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Tussen macht en onmacht. Een politieke biografie van Anthonie van der Heim (1693-1746)

Dral, W.J.

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Author: Dral, W.J.

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Summary:

Between power and powerlessness

Difficult times for the Republic

Anthonie van der Heim's career takes place in a difficult period in the Republic. Three major wars overshadow the first half of the eighteenth century. These events had political and financial consequences for the Republic. The War of Spanish succession, which ended with the Peace of Utrecht (1713), nearly bankrupted the country. Indebtedness rose so high that the rent could not even be paid. The Second Great Assembly (*Tweede Grote Vergadering*) of 1717 came up with proposals to reduce expenses. A committee of the Generality Council (*Generaliteitsrekenkamer*) made recommendations to save money on the expenses of the Union's comