughout the war the Rijnland officials had been unable to collect any taxes for several years, compounded by the fact that the fighting left the land damaged and impoverished. In order to finance the necessary repairs the *hoofd ingelanden*, elite residents of the water board but not necessarily members, were willing to take out a 6,000-pound loan to help augment the taxes from the States for the repair work.⁷⁹ This suggests that locals with access to money were willing to support the repair work.

⁷⁵ RSH 1576, 176-177, 17 October 1576.

⁷⁶ RSH 1577-1578, 73-74, 14 May 1577.

⁷⁷ RSH 1577-1578, 18, 27 February 1577.

⁷⁸ RSH 1577-1578, 33-40, 31 March 1577-5 April 1577.

⁷⁹ OAR, Gesplitste, 21 September 1577.

In the end the all-important Spaarndam received partial repairs, but it proved to be too costly to restore it to its pre-war state. The Rijnland water board estimated that it would cost a total of 36,000 guilders to repair.⁸⁰ Furthermore, the States decided that it would only pay for stopping the breaches, and rebuilding the sluices but nothing more. Any other damages incurred from the military inundations and the relief of any cities would not be reimbursed by the States.⁸¹ The States intended to stop the bleeding, but planned to do nothing for the blood already spilt.

Shortly afterwards the States discovered that they did not have enough money in the common funds to pay for all the dike repairs. The four stuiver per ton of beer tax issued in 1576 had apparently not achieved the desired results. By 20 February of the next year the States had instead confirmed that henceforth the money from this tax would be used for ammunition and fortifications.⁸² They decided instead to use the money from a 100th penny, a one-percent tax on the value of property, in order to pay for the dike repairs. In May they decided to raise the money for repairs with loans which would be repaid by the 100th penny collected over the course of the year.⁸³

The collection of the 100th penny tax, however, proved to be a complicated and divisive affair. The issue revolved around the determination of a rental property's value. The Northern Quarter of Holland wanted to use rental contracts to determine land value, while southern Holland planned to use rental contracts for the first installment, but then use a new valuation system for the second installment. The next year, several cities in southern Holland joined the

⁸⁰ RSH 1577-1578, 131, 3 July 1577.

⁸¹ RSH 1577-1578, 45-46, 11 April 1577.

⁸² RSH 1577-78, 21, 20 February 1577.

⁸³ RSH 1577-1578, 72-73, 14 May 1577.

Northern Quarter in calls for using rental contracts which again complicated the tax collection. Even more frustrating, from the States perspective, they discovered that in some cases villages had lied about the value of their properties in order to pay less. The States compounded this problem by earmarking the 100th penny funds for activities well beyond the projected collection amount.⁸⁴ On 14 May 1577 the States explicitly stated that it did not have the funds to pay for the dike repairs and the fortifications, which was also slated to come from the 100th penny. In order to rectify the situation they proposed organizing a number of loans backed by the 100th penny tax.⁸⁵ This meant that the States again could not carry through with their promise to carry out dike repairs across the province.

In 1576 the Pacification of Ghent promised relief from the problems caused by the military inundations. Just two weeks before the States of Holland ratified the Pacification, they passed the four stuiver per ton of beer tax for dike repairs across the province. When this stalled they earmarked the 1577 100th Penny tax for dike repairs, but tax collection and the repayment of other debts affected the repair work. By the end of the Pacification of Ghent, in 1579, the States were still dealing with repair and reparations from the inundations. In a resolution from that year the States required that any villages requesting a waiver must provide documentation of how long it was flooded and any structures which were burnt. The villages were given one month to supply the information to the Dike Count for consideration.⁸⁶

Clearly the effects of the military inundations lingered. After three years of relative peace during the Pacification, the States had yet to develop a clear picture of the extent and

⁸⁴ Tracy, *Founding*, 186-9.

⁸⁵ RSH 1577-78, 72-3, 14 May 1577.

⁸⁶ RSH 1579, 37, 2 March 1579.

duration of the various inundations across the province. They had made genuine attempts at repairing the damaged water-management devices with the four stuiver and 100th penny taxes, but the initiatives invariably stalled. Even the Spaarndam, which protected the interior of Holland from flooding, only received partial repairs. By 1579 there was simply no adequate provincial policy for carrying out the dike repairs and addressing the problems arising from the military inundations.

Civic Conflicts

It is ironic that at the same time that the military and financial pressure on the States of Holland abated during the Pacification of Ghent, increasing urban rivalry threatened the unity of the province and the poldermodel broke down. Holland would develop a reputation for particularism and urban rivalry as cities placed civic interests over provincial ones. The militarization of the landscape broke the poldermodel, yet the war against a common enemy in the Spanish often acted as a separate binding agent, providing a degree of unity among Holland's cities. The Pacification of Ghent removed that binding agent from Holland, and the disputes arising from the inundations generated discord and division within the province. The conflicts over water-management issues during the Pacification were some of the most vocal disputes of the early Revolt.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Maarten Prak discusses the idea of war as a “binding agent” in Dutch society. It is telling that the other period of sustained peace in Holland and the Dutch Republic during the Twelve Years Truce (1609-1621) gave rise to equally divisive issues. These conflicts revolved around the relationship between the Stadholder and the Lands Advocate, international politics relating to the Thirty Years War, and a bitter religious controversy over the idea of predestination in Calvinist doctrine. See Maarten Prak, *The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century*, trans. Diane Webb (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 30-38.

At the same time that the States began authorizing taxation for dike and sluice repairs urban rivalries began complicating the matter. The same resolution that authorized the four stuiver tax on beer also contained provisions for civic interests not necessarily related to dike repair. Leiden wanted the money to be used for the immediate repair of the Spaarndam, which had been seriously damaged during the sieges of Haarlem and Amsterdam. Rotterdam was still having financial issues, perhaps related to the repayment of the 60,000 crown loan for the relief of Leiden and thus wanted to retain the tax money for its own citizens. Schiedam and Brill were willing to consent to the tax if they could receive some form of contribution for defensive works in their city.⁸⁸ The States authorized the repair of the Spaarndam within three days, which was seemingly the most pressing issue, but in other respects water-management issues threatened to destroy the fragile peace in Holland.⁸⁹ The unresolved repair and repayment issues from the military inundations had left significant political scars, with the result that many cities chose local interests over provincial ones.

Gouda and the Leidschendam

The question of with the city of Gouda and the Leidschendam lock was the most well-known and perhaps the most contentious problem resulting from the militarization of the landscape. During the siege of Leiden Orange had created a breach in the dam to bring in ships to help relieve the city. His promise to repair the cut immediately after the siege proved a hollow one, with the result that Gouda became increasingly disgruntled. Gouda had protested against

⁸⁸ RSH 1576, 176-177, 17 October 1576.

⁸⁹ RSH 1576, 180, 20 October 1576.

the cut for a variety of reasons, noting the cost of repair (which they estimated at 12,000 guilders), the flood damage (as they were still enduring flood waters well into 1577), and that it diverted toll revenues towards Delft.⁹⁰

Only a few months after the relief of Leiden, Gouda began to voice its complaints regarding the Leidschendam. In January the city magistrates and the Prince exchanged a series of letters but resolved very little.⁹¹ Frustrated, the city regents began voicing their complaints much more publicly. So openly in fact, that Orange wrote to them personally, urging them to remain silent for the time being. As the fighting was still ongoing, he worried that the Spanish spies might get wind of the internal discord and would interpret the conflict as a sign of weakness.⁹² In these early days Orange preferred to bury the issue and resolve it later.

The Prince's warning appeared to have had some effect, as Gouda remained largely silent and conciliatory for most of the following year, but they were clearly still unhappy. There were some repairs to dikes around Gouda but not the Leidschendam.⁹³ By the end of the year, however, the regents had reached their limit and became more forceful with their demands. On 21 December 1576 they lodged a formal resolution in the States that the lock should be returned to its former condition prior to the Revolt.⁹⁴ By New Year's Eve the representatives from Gouda

⁹⁰ Hibben, *Gouda in Revolt*, 143-150.

⁹¹ William of Orange to unknown, 17 January 1575, De correspondentie van Willem van Oranje nr. 1816. And William of Orange to Magistrate of Delft, 17 January 1575, De correspondentie van Willem van Oranje nr. 1817.

⁹² RSH 1575, 9-10, 7 January 1575.

⁹³ William of Orange to the Dike Count of Schieland, the Water Board Officials of Schieland, and the Magistrates of Gouda, 22 November 1576, De correspondentie van Willem van Oranje nr. 9479.

⁹⁴ RSH 1576, 204, 21 December 1576.

requested that the city should be relieved of all inconveniences resulting from the cut in the Leidschendam, but the States struggled to meet Gouda's demands.⁹⁵

The dispute over this important dam raged throughout 1577 and revealed the fragility of the newly established unity within Holland following the Pacification of Ghent. In January the city was the only one to veto a small land tax, justifying its position on the fact that its complaints remained unresolved.⁹⁶ When this tactic failed, Gouda became more intransigent. Later that month the regents informed the States of Holland that they would stop sending representatives. At this point the Prince referred the issue to the Court of Holland for advice. Gouda held firm, and in February told the States that henceforth it would stop providing tax revenue for the *Gemeene Middelen* until the Leidschendam was restored.⁹⁷ The States might have thought that Gouda was bluffing, or perhaps would have withdrawn their complaint, because it was not until late May that they finally wrote to the city regarding their absence from meetings and lack of tax revenue.

For the majority of the summer and remainder of the year, Gouda remained absent from the States gathering, although they did send representatives to discuss the 100th penny tax. By August the States wrote to Gouda again regarding its absence. After the city missed out on an important gathering about Holland's union with Zeeland the Prince finally resolved to make a committee to resolve the conflict.⁹⁸ In the end the city took matters into its own hands and sent

⁹⁵ RSH 1576, 213, 31 December 1567.

⁹⁶ RSH 1577-1578, 13, 12 January 1577.

⁹⁷ RSH 1577-1578, 16, 3 February 1577.

⁹⁸ RSH 1577-1578, 89-185, 24 May 1577 – 17 August 1577.

out its town militia to destroy the opening in Leidschendam on 23 December 1577.⁹⁹ Gouda found that in terms of water management, it preferred to go its own way.

Haarlem

Haarlem took the opportunity afforded by the war to address one of its own long-standing grievances. Throughout the sixteenth century the city had attempted to secure better water conditions by damming up the smaller Leed (now Liede) and Penningsveer rivers which branched off the larger Spaarn river. These closures would divert ship traffic along the Spaarn and through the city, which would increase its toll revenues. They would also increase the current in the Spaarn which would help improve the city's water quality.¹⁰⁰ While these changes would benefit Haarlem, they would also put greater strain on the Spaarndam dike and its sluices. For this reason the Rijnland water board had prevented the city from stopping the two smaller rivers.

The city and the adjoining water works experienced a great deal of suffering during the first years of the Revolt. The city obstinately resisted a prolonged siege by Alva at a heavy cost. During the siege, both the rebel and Spanish forces breached nearby dikes, including the Spaarndam dike, in order to control access to the city. During the siege there were accounts of people forced to eat horse, cat and other unnatural foods. Once the city fell to Alva, it had to pay for the new Spanish garrison. In total, the city estimated it lost an estimated 350,000 pounds

⁹⁹ Hibben, *Gouda in Revolt*, 150-2.

¹⁰⁰ 't Hart, "Rijnlands bestuur," 30.

from plundering and destruction, not including the cost for garrisoning troops.¹⁰¹ Shortly after the siege the States of Holland offered to help those affected by the fighting, but with limited success as exiles from Haarlem continually requested waivers on their debt over the next several years.¹⁰²

The city remained under Spanish control for three years, and at some point during that period, it took the opportunity to block the Leed and Penningsveer rivers. It is not clear who directed the stoppages. It is possible that the city regents took the initiative to improve its waterways and navigation. The Rijnland water board members who remained loyal to the king could also have been involved. They had fled to Utrecht when the Revolt began, but had kept open communication with Haarlem and other Spanish-controlled cities. The Spanish army could have ordered the river closures in an effort to disrupt communication between the Northern Quarter and southern Holland. The members of the Rijnland water board that sided with the rebels knew who to blame. They were convinced that Haarlem had closed the Leed and Penningsveer with “great preparation.”¹⁰³

Shortly after the ratification of the Pacification of Ghent the city reconciled with the Prince and the States of Holland. The States recorded their agreement with Haarlem on 26 December 1576, but by 4 January of the next year they felt compelled to write to the city informing that they were not to interfere with ships passages to the Northern Quarter via the two rivers. Apparently the city had attempted to keep the waterways closed and ensure ship traffic

¹⁰¹ *Handvesten, privilegien, octroyen, vry-en gerechtigheid aan der stad Haerlem en haere burgers verleend: mitsgaders overeenkomsten en handelingen door de regeerders dier stad met andere steden, gemeenschappen of byzondere personen aangegaan.* (Haarlem: J en J. Enschede en J. Bosch, 1751), 327.

¹⁰² RSH 1571-1574, 261-262, 23 December 1574; RSH 1575, 402-403, 17 June 1575.

¹⁰³ OAR, Gesplitste, 6 May 1578.

passed through the city. By April they had to remind Haarlem of the agreement, and that the city had promised to keep Leed river open.¹⁰⁴

Over the next several years Haarlem and the Rijnland water board were involved in a drawn out dispute over the matter. In August 1578 the water board officials complained that Haarlem's stance led to irreparable damage, and that the city may have been using its militia to enforce its wishes illegally.¹⁰⁵ Haarlem countered by denying responsibility for the waterway's obstruction, claiming the Spanish commander Count Bossu had ordered there closure.

Furthermore, the city asserted that a privilege from 1565 granted them permission to block the two rivers. This approach essentially allowed Haarlem to side-step responsibility for the damage. More importantly, it gave them a legal avenue to prevent the re-opening of the rivers.

Among the many terms of the Pacification of Ghent was the promise to uphold and honor the traditional liberties and privileges of the Low Countries. In this regard, removing the dams from the two rivers was a violation of the Pacification.¹⁰⁶ Eventually the Prince created a commission to look into the issue, which sided with the Rijnland water board in 1579. Haarlem's argument simply did not make sense on a variety of levels. If it had obtained the privilege in 1565 why did the city not use it before the Revolt? Also, if it did have the right to dam up the rivers, why did it try to pass the blame onto the Spanish commander?¹⁰⁷ In short, Haarlem's argument did not hold any water.

¹⁰⁴ RSH 1576, 212, 29 December 1576; RSH 1577, 3-38, 4 January 1577- 4 April 1577.

¹⁰⁵ The Chief Residents (Hoofd Ingelanden) and Water Board of Rijnland to William of Orange, 6 August 1578, De correspondentie van Willem van Oranje nr. 10821.

¹⁰⁶ The Magistrates of Haarlem to William of Orange, 25 September 1578, De correspondentie van Willem van Oranje nr. 10823

¹⁰⁷ OAR, Gesplitste, 11 November 1579.

After the Prince made his initial decision in favor of the Rijnland water board, the dispute shifted to debates over general compensation for Haarlem's suffering during the siege. The city and water board did agree to build two duiker dams, dikes with inbuilt doors, which would help divert water into the Spaarn river and improve the city's water, but did nothing for diverting ship traffic. Following this partial victory, Haarlem attempted to excuse itself from the costly repairs to the Spaarndam dike and adjoining sluices. The city argued that the siege and occupation affected its ability to pay for the sluices in the Spaarndam.¹⁰⁸

While the debate over the stoppage to the Leed and Penningsveer rivers was not as vociferous as those of Gouda and the Leidschendam, it was no less significant. Disputes over the river closures stalled and delayed repairs to the important Spaarndam dike. For the Rijnland water board this was *the* critical issue for protecting the area from further flooding. This matter was the first issue they discussed during its meeting on 21 September 1577, following a five years hiatus because of the war. They noted that it needed "very necessary repairs," but were disconcerted by the immensity of the task. In some areas the devastation was so complete that it was not clear where the dike had run before the war. Collecting the money and organizing the labor also proved complicated. The Rijnland water board did receive some money from the 100th penny tax, but not nearly enough. Some towns, such as Woerden, asked for an exemption on its taxes for dike repairs because of its suffering and desertion during its siege. There were so many abandoned lands and houses near the Speeringmeer lake that the water board needed to carry out a re-zoning commission in order to carry out taxation in the area. The *hoofd ingelanden* organized a 6,000 pound loan to finance the other necessary repairs, but this surely

¹⁰⁸ *Handvesten*, 327-344.

was only a stopgap measure.¹⁰⁹ Haarlem's stance over the closure of its two small rivers only served to complicate, delay, and impede the necessary repairs.

Dordrecht and the Alblasserwaard

Dordrecht's main concern regarding the dike repair centered on the Alblasserwaard. Located at the intersection of a number of rivers the city enjoyed a privileged position as it held a number of staple and river toll rights during the Middle Ages. Everything from salt, to beer, wine, and a vast array of other commodities had to be unloaded or taxed at Dordrecht. Over the course of several centuries various cities and institutions challenged this economic privilege until Dordrecht's only remaining asset was that it was the symbolic first city of Holland, being able to vote immediately after the nobility in the meetings of the States of Holland. By the time of the Revolt Dordrecht's staple rights and authority had largely been reduced to the several nearby villages in the Alblasserwaard and Krimpenerwaard.¹¹⁰ This development meant that the city had a vested interest in maintaining and protecting these two regions.

Unfortunately for Dordrecht, the Alblasserwaard had been one of areas hit hardest by the military inundations and flooding in general. The area only experienced short periodic dry spells between the All Saints Day Flood in 1570 and 1576, when repair work began.¹¹¹ Dordrecht had

¹⁰⁹ OAR, *Gesplitste*, 21 September 1577 - 11 November 1579.

¹¹⁰ Jan van Herwaarden, "Het Dordtse Stapelrecht" in *Geschiedenis van Dordrecht tot 1572* (Dordrecht: Uitgeverij Verloren, 1996), 74-89; Jessica Dijkman, "The Dordrecht Staple" in *Shaping Medieval Markets: The Organization of Commodity Markets in Holland, C. 1200-1450* (Boston: Brill, 2011), 159-198.

¹¹¹ Gottschalk, *Stormvloeden*, 725-738.

largely opposed military inundations in the Ablasserwaard as it had a vested interest in the land's preservation. When Spanish troops began lodging there, however, the decision to flood the area became an obvious one for the rebels.

Dordrecht and the States of Holland employed a variety of tactics to carry out the repair work in the Albasserwaard, but with very little success. In many ways, the area was a lost cause as natural and man-made inundations caused too much damage. Nevertheless, repair work began in the summer of 1576 but a lack of funds was immediately apparent. In June the States created a commission to repair the easternmost embankments, hoping to pay for the repairs with the *gemene middelen*, or common funds, raised from provincial excise taxes. They also authorized the commission to take necessary materials directly from Dordrecht, an indication that funds and material were lacking. In July the States tried to entice the collectors of the *gemene middelen* into action by allowing them to keep any extra money they collected for the repair of the Wolfersdijk, which raised some additional funds, but not enough.¹¹²

At the beginning of October 1576 the States noted that they had no available funds for the necessary dike and sluice work in the Ablasserwaard. As a response they authorized an additional one-stuiver tax on each ton of beer poured in cities throughout Holland for the next three months. They later extended the coverage of this tax, foolishly hoping that it would raise enough money to repair all the dikes cut during the war.¹¹³

In truth, it probably would not have been enough for the Albasserwaard alone. Once the 100th penny tax was authorized for dike repair throughout Holland the States still introduced a monumental thirty-stuiver per morgen of land tax in the Albasserwaard. This land tax would be

¹¹² RSH 1576, 103-152, 25 June 1576 - 5 September 1576.

¹¹³ RSH 1576, 165-171, 5 October 1576 - 20 October 1576.

collected regardless of the condition of the land, and the States proposed instituting martial law within fourteen days to ensure that the funds were collected. The Dike Count and the water board followed this with a request for an exemption on all taxes for six years. The States denied this request, but allowed the excise taxes to be used for dike repair. It does appear as though some of the repair work had been carried out since the Dike Count began receiving reimbursement for repair work from the 100th penny tax, but ultimately with little success.¹¹⁴

In August 1577 the Alblasserwaard was still in disrepair. The dike at Papendrecht was in a “sober and dangerous” condition according to one report, with numerous *spaadstekens*, meaning the abandonment of dike maintenance responsibilities by local residents. The locals literally stuck a shovel (*spaad*) in the dike to denote their relinquishment of dike care. The States discussed the possibility of raising 15,000-16,000 pound loan for the dike work. But the next day they reversed their decision and decided to suspend the repairs. The area remained in desolation, as evidenced by a resolution in September of the following year with the States noting that they were still finding the works in this area increasingly expensive. As such they began discussions with the count of Papendrecht about the possibility of having people permanently abandon the area to reduce repair costs.¹¹⁵

Dordrecht continued to plead with the States regarding its obligation to repair the damage from the military inundations, but to little effect. Roughly a month after this last request the States decided it would only pay for the stoppage of the dike cuts, but nothing further.¹¹⁶ In this case, despite Dordrecht’s best efforts to hold the States accountable, and some sincere efforts by

¹¹⁴ RSH 1577-78, 87-123, 23 May 1577 - 28 June 1577.

¹¹⁵ RSH 1577-78, 24, 26 September 1578.

¹¹⁶ RSH 1577-1578, 27-46, 22 February 1577 – 11 April 1577. In this case, Dordrecht was arguing for the repair of the dike in Ridderwaard.

the States to repair the damage, the destruction in the Ablasserwaard appears to have been rather permanent.

Brill

Brill was the site of the first military inundation during the fighting in Holland and the city would feel its effects for some time. The consequences came in the form of insufficient funds for new fortifications. The city defended the Holland side of the Maas estuary, and it served as an important stronghold against invasion from the sea. As early as 1575 the city had begun improving its defenses, which, interestingly enough, coincided with another round of military inundations.

A few months after the commencement of the project the States decided that each city would be put on a quota system for new fortifications except Brill. The resolution made no mention of how Brill was to raise the funds, but two resolutions several months later give an indication. One resolution allowed the city to have the dike count of the island of Voorne collect funds, while the other mentioned that the city will receive some funds from Zeeland as part of the union between the two provinces.

The collection of funds from Voorne and the surrounding areas proved to be a difficult affair. At one point the island representatives considered selling lands to raise funds rather than collecting taxes. They also put Jonkheer Johan van Woerden van der Vliet in charge of the whole island, appointing him as governor of Brill and the dike count and bailiff of Voorne. Despite these initiatives the island was in no condition to begin providing funds for costly fortifications. This is clear from the appeal for a waiver by residents of the nearby island of

Bommende, requesting various exemptions because of the ruin and devastation. Along with the partial tax breaks which the States allowed, it also paid 2000 pounds for dike repair.

Because of these difficulties Brill began to leverage its consent to various States resolutions in return for the guarantee of funds from Zeeland as part of the union between the two provinces. The city consented to both the four-stuiver tax on beer and the 100th penny if they could get money from Zeeland, first requesting 400 pounds per month, but later reducing it to 300. It is ironic that these two resolutions would have actually provided funds for much needed dike repair, thus allowing the city to collect taxes across the island to pay for fortifications. But these taxes represented long term solutions while Zeeland's money offered immediate benefits.¹¹⁷ In any case, Zeeland's support in the venture was tenuous at best. It did not have the same financial resources of Southern Holland, had endured devastating military inundations as well, and it did not like sharing the costs of joint projects. The Burgomaster of Zierikzee stated it best when he noted, "In the name of freedom we are going under [financially]."¹¹⁸

Because of the necessity of a strong fortress at Brill, the Prince authorized the monthly payment of 300 pounds for three months. The city also received some funds from the 100th penny tax for fortifications and dike repairs around the city. The agreement cost the those living outside the city, as part of the agreement involved taking funds for dike repairs on the nearby islands of Putten and Overflakkee for use in Brill. In the end, it appears as though Brill still went

¹¹⁷ RSH 1576, 35 – 188, 7 April 1576 – 2 November 1576; RSH 1577-78, 23 - 118, 21 February 1577 – 25 June 1577.

¹¹⁸ K.W. Swart, *Willem van Oranje en de Nederlandse Opstand, 1572-1584*. eds Raymond Fagel, M.E.H.N. Mout, and Henk van Nierop, (The Hague: SDU, 1994), 64.

into debt to pay for the fortifications, but ultimately received reimbursement from the 100th penny.¹¹⁹ In this case of brinkmanship Brill came out the clear winner.

Conclusion

The States of Holland struggled to establish effective forms of rule in the first years of the Revolt. Many of the traditional institutions remained, such as the Stadholder and the States of Holland, but their roles, responsibilities, and relationship to each other changed. Before the Revolt, both the Stadholder and States had ruled at Philip II's command. He installed the Stadholder of his choosing and he summoned the States to discuss matters of import, usually taxation.

Without the Habsburg sovereign as a reference point the different institutions and provinces of the Revolt had to redefine their relationship to one another. When Orange returned to Holland following the capture of Brill, he directed one of his associates to arrange the first meeting of the States of Holland without a summons by Philip II. One of the State's first acts was to recognize him as Stadholder. This raised the obvious question of who answered to whom? Other matters, such as the best means of coordinating their efforts, via a *Landraad* or other councils, all complicated the establishment of an effective form of rule.

This confusion trickled down the layers of government and affected the States of Holland's ability to pay for the war and repair the damages from the military inundations. There were a number of important offices that were vacated as loyalists fled Holland. This turnover hurt the States' ability to collect taxes, as the new officials (often with less experience) had to

¹¹⁹ RSH 1577-78, 118, 25 June 1577.

learn on the job under duress. By the Pacification of Ghent in 1576 it appeared as though the coffers were about to run dry.

There were attempts to retain and sustain the poldermodel, but these were undermined by the military inundations. The prolonged negotiations between the States, Stadholder, and other rebellious provinces were typical of poldermodel politics. Similarly, the expansion of represented cities in the States of Holland from six to eighteen is an excellent example of the poldermodel at work. The different cities which were affected by the ongoing war had a chance to meet, discuss, and debate all the important matters of state and taxation. Yet the strategic floods which ravaged the province ensured that one of the topics which consistently appeared on the docket was the most controversial and divisive.

The temporary reprieve offered by the Pacification allowed the States an opportunity to follow through on their promises to repair the damages from the military inundations. They agreed to a number of resolutions directed towards repair work such as the four stuiver per ton of beer tax and the 100th penny. For the most part, however, these initiatives stalled because of the difficulties collecting the money and because the States earmarked the funds for too many purposes.

At the same time as the States attempted to repair the damaged dikes and sluices, the discontent from the militarization of the landscape threatened the fragile peace of the Pacification. Gouda was upset enough at the unrepaired Leidschendam that it refused to send delegates to the States of Holland for nearly a year. Haarlem took the opportunity with the Revolt provided to secure better transportation and river access with the closure of the Leed and Penningsveer rivers. The debates over the legality of these actions delayed the repairs to the all-important Spaarndam dike. Dordrecht did its best to look after its hinterland in the

Alblasserwaard with little success, while Brill conceded the money for dike repairs to its hinterland in exchange for new fortifications.

The military inundations achieved short term successes for the rebels, but created long-term problems. The intentional flooding gave the rebels the ability to resist the Spanish force until the latter's finances crumbled and the soldiers mutinied. The same waters that ushered the Spanish out of Holland also brought with it desolation and divisiveness. The inundations made it more difficult for the States of Holland to establish their authority and develop effective forms of rule. The intentional flood were a low cost short term alternative to a larger army, but they had a high cost to the longer term political stability.

The intransigent nature of this bout of civic particularism resulting from the floods permeated the States of Holland and affected the functioning of the poldermodel. Particularism existed in Holland before the Revolt and the inundations and became entrenched in the political fabric of the Dutch Republic. The vital difference between the particularism arising from the militarization of the landscape is that it broke down the poldermodel. During the Pacification, a time when the States could have been consolidating power and formalizing modes of governance, they were consumed with infighting and internal strife. In that atmosphere each city decided to pursue its own interests over provincial ones. There were little if any debates or willingness to compromise. Haarlem took it upon itself to open up the rivers and Brill held up dike repairs taxes across Holland until its needs were met first. Gouda provides the best example of the breakdown of poldermodel as it simply refused to send delegates to the States of Holland. How can the poldermodel function in the absence of discussion? In this regard, the Prince was right to ask the city to remain silent about its complaints regarding the Leidschendam in 1575, the debate foreshadowed of future divisions.

CHAPTER FIVE: REPAIRING THE POLDERMODEL: THE POLITICAL CAREERS OF ABRAHAM VAN ALMONDE, PAULUS BUYS, AND JOHAN VAN OLDENBARNEVELT

Introduction

The lack of a unified institutional response to the conflicts and dilemmas associated with military inundations was a double-edged sword. The fact that the States of Holland struggled to find any answers to these problems also meant that individuals were free to develop their own potential solutions. There was an opportunity for ambitious bureaucrats, politicians, and others to solve the problems on their own initiative. Those with water-management experience were best positioned to take advantage of this opportunity. Not only did they have the requisite capabilities to deal with dike repair and other administrative issues relating to the tactical flooding, but there were many vacant offices in water boards and the States of Holland that needed filling. Many officials in Holland had remained loyal to Philip II and the Spanish monarchy and fled abroad (usually to Utrecht), abandoning their offices. This political vacuum meant that established officials could expand their power and prestige, while younger and less experienced officials could gain a foothold in Holland's politics in such a way that would have been more difficult in times of peace. In other words, the combination of military inundations and vacant offices created a distinct need for officials who could handle water-management politics and also provided a path for them to further their careers. Three individuals in particular highlight the unique political opportunity which the military inundations created: Paulus Buys (1531-1592), Johan van Oldenbarnevelt (1547-1619), and Abraham van Almonde (1533-1593).

These three figures have received significantly different amounts of scholarly attention. Buys has received far less scholarly attention than Oldenbarnevelt, the architect and founder of

the Dutch Republic. Nevertheless, these two statesmen had much in common. Both came to think of themselves as Hollanders even though they were born in Amersfoort, in the province of Utrecht. They both studied law abroad in France, which was common practice for many professionals in the Low Countries, although Oldenbarnevelt also pursued studies at Louvain, Cologne, Heidelberg and Padua before finally receiving his degree in law. Upon returning both worked in the Court of Holland and later became Lands Advocates. Importantly, both also served on regional water management boards. Buys was unofficially involved with the Rijnland water board as early as 1565, but officially began serving on it in 1577 until his death in 1594.¹ Oldenbarnevelt developed his expertise in water management serving in the Court of Holland before the Revolt. He did not begin sitting on the Delfland water board until 1589, as one of the important property owners in the area, and then was officially sworn in as a member in 1593.² Almonde followed a much different trajectory. He was born into the nobility of Holland and had an almost guaranteed seat on the town council of Delft and the water board of Schieland. He used his skills in water management to the benefit of the province and was a key figure in settling some of the smaller disputes.

Each of these individuals used his knowledge and expertise in water management to resolve lingering problems from the military inundations. At the same time, their problem-solving abilities in this matter opened up doors for them to advance their careers. Almonde came from a privileged background, but his ability to coordinate dike repairs and appraise the damage from flooding earned him the place on numerous committees in the States of Holland. Through these committees he helped establish the *verponding* tax which stabilized the province's

¹ M.H.V. Amstel-Horak, "Paulus Buys en het Hoogheemraadschap van Rijnland," *Leids jaarboekje* (1994): 35-50.

² Postma, *Delfland*, 73-74.

finances. Oldenbarnevelt enjoyed no noble privileges, but through education and hard work became an expert in feudal dike law. During the Revolt he helped coordinate the financing for the dike repairs on the island of Schouwen in Zeeland for the States of Holland which introduced him to the world of interprovincial politics. Furthermore, the city of Rotterdam appointed him as its pensionary or legal advisor, and he used his skills to help it improve its finances, increase its influence in the Schieland water board, and oversee necessary dike repairs. Of these three individuals, Buys was the most established by the time of the Revolt. He already played an important role in provincial politics. During the war, he used his knowledge in land reclamation to justify Holland's dubious claim to land that actually belonged to the neighboring province of Brabant, which helped secure the military defenses of Holland's southern border. The final example in this chapter, concerning Amsterdam's *Satisfactie* (accord) with the States of Holland, demonstrates how these three figures incorporated water-management politics to help resolve conflicts and rebuild the poldermodel.

In many ways, repairing the poldermodel entailed satisfying civic interests, as the Amsterdam example highlights. The disputes during the Pacification of Ghent provided a salient lesson for the States of Holland, civic particularism overrode provincial concerns. In order for substantive and worthwhile negotiations to take place city interests needed to be satisfied first. Each of the individuals listed above heeded this reality. The *verponding*, which Almonde played an important role in establishing, guaranteed that funds went to the cities first. Oldenbarnevelt's tenure as pensionary of Rotterdam allowed the city to take control of its finances and extend its influence over water-management priorities in the Schieland water board. Buys helped ensure that once the war resumed, the fighting would take place outside of Holland, saving all the cities in Holland the tribulations of further fighting in Holland. The case of Amsterdam's *satisfactie*

demonstrates how these figures could work together to satisfy the city's interests while serving the greater good of the province. The military inundations significantly broke the poldermodel and dis-incentivized the cities from taking part in the broader provincial debates. These three figures helped bring the cities back to the negotiation table.

The Career of Abraham van Almonde

Abraham was born into the Holland nobility, and officially became the Lord of Beukelsdijk, Bloemersdijk and Altena when his father died in 1555. The Almonde family was active in water management and politics throughout the sixteenth century; as they regularly sat on the town councils of Delft and served on the water board of Schieland in southeastern Holland.³ Abraham benefited from his family connections but still distinguished himself through his own accomplishments. He had begun serving on the water board of Schieland in 1567, before the Revolt began, and would hold onto the office until his death in 1593. In 1591 he was also selected as a member of the Rijnland water board. This honor not only serves a testament to his knowledge and abilities in terms of water management, but also his role in the aftermath of the military inundations. Despite his noble lineage, Abraham van Almonde's life seem to have barely registered in historical and contemporary accounts. Neither A.J. van der Aa's nor P.C.

³ Henk van Nierop, *The Nobility of Holland: From Knights to Regents, 1500-1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 159; H. ten Boom, "Het patriciaat te Rotterdam voor en na 1752" *Rotterdams Jaarboek* (1990), 168.

Molhuysen and P.J. Blok's compendious biographical encyclopedias on the Netherlands have an entry on him although they do mention some of his descendants.⁴

Abraham appeared to have largely abstained from politics before the Revolt. The only known correspondence between him and the Prince regarded the implementation of various placards in 1566.⁵ By 1574, however, he was appointed as one of the regents of Delft and afterwards began appearing regularly in the States of Holland. At this point it is likely that he received his seat in Delft because of his family connections, but his experience in water management made him a treasured asset in the States of Holland.

Over the course of 1575 and 1576 the States would send him to oversee a number of water-management cases across southern Holland, from the town of Brill in the southwest, to the Alblasserwaard in the southeast, and the Rijnland and Schieland water boards in between. It was under his command that the dikes were cut around Brill in 1575 as part of an attempt to stall a Spanish invasion from the southwest. This military inundation aside, the States used him more often for his ability to repair flood damage. During his stay in Brill, they also ordered him to oversee the construction of a new sluice in the nearby Vekhoek polder and the repair work for the surrounding dikes.⁶ Only a few months later he was part of a commission to oversee dike repairs in the critically damaged Alblasserwaard, which had been flooded in connection with the relief of Leiden. Later in the same year, he coordinated repair work with the water boards of

⁴ A. J. van der Aa, *Biographisch Woordenboek der Nederlanden* (Haarlem: J.J. van Brederode, 1852); P.C. Molhuysen and P.J. Blok, *Nieuw Nederlandsch biografisch woordenboek* (Leiden: Sijthoff, 1937).

⁵ William of Orange to Abraham van Almonde, 15 April 1566, *De correspondentie van Willem van Oranje* nr. 9406.

⁶ RSH 1575, 725, 3 November 1575; RSH 1576, 3, 3 February 1576. The sluice and dike repairs were important enough to be partially paid for directly from confiscated goods.

Schieland and Rijnland to repair the flood damage after the siege of Woerden, working on the Ijssel dike and the embankments around Gouda.⁷

Almonde was often the States of Holland's first choice when it came to matters of dike repair and maintenance. They valued his ability to develop timely and efficient plans for repairs. In many ways he was like an early modern claims adjuster, establishing repair estimates and acting as a liaison between the States and the local residents as they carried out dike repair. His activities during his first two years in the States of Holland demonstrated his worth, and opened up doors for his future.

His biggest achievement for the States was the establishment the *verponding* in 1581, a levy on real property that helped to stabilize the province's finances. This tax provided reliable revenue from the rural sectors of Holland, the areas which had been most affected by the inundations. This was a colossal task. Even in the best of times governments in the early modern period had difficulty developing reliable records for taxation purposes. The possibility of an income tax was still centuries away, while the property registers which did exist were "almost always seriously incomplete and hopelessly outdated."⁸

The Revolt further complicated the process of tax collection because of the disruption wrought by the military inundations and the changing ownership patterns in the countryside. The war in general, and the military inundations in particular, caused a great deal of upheaval to the rural sectors of Holland. Nearly half of the province lay under water at some point during the first years few years of the Revolt in Holland. In some areas the changes to the landscape were so dramatic that local officials could not determine who owned a given property, let alone how

⁷ RSH 1576, 35, 7 April 1576; RSH 1576, 143, 25 August 1576.

⁸ 't Hart, *Dutch Wars*, 148.

much the owner would owe in taxes.⁹ The slow pace of the dike repair meant that many in the rural sectors were displaced for years, sometimes never to return. As some regions lay under water for years, it meant that farmers and other rural workers were forced to find other means of providing for themselves and their families. With their livelihood threatened they were still pressured to pay for rents and taxes on land and services from which they could receive little to no benefit or income. The urban populations, conversely, while suffering from particular sieges, were in a much better situation, specifically financially. A significant portion of rural wealth went to the cities during this period. As one infantry captain noted, “Here are many towns wishing that the war may last longer, because they are enriched by it. A house that was rented at twenty guilders now yields a hundred.”¹⁰ In fact, after 1580 the land ownership patterns changed drastically from countless small-scale holdings to medium and large-scale.

To complicate matters even further, there were numerous debates over how to carry out land taxes and problems with their collection. These issues plagued the collection of the 100th penny tax as some cities wanted to assess the value of land based on rental contracts while others wanted to use tax assessments that predated the Revolt. The problem with the latter approach is clear, as these assessments could not reflect the great changes to the landscape and landownership resulting from the war. Nevertheless, the majority of cities used the pre-Revolt values, with the exception of Leiden, Gouda, and Dordrecht. The problem with rental contracts, as the States discovered, was that many landlords and leasers created false contracts in an effort to reduce their tax payments.

⁹ Jacobsz, *Dagboek*, 191.

¹⁰ ‘t Hart, *Dutch Wars*, 107.

After several years of complications with the collection of the 100th penny, the States finally did away with it in place of the *verponding*, or a levy on real property. Doing away with the 100th penny and instituting a new tax proved to be a complicated affair. In 1581 the States began the process of discontinuing the 100th penny and implementing the new *verponding*. Because of increased burdens for the war the States agreed to establish the *verponding* while simultaneously imposing a 100th penny tax in cities, and two 100th penny taxes, or a 50th penny tax, on the countryside. The penny taxes were estimated to raise a total of 165,000 pounds, with 110,000 coming from the rural sectors of Holland. Like the 100th penny tax, the *verponding* was an extraordinary contribution that the States could collect as needed. They set each *verponding* to raise roughly 100,000 pounds per collection and often issued multiple assessments per year. Unlike the 100th penny which was a one-percent tax on the value of property, the States set the *verponding* to raise roughly 100,000 pounds per levy based on a quota system. Depending on current needs, the States could issue multiple *verpongingen* per year.

Almonde's experiences and abilities in dike repair and water management gave him the opportunity to take part in establishing the taxation policies for the province. The States selected Almonde and four others to oversee the collection and liquidation of the 50th penny in July 1581. Over the course of the next year this committee, along with the Receiver General Cornelis van Meirop, increasingly found that the money from the penny taxes was not meeting the financial needs of the province. During the same time the States continued to appoint Almonde to dike repair issues across the province. He negotiated with Gouda and the Schieland water board over the construction of a new dike outside the city. A few weeks later he oversaw the dike repairs on the island of Voorne.¹¹

¹¹ RSH 1581, 406, 30 July 1581; RSH 1582, 36-62, 24 January 1582-6 April 1582.

While Almonde was busy with his committee work and overseeing water management cases across Holland, the States were finding the collection of the *verponding* to be a complicated affair. According to a resolution on 30 July 1581, the States intended the quota for the *verponding* to take into account the physical and financial conditions of the towns and cities in the province. By 24 August the rates for the cities were set, but the States struggled to find a way to accurately gauge assessments for the countryside. In September they decided to use the 100th penny assessment for movable goods, and the *schiltal*, a province-wide assessment land tax from 1514, as the base for land values. If these were missing, the States recommended the use of *morgenboeken* or *molenboeken*, tax records used by water boards to pay for dike upkeep and mill construction.¹²

By 3 July the States reported to the Prince about “great inequalities” in the *verponding* assessment and collection. The central issue revolved around addressing the widespread changes from the war. As such they decided to create a committee to oversee the project, composed of either three or seven qualified individuals. Almonde was on both the three-and seven-person lists because he fit all of the necessary qualifications. Unlike the sometimes vague instructions for some of the other committees, the States of Holland included a specific list of various requirements which the potential committee members had to meet. In addition to making sure that this new committee would not interfere with their other duties, the States wanted a “neutral” person from each quarter that could competently assess the dramatic changes in the landscape. They were instructed to use several previous tax assessments, both before and during the Revolt to estimate the value of a piece of land to arrive at the fairest valuation. Next, they were to address all the changes from the war, taking into account any villages that were “burnt and

¹² RSH 1581, 406-471, 30 July 1581- 8 September 1581.

ruined,” or “land that was changed through the breaking of dikes and the introduction of flood waters.” Finally, to make sure that there was no chance for fraud, they made sure that none of the committee members could survey the city or surrounding area in which they lived.¹³

After several months of waiting, the Prince finally selected the seven-person committee on 8 November 1582, and work could begin in earnest even though it achieved very little initially. The first task for the commission involved clarifying some of their instructions which it had received from the Prince. For the most part his instructions were almost identical to their own drawn up months before, but the members still felt the need to insert their own “interpretation of the instructions” for the *verponding*. This “interpretation” was a very brief document, mostly discussing how to take into account changes from previous assessments. For instance, it discussed how to estimate a house’s value if it was not included in the 10th penny tax in 1563 by using their neighbor’s tax records. It also included a discussion about how to evaluate land that was unreclaimed prior to a 1569 audit.¹⁴

Over the next year Almonde and the committee would finally solve the complicated issues of establishing the *verponding*, and creating a stable collection method for rural taxes. In the new method of collection local officers such as the sheriff, town alderman, or another sworn official would carry out the assessment, as they had “the best knowledge of the land” in an around the village. They were also instructed to measure out the land, down to the thumb-length, in order to estimate its true worth.¹⁵ In other words, in place of the committee traveling across Holland to assess the dramatic changes in villages resulting from the war they passed the

¹³ RSH 1582, 411-413, 24 August 1582.

¹⁴ RSH 1582, 527-544, 8 November – 10 November 1582.

¹⁵ RSH 1584, 122-123, 11 February 1584.

obligation onto local officials. However, what kept local officials from cooking their books as they had before?

In addition to the oath which the officials swore promising to carry out the allotment correctly, there was another enforcement mechanism which ensured better collection. A major goal of the *verponding* was to pay back loans that were guaranteed by the *gemene middelen*, excise taxes, but not payable from it. For the most part these were loans to local residents, which the town or city magistrates could then pay directly from the *verponding*. If the local official falsified their *verponding* account to report a lower amount, then it would take longer for the local residents who were owed money to get repaid. This method of collection proved to be more successful than the 100th penny and previous tax methods, and helped bring in reliable tax revenue from the rural sectors of Holland which often paid less than the cities.

The *verponding* became an important component in Holland's pyramid of credit and a sort of social lubricant to reduce civic particularism. Each assessment raised around 100,000 pounds, and the tax could be levied several times per year depending on current needs. The States used this money to pay portions of the different loans contracted for the war. The *verponding* was not enough to wipe away these debts, but they helped Holland maintain its credit worthiness. A significant number of these loans were from better-off citizens in the cities. As such, the States specifically ear-marked *verponding* payments from specific villages for burgher loans from a particular city. For example, one of the assessments for the town of Rijnsaterwoude went to Amsterdam in 1586 and Delft the following years. These cities argued over who would be paid first, but the regularity of the *verponding* gave them confidence that they could repay the loans to their citizens.¹⁶ The lesson from the civic particularism arising during the Pacification

¹⁶ Tracy, *Founding*, 186-193, 256-261; Fritschy, "Financial Revolution," 56.

of Ghent was that cities needed to have their needs met first for the poldermodel to function. Almonde and the *verponding* committee were clearly aware of this fact, and ensured that money went to the cities first. In short, the revenue stream did enough to maintain Holland's credit worthiness and keep the cities happy.

Almonde turned out to be a capable servant for the States of Holland. He came from a privileged background, but his familial influence rarely extended beyond the city of Delft and the Schieland water board. Almonde's water-management experience and expertise brought him provincial recognition, as the States utilized his skills in dike repair and land assessments. He repaid their faith in him with the development of the *verponding*, which allowed them to generate dependable revenue streams from the countryside. There was nothing easy about the development of this tax, but it proved important for repairing the poldermodel. Cities proved to be the most intransigent and the revenues from the *verponding* not only spread around the tax burden, ensuring that the countryside provided funds for the war, but also guaranteed that the cities needs were satisfied first.

The Political Career of Johan van Oldenbarnevelt

Very little in Oldenbarnevelt's background suggested he would become one of the finest statesmen in Europe. Oldenbarnevelt's family history could hardly have been more checkered. His father was continually in trouble with the law, and may have even been banned from the city for a period. As Jan den Tex, the best known biographer of Oldenbarnevelt stated, "Seldom has a Dutch statesman come out of such a degenerate nest."¹⁷ After finishing Latin school in his

¹⁷ Jan den Tex and Ali Ton, *Johan van Oldenbarnevelt*, (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1980) 17.

home town, young Johan traveled to The Hague and served as a lawyer's apprentice. In 1566 he left Holland to study law, bouncing around five different universities in Europe before finally earning his degree in law and returning in 1570. Early that year he passed the bar and began serving as an advocate for the States in the Court of Holland.

It took a couple of years for Oldenbarnevelt to find his role in the Revolt. When fighting broke out in 1572, Oldenbarnevelt pledged his support to the Prince and the States of Holland even though the majority of the Court chose the loyalist side and fled to Utrecht. He resided for a short period in The Hague, but quickly moved to Delft when Orange reestablished the Court of Holland there in November. The city had walls and provided more security for the Prince and the fledgling rebel government. At the outset Oldenbarnevelt had little, if any, contact with the rebel leadership. While he remained in The Hague he tried to organize the town's defenses against the Spanish, collecting voluntary funds and creating an improvised militia. He was also involved in a feeble military attempt to break up the siege of Haarlem. He was fortunate to escape unharmed as the leader of his command was killed in action.¹⁸ These events persuaded young Johan that he was clearly not cut out for a military career.

Instead, Oldenbarnevelt found that he could best serve the Prince and the Revolt with his expertise in water management. Upon his return to Holland in 1570, he quickly became an expert in feudal dike laws and drainage issues. He established a "lucrative practice" serving as a lawyer for nobles, Dike Counts, and cities. The States of Holland often used his services for water-management cases. Oldenbarnevelt's skills in water-management cases became the key that opened up doors for his political career. He mentioned this fact himself in his

¹⁸ Jan den Tex, *Oldenbarnevelt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 12.

autobiography, noting, “Nearly all the Nobles, Lords, many towns...and nearly all the dike-reeves [counts] and polders board officials” were his clients in civil cases.¹⁹

Dealing with dike laws and polder societies gave him the skills necessary to heal many of the rifts caused by the war. In 1573 the Prince tasked him with resolving a dispute between farmers who were being harassed by “friendly” English troops under the command of Thomas Morgan in the Hoekse Waard in southern Holland.²⁰ A few years later Orange appointed him as a special commissioner to look into possible cases of treason in the Northern Quarter in which torture and other dubious methods had extracted confessions. Oldenbarnevelt never served on this commission however, since the Pacification of Ghent in 1576 led to the prisoners’ release.²¹

What is important about these early episodes is that they demonstrate that Oldenbarnevelt had begun to carve out a niche for himself as an individual who could resolve lingering problems resulting from the war. The representatives in the States of Holland clearly saw his potential as they appointed him as one of the original members of the Council of Appeal. In fact, he was instrumental in helping set up the Council, whose stated objective was to restore peace and resolve any injustices which had occurred during the war.²²

¹⁹ Den Tex, *Oldenbarnevelt*, 9.

²⁰ Den Tex, *Oldenbarnevelt*, 11 and *Johan van Oldenbarnevelt: Bescheiden betreffende zijn staat-kundig beleid en zijn familie*. ed. S.P. Haak, Eerste Deel: 1570-1601 (‘S-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1934), 4-5.

²¹ Van Nierop, *Treason*, 198; den Tex, *Oldenbarnevelt*, 11-12.

²² RSH 1580, 263, 8 December, 1580; RSH 1581, 70, 15 March 1581. The Council of Appeal never seemed to gain any traction, as it only sat in on one case regarding the status of nobility, see RSH 1581, 20 September 1581, 517. Interestingly, however, the only serious issue regarding Oldenbarnevelt’s selection as the Lands Advocate in 1586 revolved around his seat on this council, see RSH 1586, 94, 6 March 1586.

This talent for resolving problems created by the war was also evident in his role with the military inundations and their aftermath. It was in this regard that he truly distinguished himself. He received a first-rate introduction to military inundations while serving on a commission for cutting dikes to relieve the siege of Leiden. His exact role in this enterprise is unclear, but he likely directed the digging and cutting of dikes, helping to minimize the damage and coordinate the financial and jurisdictional matters with local polder boards. Den Tex notes that this could have been an important education for the future advocate.²³ It does appear to have been a launching point for his career since after this point he began to appear regularly as an advocate in the Court of Holland, specifically in cases dealing with water management and with the confiscation of church and émigré property, all of which were contentious issues.

The widespread use of military inundations in the early years of the Revolt in Holland and Zeeland created opportunities for Oldenbarnevelt to showcase his abilities. For instance, one of his first assignments for the States General was to help settle dike repair financing issues on the island of Schouwen in Zeeland as a result of the siege of Zierikzee in 1575-1576. These were important and complicated negotiations, even if they were only a “Holland-Zeeland matter.”²⁴ The damage was apparently considerable enough for the regents of Zierikzee to note the “great affection they have for the poor drowned fatherland,” arguing that if the Schouwen dike was not repaired immediately it would lead to “inestimable, but also irreparable damage.”²⁵

²³ Den Tex and Ton, *Oldenbarnevelt*, 24.

²⁴ Den Tex used this label to demonstrate Oldenbarnevelt’s lack of influence outside of Holland. It is telling, however, that his first assignment was a water management case. See den Tex and Ton, *Oldenbarnevelt*, 33.

²⁵ Magistrates of Zierikzee to William of Orange, 4 March 1577, *De correspondentie van Willem van Oranje* nr. 1772.

After some initial attempts by Zierikzee to secure funds from the city of Bruges in Flanders were refused, the city opened talks with the Prince of Orange to arrange the repair work. On 31 March 1577 Oldenbarnevelt served on a committee tasked with the inspection of the dikes not just on Schouwen, but also on the nearby islands of Overflakkee, Voorne, and Putten, which were still in disrepair. After several months of aborted attempts to raise the funds, the two provinces finally reached an agreement whereby Holland would lend Zeeland a sum of 21,810 pounds, which would be added to the 100,000 pounds it promised as part of the union between the two provinces.²⁶ The city of Middelburg complicated the negotiations by refusing to authorize the loan, as it did not want to pay for the war debts of the province while it had remained under Spanish authority. Oldenbarnevelt was one of the chief negotiators in this matter, getting the city not only to sign off on the loan, but also to further support the union between the two provinces.²⁷

Oldenbarnevelt's knowledge in water management earned him a place on the committee to work with the States of Zeeland and introduced him to the world of interprovincial politics. Following this initial success, the States of Holland regularly chose Oldenbarnevelt for their negotiations with Zeeland. Over the next few years, he continued to represent the States of Holland in their dealings with other provinces. He played a significant role in drafting of the Union of Utrecht in 1579, the defensive alliance among the northern provinces.

Another important step in Oldenbarnevelt's young career was his role as the pensionary for the town of Rotterdam. Although he was not the regents' first choice, he repaid their

²⁶ RSH 1577-1578, 33-110, 31 March 1577 – 14 June 1577; and Den Tex and Ton, *Oldenbarnevelt*, 33; *Resolutiën der Staten-General van 1576 tot 1609* ed. N. Japikise and H.H.P. Rijperman. Vol 1. ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1915), 596-597.

²⁷ RSH 1577-1578, 112, 15 June 1577.

decision by playing a key role in enhancing the city's status in Holland. The role of the pensionary was largely to look after the financial matters and serve as an advisor to the regents. Oldenbarnevelt accomplished a lot of impressive feats for Rotterdam, but he also learned a great deal from his experiences, noting in his own autobiography that, "[I performed] extraordinary services for the city and Holland during my nine years" in the office.²⁸ He helped turn it from a "petulant" young city, into the most important of the small cities, those which were only awarded representation in the States during the Revolt, as opposed to the big six cities which had voting rights prior to the Revolt.²⁹ Oldenbarnevelt helped the city take control of its finances, increase its influence in Schieland, and carry out dike repairs resulting from the military inundations.

When he took the office of pensionary on 28 December 1576, Rotterdam was one of the few cities in Holland which was well positioned to be able to settle its finances and water-management issues on its own terms, even if this fact was not immediately apparent.

Throughout the sixteenth century Rotterdam's water-management policy was often at odds with the other cities in Schieland, particularly in terms of turf mining. Several of these cities, Gouda in particular, were supported in large part through peat mining and trade, which led to widespread fen and lake creation. The dike count of the Schieland water board had attempted to slow down the Gouda turf trade, but not too rigorously as those who held the office often had economic incentives not to injure the turf industry. Furthermore, wealthy investors from Gouda and Delft would often secure their interests by manipulating the poorer villagers throughout Schieland by buying up their land and then hiring them as laborers, ensuring there was land for exploitation and cheap workers. Many people in Schieland feared the creation of another great

²⁸ *Barnevelts Apology: or Holland Myserie with Marginal Castigations*, (London: Thomas Thorpe, 1618), D3.

²⁹ Den Tex, *Oldenbarnevelt*, 28.

inner lake just like the Harlemmermeer in Rijnland. Because of the importance of the turf industry, however, the landscape continued to deteriorate, which led to fen and land creation. During the Revolt and its widespread use of intentional flooding, the nightmare became a reality and only the highest elevated cities of Schieland were spared the worst of the widespread flood damage.³⁰

The outbreak of fighting in 1572 put Rotterdam at odds with its neighbors in terms of finances as well. The establishment of the regional receiver system in 1574 seemed to be an indication of its low standing among the other Holland cities. In this system, the money collected in Rotterdam was sent to the collector Pieter Hanneman in Delft who functioned as the receiver for goods in Schieland and Delfland. These meant that even money destined for local use had to be filtered through the regional receiver system, which usually took a cut of the taxes for other purposes. The fact that Gouda, also situated in Schieland, became the regional center for tax collection in Schoonhoven, Brill, and Voorne must also have been a real “poke in the eye” for Rotterdam, especially as it tried to achieve hegemony in Schieland to secure its water management goals.³¹

The two issues resolved themselves in Rotterdam’s favor when the States of Holland began authorizing the sale of confiscated ecclesiastical and émigré properties. As early as 1573 the States began these sales to help fund the war, although it was initially done on an ad hoc basis as the Prince had his reservations about the process. Rotterdam appears to have been one of the first cities to benefit from this policy as they used the money raised from these sales to pay off old debts and as leverage to achieve financial and environmental security. In Rotterdam the

³⁰ Van der Ham, *Hoge dijken*, 81-89.

³¹ H. ten Boom, “De eerst ontvanger van de gemeenelands belasatingen in Rotterdam,” *Rotterdams Jaarboek* 9 (1989), 295-297.

money from these sales went to wealthy urban investors in the form of a credit, which they then used to buy up domain lands throughout Schieland.³²

At the same time the city also called in an old debt owed to them by the States of Holland to extend its influence over its hinterland. In the early years of the war Rotterdam had loaned the States 19,000 pounds, which the latter had difficulty repaying. As the States began carrying out the sale of ecclesiastical property to pay off old debt, the regents of Rotterdam refused to authorize the sales until its own debts were satisfied first. The commissioner for the sale of the goods called the pursuit “fruitless” until the issue was resolved. After several months of debate and discussions, the city and province finally reached an accord on 14 February 1576 where, in return for writing off the States debt, Rotterdam purchased the rights to the offices of the dike count, bailiff, and sheriff in the Schieland water board. Schieland became a de facto colonial area of Rotterdam.³³

Oldenbarnevelt became the pensionary of Rotterdam after the city had negotiated the purchase of the offices in Schieland, but he still managed to play an important role. It was largely his responsibility to defend and justify these actions after the fact, a duty which he took very seriously. The sale of these offices generated considerable insecurity and conflict in Schieland. Many rural residents were rightly concerned about repairing the damage from the military campaigns of the previous few years and feared that these events might delay the dike

³² For a general description of the process see, James Tracy, “Émigré and Ecclesiastical Property as the Sheet-Anchor of Holland Finance, 1572-1584,” in *Reformation, Revolt, and Civil War in France and the Netherlands, 1555-1585*, eds, Philip Benedict, Guido Marnef, Henk van Nierop, and Marc Venard (Amsterdam: Royal Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1999), 255-266. For the process with Rotterdam and Schieland see van der Ham, *Hoge dijken*, 88-89; J.L. van der Gouw, “Schieland als koloniaal gebied van Rotterdam,” *Rotterdams Jaarboek* 8 (1977): 242-243.

³³ Gouw, “Koloniaal,” 243. In addition to these offices the city also received several other rights associated with trade and brewing, which Gouw estimates to be worth around 19,460 florins and 7 shillings.

restorations. The office sales also displaced those already in the offices as Rotterdam appointed their own officials. This turnover meant that important members of rural communities and other cities lost the revenues from these positions. To some people, Rotterdam's purchase of these offices signaled a change in water management and economic policy in Schieland. For example, Gouda and Delft interpreted the appointment of a well-known beer brewer as the dike count as a direct attack on their beer industries. For the short term, however, these issues remained a moot point, since the States reneged on their agreement with Rotterdam almost immediately and refused to ratify the sale of the offices.

The States' refusal, along with the frustrations of the regional receiver system convinced Rotterdam that it might benefit from forging its own path. Rotterdam was not alone in its objections as many cities felt the current system favored some cities above others. As such, Rotterdam began undermining the system by paying its soldiers directly, as opposed to funneling their money through regional receiving center. The city went a step further in the summer of 1577 by simply naming its own receiver without the State's permission. The States obviously could not accept Rotterdam's position and gave the city three months to send their money to the receiver in Delft, threatening trade penalties for non-compliance.³⁴

At Oldenbarnevelt's insistence, however, Rotterdam refused to back down, and with good justification. According to den Tex, this was the only time during Oldenbarnevelt's tenure as pensionary that he incited the town to a strong line of opposition.³⁵ He also took the opportunity to remind the States of Holland that as long as the sale of the Schieland water board offices remained unconfirmed, it still owed the city 19,000 pounds. In the meantime the city

³⁴ Boom, "Eerst ontvanger," 298-299.

³⁵ Den Tex, *Oldenbarnevelt*, 14.

receiver, who also happened to be a good friend of Oldenbarnevelt, had already collected 8000 guilders worth of taxes in the city and surrounding villages. The city used this money to repair the dikes at Cappelle and along the IJssel which had been broken for the relief of Leiden. The regents of the city rightly believed that each city having its own collector did not damage Holland and the common cause, but in fact had proven more efficient and had better served the province. That the city used local funds for local dike repairs serves as a testament to this fact.

This episode is important for a variety of reasons. First, it introduced Oldenbarnevelt more thoroughly to the world of civic politics, the pervasive influence of particularism, and to the power of the purse strings. Rotterdam was not alone in its call for its own receiver, and ultimately every city would secure control over the method of its tax collection shortly thereafter.³⁶ Second, that the city used the money for its own water-management initiatives is telling. As pensionary, Oldenbarnevelt would clearly have had a hand in these decisions, and it showed him the political possibilities of shrewd water-management politics. He satisfied the provincial need for money and the city's needs for greater control over its environmental destiny. These are lessons which he would carry with him going forward.

One of Oldenbarnevelt's principal duties as the pensionary of Rotterdam included the sale of domain lands and offices, which were another means for cities to generate revenue outside of taxes. Before the Revolt these domain lands and offices were royal Habsburg possessions which they would lease out for income generation, such as toll rights, alum licenses, and offices. Prior to the Revolt the States of Holland administered these lands as a guarantee for the money they lent to the monarchy. During the war the States repurposed this money for a

³⁶ Tracy, *Founding*, 174-179.

variety of needs, with Oldenbarnevelt playing a leading role in the redeployment of the revenue for dike repairs.

Rotterdam benefited from the sale of confiscated goods, allowing the wealthy city burghers to buy up nearby lands and increase their influence in Schieland. The first round of sales was finished before Oldenbarnevelt became pensionary, but he must have noted their importance, for he was appointed to a commission to oversee the sale of domain lands in the five great cities. Since Amsterdam had only recently rejoined the States of Holland in 1578 against Spain, the sale of its domain lands was a separate issue still being negotiated as part of the city's *satisfactie* with the States. Over time, however, Oldenbarnevelt would help administer the sale of domain lands in Amsterdam as well.³⁷ In addition to the great cities he also oversaw sales in Gorinchem, and of course, Rotterdam. Over the next several years he served on commissions such as these, whose main goal was to liquidate the States' debts, most often with the repayment of *renten*, or bonds owed to the wealthy urban burghers.

The sale of domain lands could raise significant funds, some of which Oldenbarnevelt directed towards dike repair and other water-management issues. Initially the 100th penny tax, the one percent tax on the value of land, had been allocated for funding the major dike repairs across Holland. As noted, it does not appear as though all of the tax funds reached their destination. Oldenbarnevelt was clearly aware of this fact as he served on a commission to look into uncollected money from the tax.³⁸ As the 100th penny was not securing the payments for the necessary dike work he turned to another source of revenue: the sale of domain lands. An indication of the profitability of these ventures can be seen in the sale of domain lands in

³⁷ RSH 1579, 179-201, 6 August 1579 - 28 August 1579.

³⁸ RSH 1577-78, 127, 1 July 1577; RSH 1581, 519-520, 7 October 1581.

Zwijndrecht and Putten. The sales there helped to liquidate, or at the least, considerably decrease, a 50,000 pound loan from the city of Dordrecht.³⁹

Domain lands were an attractive investment for wealthy urban burghers, and could serve as an important revenue stream for cities and the States of Holland.⁴⁰ On the Prince's advice the States established a commission in 1580, which included Oldenbarnevelt, to oversee the expansion of domain sales to help reduce the debts on their outstanding *renten*. The management of *renten* debt was an important part of Holland's credit worthiness. The States of Holland had cancelled the repayment of the debt from 1572 until 1576, and following the Pacification of Ghent had been attempting to get their finances in line.

The sale of domain lands towards the *renten* payments was another step in this direction. Interestingly, the same resolution which authorized the domain sales for *renten* also decreed that Oldenbarnevelt's commission should take into account the debt which the land would incur from dike repair and deduct it from the sale. This statute essentially passed the onus of repair onto the buyer. It appears to have been an extremely effective tactic. The domain lands around Alkmaar sold by the commission amounted to 81,453 pounds. This specific sale again mentioned the clause about the dikes, but did not mention the reduced cost from the dike repair.⁴¹

Before the Revolt, Oldenbarnevelt held a lucrative position as a lawyer in cases regarding feudal dike laws. He served as an advisor to nobles, cities, and even the States of Holland in these matters. During the war, he sided with the Prince and the rebels in opposition to the Spanish. Through his expertise in water management he quickly established himself as a central

³⁹ RSH 1581, 16, 16 January 1581.

⁴⁰ Tracy, *Holland under Habsburg*, 143.

⁴¹ RSH 1581, 123-124, 1 July 1581.

figure in the political world of the Revolt. It was because of this background that he served on the commission to finance the dike repairs on the island of Schouwen, which served as his introduction to inter-provincial politics. During his time as the pensionary of Rotterdam he helped the city rebuild its finances and establish a greater influence over Schieland. This resulted in the repair of several dikes that were damaged from military inundations. Similarly, while serving on the committee to oversee domain sales in the cities throughout Holland he ensured that the transactions resulted in dike repair and maintenance. In short, Oldenbarnevelt's expertise in dike laws and water management opened up political doors, and he used it to the benefit of his client, in this case Rotterdam and the States of Holland.

The Career of Paulus Buys

In many ways Paulus Buys is a forgotten figure of the Dutch Revolt; the last biography on him was published in 1895. At that point the biographer noted that Buys was “still an unknown entity,” citing the fact that the date of his official confirmation as Land's Advocate was still unknown.⁴² Perhaps part of the issue is that Buys had a contentious personality, both historically and in the historiography as well. Periodically throughout his political career he was involved in high-profile disputes. The most well-known occurred with Sir Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester, during his stay as governor-general of the United Provinces in 1585-1587, when he got Buys drunk and had him arrested. This episode essentially ended Buys' political career, but even in his later years he quarreled with Jan van Hout, the town secretary of Leiden, and a representative of the important land holders of the Rijnland water board.

⁴² W. van Everdingen, *Het leven van Mr. Paulus Buys, advocaat van de lande van Holland* (Leiden: P.W.M. Trap, 1895), xii.

Before the Revolt, however, Buys appears to have been more of a conciliatory figure, or at the least, an individual interested in keeping the peace. He began his career as a lawyer in the Court of Holland and by 1561 he became the pensionary of Leiden, providing legal advice for the city's regents. When the iconoclastic riots broke out in Flanders and Brabant in 1566, Prince William of Orange and the States of Holland sent Buys and Jacob van Eynde, the current lands advocate, as their representatives to the States General in Brussels to negotiate with the Habsburg regent.⁴³

Already in these early years Buys was an ardent supporter of the Prince and a proponent of civic liberties and privileges. It is possible that Buys was actually one of a select few politicians that formed a secret committee to keep in contact with Orange when he fled the Low Countries to Germany in 1568 to escape Alva's punishment for his role in the early revolt.⁴⁴ Throughout 1560s Buys supported a policy of religious toleration within Leiden, like many other Holland regents. He openly opposed Alva and Philip II's policies on the persecution of heretics and the collection of the 10th penny on the grounds that they would create discord in Holland.

During the same period Buys was also involved with the water board of Rijnland. After the All Saints Day Flood in 1570 Buys worked with members of the Schieland and Delfland water boards to repair the damage. In particular, the joint committee looked after the breach in the Diemer dike, situated along the Zuiderzee near Amsterdam, which led to inundations in all the water boards. He also helped with the delicate task of maintaining the Spaarndam, as he took part in a series of negotiations with Haarlem over the construction of a new sluice in the dike. He later worked with Haarlem to prevent the construction of a dike in

⁴³ Everdingen, *Buys*, 8-9; Amstel-Horak, "Buys," 36-7.

⁴⁴ Arie de Fouw, *Onbekende Raadpensionarisen* ('s-Gravenhage: D.A. Daamen's uitgeverijmaatschappij, 1946), 12-16.

Wijkermeer which would lead to increased water in the IJ river and increased pressure on the Spaarndam.⁴⁵ In short, he had a background in solving intricate and complex water management issues.

During the Revolt Buys employed his talents in the service of Orange and the States of Holland. He was present at the first meeting of the States when they gathered on their own authority in liberated Holland in 1572, and probably served a vital role as he was well known. He carried out many of the duties of the vacant land's advocate office, since van Eynde had been arrested for heresy and died in captivity a few years previously. By December 1572 The States confirmed Buys as the land's advocate.⁴⁶

Over the next few years he would also play an important role in carrying out the military inundations during the siege of Leiden. After ensuring that his home city came over to the Prince's side within during the summer of 1572, he helped oversee the dike breaches that helped rescue Leiden only a few years later. He gave instructions for breaching the Ijssel and Maas dikes and carried out inspections throughout the Schieland and Delfland water boards to ensure the flood waters were moving north towards Leiden.⁴⁷ Before the siege ended he also assisted with military inundations in the Alblasserwaard in an attempt to prevent a Spanish attack from the rear.⁴⁸

It appears as though these difficult days during the first years of the fighting put a strain on Buys as his conciliatory personality grew more abrasive. He threatened to resign several

⁴⁵ Amstel-Horak, "Buys," 37; OAR, Gesplitste, 10 May 1566- 20 June 1572.

⁴⁶ Fouw, "Onbekende," 18.

⁴⁷ Everdingen, *Buys*, 24-28.

⁴⁸ RSH 1571-1574, 79, 7 September 1574.

times, mostly over salary issues, but also over matters of procedure, such as being allowed to open letters without all representatives of the States of Holland being present.⁴⁹ Furthermore, he was keenly aware of how to exploit a situation for his own benefit. In the middle of September 1574, when the successful relief of Leiden (his own city!) hung in the balance, he made sure to remind the States that they owed him roughly 2,500 pounds for his services over the last two years.⁵⁰ Actions such as these made Buys an increasingly divisive figure, but one whom the States desperately needed because of his abilities. Later that same year the States refused to grant his resignation or select another advocate to help share the responsibilities of the position.⁵¹ He was for them a necessary headache.

Buys understood the importance of his privileged position, he continually asked either for his dismissal or more compensation. In May 1575 he asked again for his dismissal because of the difficulties associated with establishing an effective government. The representatives in Holland were split on the issue of his resignation, with Leiden, the nobility, and Delft wanting him to continue; Rotterdam, Dordrecht, and Gouda were willing to let him leave, while the remaining cities deferred to the Prince. Buys remained in the office, but a week later (as if to test their patience) he again asked for money. This time, it was in the middle of negotiations with Zeeland over forming an effective union and further solidifying the relationship between Orange and the States of Holland. He finally got a partial payment in June, but the dispute over his resignation and salary would run throughout 1575.⁵²

⁴⁹ Everdingen, *Buys*, 31.

⁵⁰ RSH 1571-74, 93, 14 September 1574.

⁵¹ RSH 1571-74, 184, 8 November 1574.

⁵² RSH 1575, 269-358, 9 May 1575-4 June 1575.

Buys' grievances were not unfounded, however, even if he timed the airing of these for maximum effect. Buys often acted as the intermediary between Orange and the States of Holland. Buys would keep up communications with the Prince while the latter was away while also serving on a number of commissions and delegations. Orange had Buys preside over the Council of State while he was absent from Holland in 1573, a few years later in 1575 he represented the Prince at peace talks in Breda, and served on the delegation to Brussels to conclude the Pacification of Ghent.⁵³ These were not unfamiliar roles, since as previously noted he might have been on a secret committee to keep in communication with the Prince prior to the Revolt.

These matters of high politics occupied a great deal of Buys' time, but he remained active with water-management issues. When the Rijnland water board began meeting again in 1577, Buys received a seat for life and remained active in the organization. He was at nearly every tribunal meeting, which took place four times per year, and oversaw the inspection and compliance of all laws pertaining to the dikes and fen areas throughout Rijnland. His few absences were conspicuous enough for the secretary to make specific mention; if he missed a meeting it was because he was conducting affairs for the Prince or the States.⁵⁴ It is unclear what role he played in the actual organization for the repair work in Rijnland, but shortly after he received his seat he helped organize financing for the dike repairs across Rijnland, paying particular attention to the Spaarndam dike.⁵⁵

⁵³ William of Orange to Paulus Buys, 6 June 1573, *De correspondentie van Willem van Oranje* nr. 2417; RSH 1575, 121-127, 7 March 1575; RSH 1576, 203-204, 14 December 1576.

⁵⁴ Amstel-Horak, "Buys," 44

⁵⁵ OAR, *Gesplitste*, 21 September 1577.

In addition to helping with dike repairs in across Holland, Buys used his water management experience to help establish military defenses along the province's southern border. The Pacification of Ghent was a fragile peace, and it was clear to many in Holland that the war would soon return. The Spanish commander Mondragon's daring crossing of the Zijpe channel between the provinces of Zeeland and Brabant in 1575 demonstrated that Holland was vulnerable from an attack from the south. The States of Holland decided that the best approach to prevent further incursions was to strike at the root of the problem. Mondragon began his invasion from the northern shores of the province of Brabant. Rather than building defenses all along the shores of southern Holland, it made more sense to disrupt the fewer bases of the Spanish attacks in northern Brabant.

This approach involved Holland maintaining a significant military presence in the province of Brabant, which generated resentment from its southern neighbor. The Prince and the States of Holland understood the precariousness of its southern defenses even before the Pacification of Ghent. During the temporary truce they worked hard to shore up these vulnerabilities. In a variety of ways, numerous towns and villages in northern Brabant came under Holland's control. In 1577 the Prince signed a *satisfactie* with the town of Heusden in Brabant which formally brought it under the jurisdiction of Holland. Less formally, Holland occupied the nearby town of Sint Geertruidenberg even though Brabant claimed it. To the west, the three villages of Klundert, Rugenhil, and Fijnaart asked for a safeguard and protection from the Prince and the States of Holland when Spanish forces returned to the area in 1579.⁵⁶ In effect, Holland annexed part of Brabant.

⁵⁶ RSH 1579, 281-282, 19 November 1579.

Militarily these acquisitions made sense, but the States of Holland still found it difficult to justify these claims on legal grounds. According to Tracy, “Orange and the Lords States [of Holland] espoused a maximal understanding of Holland’s boundaries. They wanted not just everything within the historic borders – including towns that were still loyal to the king- but also what had been added by conquest, along the strategic south-eastern frontier [in Brabant].”⁵⁷ However, under the terms of the Pacification, the province of Brabant was an ally. How could Holland warrant the appropriation of land from an ally for military purposes?

In 1581 a dispute arose between the provinces of Holland and Brabant over the administration of the villages of Klundert, Rugenhil, and Fijnaart. Under the terms of the safeguard, Holland had the right to collect taxes in the area to pay for its defense, but Brabant officials had obstructed Holland’s appointed rentmaster from collecting these fees. The States of Holland responded by writing to the States of Brabant, noting that the Holland rentmaster had the appropriate authority, and further, Klundert, Rugenhil, and Fijnaart had “*always* been part of Holland’s ground.” Understandably, the States of Holland were willing to stretch the truth in order to protect its southern border.⁵⁸ The issue became a talking point at a meeting of the States General in February 1582. Part of the secret instruction given to Buys and the other Holland representatives was that they must “beyond all doubt” secure these islands for Holland as they are necessary for Holland’s defense. The States tasked the committee to convince the other

⁵⁷ Tracy, *Founding*, 151.

⁵⁸ The States drew the boundary along the Mark river, which would have put those three towns plus Zevenbergen under Holland control. Also because of this complication the towns had not raised the necessary taxes, Klundert owed ninety-nine pounds. In this regard it was like many other Holland towns, Huesden owed 1,180 pounds, Brill and Voorne were responsible for an unpaid amount of 4,400 pounds, while waterland in the Northern Quarter owed the monumental amount of 30,000 pounds. See RSH 1581, 346-347, 14 July 1581; RSH 1582, 23-33, 22-24 January 1582; Tracy *Founding*, 151.

provinces in the States General that this area had always been part of Holland, and it was their right to collect taxes for its defense.⁵⁹

Buys used water-management policies to enforce Holland's claim to these villages. Immediately after the dispute arose between the two provinces, Holland sent a committee to the island to inspect the tax records of the Dike Counts of the villages. These records provided the clearest measure for assessing the *verponding* and other taxes in the villages. At the same time, the records also gave an indication of the quality and condition of the dikes in the area. These initiatives helped Holland establish its authority in the villages, but how did the States justify their presence there in the first place? Buys found the answer in dike laws. He argued that the States of Brabant had never taken formal control of the areas because they were new villages, settled on reclaimed land from the sea. Since the residents had only built dikes in the last three decades, "those of Brabant had taken no single act of possession in the form of contributions [taxes]." In other words, Buys classified these as new lands that were essentially up for grabs.⁶⁰

Buys also made the argument that the States of Brabant owed the Prince these villages for lands lost elsewhere, but the water-management activities had a more lasting impact. In 1580 the city of Breda, the ancestral home of the Prince in the Netherlands, defected to the Spanish. Buys argued, rather weakly, that this event justified the Prince's appropriation of Klundert and the other villages.⁶¹ Tellingly, however, in 1584 the Prince wrote to the village residents regarding his claim to the area. He only briefly mentions the Marquise of Bergen op Zoom's claim to the area [on behalf of Brabant]. Instead, the entire twenty eight page letter is filled with issues

⁵⁹ RSH 1582, 87-90, 24 February 1582.

⁶⁰ RSH 1582, 33 – 248, 24 January – 10 May 1582; Andries Vierlingh, *Tractaet van dyckagie* eds J. de Hullu en A.G. Verhoeven (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1920), 40.

⁶¹ RSH 1582, 248, 10 May 1582.

relating to water-management concerns. The letter provides an exhaustive overview, history, and plans for the installation of Dike Counts, taxation policies for dikes and sluices, and construction projects detailing the height, width, and location for embankments.⁶² Buys understood that the Prince and Holland's influence over the water management in the villages served as the best justification for their annexation of these villages. Military needs necessitated the seizure, water management needs justified the authority.

This letter and the improvements in the area are important for a variety of reasons. This letter was one of the Prince's last, as he was assassinated roughly two weeks later on 10 July 1584. The new reclamations and fortifications at Rugenhil were later to be named Willemstad in his honor. Interestingly, the city came to serve as a testament to the marriage of water management and defensive considerations (See next chapter). The city perfectly exhibits the careful planning of polder reclamation while also exhibiting ideal fortification specifications.

At the beginning of the Revolt, Paulus Buys was already an influential figure in Holland's politics and an active participant in the Rijnland water board. In those first years of fighting he labored under the pressure of establishing a stable and successful form of government, one capable of financing the costly war. At the same time, his knowledge and experiences in water management served him well. He helped save his home city of Leiden, overseeing dike inspections and dike breaches during the military inundations. Furthermore, his role in the appropriation of the villages of Klundert, Rugenhil, and Fijnaart helped secure Holland's southern border. After the Prince's assassination Buys' influence grew, and he played a vital role in securing the Treaty of Nonsuch with England, and the establishment of the Earl of Leicester as Governor General of the United Provinces (1585-1587). The treaty would end in

⁶² William of Orange to the residents of Fijnaart and Rugenhil, 27 June 1584, De correspondentie van Willem van Oranje nr. 11210.

failure and spell the end of Buys' political career, but his accomplishments in the States General with the justification of the annexation of Brabant land demonstrated his political acumen. He was one of the most qualified individuals to help reorganize the war effort and direction of the rebellion after the Prince's death. In other words, he was a qualified candidate, even if he ultimately failed. It is also telling that after his inglorious departure from Holland politics he remained an active member in the Rijnland water board.

Satisfying Amsterdam – Almonde, Buys, and Oldenbarnevelt in action

In addition to the lingering problems from the military inundations, Amsterdam's position in Holland generated considerable discontent in the province. At the start of the fighting in 1572 the city remained loyal to Philip II, and endured a prolonged siege at the hands of the rebel forces. It remained loyal to the king until 1578, when the city regents signed a *Satisfactie* with the Prince and the States of Holland. Part of the agreement involved the prohibition of Protestant worship within the city, but the new *vroedschap* (city council) which took over only four months later reneged on this part of the arrangement. This change raised the question as to whether the whole *Satisfactie* should be voided. In reality, the establishment of Protestant worship in the city offered the States of Holland a pretext to secure better subsidies from Amsterdam. The initial agreement stipulated that the city would not be liable for any provincial debts from 1572-1576. In other words, the city would not pay for the Revolt. For the next three years, the States of Holland and the city renegotiated the terms of the *Satisfactie*. In this round of negotiations Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, Paulus Buys, and Abraham van Almonde each played an important role in the new accord.

One of the lesser-known disputes which became part of these negotiations, was water-management politics relating to the Diemer dike and lands east of the city. Each of the individuals listed above would play his part in securing a new *Satisfactie* between the States and Amsterdam. Oldenbarnevelt had the uninviting task of justifying the need for these new negotiations and keeping the pressure on Amsterdam. Almonde served to assess the condition of the dikes and damage to the area, and help establish a plan for improving the flood defenses. Buys got involved to help secure permission and support from the province of Utrecht, since these plans affected the water conditions of Holland's neighbor. In the end, Buys failed to convince Utrecht to approve the plans, but in the process of negotiating with the province he found common ground with Amsterdam, which helped secure a new *Satisfactie* in 1581.

Oldenbarnevelt's role in the new accord with Amsterdam has little to do with water management, but more with applying political pressure to the city. The States of Holland selected Oldenbarnevelt as their chief negotiator. It was his job to convince the Prince, who acted as the arbitrator, that the establishment of Protestant worship in the city violated the first accord. This alteration, however, was exclusively a civic matter, and had little to no bearing on the States of Holland or the benefit it derived from the agreement. That part of the agreement had been included for Amsterdam's benefit. Oldenbarnevelt had to argue that this change somehow injured the States and required new negotiations. It was "chicanery."⁶³

Nevertheless, Oldenbarnevelt took his charge seriously and did his best to represent the States of Holland. He began by attempting to make Amsterdam appear unreasonable in the negotiations. At the outset, the city was willing to do away with the agreement and all of the favorable clauses it contained within it in exchange for money. It was willing to be bought off.

⁶³ Den Tex, *Oldenbarnevelt*, 23.

Oldenbarnevelt proceeded to offer an insultingly low amount, knowing that Amsterdam would decline, and he could argue that the city was not negotiating in good faith.⁶⁴ He repeatedly returned to this theme in his negotiations. In his report to the States of Holland on the ongoing talks he made sure to underline the terms, “infringed” and “impertinent” in regards to Amsterdam’s stance. At the same time, he attempted to force the city to take responsibility for provincial debts for the war, arguing the city was saved just like all the other cities of Holland.⁶⁵

While Oldenbarnevelt put pressure on Amsterdam, Almonde began assessing the flood damages to the area around Amsterdam. The area extending southeast from the city to the Utrecht border formed an important region for flood defense, and later military defense, but it was in a poor state by the time of the *Satisfactie*. The relatively short Diemer dike which only stretched thirty kilometers, protected around 20,000 morgens of land and was in critical condition (See Figure 4).⁶⁶ The All Saints Day Flood in 1570 demonstrated the destruction which a breach could cause, as the storm broke it at several locations, flooding large swaths of land around Amsterdam. The openings were closed to prevent further flooding, but comprehensive repair work stalled because of the war. Further damage occurred when the Beggars cut the dike in 1573 during the siege of Haarlem, in an effort to circle around Amsterdam and reach the Spanish forces. Further cuts followed during the siege of Amsterdam

⁶⁴ Den Tex, *Oldenbarnevelt*, 23.

⁶⁵ Oldenbarnevelt, *Beschieden*, 59-62.

⁶⁶ Alfons Fransen, “Een kleine dijk met een groot doel: de financiering van de Diemerdijk, 1591-1864.” (PhD diss., Vrije Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2009), 16.

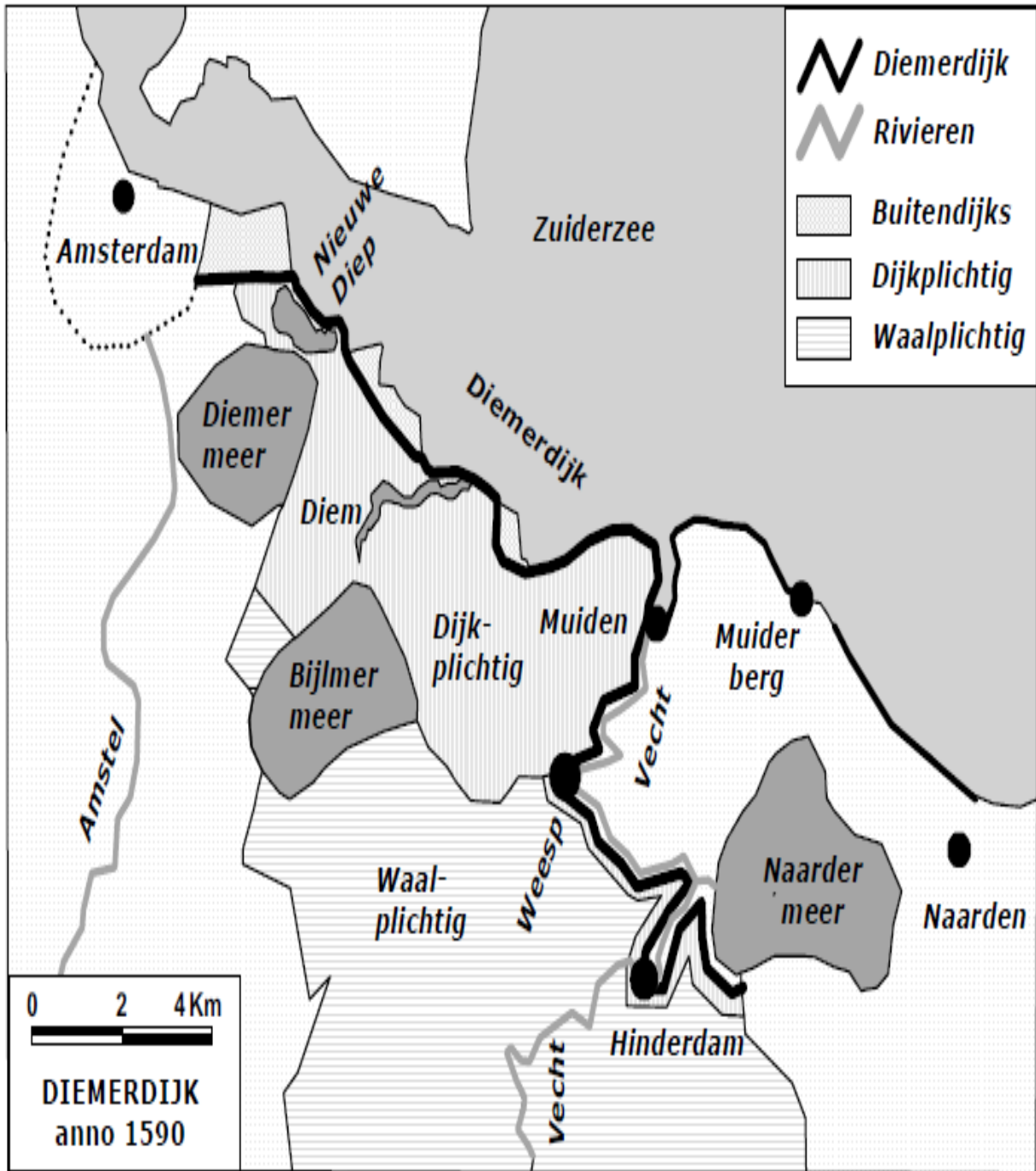


Figure 4: Map of the Diemer dike. Fransen, “Een kleine dijk,” 19. The black line denotes the Diemer dike. This area proved to be an important consideration in the talks between Amsterdam and the States of Holland.

as the rebels tried to isolate the city. A final breach occurred from natural forces in 1577.

Clearly there was a considerable amount of repair work required for the area.⁶⁷

Almonde was the first to get involved with the repair work a few months after the initial *Satisfactie* in 1578, but he accomplished little at the outset. The States of Holland assigned him to the committee to look into the construction of a new dike near Muiden and negotiate with Utrecht over funding the operation. After an initial survey, the committee estimated the cost of constructing a new dike to be around 50,000 pounds, which amounted to a monumental price tag. They justified it by noting the great deal of suffering and misery which they encountered in the area.

Afterwards the States of Holland assigned Buys and Jan Claesz Cat, a burgomaster of Amsterdam, to further investigate the situation. Amsterdam provided some initial funding, well short of the estimated amount, in return for a small reduction of the city's debt. The States revisited the situation the following spring and found a temporary solution with the construction of *paalwerken*, a series of poles and earth works at the base of the dike. These help to break up the waves and prevent further erosion of the dike in the short term.⁶⁸ The fact that Amsterdam was willing to invest in the water-management infrastructure in return for debt reduction demonstrates its interest in the area, and formed an avenue through which the city and States could build consensus. It was an excellent opportunity for the poldermodel to function.

Over the next few years Buys and Almonde engaged in prolonged negotiations with the States of Utrecht which helped to build a working relationship between Amsterdam and the States of Holland. These talks revolved around the construction of a new dam south of the town

⁶⁷ Alfons Fransen, *Dijk Onder Spanning: de ecologische, politieke en financiële geschiedenis van de Diemerdijk* (Hilversum: Utgeverij Verloren, 2011), 49.

⁶⁸ RSH 1579, 75, 28 April 1579 to RSH 1580, 73, 3 May 1580.

of Hinderdam and the stoppage of a small adjoining river. In June 1580, the States of Holland appointed Buys, Almonde, and Willem Bardesius, a member of the Amsterdam *vroedschap* to carry out negotiations with Utrecht. The talks appear to have been rather complicated, as the three were negotiating not only with the magistrates of the city and States of Utrecht but also the Utrecht nobility, several religious houses, and other property owners in the affected area. In September Buys reported back that negotiations were ongoing, but hoped to secure funding from Utrecht along with a local tax on those who would be affected, “as was always done in previous times.” When the negotiations with Utrecht stalled, the States of Holland authorized the construction of a small sluice near the town of Muiden. This was another short-term solution.⁶⁹

In the end the States could never get Utrecht to pay for any of the project as it had the upper hand and the higher land, but that does not mean these negotiations were not without benefit for the relationship between Amsterdam and Holland. Utrecht was not as threatened from flooding and had less of a vested interest to pursue flood protection in this area. Nevertheless, in these negotiations the States granted Amsterdam considerable latitude, and at times even followed the direction of the city. During the debates with Utrecht the States of Holland were quite willing to let Amsterdam extend its influence in its hinterland, which proved useful in their ongoing disputes with the city over the remediation of terms of the *Satisfactie*.

After the failed talks with Utrecht the States of Holland offered the city greater control over the nearby Diemer dike, which proved to be a breakthrough in the talks between city and province. The States of Holland agreed to allow Amsterdam to take part in an inspection of the Diemer dike to “prevent fraud and abuses.” The major issue regarded ships unloading their cargo on the dike, which not only damaged the dike, but also impacted Amsterdam’s harbor

⁶⁹ RSH 1580, 115, 22 June 1580 to RSH 1581, 150, 17 April 1581.

revenue. Amsterdam chose Bardesius to oversee the inspections, since he was the supervisor of Amsterdam's dockyard, and had already developed an understanding of water-management issues during his negotiations with Utrecht. Furthermore, the States authorized Bardesius and members of the Amstelland water board to assess a ten-pound fine on their own authority for any violations.⁷⁰ In short, Amsterdam gained control over the Diemer dike, which meant it could not only look after its own flood defenses, but also its bottom line in the form of harbor revenue.

Just two weeks after the talks concluded on the Diemer dike Amsterdam and the States of Holland agreed to a new *Satisfactie*, signed in December 1581. The document mentions the city's right to collect taxes from its hinterland for its defenses. In previous discussions the city was primarily concerned with its flood defenses, but now turned its attention also to military defenses, as the Spanish threatened an invasion from the Zuiderzee and from the east. In this regard, the States granted the city considerable latitude regarding its water-management concerns. This aspect became part of the give and take which characterized the new agreement. Amsterdam agreed to take on a portion of Holland's war debt, and in exchange its burghers could begin receiving repayments on previous loans. The water-management aspect of the debate might have been a smaller matter in the larger discussion over religion and debts from the war, but it showed the State's ability to compromise.⁷¹

The importance of this part of the agreement for Amsterdam is evidenced by the speed with which the city began exercising its new authority. Roughly a month after the agreement the city began looking after its defenses. It immediately began collecting taxes for fortifications in the city, and almost simultaneously began looking into a new dam and fortifications in the

⁷⁰ RSH 1581, 415-529, 1 August – 11 October 1581.

⁷¹ RSH 1581, 618-638, 5 December – 20 December 1581; Tracy, *Founding*, 198-202

village of Muiden. Amsterdam took the lead in creating a multi-city commission to look into the matter which reported back a month later. The committee found that the new dam would require considerable work: three large dike sections, two duikeldams to help collect mud, and a small sluice, which they estimated to cost around 30,000 pounds. Amsterdam agreed to front around 10,000 pounds and to raise the remaining funds with taxes.⁷²

In the end the issue stalled again because of the cost of the venture and a lack of support from Utrecht. Amsterdam, despite the States' assistance, was still unable to force through changes which could adversely affect Utrecht, and was hesitant to take on the extra debt. The situation remained unresolved for the next decade, with the area apparently still in a perilous condition. In this regard it is little surprise that the area around Muiden and to the south would form the first waterline, a system of defenses that allowed the systematic inundation of lands to prevent enemy passage (see next chapter). Throughout the 1580's Amsterdam attempted direct negotiations with Muiden and Utrecht to improve the situation but had little success.

The situation finally improved in 1591 with an accord between the States of Holland and Utrecht, and the Rijnland, Delfland, and Schieland water boards. In order to prevent flooding they agreed to broaden the Diemer dike, make it a uniform height, and angle the dike towards the *paalwerk* which would reduce erosion and enhance the dike's longevity. The central figure in this later agreement appears to have been Oldenbarnevelt, who had taken an interest in the matter once he had become the lands advocate.⁷³

After three years of negotiations Amsterdam and the States of Holland finally agreed to a new *Satisfactie* thanks to Buys, Almonde, and Oldenbarnevelt. In their own way, each of these

⁷² RSH 1582, 53-113, 12 February – 16 March 1582.

⁷³ Fransen, *Dijk onder spanning*, 41-71.

individuals played a role in the new accord and helped to reestablish working relationship that had been injured during the Revolt. Almonde developed plans for repair work in area protected by the Diemer dike, Buys carried out negotiations with the States of Utrecht and built up good will with Amsterdam, while Oldenbarnevelt put political pressure on the city. In the end, the city took on some of the provincial debt from the Revolt in exchange for greater control over its flood and military defenses. Was it a perfect solution? Probably not, Oldenbarnevelt's zeal in these talks made him life-long enemies in Amsterdam and earned him a reputation for obduracy.⁷⁴ Nonetheless, solutions such as these were necessary for rebuilding the poldermodel in Holland.

Conclusion

Almonde, Buys, and Oldenbarnevelt's experience in water management served themselves and Holland well. The military inundations created a need for men of their talents to find solutions to the enduring difficulties resulting from the tactical flooding in the province. In their own way each of these men helped to repair the poldermodel in the province. The disputes during the Pacification of Ghent sent a clear message to the States of Holland, that city interests overrode provincial ones. Each of these individuals found different ways of satisfying civic needs and desires.

Almonde helped establish the *verponding* which produced dependable revenue from the countryside, the area hardest hit by the inundations. This tax became an important component of Holland's pyramid of credit. The debates and negotiations surrounding the levy were complex,

⁷⁴ Den Tex, *Oldenbarnevelt*, 24-5.

and made even more complicated as a result of the floods. Yet Almonde and the *verponding* committee found a workable plan to raise revenues from the countryside and satisfy the cities.

Acting as the pensionary for Rotterdam, Oldenbarnevelt greatly improved the city's finances and environmental security. He successfully defended the city's purchase of the offices of the Schieland water board and the installation of its own receiver. The city used this money to carry out necessary dike repairs and improve its position within Schieland. These episodes not only served Rotterdam and gave the city satisfaction, but helped advance Oldenbarnevelt's career. His problem solving abilities in water-management issues also opened up doors for him in provincial and inter-provincial matters. He helped set up domain sales throughout the province which aided the repair of still damaged dikes across Holland, and also served on the inter-provincial committee to finance dike repairs in Zeeland.

Buys' greatest achievement in repairing the poldermodel was to act on Holland's behalf in inter-provincial matters. This fact is evident in his dealing with the heated negotiations with Brabant and his role in the negotiations with Amsterdam. Buys secured Holland's security through his justification of the annexation of lands in Brabant, on the grounds that they were unclaimed lands. This rationale was a pretext for Holland's seizure of the lands for military purposes, but it was effective enough to bring them under the States of Holland's control.

The negotiations with Amsterdam over a new *Satisfactie* provide a salient example of how these water-management politics could give the city satisfaction and help restore the poldermodel. Amsterdam rejoined the other cities of Holland in 1578, but had reservations about taking on provincial debts contracted during the war. Oldenbarnevelt pressured the city into a new round of negotiations, Almonde developed repair plans for the Diemer dike and other flood measures in the city's hinterland, and Buys championed Amsterdam's cause in the talks with the

city and province of Utrecht regarding the new plans. The talks with Utrecht failed, but Buys engendered goodwill with Amsterdam. In the end, the States granted Amsterdam greater control over its hinterland to the southeast in exchange for taking on part of the provincial debt.

The continued importance of these three politicians is evident after the Prince's assassination on 10 July 1584. They would play an important role in filling the power vacuum in the politics of Holland and the States General. Already after an unsuccessful attempt on Orange's life in 1582 Buys, Oldenbarnevelt, and the Haarlem burgomaster Nicolas vander Laan had been assigned to discuss several "secret cases" of Holland with the States General.⁷⁵ This apprenticeship in rule apparently paid dividends as Oldenbarnevelt was one of the "seventeen gentlemen" who met at Delft to make arrangement for the government of Holland after Orange's assassination.⁷⁶

After the Prince's death these three politicians experienced differing levels of success. Almonde continued on in largely the same role, working behind the scenes on individual water management cases for the States of Holland. Buys' role in Holland politics came to a jarring halt when he fell out with Leicester. In a private letter, Leicester referred to Buys as an atheist, villain, and dissembler who sought to make himself great; he arranged to have Buys arrested and put on trial. Oldenbarnevelt, who became the new lands' advocate in 1586, did the most to direct the opposition against Leicester and later successfully came to Buys' defense.⁷⁷ This was another striking example of how the lives of these two lands advocates intertwined.

⁷⁵ RSH 1582, 170-171, 10 April 1582.

⁷⁶ Den Tex and Ton, *Oldenbarnevelt*, 38.

⁷⁷ Everdingen, *Buys*, 136.

After Leicester's resignation in 1588 Oldenbarnevelt began playing an increasingly important role in the domestic politics of Holland and its relationship with its neighbors through the States General. Through it all water-management politics remained an important part of his statecraft. This fact is evident in his dealings with Amsterdam in the lead up to the negotiations over the Twelve Year Truce in 1609. This temporary peace with the Spanish threatened Holland's commerce in general, but Amsterdam's in particular. In order to entice the Amsterdam regent's into the going along with the peace talks Oldenbarnevelt offered them the chance to invest in the lucrative reclamation of the Beemster Lake in the Northern Quarter. He knew that the red tape associated with the project would lead to lengthy delays, so he found a legal technicality to rush the patent through the administrative process. Usually it took two to three months to gather all the relevant information and negotiate with local interests before reclamation or other water works could be carried out. The patent for the reclamation of the Beemster lake only took twelve days. Oldenbarnevelt took the view that it was better to ask for forgiveness than permission, as all the complicated negotiations took place after the patent had already been approved, which significantly weakened the bargaining power of local communities. This "surprise attack" ensured that the wealthy investors of Amsterdam, along with his brother Elias van Oldenbarnevelt, received the rights to reclamation and made a handsome profit on the venture.⁷⁸ According to one historian, the Beemster was reclamation "perfected and mathematicized" and came to inspire a fury of other reclamation projects

⁷⁸ Piet van Cruyningen, "'Dealing with drainage': State regulation of drainage projects in the Dutch Republic, France, and England during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries," *The Economic History Review* 68 (2015), 421-28; Guus Borger, "De Beemster – ideaal of compromis," in *Geordend landschap: 3000 jaar ruimtelijke ordening in Nederland* (Hilversum, Verloren, 2004), 75-102.

throughout Holland and the Northern Quarter.⁷⁹ Clearly, water-management politics was an effective tool in Holland, and an important component of the poldermodel.

⁷⁹ Ed Taverne, “Het Betwiste Landschap van de Haarlemmermeer” *BMGN* 121 (2006), 712.

CHAPTER SIX: MAINTAINING THE POLDERMODEL – EXPORTING AND SYSTEMATIZING THE INUNDATIONS

Introduction

The tactical inundations during the first years of the Revolt in Holland, from 1572 until the Pacification of Ghent in 1576, proved to be a useful military tool but a disruptive political one. In 1579 the war resumed following the Pacification's collapse. The goal, from Holland's perspective, was to find a way to utilize military inundations that avoided destruction and political discord within the province. The answer to this dilemma came in two forms. First, the States of Holland ensured that the military inundations occurred on "foreign soil" in the nearby provinces of Flanders and Brabant. In effect, they tried to export the inundations out of Holland. Second, the States attempted to integrate their fortifications within the existing water-management systems, simultaneously improving a town's defenses and allowing for the widespread and systematic inundations. These two tactics were not mutually exclusive.

Although the Pacification failed to unite the Low Countries permanently, it did help provide a sense of clarity going forward helping to delineate the different combatants and provide something resembling a front line. After the Pacification fell apart the various provinces joined either the Union of Arras or the Union of Utrecht. The Walloon provinces along the French border, reconciled with Philip II and the new Spanish governor of the Low Countries, Alexander Farnese, the Duke of Parma. In the north, the provinces of Holland, Zeeland, Gelderland, Friesland, and Utrecht along with sections of Groningen joined the Union of Utrecht (See Figure 4). The Union formed a defensive alliance against the Spanish. Holland was the pre-eminent power behind the Union of Utrecht, as evidenced in the fact that some

detractors termed in the “Hollandsche Union.” As the States of Holland provided the greatest portion of the war budget it called the shots. Within two years after the ratification of the Union, Holland took control of key towns for its defense in the provinces of Gelderland and Brabant.¹ In short, Holland took the lead in the Union of Utrecht and ensured that it met their defensive needs.

Those provinces which did not side with either Union, specifically Brabant and Flanders, were caught between the hammer and the anvil. The States of these two provinces vacillated, hoping to secure better religious freedoms and put greater power in the States General, which in theory still represented all the provinces of the Low Countries. In actuality, the States General came to represent only those provinces in the Union of Utrecht, and the States of Flanders and Brabant were seen more as an ally than a member.² The two provinces’ delays meant that they became the front line between the States Army, representing the States General, and the resurgent (and better paid) Spanish forces under the command of the Duke of Parma. Beginning with the southernmost cities of the Low Countries, Parma commenced a methodical crawl northward subjugating all in his path. He proved to be the most successful Spanish commander during the Revolt, conquering more cities than any of his predecessors or successors.³

¹ Tracy, *Founding*, 163-164.

² Boogman, “Union of Utrecht,” 388-389.

³ Violet Soen, “Reconquista and Reconciliation in the Dutch Revolt: The Campaign of Governor-General Alexander Farnese (1578-1592),” *Journal of Early Modern History* 16 (2012), 1.



Figure 5: Map of the borders of the Union of Utrecht. Tracy, *Founding*, 166. This map depicts the borders of the Union of Utrecht as of 1584. By 1579, the States of Holland had already taken control of the garrisons in Bommel and Tiel in Gelderland, along with Heusden (not pictured) in Brabant.

On the “foreign soil” of Brabant and Flanders the States of Holland and the States General had little incentive to use any restraint and resumed military inundations similar to the ones in the first years of the Revolt. During the siege of Antwerp (1584-1585) and the related skirmishes, the use of strategic floods was common and their effects were as devastating, if not more so, than those experienced during the relief of Leiden. In eastern Brabant the States Army used fire and scorched-earth campaigns to cow the inhabitants into submission and prevent them giving any aid to Spanish forces. In other words, The States of Holland and the States Army had no problem with unleashing the twin weapons of fire and water, so long as they occurred outside Holland’s borders.

In areas closer to home, the States of Holland attempted to systematize the floods so as to limit the collateral damage. These measures were part of a larger process of instilling discipline and order within the States Army.⁴ They did this through the construction of fortifications not only in Holland but in the frontier cities in the adjoining provinces, which created a buffer for the province and helped “close the garden.” Under the direction of the fortification engineers Adrian Anthonisz and Simon Stevin they developed a style of defenses known as the “Old Netherlandish System.” This fortification method involved the use of earthen embankments, extensive outer defenses, and the use of wet ditches. This last feature involved the integration of the fortifications within the existing flood defenses and water-management systems already in place.

At the same time Dutch military planners began contemplating the possibility of systematic and planned inundations. The end result of this long line of thinking resulted in the first waterline in 1589, a series of defensive fortifications capable of flooding an entire region

⁴ Attempts at organizing and disciplining the military were a key feature of the newly formed army of the Dutch Republic. See Olaf van Nimwegen, *The Dutch Army and the Military Revolutions, 1588-1648* translated by Andrew May (Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 2010); ‘t Hart, *The Dutch Wars of Independence*.

with the express goal to prevent an enemy attack. The underlying premise of this waterline was not only to defend the province of Holland, but also to limit collateral damage through directed flooding. In short, the States of Holland preserved the poldermodel after the Pacification of Ghent by passing the burdens of the inundations onto “foreign” provinces while attempting to limit the scope and damage arising from the inundations closer to home by restraining and regulating them.

Flooding on Foreign Soil - The fall of Antwerp (1584-1585)

Prior to the Pacification of Ghent, the provinces of Flanders and Brabant had been spared from the more tenacious and ruthless parts of the war, but that would change once the fighting resumed in 1579. They suffered isolated incursions by the Sea Beggars, such as the burning and plundering of the town of Axel in Flanders in 1574, resulting in the destruction of two-thirds of the town’s structures. Though devastating, attacks such as these were limited in number.⁵ During the Pacification, the States of Holland made a concerted effort to push the front lines further south with the de facto seizure of land in north Brabant.⁶ These limited acquisitions were the extent of Holland’s interest in the south, as their priorities lay to the east, securing defenses along the major waterways there through which Holland could still be invaded. Conversely, Parma devoted considerable attention towards recapturing the city of Antwerp and, by extension, the provinces of Flanders and Brabant. In this regard, military inundations offered the States of Holland the possibility of delaying and complicating Parma’s re-conquest without tying up a lot

⁵ De Kraker, “De Overgang van Axel,” 165.

⁶ See the section on Paulus Buys in the previous chapter.

of their resources. The effectiveness of the military inundations would determine the outcome of the siege of Antwerp, the fate of Antwerp would decide the fate of Flanders and Brabant.

The city of Antwerp, and the adjacent region of northern Flanders, was ill suited to endure devastating tactical floods. The city of Antwerp lay on the Scheldt river which drains into the Scheldt estuary and from there to the North Sea. During the Middle Ages northern Flanders had only been protected from flooding with great difficulty. The sixteenth century proved no less problematic for the area. A major flood in 1530 resulted in the “drowned lands” of the island of South Beveland at the mouth of the Scheldt river. Despite attempts by merchants in Antwerp and nearby Mechelen to reclaim the land it was a lost cause. The All Saints Day Flood in 1570 led to the widespread abandonment of lands and a political contest among several provincial, civic, and regional organizations over paying for the repair work, estimated around 91,000 guilders.⁷ Further to the east around Axel, water management suffered because of economic woes resulting from the declining salt trade and political re-alignments between the city and local water board.⁸ All across northern Flanders the water-management infrastructure was in dire need of repair and restoration.

When Parma first approached Antwerp on 3 July 1584 he found the area immediately around the city already flooded on the Prince of Orange’s orders. These opening salvos set the tone for the general course of the siege. The States Army used these floods in an effort to disrupt Parma’s “unvarying routine” of siege warfare. This involved isolating the city from the surrounding countryside with cavalry attacks, setting up siege lines around the city, and if a city was situated on a river, like Antwerp, constructing a river blockade. The States Army hoped the

⁷ Dekker, *Geld in het water*, 188-217.

⁸ De Kraker, “Overgang van Axel,” 163.



Figure 6: Inundations during the Siege of Antwerp. Fans Hogenberg, *Dijken doorgestorken bij Antwerpen*, 1585. Available at Rijkmuseum: <http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.collect.447991>. This image provides a view of the dike breaches associated with the siege of Antwerp, visible at the top of the image. Note the various broken dikes and the fortresses which Parma constructed on the remnants. The famous boat bridge is visible in the center of the picture. Note also the extent of the flooding.

inundations would prevent Parma from encircling the city and isolating it. The tactic failed, however, as Parma quickly captured the Koevenstein dike on the eastern bank of the Scheldt river.

Parma and his forces were the clear victors in the early stages of the siege. The initial round of dike breaches and flooding had not had the intended effects. Although large sections of the countryside stood underwater it was not enough to drive out the Spanish forces.

Additionally, many sections of the dikes still stood above water and they became the sites of small pitched battles which the Spanish usually won (See Figure 5). These victories allowed them to set up small forts and redoubts and tighten their grip on the city. Furthermore, Antwerp became increasingly isolated as many of the surrounding towns which had sided with the Union of Utrecht surrendered to Parma, some without a shot fired.

The biggest obstacle, however, from the States' perspective, was Parma's floating boat bridge. It comprised a series of interconnected boats which stretched across the Scheldt river with defensive fortifications on each shore. It took him several months to construct, but once completed, it effectively completed his encirclement of the city. The States Army could no longer resupply the city via the Scheldt river. The strategic location of the blockade downriver (north), also allowed Parma to escape having to attack the city's modern and imposing citadel which was located upriver.⁹

The rebels were not without alternatives, however, and tried to break up the siege both directly and indirectly. The most direct route for the rebels was to demolish the boat bridge which choked the city. Parma had staked the success of the siege on his ability to close off the

⁹ Parker, *Revolt*, 214-215 and Martha Pollak, *Cities at War in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 18-19. According to Pollak, Parma emulated Roman tactics during the siege, dubbing himself *Pontifex Maximus*.

city, noting that it would either be “his sepulcher or his pathway into Antwerp.”¹⁰ Conversely, this logic meant that destroying the boat bridge would save the city.

Fittingly, the final plan for breaking the blockade came from a disgruntled Italian military engineer, Federigo Giambelli, who prior to the Revolt had sworn his loyalty to Philip II. The Spanish king’s rejection of Giambelli’s numerous plans for war machines and other military technologies left the Italian disgruntled. He left Italy and settled in Antwerp, vowing that, “the Spanish would one day hear him spoken of in a way that would make them regret they had scorned his offers.”¹¹ The Spanish siege had landed on his doorstep, and he did his best to fulfill his pledge.

His plan was nothing revolutionary, but it proved effective. It entailed a different take on the use of fire ships, burning vessels which were sent sailing among an enemy fleet that wreaked havoc in naval battles. In place of a fire ship, Giambelli proposed sending an explosive ship. He loaded two small ships with shrapnel and roughly 6,000 pounds of gun powder, and sent them down the Scheldt river on the night of 4-5 April 1585, almost a full year after the siege had begun. One of the ships got stranded on the bank, but the other found its mark, erupting with a deafening explosion.

The bombing served its purpose, but had perhaps been too effective. The explosion decimated the western side of the bridge, killing roughly 800 soldiers and commanders. Months later the Spanish were still removing dead soldiers from the site of the detonation. The shrapnel had a blast radius of several miles, and it took minutes for some of the pieces to finally land. Such was the shock that the defenders in Antwerp forgot to send up a rocket to signal the

¹⁰ Parker, *Dutch Revolt*, 214.

¹¹ Duffy, *Siege*, 78.

awaiting Holland-Zeeland fleet to enter the Scheldt and relieve the city. The delay allowed the Spanish to reestablish their control over the river, and the direct route was closed. The States Army could not save the city through a frontal assault on Parma's forces.¹²

At the same time that the rebels struggled to break up the siege directly, they also employed more indirect tactics. The indirect approach involved military inundations all along the northern coast of Flanders (See Figure 7). Many of the small towns in the area, such as Terneuzen and Axel, had reconciled with Parma even before siege of Antwerp had begun. Zeeland rightly feared that these towns could serve as a launching pad for attacks and quickly recaptured Terneuzen in 1583, which then actually served as a center for attacks by the States Army against nearby Axel and Hulst. Once secured, the rebels used Terneuzen as a base of operations and began utilizing inundations throughout the area.

This capture of Terneuzen was only the first step in widespread inundations along the coast of Flanders. Over the summer of 1584 the States forces broke dikes and closed sluices in order to drive out Parma's forces from the area. The Spanish attempted to close the sluices and prevent the breaches, but the area between Axel and Terneuzen became abandoned as sea waters flooded the land. Terneuzen became a veritable island, easily defensible, and a thorn in Parma's side.

The rebels followed up this victory by discussing the possibility of opening up a water passage to Ghent by flooding the land southwest of Axel. The stated goal of the inundation was to organize the laborers as quickly as possible in order to breach not only the dikes along the sea but all the interior dikes, so that "the water may course up to the city of Ghent." The States

¹² Duffy, *Siege*, 78-9.

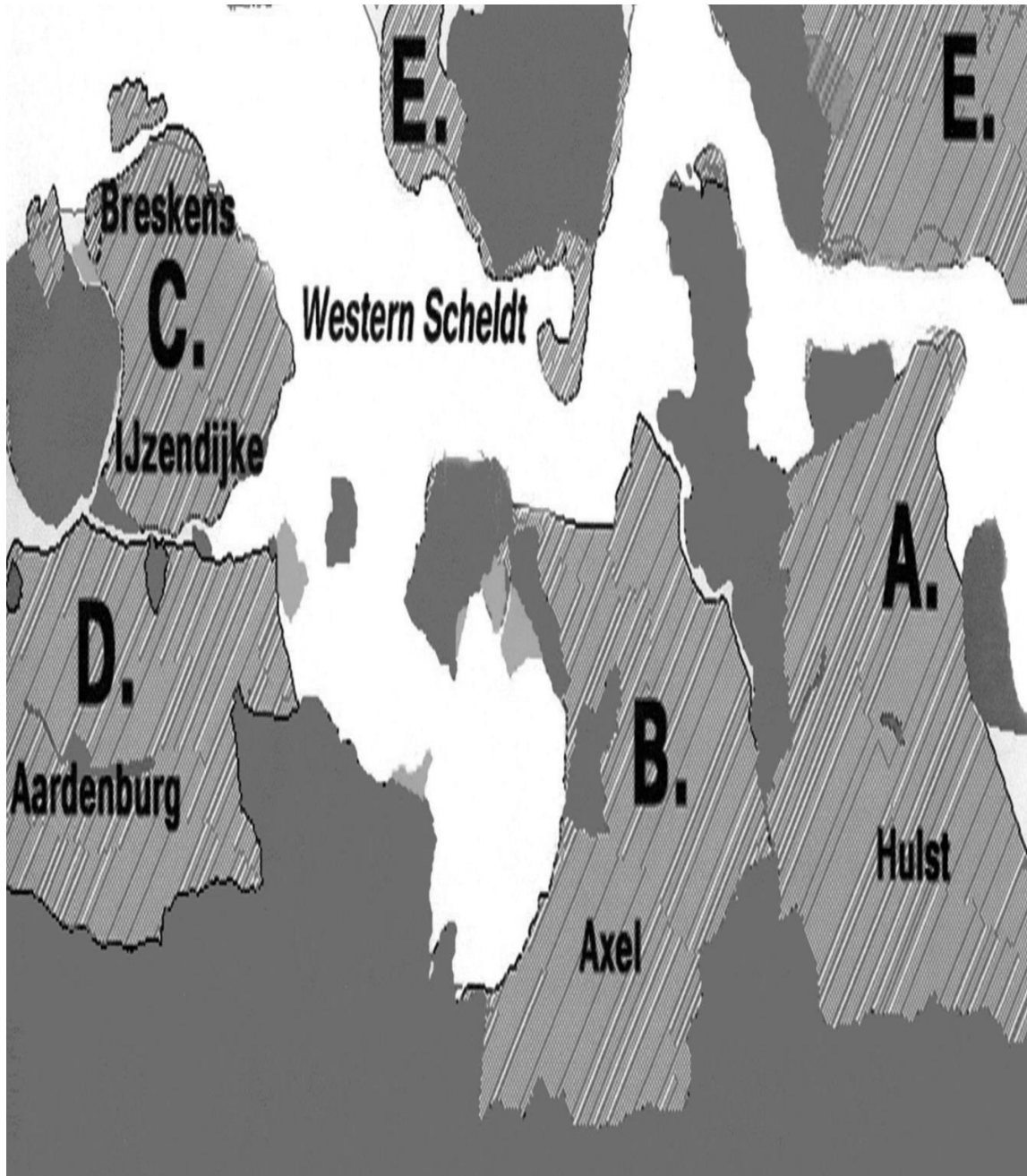


Figure 7: Inundations along the northern coast of Flanders. De Kraker, “Flooding as man-made disasters: Special flooding events in coastal Flanders and the inlets of the SW Netherlands, 1400-1600” *Zeitschrift für Geomorphologie* 59 (2015), 118. The areas around Hulst (A) and Axel (B) were flooded in relation to the siege of Antwerp. The lands in Zeeland were already inundated from natural forces earlier in the sixteenth century (E). The States forces flooded the polders in Ijzendijke (D) and Aardenburg (C) in 1584 and again in 1621.

Army also anticipated that these floods would hinder the ongoing siege of Antwerp.¹³ This undertaking was on the scale as that of the relief of Leiden. However, disputes between the States of Holland, Zeeland, and Brabant in the States General over the possibility of French aid delayed the cuts until the matter became a moot point with the surrender of Ghent to Parma.¹⁴

Ghent's capitulation was soon followed by Antwerp's, but not before another attempt at tactical floods by the States Army. They tried once more to capture Koevenstein dike on the east bank of the Scheldt to flood the area and drive out the Spanish forces. The States Army along with forces from Antwerp attacked the Spanish soldiers on the dike from both sides, hoping to capture it and create a breach. When this failed the Spanish became "masters of the inundation" around the city, as well as the river.¹⁵ The direct and indirect tactics of the States Army failed, and the city finally surrendered on 15 August 1585 after enduring the siege for a year.

The military inundations carried out by the States Army before the fall of Antwerp failed to have the desired effect, but there were some unintended consequences which benefited the States forces. As a weapon the flooding had failed, but it had also helped establish an effective defensive zone along the coast of northern Flanders. The flood waters had been more powerful than originally anticipated, and washed away around 10,000 hectares of productive farmland. The force of the currents and their scouring made the repair of some of the sea dikes nearly impossible. Under the direction of the William of Orange's second son, Maurice of Nassau, the rebels followed up on this advantage with the capture of Axel with little difficulty. As this was one of Maurice's first military feats, it is interesting that he showed no hesitation to cut the

¹³ RSG 1584, 421-437, 31 July – 2 September 1584.

¹⁴ De Kraker, "Overgang van Axel," 168-169.

¹⁵ Duffy, *Siege*, 79.

nearby dikes and prevent the city from receiving any reinforcements. His actions demonstrate his faith in strategic floods as a useful military tactic, and the fact that they took place in Flanders removed the adverse political consequences.

This latest round of inundations served to create a provisional water barrier which defended both the States Army's defenses at Terneuzen and Axel as the two towns became only accessible via water. Flooding the lands made for a durable defensive perimeter that the Spanish struggled to breach. Zeeland took control of the two towns in order to arrange their governments and military defenses, since they had already been administering the former for several years and were better positioned to help safeguard the area. Two decades later after Maurice's capture of Sluis in 1604, this water barrier extended almost the entirety of the northern coast of Flanders, from Axel and Terneuzen in the east to Sluis, IJzendijk and Aardenburg in the west.¹⁶

In many ways the fall of Antwerp meant the collapse of the States of Holland's war efforts in Flanders and Brabant except for the northern fringes of these two provinces. The military inundations failed to break up the siege of Antwerp, but from Holland's perspective it was little ventured, little gained. The States of Holland sent plenty of money south, but its investment in terms of military personnel was tepid and its priorities lay elsewhere. As Tracy observed, "In sum, while Parma concentrated on Flanders and Brabant, Holland focused on defending positions in Utrecht, Overijssel, and Gelderland, [to the east] on the rivers along with Holland might be invaded."¹⁷ Similar to the situation in Holland in the 1570's, the floods were a more convenient alternative to traditional military campaigns and maneuvers. Stated differently, the military inundations in the "foreign" province of Flanders offered all the military advantages

¹⁶ De Kraker, "Overgang van Axel," 168-169; De Kraker, "Zeeuws-Vlaanderen," 35-36.

¹⁷ Tracy, *Founding*, 241.

associated with tactical flooding and none of the political downsides. Whether the inundations succeeded or failed, it was up to the States of Flanders, not Holland, to clean up the mess.

The Meierij, Scorched-Earth campaigns, and further inundations

The States of Holland and the States Army moved away from inundations and began using fire to secure their strategic objectives along the eastern front, in the provinces of Friesland, Gelderland, Groningen, Overijssel and Brabant. Here, the goal was to prevent local populations from providing aid to Spanish forces. This approach produced varying degrees of success. In Overijssel the States Army had to abandon the practice, while in the Meierij, the district surrounding the Spanish held city of 's-Hertogenbosch, suffered from repeated fires. When the scorched-earth failed to produce the desired results the States Army began instilling discipline in their forces in the Meierij. The fires had not scared the inhabitants of the Meierij into submission, so the States hoped that a more orderly and disciplined army might bring them over to their side. Neither scorched-earth campaigns nor well-behaved military brought the region over to the States' side, so when the town of 's-Hertogenbosch needed capturing in 1629 the States Army implemented inundations on a massive scale.

Surprisingly, the resolutions in the States General and States of Holland which authorized the burning and plundering in these regions often coincided with calls for greater discipline and organization in the army. The States wanted an orderly and restrained army as it carried out acts usually associated with mutinous and ill-disciplined forces. Not surprisingly, however, Overijssel was the only province which benefitted from this "discipline" (of not having their land set ablaze) since it had representation in the States General and could argue its case. In 1584, in

response to reports that farmers in Overijssel had aided Spanish forces the States Army adopted a scorched-earth tactic as punishment. Shortly thereafter, the province issued formal complaints in the States General regarding this “misunderstanding” and the resulting destruction of land. The States General then prohibited the use of scorched-earth tactics in any lands in which fell under its jurisdiction.¹⁸

Since the Spanish remained a threat to Overijssel, the States Army continued to use scorched-earth tactics, but sparingly because of the hostility they provoked. The criticisms reached a crescendo when the nobility complained that friendly soldiers in the area had done more damage to the province than the Spanish, or the Turks, would have ever done.¹⁹ In actuality, however, the States were restrained and limited their burning to a small area around the town of Zutphen.²⁰ Overijssel escaped the worst of the destruction.

The Meierij in Brabant, on the other hand, had no political representation in the States General until much later when it became part of the Generality lands, and because of this fact it endured a tremendous degree of suffering and devastation. The destruction here was not happenstance, but rather a calculated maneuver on the part of the States of Holland and States General. The town of ‘s-Hertogenbosch served as the most important and powerful city in the Meierij district, but it had reconciled with Parma almost immediately after the Pacification of Ghent ended.

This development meant that the southeastern corner of Holland and the States General’s defenses were compromised. Almost immediately the States wrote to the magistrates of nearby

¹⁸ RSG 1583-1584, 375-377, 15-20 February 1584.

¹⁹ RSG 1583-1584, 449, 28 November 1584.

²⁰ ‘t Hart, *Dutch Wars*, 108.

Gorcum about stopping the Dieze River and flooding the area around 's-Hertogenbosch. They also considered sinking ships to help disrupt the cities trade and communication.²¹ The flooding and disruption of trade appeared to have had little effect.

Over the next few years the local inhabitants experienced a nearly endless succession of lawful and unlawful plundering. In 1581 the States forces began looting the area on official orders, followed by mutinous States Army soldiers from nearby areas. The town of 's-Hertogenbosch attempted to raise its own forces to protect the area, but they intended to pay for it with taxes raised in the Meierij. Once it became apparent that the rural populations had no more money to give, the soldiers from 's-Hertogenbosch began robbing the area they were supposed to protect.²²

By 1583 the States General decided that the pillaging the Meierij was not achieving the desired effects and took aim at the economic foundation of the area. This round of fighting was more targeted and ultimately more destructive. A resolution in the States General noted that any villages which fed or helped the enemy should be “devastated, destroyed, and burnt.”²³ The States would keep up this pressure throughout the decade as a few years later the States will continue “with the devastation and burning of all places, houses and villages” necessary to secure their objectives. Thirty or forty villages, as well as the cities of Helmond and Eindhoven, were burnt to the ground.²⁴

²¹ RSH 1580, 89-119, 16 May 1580-11 August 1580.

²² 't Hart, *Dutch Wars*, 108-110.

²³ RSG, 1583-1584, 419, 21 July 1584.

²⁴ RSH 1587, 170-186, 23 June – 9 July 1587; 't Hart, *Dutch Wars*, 110-111.

From a military and strategic perspective the scorched-earth policies in the Meierij accomplished little beyond the widespread depopulation of the area. The town of 's-Hertogenbosch continued to get supplies by river and remained a threat to Holland and its allies. In response, Maurice and the States changed their tactics in 1588, and attempted to abide by the rules of war. Armies were instructed to purchase their supplies and could only lodge in a village for a single night. The States forces maintained these standards for the most part and only violated these rules during prolonged sieges.²⁵ Perhaps a softer touch could win over the Meierij if not the town.

The fire and water approach achieved mixed results in terms of strategic importance, but from the States of Holland perspective the most important consideration is that the maneuvers occurred in other provinces. The strategic floods during the siege of Antwerp failed to save the city and put large sections of the coast of northern Flanders under water permanently. Fortunately, from the States' perspective, the inundations did not drown the land entirely, but isolated the States Army's positions in Axel and Terneuzen, improving their defense. The use of fire in the Meierij achieved little beyond introducing widespread misery and suffering to the area. The plundering and scorched-earth tactics were intended to bring the town of 's-Hertogenbosch to heel. No matter the results, it was up to the people living in Flanders and Brabant to deal with the aftermath.

²⁵ 't Hart, *Dutch Wars*, 112-113.

Fortifications

During and after the Pacification of Ghent the States Army did well to shift the front lines of warfare away from Holland and into the provinces of Flanders and Brabant in the south, and into allied provinces in the east. Their goal then became to keep the situation that way, which could best be accomplished through the construction and improvement of fortifications. This plan required a great deal of adaptation and ingenuity on the part of the Dutch fortification engineers; but harmonizing the flood protection with military fortifications could greatly improve a town's defense.

This section provides an examination of the theoretical and practical developments of fortification design in the Low Countries. In terms of theory, the best practices of the time came from Italian engineers who argued that fortifications should be built according to idealized designs. These ideas came to the Low Countries before the Revolt, but never established roots in Holland and the other provinces included in the Union of Utrecht. Instead, the “Old Netherlandish style of Fortifications” that emerged during the Revolt adapted parts of the Italian theories to the swampy geographic conditions of the Low Countries.

Fortification building was another element in the militarization of the landscape during the Revolt. Unlike the inundations which damaged and destroyed dikes, sluices, and other devices of flood protection, the fortification involved harmoniously fitting the military defenses within the water-management infrastructure. An effective fortification needed to provide both environment and military protection, saving its inhabitants from flooding and enemy troops. In this regard, the fortification systems which emerged during the Revolt rested on synthesis and the integration of new fortifications into existing flood defenses. The two best-known military

engineers from the period, Adrian Anthonisz (1541-1620) and Simon Stevin (1548-1620), knew this fact well and utilized their background in water management to blend environmental considerations with military ones. In terms of practical considerations, the section closes with a discussion of the fortifications at Gorcum, Naarden, and Willemstad. Each of these projects encountered differing levels of complexity integrating them within the flood defenses.

For most of the sixteenth century Italy was the center of fortification innovation. The Italians developed a number of defensive designs to cope with the new pattern of warfare resulting from the introduction of gunpowder. These early iterations focused on theory rather than practice, with many of the treatises beginning with a lengthy exposition on geometry. The underlying premise of the new style of fortifications was to create situations where the defenders could direct their fire at the enemy's flank as they approached the walls. Enfilade fire, as it was known, was much more effective than fire directed at front of an enemy assault. In order to achieve enfilade fire, fortification were designed with firing angles in mind and ensuring that there were no "dead zones," areas which could not be targeted with artillery. Italian engineers came to value the idea of "modular repetitiveness" and the importance of bastions to provide the necessary platform for defensive artillery.²⁶ By the mid-sixteenth century these were combined with the construction of pentagonal citadels which were intended to both dominate the surrounding region and hold the local populace in check.

The introduction of Italian fortifications in the Low Countries began in 1540 when the Habsburg ruler Charles V decided to update the defenses of Antwerp. From this date until the Twelve Years Truce in 1609, no less than sixty different Italian engineers plied their trade in the area. For the most part Holland remained unaffected, for a variety of reasons. Initially the work

²⁶ Martha Pollak, *Cities at War in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 10.

focused on the southern provinces since Charles wanted to shore up his defenses along the French border. Additionally, most of the knowledge only passed by word of mouth or through fractional sources such as manuscripts and drawings, as opposed to formal treatises and publications. Furthermore, the Italian engineers struggled to construct their fortifications based on their preferred method of perfect geometry and the Renaissance notion of the “ideal city,” and instead had to be more adaptable in their approach.²⁷

While the Dutch borrowed a number of innovations from the Italians, such as the effectiveness of the bastions, they developed their own “Old Netherlandish System of fortification.” According to the military historian Olaf van Nimwegen, the chief characteristics of this system were, “bastions set at an interval equivalent to the range of a musket shot – 300 paces or 225 meters – a *fausse-braye*, a wet ditch with ravelins, a continuous covered way along the outer edge of the ditch, and hornworks.”²⁸ This system differed from the Italian designs in two significant respects. First, the Dutch used earth to build their fortifications as it was cheaper and easier to find than the stone used by the Italians. Second, they used wet ditches to surround the fortifications which suited the high water table of many areas in the Low Countries.

²⁷ Charles van den Heuvel, *‘Papiere Bolwercken’: De introductie van de Italiaanse stede-en vestingbouw in de Nederlanden (1540-1609) en het gebruik van tekeningen* (Alphen aan den Rijn: Canaletto, 1991), 225-228. As Pollak notes, the competition between designs based on geometric perfection and practical realities dominated fortress building throughout the early modern period, see Pollak, *Cities at War*.

²⁸ Van Nimwegen, *The Dutch Army*, 135. The *fausse-bray*, raveline, and hornwork are all defenses which lie outside of the main fortification and help to provide depth to the defenses. A *fausse-bray* is a defensive wall, a raveline is a triangular fortification, and a hornwork is a hornshaped defense.

Most historians mention these discrepancies with little comment.²⁹ The inclusion of these fortifications systems within the existing water management networks of the Low Countries, however, required considerable adaption and ingenuity. Not only did the new defenses have to protect against an enemy attack, they also had to protect against flooding. Integrating military defenses into flood defenses was a complicated affair. For instance, the city of Edam, located north of Amsterdam, had numerous problems with its soil quality. During the construction of its new fortifications 1585 the soil consistently washed away, meaning that the town's defenses were lower than the adjoining dikes. If an enemy controlled the dikes around the town, they had the high ground and could fire down into the city. In 1586 they resolved the soil erosion and elevated the town's defenses to the same height as the dikes.³⁰ The town of Oudewater, in southeastern Holland, had recovered relatively quickly from the Spanish massacre in 1575 and were given new defenses as early as 1585.³¹ The project required a significant modification to the city's waterways and adjoining rivers, which were only undertaken after prolonged negotiations between the States of Holland and the villages surrounding Oudewater.³² Brill, conversely, had attempted to improve its defenses since the first years of the Revolt yet still encountered problems. By 1586 the city complained of its debts

²⁹ P.C. Hoof mentions them briefly, but focuses rather on how the bastions attached to the walls, see P.C. Hoof, "Fortifications in the Netherlands (c. 1500-1940)," *Revue d'Histoire Militaire* 58 (1974), 99-126. Duffy provides a salient account of the progression of Dutch defenses and their increasing intricacy, but focuses much more on the earthen fortifications, see Duffy, *Siege*, 90-93. Pollak barely mentions it at all despite ample discussion of the Dutch practices in siege warfare and fortification; see Pollak, *Cities at War*.

³⁰ RSH 1585, 178, 14 March 1585; RSH 1586, 367-70, 26 August – 11 October 1586.

³¹ Kuijpers, "The Oudewater Massacre in 1575," 190-204.

³² RSH 1585,330-668, 6 July -2 November 1585; RSH 1586, 367-370, 26 August – 11 October 1586; RSH 1587, 156-218, 29 May – 11 August 1587.

from maintaining its dike and building new fortifications. Despite the money which Brill had already paid they still required two new bastions by the harbor and were having issues with leaking sluices.³³ Nearly every town which received new fortifications also required modification of its water-management infrastructure to some degree (See Fortress Comparison Chart below).

Clearly combining flood defenses with fortifications required considerable ingenuity and fortification engineers with a background in water management. The two most important engineers during this period, Adrian Anthonisz and Simon Stevin highlight the importance of this background. Anthonisz was the most important figure in the development of the Old Netherlandish system, working on no less than twenty-nine different fortifications for the States of Holland and the States General. Stevin appears to have participated in fewer projects but provided the theoretical underpinning for the Old Netherlandish system. In short, Anthonisz was practical while Stevin was theoretical, but each contributed a great deal to fortifications and the use of water for defense.

Anthonisz had a thorough understanding of water-management practices before the outbreak of the Revolt. Anthonisz' family background most likely put him on this track, as his father helped with the reclamation of the Zijpe polder in the Northern Quarter of Holland. By 1566 Adrian had carried out a number of survey projects, and in 1568 the Court of Holland appointed him as one of their surveyors because of the quality of maps. Two years later the Rijnland water board also called on his services. In other words, by the time of the Revolt he was already skilled in the arts of surveying, dike construction, and reclamation.

³³ RSH 1586, 211-384, 15 May – 11 October 1586.

Fortification comparison table: Details the extensive work required to fit defenses into existing water-management systems

26 August 1586

Location	Recommendations	Cost (in pounds)
Workum	Bastions, bolwerks, higher walls, and storage for gun powder/ammunition	Not listed
Werkendam	Sconce	2,000
Gorinchem	Not listed	12,000
Schoonhoven	Rebuild broken walls, breastwork along the Ijsell, haven and dike repair work, and two sconces	5,800
Oudewater	Repair sunken wall, work with surrounding villages and dike count to heighten and repair sections of the Ijsell dike. (In the case of dispute with dike count over the Ijsell dike, the fortifications will receive priority)	1,900
Woerden	Not listed specifically, but Anthonisz already developed a plan and is to coordinate their construction with Leiden	3,500
Muiden	Build up the west side defenses	5,000
Naarden	Stone bridge along one of the walls, filled with dirt underneath to complete the breastwork, and the adjustment of part of the dike to deepen the canal	1,900 (provided by Amsterdam)
Medemblik	Change and enlarge the western bolwerk through the demolition of several houses, a mill, and a smaller bolwerk	6,000
Brill	Construct two small forts by the haven, repair fallen walls and breastwork, repair sluices which are not allowing the passage of water	1,500
Heusden	Repair part of fallen bolwerk	6,000
Louvestein	“Deepen” the defenses with a counterscarp	Not listed
Geertruidenberg	Rebuild fallen walls	2,200
Edam	Elevate the bolwerk to the height of the dike along the south side of the city	1,500
Moninkdam	Palework along the waterside of the fortifications and rebuild fallen walls	Not listed
Klundert	Broaden the walls all along the waterway and construct the breastwork (This sufficed for the moment, but they note further improvements will still be required)	1,300
Thiel	Anthonisz needs to visit the town before developing plans	Not Listed

11 May 1588

Location	Recommendations	Cost (Guilders)
Woudrichem	Palisades on east wall which was damaged by the Maas when the dike broke, Haven improvements, and redirecting part of the river	2,400
Werkendam	A sponce and a palisade with more housing for the soldiers	300
Gorinchem	New walls, as well as unlisted works already agreed upon by the city and the States of Holland	6,000
Schoonhoven	Elevate the walls along the haven and improve the breastwork,	1,500
Oudewater	Breastwork between the watermill and the Waterport, and place a breastwork in one of the long walls	25,000
Woerden	A bolwerk	4,000
Muiden	Elevated the dike and complete the city walls in agreement with most recent plans, and place a bolwerk along each side of the city running with the Liet-dike	8,000
Gouda	Many places have no fortification, rebuild fallen walls, and elevate the them along with the bolwerks	1,000
Rotterdam	Repair the walls	1,500
Schiedam	Not listed	800
Weesp	Two small bolwerks, a sponce outside the city, and improve the dike	2,500
Louvestein	The walls have fallen and the canal filled with sand, recommend building new defenses outside of the existing ones and rebuilding them is not practical	4,000
Hoorne	In a sober state and would be unable to sustain an enemy attack	4,000
Enkhuizen	Also in a sober state	5,000
Maaslandsluis	Rebuild fallen walls to protect against the scouring of the Maas	1500
Bommende	Deepen the wet ditch and improve the walls (Considered a priority)	4,000
Delfshaven	Not listed	3,000

Source: RSH 1586, 367-370, 26 August – 11 October 1586; RSH 1588, 145-156, 11 May 1588

When fighting began in 1572 in Holland, Anthonisz assisted with the improvement of the fortifications for his native city of Alkmaar. He started out on a commission to appraise the value of houses which needed demolished for the new defenses, but by the end of the short siege he was given full authority over the city's fortifications. His exploits in Alkmaar soon earned him the opportunity to ply his trade elsewhere.

Nearly all of Anthonisz' fortifications involved the practical matter of marrying water-management needs with military concerns. In 1575 and 1576 he oversaw defensive works in cities and towns across and the Northern Quarter. In the city of Hoorn he worked on combining the new fortifications with the harbor improvements. In 1577 he began coordinating the complicated fortifications at Naarden, east of Amsterdam (see below). He worked extensively on the fortifications at Schoonhoven in southern Holland in 1582 to ensure the new wet ditches which drew in water from the Lek river did not undermine the city's walls. By 1584, he had distinguished himself enough that the States of Holland and Utrecht named him the superintendent of fortifications for Holland, which increased his already taxing work load. This was the same year that he also began work on the defenses at Willemstad (see below).³⁴

Like Anthonisz, Simon Stevin had an accomplished background in water management activities, which he used to help develop the theoretical underpinning of the Old Netherlandish system of fortifications and develop methods in which fortifications could use water to improve their defenses. Stevin had considerable hands-on experience in water-management designs, but his lasting achievements were in his ability to abstract and systematize this knowledge so that he could share it with others. For instance, in 1586 he published "The Principles of weight in water," which was the first serious advancement in hydrostatics since Archimedes, and also

³⁴ Frans Westra, *Nederlandse Ingenieurs en de fortificatiewerken in het eerste tijdperk van de Tachtigjarige Oorlog* (Alphen aan den Rijn: Canaletto, 1992), 36-42.

published a number of works on the best cogs and staves for use in windmills. He developed the *molengang*, a system for the systematic drainage of lakes with water-lifting mills working in tandem. He received a patent for this invention in 1589, but never got the opportunity to use it. The first documented case of its use was in 1609, after his patent expired, by the famous reclamation expert Jan Adriansz Leeghwater. After this point the use of the *molengang* helped with the widespread land reclamation in Holland throughout the early seventeenth century.

Stevin played a vital role in the development of the Old Netherlandish system despite the fact that he only worked on a limited number of actual fortifications. His major accomplishment was in the systematization and dissemination of Anthonisz's ideas and the Old Netherlandish system. Although Anthonisz accomplished a great deal in terms of improving the quality and quantity of fortifications in the young Republic, he did little in terms of spreading his ideas and techniques beyond the small cadre of fellow military engineers with whom he worked.

Stevin, conversely, was superb at summarizing and systematizing the existing practices for dissemination to a wider audience. This approach is clearly evident in his 1594 work *The Art of Fortification*, which provides a mathematical foundation for the development and construction of fortresses. This work served as the textbook for fortifications, beginning with definitions for the twenty-one components of a fortress, then moving onto the mathematical premises for an ideal fortification, before ending with discussion of debates within the field, and how to adapt ideal designs to particular locations. In general, his maxim for dealing with these issues was that the engineer should attempt to make the fortifications as close to the ideal design as possible.³⁵

³⁵ Simon Stevin, "De Sterctenbouwing" in *The Art of War* ed. Ernst Crone, E.J. Dijksterhuis, R.J. Forbes, M. G. J. Minnaert, and A. Pannekoek, vol. 4 of *The Principal Works of Simon Stevin*, (Amsterdam: C.V. Swets & Zeitlinger, 1964): 191-231

Stevin's ideas regarding water's use in defenses is best seen in his work, *New Manner of Fortifications through a pivoted sluice lock*, published in 1617. In this pamphlet he laid out how his new sluice design could help improve fortifications through twelve different hypothetical examples. The chief virtue of his design was that because of its robust and multifunctional construction it could better regulate the water level in the wet ditches surrounding towns and fortifications. It should be noted here that he never succeeded in getting his sluice built, but it still provides a good understanding for Stevin's views on water defenses.

Three characteristics define Stevin's views on water defenses: completeness, integration, and accessibility. Completeness meant that the wet ditch needed to surround the fortification completely. Any shallow or silted up sections of the wet ditches undermined the defenses entirely. Integration involved the incorporating the defenses into the existing water-management system, or conversely, adapting geographic conditions to suit the fortifications. He included several examples of how this could be achieved. For instance, if the water source for the wet ditch was a small river which could not always provide the necessary quantities of water there were a number of different options. The town could build sluices along the river to store water, which could then be released as needed. Alternately, the town could create a reservoir inside the defenses which could pump water into the wet ditch using a water-lifting mill. Furthermore, in terms of integration, the wet ditch should complement the other forms of defense. For example, he notes the great advantages of constructing a ravelin adjacent to the sluices and the water-lifting mills, as each component protects the other. The wet water-lifting mill keeps the wet ditch full, the wet ditch prevents enemies from approaching the ravelin, the ravelin provides cover for the water-lifting mill. The integrated system is a harmonious one. The final characteristic is

accessibility. By this, Stevin meant that the wet ditch could also allow ships to reach the fortified town. The area adjacent to the sluice essentially formed a harbor (See Figure 8).³⁶

Stevin provided theoretical description of the possible uses of water in defenses. The fortifications constructed at the towns of Gorinchem, Naarden, and Willemstad provide succinct examples of the range of difficulties and the potential which these fortifications offered. These three towns occupied the corners of Holland's defensive land perimeter. Naarden was the northeastern corner, Gorinchem lay directly south, occupying the southeastern corner. Willemstad, situated in former Brabant lands covered the extreme southwest corner, with the rest of Holland bordering a body of water either the North Sea or the Zuiderzee. Gorinchem was still in a precarious position environmentally when fortification work began which complicated and delayed the project considerably. The area around Naarden was in better shape ecologically but political disputes delayed the construction. Willemstad did not suffer from any of these difficulties, allowing the military engineers to build an ideal fortification.

The many military inundations during the first years of fighting in Holland hit the town of Gorinchem hard. The town lay in the southern end of the Ablasserwaard along the Merwede river. By 1582 one official in a nearby village complained that the whole water-management infrastructure there was still unusable as a result of inundations related to the relief of Leiden eight years prior. The following year there were reports that some dikes had still not been repaired, a situation which became worse when heavy storms hit the area during the fall.³⁷

³⁶ Simon Stevin, "Nieuwe Maniere van Stercktebou door Spilsluysen" in *Engineering ed.* Ernst Crone, E.J. Dijksterhuis, R.J. Forbes, M. G. J. Minnaert, and A. Pannekoek, vol. 5 of *The Principal Works of Simon Stevin*, (Amsterdam: C.V. Swets & Zeitlinger, 1966), 83–195.

³⁷ Vermeersch, "Oorlog, steden, en staatsvorming," 44-45.

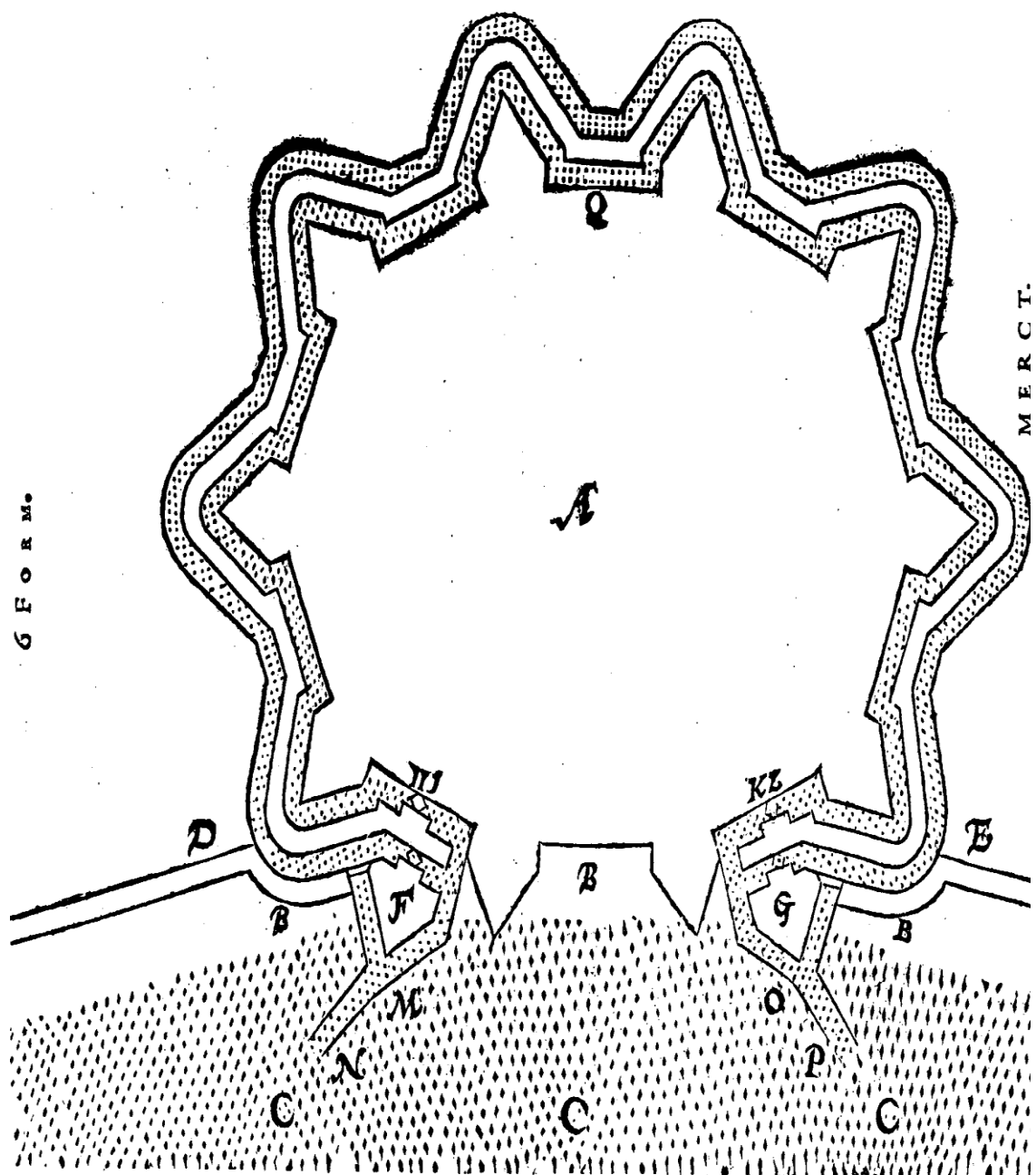


Figure 8: Simon Stevin's Idea fortification system. Stevin, *Nieuwe Maniere*, 146. This image depicts one of Stevin's more elaborate fortifications designs with his sluice. The fortified town (A) has a number of integrated defenses. The ravelines (F and G) lie in front of the wet ditches and overlook the two harbors (NM and OP). The sluices (HI and KL) lie in both sets of ditches near a water lifting mill (not pictured). The dikes (D and E) protect the land behind the town from flooding.

The States of Holland named Adrian Anthonisz to oversee the city's fortifications, with work beginning in 1584. Once construction began on the city's defenses the precarious water-management systems in the area hindered the entire project. At the outset Anthonisz discovered that the dikes and sluices in the land of Arkel to the north of the town were in disrepair and needed attention before real work could begin on the fortifications. The situation further deteriorated with a broken dike far to the east in the Bommel region by the city of Nijmegen. The broken dike diverted a great quantity of water from the Waal river towards the Alblasserwaard, which put a great strain on the Dief dike, which protected the entire eastern border of the Alblasserwaard. The damaged dike by Nijmegen essentially began a domino effect of potential flooding westward which threatened Gorinchem and its fortification project.

Maintaining and improving the Dief dike, however, required considerable negotiations involving the town, States of Holland, residents of Arkel, and the Count of Culemborg. The States tried to act as an intermediary and negotiate among these parties but encountered immediate difficulties as it became apparent the Count of Culemborg had numerous problems with the water-management infrastructure in his lands. He had failed to repair the broken dikes in Bommel, had problems with spade-stekens (land abandonment), and needed to build sluices in the Lek dike which protected the northern border of the Alblasserwaard.

In the end it took a concerted intervention on behalf of the States to complete the necessary repairs and complete the fortification project. They sent in Abraham van Almonde to oversee the repairs to the Dief dike. At the same time they promised to help with the construction of two sluices in the Lek Dike. They decided to leave the broken dike by Nijmegen for the time being since it proved to be a nuisance for Spanish forces in the Bommel area. By 1600 the city had a complete set of fortifications, with eleven bastions and a well-regulated wet

ditch after both the States and the town contributed enormous amounts of revenue toward the project. The ecological instability around Gorinchem served to complicate the entire project.³⁸

The fortifications for the city of Naarden demonstrate the political difficulties in these construction projects. Naarden and its surroundings offered the most likely route for an enemy attack on Amsterdam from the Zuider Zee or through Utrecht. For this reason, the area essentially became a hinterland for the powerful city to exert its political muscle and ensure its own environmental and military security.

Amsterdam exhibited this influence most often with the power of the purse strings, using its finances and wealth to secure its ends as evidenced from the negotiations discussed in the previous chapter. For example, in 1584 the city paid a considerable amount for new sluices to help drainage excess water from the Naarden lake.³⁹ Over the next several years Amsterdam came to increasingly finance construction projects near Naarden and Muiden as disputes over the right to tax residents at the Kever dike located in between the two cities. The litigations dragged on for several years which affected their revenues, meaning that when funds were short Amsterdam would step in and resolve the situation.⁴⁰

Beginning in 1585 the States of Holland began fearing a possible invasion by Spanish forces from the east via the Zuiderzee or Utrecht. To protect their eastern border they extended Amsterdam's authority over the area putting the city in charge of coordinating with Adrian Anthonisz for all the fortifications to the east in Naarden, Muiden, and Weesp. In 1586 they decided that these fortifications still required further integration into the existing water systems.

³⁸ Vermeersch, "Oorlog, steden en staatsvorming," 120; RSH 1587, 240-260, 3 September 1587-19 September 1587.

³⁹ RSH 1584, 245-6, 18 April 1584.

⁴⁰ RSH 1585, 447-680, 31 July -9 November 1585; RSH 1589, 175-177, 13 July 1589.

Naarden in particular needed a new stone sluice, deeper canals, and improved walls. Amsterdam again took the lead in arranging the finances for the work and coordinating with Anthonisz.

The fortification at Naarden proved massive, dwarfing the smaller city located inside of it. This design caused problems as previously communal lands were incorporated into the defenses, stretching from the city towards the nearby Naarden lake. There were talks about having Naarden take sixty morgens of land to divide among the poor to compensate them for their loss. These ultimately stalled, and when the fear of an invasion became more pressing the States of Holland had Anthonisz work with Amsterdam's regents to buy up the land so the fortification could finally be completed, and the area could once again be "fruitful." When Muiden needed supplies for repairs to the palisades and other defenses Anthonisz was ordered to get supplies directly from Amsterdam. The political issues complicated the defenses in this area, and it was only Amsterdam's financial and political sway that overcame the challenges.⁴¹

The fortifications at Willemstad demonstrate the possibilities when the water-management and political issues were in better alignment, serving as "one of the finest examples of fortress construction in the 'Old Netherlandish Style.'"⁴² Originally the city was named Rugenhil and was one of villages which Paulus Buys helped secure for Holland from Brabant as discussed in the previous chapter. His depiction of the land as virgin land was appropriate as it had been reclaimed in the course of the sixteenth century. The fact that it took considerable work to build the dikes and drain the water from the land meant that the new settlements exhibited a clear organization from the outset. This circumstance, coupled with the fact that

⁴¹ RSH 1584, 245-246, 18 April 1584; RSH 1585, 129-680, 20 February- 9 November 1585; RSH 1586, 401-451, 26 August – 9 December; RSH 1588, 92-111, 7 April 1588.

⁴² Hoof, "Fortifications in the Netherlands," 101.

there was only a small population in the town and few pre-existing structures to deal with, meant that the Dutch could build fortifications at Willemstad based on idealized designs.

Plans for the fortification began as early as 1583 and within two years Anthonisz was making plans for completing the work. The project seems to have proceeded rather quickly due to the lack of any environmental or political complications. Holland had extended its authority of the area rather heavy handedly, but also had conducted thorough assessments of the conditions of the water-management structure. This state of affairs meant that Holland would experience very little political opposition from the local residents (and the opposition that did exist was not recognized as it was essentially considered conquered territory). Additionally, the military engineers could build the fortification based on the most idealized plans and seamlessly integrate them into the water management network. The fact that the final design was almost identical to the original plan attests to the relatively trouble-free process of the construction project (see figures 9 and 10).

Waterlines

At the same time that fortification engineers were busy integrating individual defenses into local water-management systems, military planners also began thinking about using water more expansively. This approach entailed the inundation of an entire region with the express purpose to prevent an enemy attack. The genesis of this idea is unclear, but there were numerous examples from which the Dutch could draw inspiration such in those in the Northern Quarter and the siege of Antwerp. What is clear is that military planners began thinking about



Figure 9: Plan for the defenses of Willemstad. Westra, *Bouwers van Sterke Werken*, 10. Plans drawn in 1583 by fortification engineer Abraham Andriessen.

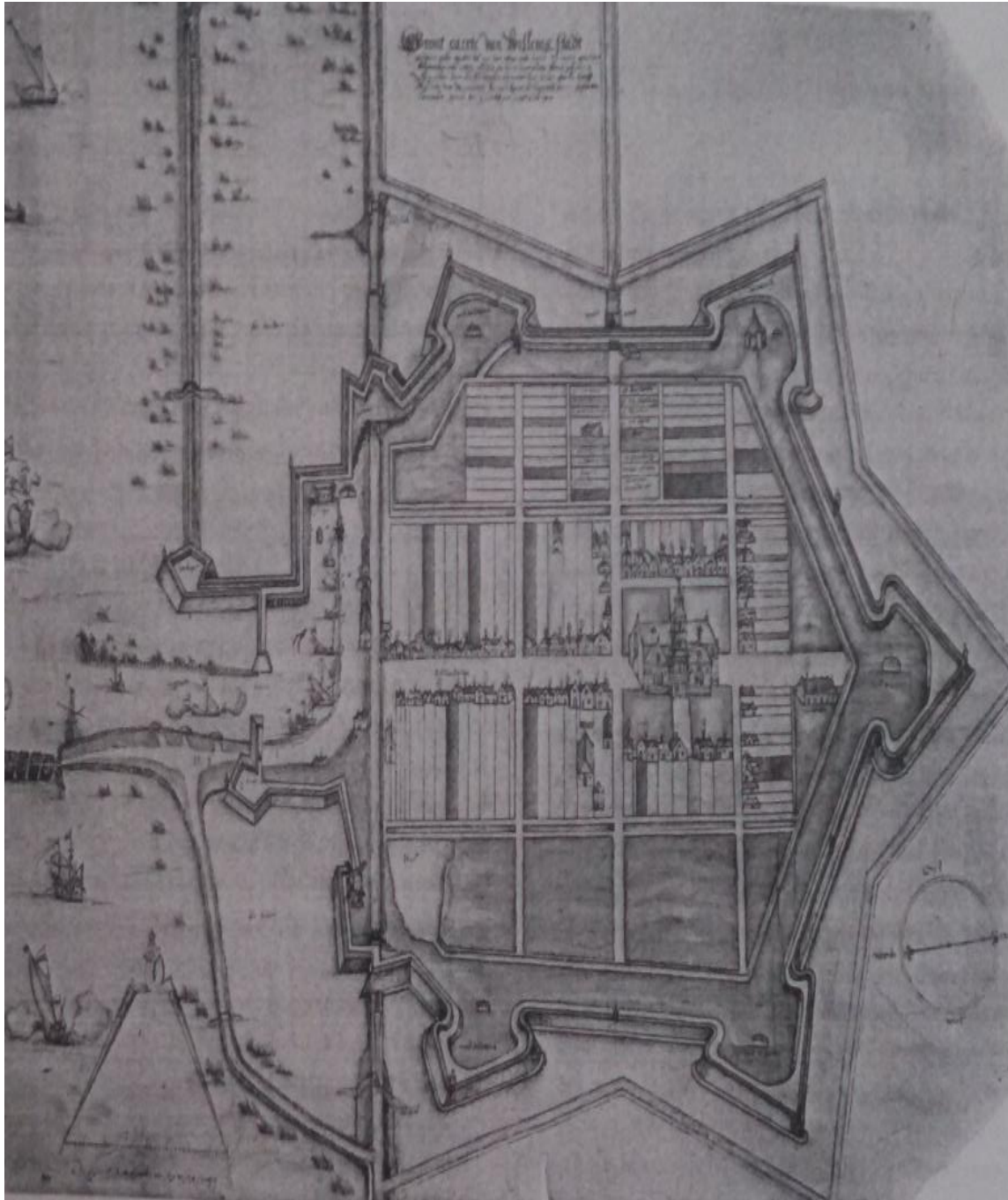


Figure 10: Actual defenses of Willemstad. Van de Ven, *Mand-made Lowlands*, 131.

how to carry out the inundations systematically, as evidenced in the example of the fortifications at the town of Werkendam near the border to the province of Brabant. By 1589, both the States of Holland and Utrecht had developed formal plans for a water line to protect against a possible Spanish invasion from the Zuiderzee. The proposal “For the defense of the Nether-sticht and Holland” was the first formal articulation of a waterline.⁴³ The plan called for the systematic inundations along the Holland-Utrecht border.

The origin of the waterline has proven difficult for historians to pinpoint with any certainty. Wim Klinkert dates a provisional waterline to shortly after the relief of Leiden, when the Sea Beggar leader Diederik Sonoy organized a series of inundations across the Northern Quarter in 1575. In that year the rebels learned of a massive Spanish invasion to capture Alkmaar. The “secret” plan had been leaked, allowing the Prince to advise Sonoy to take the necessary precautions. In place of man-power Sonoy used water-power, creating a wall of floods from Petten to Monnickendam, inundating three separate polders. The flood waters stretched across the entire Northern Quarter from east to west and prevented a second siege of Alkmaar.⁴⁴

Adriaan M.J. de Kraker suggests the inundations during the siege of Antwerp could have given Dutch military engineers the idea. Regarding the numerous strategic floods he states, “Moreover, repairs could not be undertaken because of the ongoing war and this soon made the Dutch realize that such a vast flooded area could be useful in the defensive strategy against the Spanish.” According to de Kraaker this area served as an informal water line until special sluices

⁴³ Chris Will, *Sterk Water: de Hollandse Waterlinie* (Utrecht: Matrijs, 2002): 29-30.

⁴⁴ Klinkert, “Water in Oorlog,” 458-463; Van Nierop, *Treason*, 86-88.

were installed to specifically flood polders in times of war. His article does not mention when these sluices were built, but notes that the water line functioned until the year 1800.⁴⁵

Chris Will begins his study of waterlines in 1585 with the little-known defeat of the States army by the village of Amerongen along the Utrecht-Gelderland border. After this defeat the States army opened sluices by Vreeswijk along the Lek river to prevent any further Spanish advances. According to Will this event demonstrated the possibilities of a waterline, even though at that point no concrete plans for the creation of one existed. The first official plan for a waterline began in 1589-90 when Holland and Zeeland felt threatened by a possible Spanish attack coming from the Zuiderzee. As such, both provinces began researching the creation of a defensive line which could inundate large swaths of land to prevent an invasion.⁴⁶

Even if the conception of the waterline cannot be pinpointed, the tactic was part of a broader trend to regulate inundations. In this regard the history of the fortifications and floods around the town of Werkendam along the southern border of Holland are instructive. The fortification lay at the confluence of the Maas, Waal, and Linge rivers. It served as a useful location to monitor traffic along the rivers and prevent enemy advancement along over land from Brabant.

The geographic features of the area made it easy to carry out inundations but difficult to control them. This can be seen in a series of disputes between the nearby cities of Dordrecht and Gorinchem in 1581 over the stoppage of a small river. The former had stopped the river on its own authority because it felt it impinged their river toll revenues, allowing some ships to bypass the city. As these closures threatened to flood the entire region around Werkendam, Gorinchem

⁴⁵ De Kraker, "Flooding Events," 120-3.

⁴⁶ Will, *Sterk Water*, 29-30.

reopened the closures. The disputes lasted well over a year with the States of Holland, the Prince, and the Court of Holland all involved. In the end, the Court sided with Gorinchem since the closures to the small rivers could lead to widespread flooding.⁴⁷

Once it became clear that Antwerp would surrender to the Spanish in 1585, the States of Holland looked to Werkendam to improve its southern defenses. Part of the project involved making adjustments to river dikes which protected the land from flooding. While the changes had not led directly to inundations, it was feared that any break in the new dikes would lead to the widespread abandonment of land around Werkendam. After consulting with Anthonisz and the Gorinchem regents, the States authorized the construction of a supporting embankment to protect the land.⁴⁸ At this point the enemy threat had abated; so with reduced military threats the States of Holland looked to protect the land from environmental damage.

Two years later in 1589 the situation had reversed itself, meaning the States revisited the defenses at Werkendam. The whole eastern frontier, from Nijmegen to the river Ems, was under Spanish control. Along Holland's southern border the situation was little better since the English garrison at nearby Geertruidenberg sold the town to Parma.⁴⁹ A week after the city went over to the Spanish, the cousin of the stadholder Maurice, Philip of Nassau, began overseeing the immediate improvement of the Werkendam defenses. This involved a 10,000-pound payment for completion of the fortification, including the breastwork and crown work for the adjoining dike. The last part of the plan involved inundating the area around the unfinished fortress to

⁴⁷ RSH 1581, 522-560, 7 October- 6 November 1581; RSH 1582, 134-289, 28 March – 16 June 1582; States of Holland to William of Orange, 16 June 1582, De correspondentie van Willem van Oranje nr. 9124.

⁴⁸ RSH 1585, 487-528, 19-29 August 1585; RSH 1587, 112-113, 11 April 1587, 112-113.

⁴⁹ Israel, *Republic*, 241.

create a water barrier, allowing them time to complete the project. Philip of Nassau ordered two to three dike breaches “in order to prevent the arrival of any enemies or riders [cavalry].”

Similar to previous resolutions calling for military inundations, the States of Holland wanted to carry out these floods “to the least damage of the land” and promised that they would pay for the damages.⁵⁰

Interestingly, however, the proposed inundations never took place as debates in the States of Holland about how to carry out the breaches and their effectiveness prevented their implementation. Only two days after the States ordered the dike cuts they wrote to the regents of Gorinchem and Dordrecht, reminding them of the seriousness of the situation. They flatly told the cities that the defense of Werkendam was the best way to prevent an enemy invasion. The States implored the regents to be diligent with the necessary arrangements of labor and material for the fortifications, while also reminding them that they would be “faultless” for the dike breaches as they had been ordered by Philip of Nassau. Philip himself had reservations, although, as his discussions with local residents convinced him that the proposed cuts would not have the desired effects. As the fortification work was progressing rather quickly, Philip decided not to breach the dikes at the present.

Over the next week he continued to research the best plans for the inundations, with the critical issue revolving around the ideal amount of flood water. The proposed cut in the Waal dike, downriver from the nearby city of Woudrichem, would not bring in enough flood water to prevent enemy movements. Conversely, the plan for a breach in the Maas dike, upriver from Woudrichem, would bring in far too much flood waters and damage the fortifications at Werkendam. In the end the inundations never occurred as Anthonisz and Philip continued with

⁵⁰ RSH 1589, 245-265, 17-19 April 1589.

the fortification at Werkendam and the adjoining sponce on the nearby dike. They made it clear, however, that in case of an actual attack they would not hesitate to flood the land.⁵¹

The Werkendam example demonstrates that the States of Holland military planners were interested in systematizing and regulating military inundations. Over the course of the spring and summer of 1589 there were lengthy debates over how best to carry out the inundation. First the States planned to use floods to create a barrier allowing laborers time to finish the fortifications. As the work on the construction progressed well, the discussion then turned to how best to inundate the land. What was the right amount of flood water, and which dike breaches could achieve the desired result?

The Werkendam example is a microcosm of the larger discussions over military inundations and the construction of a water line. The water-management historian G.P. van de Ven provides a clear connection, noting,

Basically the system of the water defense line was very simple. The sluices of innumerable low-lying polders were opened and water was let in, though not too little water, for in that case the enemy troops could wade through. On the other hand not too much water, for then the barrier could be taken with ships.⁵²

This quandary was the same with Werkendam, only instead of worrying about attacks from ships there were fears of damaging the fortifications. The major difference between the two was that while the Werkendam floods were only meant to inundate a small area, the goal of a water line was to create an impassible flood zone across entire regions. Additionally, the waterlines

⁵¹ RSH 1589, 280-451, 2 May – 5 July 1589.

⁵² Van de Ven, *Man-made Lowlands*, 174.

required fortifications to protect the higher elevated positions along dikes and roads that were not flooded.

Around the same time as the debates over Werkendam, Maurice and other military leaders began thinking about constructing a water line along the Holland-Utrecht border. The Spanish victory at Amerongen in 1585 never resulted in a full-fledged invasion of Holland and Utrecht, but it raised alarm bells. When the threat was most acute, as in the spring of 1588, the States of Holland and Utrecht agreed to keep up constant communication and arrange a watch along the Diemer dike and further south near the town of Hinderdam.⁵³

Simultaneously both states began making arrangements for improving the fortifications in the area along with plans for a water line. “For the defense of the Nether-sticht and Holland,” as the plan was known, called for better fortifications all along the Vecht and Vaart rivers and around the city of Utrecht (See Figure 11). It also included plans for systematic floods along the same route. The sluices at the town of Hinderdam, near Naarden, would bring in water from the Zuiderzee from the north while sluices at Vreeswijk could bring in water from the Lek to the south. The waterline never materialized at this point because of disputes between the two provinces over the path of the inundations. Furthermore, military successes elsewhere removed the threat. By 1590 the strategic position of the Holland made the water line unnecessary.⁵⁴

Although the immediate need for a waterline between Holland and Utrecht had passed, the idea that they could use floods in an orderly and systematic fashion for strategic purposes still captivated the imagination of the military thinkers in Holland and its allies. In a final attempt to subdue the city of ‘s-Hertogenbosch and the Meierij in 1629 the new stadholder Frederick Henry

⁵³ RSH 1588, 111, 7 April 1588; RSH 1589, 231-232, 8 April 1589.

⁵⁴ Will, *Sterk Water*, 29-30.

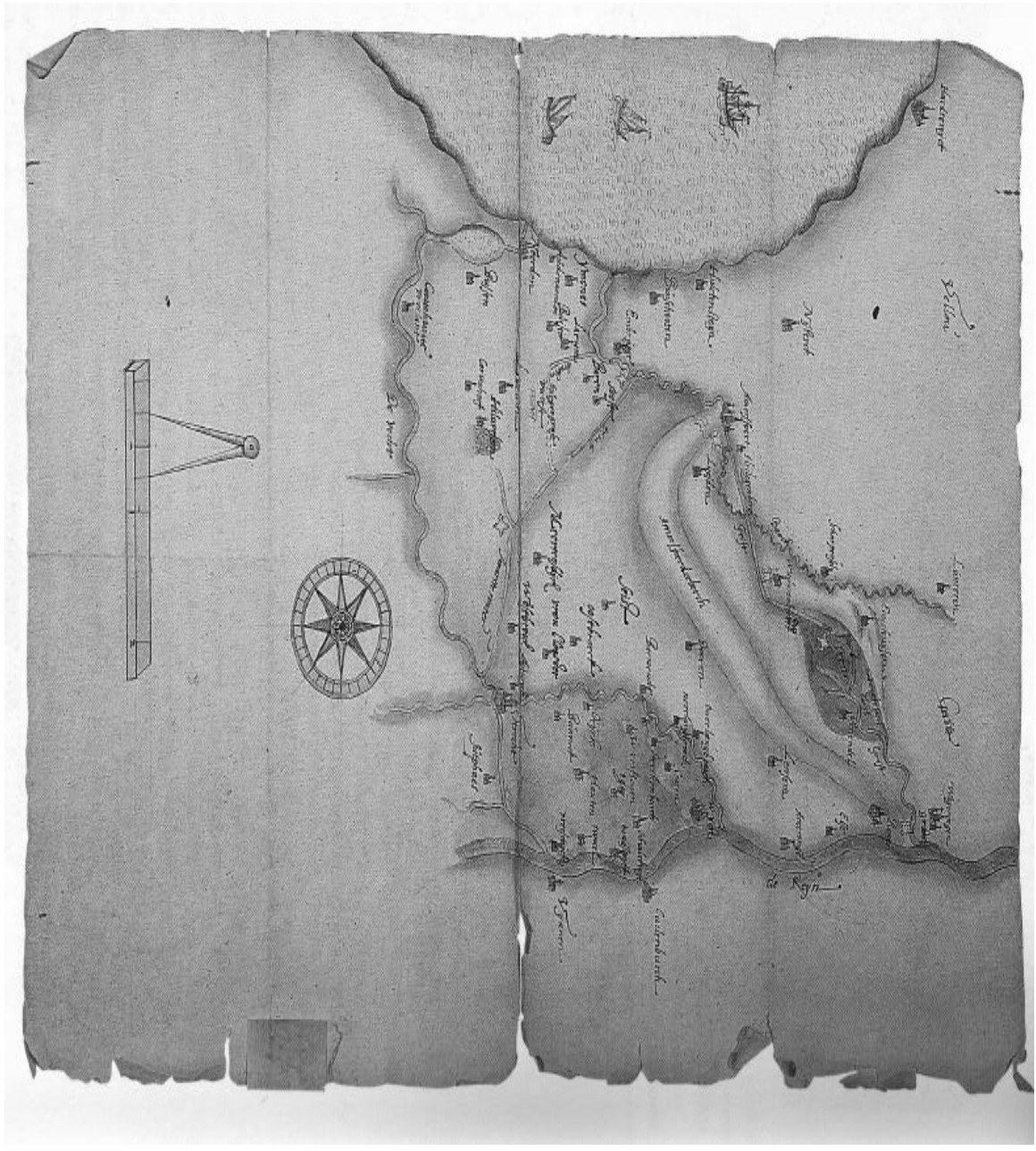


Figure 11: Proposed inundations for 1589 Waterline. Will – Sterk Water, 31. This image shows the flood path for the proposed inundations stretching from the Zuiderzee (top) to the Lek (bottom).

used a water line. During the siege he constructed a massive siege line around the city. In the process he stopped two the Aa and Dommel rivers which flowed into the town. This served two purposes, to reduce the water flowing into the swamps surrounding 's-Hertogenbosch and to create a makeshift water barrier behind the States army, protecting it from an attack from the area. When a Spanish attack directed towards Holland threatened to end the siege he ordered the inundation for the entire region of Altena to the north. Fire in the form of scorched-earth tactics did not defeat 's-Hertogenbosch and the Meierij, water did.⁵⁵ The fires did not bring the local residents to the States' side, nor did a more orderly and disciplined army. The States' expert use of water management finally subdued the city and region.

During the same year, 1629, Frederick Henry and the States of Holland and Utrecht formalized the Old Holland Water line, previously discussed in 1589. According to Marjolein 't Hart it was during this year, 1629, that the famous Holland waterline was created, which involved inundations all along the Holland-Utrecht border. Frederick Henry arranged thousands of pioneers and laborers to carry out the inundations, but again a Spanish withdrawal made the strategic floods unnecessary.

It was not until 1672 that the Dutch would actually utilize the Holland waterline. In this *rampjaar* (disaster year) the French king Louis XIV threatened to conquer the entire Dutch Republic. In response the stadholder William III carried out the inundations which were talked about in 1629. In both years local population conspired to sabotage the inundations. Some farmers constructed unapproved dams while others secretly drained their fields. It was only when William III threatened death penalties that locals complied with the directives to flood their

⁵⁵ 't Hart, *Dutch Wars*, 69-70.

lands.⁵⁶ No matter how much the military planners systematized and regulated the military inundations, they were still floods, and centuries' worth of experience had taught the Dutch that they were something to be avoided.

Conclusion

Rebuilding the poldermodel in Holland proved to be a challenging affair, so when the war resumed attention turned towards maintaining it. The States of Holland developed two clear strategies towards this end. They continued to militarize the landscape for strategic purposes, but with two significant changes. The first involved ensuring the most destructive encounters occurred on “foreign soil,” and the second entailed the development of effective fortifications that protected the land from flooding and the Dutch from military attacks.

Shifting the theater of war to neighboring provinces was hardly a novel concept, but it was effective from Holland's point of view. Militarizing the landscape in nearby Flanders and Brabant offered all the short term military benefits with none of the long term political ramifications. The series of strategic floods during and after the siege of Antwerp were low cost alternatives for Holland that still held out the possibility of saving the city. At the very least, the strategic floods delayed and halted Parma's advance northward. The fact that the inundations were just as environmentally destructive meant little to Holland. The scorched-earth tactics in the Meierij likewise generated considerable misery and destruction. Militarizing the landscape in these ways required less money, and allowed the States to focus on the second approach, fortifications.

⁵⁶ 't Hart, *Dutch Wars*, 69-70.

This tactic involved improving fortifications across Holland and its allied provinces, and integrating these defenses into the existing water-management systems. This process was a complicated one, and it is no surprise that Adrian Anthonisz and Simon Stevin, the two military engineers most responsible for developing the Old Netherland fortification system, were experienced water-management professionals. The defenses at Gorinchem and Naarden demonstrate the political and ecological challenges in such projects. Stevin's idealized designs formulated in *New Manner of Fortifications* and the real-life defenses at Willemstad demonstrated the strength of fortifications which harmoniously combined military defenses with flood defenses. These fortifications served to keep the fighting out of Holland.

Over time military planners also considered the possibility of combining these two approaches with waterlines. These were essentially ready-made floods which could put large swaths of land underwater to prevent enemy passage. Although the origin of the idea has been difficult to pin down, the example of the fortifications and inundations around Werkendam are indicative of the broader trend in regulating and systematizing floods. The best military inundations required just the right amount of water. There were lots of discussion about the use of waterlines, and several instances when the military leaders almost used the maneuver, but it was not until the French invasion in 1672 that it was put to the test.

These two approaches helped to preserve the poldermodel in Holland, exporting the inundations and limiting their damage when they did occur in the province, but the States did their best to avoid testing the strength of the newly rebuilt poldermodel. Within the province, the States were keen not to work with local populations to avoid open conflict. During the fortification work at Gorinchem the States brokered a number of negotiations with the city, the Count of Culemborg, and affected local residents. The States ended up paying for a considerable

portion of the defenses, but the manner in which they conducted the affair limited discord. At the town of Werkendam the military leaders entered into numerous discussions with local residents over how to flood the area in such a way that secured the military objectives and while limiting the environmental destruction. It took considerable work to rebuild the poldermodel, and the military and political leaders were rightly hesitant to jeopardize it.

CONCLUSION

The only recorded resolution for the noon meeting of the States of Holland on 17 May 1583 reads, “Absolutely nothing is resolved.”⁵⁷ The military inundations in the province during the first years of the Dutch Revolt ensured that days such as this one were an anomaly, since the delegates were often busy resolving issues arising from the militarization of the landscape. In many ways these strategic floods tore apart the social fabric of Holland. For centuries those in Holland worked tirelessly to protect the land from flooding. In the process they developed the poldermodel, which promoted discussion, debate, and compromise as the best way to avoid disastrous inundations. During the war these values were discarded in the name of military necessity.

The strategic floods struck a landscape that was already in critical condition. Long-term peat mining and the disastrous All Saints Day Flood in 1570 left the dikes and flood defenses across the province in disrepair. The States of Holland’s pleas for tax waivers and exemptions fell on the deaf ears of their Habsburg rulers, adding to the already growing discontent of many in Holland against their sovereign and his administrators. When fighting broke out in 1572, those who rose up in revolt were seriously outmatched in terms of manpower and organization. This fact made the military inundations such an appealing option in terms of military objectives. During the first four years of fighting in Holland, the rebels repeatedly released flood waters upon the land.

The Pacification of Ghent in 1576 appeared to offer the rebels a reprieve from the burdens resulting from the floods, but the temporary cessation of fighting actually set off a round

⁵⁷ RSH 1583, 159, 17 May 1583. Incidentally, this is my resolution for 17 May 2016, a few days after I graduate.

of divisive political conflicts in Holland. Long standing criticisms over unrepaired dikes, tax collection, and the allocation of the limited funds that were available generated a round of particularistic conflicts where cities looked after their own concerns. Gouda in particular, simply refused to send delegates to the States of Holland until the opening in the Leidschendam was repaired. Individuals with experience in water management such as Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, Paulus Buys, and Abraham van Almonde found solutions to these problems. These figures helped establish a reliable tax base with the *verponding* and allowed cities to extend their influence over their hinterland as seen with Rotterdam and Amsterdam.

When the fighting resumed in 1579 the States of Holland made a concerted effort to push the front line of the conflict onto neighboring provinces. In these locations they pursued a destructive brand of warfare, similar to the style of fighting in the first four years. Whether it was fire or water, what mattered most to Holland is that the destruction occurred elsewhere. Closer to home, military planners and engineers attempted to implement a sense of order and discipline in the inundations. They incorporated the new style of fortifications within the existing dike, sluice, and embankments already in place which greatly improved a town's fortifications. In the waterlines, they tried to create ready-made floods that could hinder and halt enemy's advance.

This dissertation posed the research question: What happens to the poldermodel when polders were intentionally destroyed during the Dutch Revolt? In short, the militarization of the landscape in the form of strategic floods broke the poldermodel. Yet this was not the only consequence of the inundations. As previously noted, these intentional floods struck at the core of Dutch society. For centuries, the Hollanders diligently worked to protect their land from flooding. During the Revolt, the rebel forces violated this tacit rule of Dutch life as they

militarized the landscape and weaponized the flood waters. Is it any wonder that tremors from these events would be felt elsewhere? The range and variety of topics discussed in this dissertation are a result of those tremors. The reverberations of military inundations were felt in domestic politics, financial and taxation matters, fortification designs, and intra-provincial negotiations.

Going into this research, I promised myself that I would let the sources speak for themselves and not try to fit them into some prepackaged argument. I should have been more careful with what I wished. Reading through the Resolutions of the States of Holland and the other sources, there was a cacophony of voices discussing the military inundations. The people of Leiden offered shouts of joy as they saw the waters creep towards their city. Those in Gouda raised their voices in rage, and then fell silent refusing to talk with the other rebellious cities. Politicians like Johan van Oldenbarnevelt spoke the language of water management, and slowly helped the cities of Holland learn how to once again sing in relative harmony. Others, like Simon Stevin and Adrian Anthonisz simply spoke in terms of rationalization and systematization, about how those in Holland could best utilize water for military purposes.

While there is a plethora of voices calling out from the historical source material, there is a distinct shortage of scholars today willing to listen. Individuals like myself, who stake their claim at the intersection of environmental history boulevard and military history avenue, are all too few. This dissertation demonstrates that there are numerous paths of investigation which sadly remain untraveled. The militarization of the landscape was not limited to Holland in the late sixteenth century. Wars stretched all across Europe in the early modern period, yet we know surprisingly little about how the environment impacted, and was impacted by these events. So much of the scholarly attention has focused on the monetary colors of gold and silver in these

encounters, but there is a good case for re-examining warfare through an environmental green lens, or in the case of Holland, a watery blue one.

This type of research is vital for a number of reasons. First, it fills in a sizeable lacuna within the existing scholarship. Military history works usually highlight the flood's impact in determining the victor of a given encounter, while environmental historians have been slow to evaluate military issues. In many other works, the tactical floods are glossed over or portrayed as a diversion, a side story to the main argument of the work. Scholars briefly introduce the inundations, discuss their destructiveness, and then note the length of the interval until a sense of normalcy (pre-war conditions) returned. Addressing this gap in the scholarship means that scholars must examine the floods from both a military and environmental perspective. The same waters which saved Leiden became a burden for the people living in Holland well after the Spanish forces withdrew, and in order to do the subject justice, it needs to be studied holistically.

Second, viewing the history of Holland through a blue lens substantiates and supports arguments within the wider historiography while also challenging the foundation of those same claims. In other words, this research supports several widely held views on Holland's history, yet it also suggests alternative explanations for their validity. For instance, scholars have provided a number of religious, economic, and political arguments to explain why there was such a gulf in priorities between the Habsburg monarchy and its subjects in the Low Countries. This research similarly highlights their diverging viewpoints, but provides an ecological origin in the form of the All Saints Day Flood. Another example can be seen in the interpretation of civic power in Holland. There is nearly universal agreement among scholars that the cities and the regent class were the real power brokers in Holland politics. The findings of this dissertation support that point as well, but focus here is put on the politicians such as Oldenbarnevelt who

ceded civic control over the countryside in order to repair the poldermodel. The push to instill discipline in the military, a foundation of the military revolution debate, can also be traced to a reaction against chaos produced by the widespread tactical floods. In some ways this dissertation simply affirms some well-established arguments within the historiography of the Low Countries. Yet, in other ways, this research challenges those same views, offering different explanations for their validity.

Third, this approach demonstrates the centrality of the complex negotiations between Hollanders and their watery environment throughout history. That is not the same as reducing Dutch history to a stereotypical account of Hans Brinker or the boy who stuck his finger in a dike. Rather, as this dissertation shows, the people of Holland carried out intensive debates in the Middle Ages and during the Revolt. These talks were not only between Hollanders and their landscape, but among themselves over the best ways to carry out these discussions.

The negotiations rarely, if ever, left all parties satisfied. During the Middle Ages the Hollanders developed the poldermodel, an inclusive form of decision making, yet by the sixteenth century there were serious issues with the flood protection in the province, as evidenced by the creation of the great inner sea of the Haarlemmermeer. After the All Saints Day Flood struck in 1570, the Hollanders opened up negotiations with their Habsburg rulers for tax exemptions to fix the broken dikes and sluices. When these talks broke down and the rebels took control of Holland, they enlisted the support their watery environment to escape Spanish reconquest. In the process, several cities became disgruntled and the consensus-forming spirit of the poldermodel briefly disappeared, to be restored when politicians gave cities greater control over their surroundings. Afterwards, the cities of Holland agreed to export the strategic floods and limit their destructiveness in the event of future uses.

Framing these interactions in terms of a relationship offers the best opportunity for generating traffic at the intersection of environmental history boulevard and military history avenue. It encourages military historians to look at the landscape not as a blank chessboard awaiting its pieces, but as a dynamic character, with agency of its own. As soldiers dug trenches and engineers planned fortifications they were making demands on their environment. Nature's answer could often play an important role in a military encounter and have profound and unanticipated effects. The rebels used strategic floods during the sieges of Leiden and Antwerp, yet only the former was saved because of natural forces. Two encounters, two different results with a victory and a defeat, yet many in Holland could be relatively satisfied with both results. The relief of Leiden meant the Revolt continued, while the loss of Antwerp, although disappointing, did nothing to disrupt the newly restored poldermodel in Holland.

Similarly, utilizing a framework of relationships invites environmental historians to study the impact of warfare on grounds with which they are more comfortable. The initial works which set the agenda for the discipline highlighted the importance social and ecological relationships. As this dissertation demonstrates, the effects of warfare are felt well beyond the battlefield, influencing financial, social, and political developments. Focusing on relationships allows environmental historians to examine these events, and see how they change over time. These scholars do not need to avoid addressing the consequences of warfare as if it is obstacle to their larger points. Instead, as this research shows, combining military history with environmental history provides a more holistic understanding of events in a way that both supports and challenges the existing historiography.

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VITA

Robert Tiegs is interested in exploring the complex relationship between military activities and their environmental repercussions in sixteenth and seventeenth century Holland. He is not a native Dutch speaker, but chose this research because he found it fascinating. He follows these studies across several disciplinary divides as demonstrated with his two publications, one of which focuses on the history of technology while the other utilizes an art history approach. As this is a relatively understudied field of research, he has his work cut out for him.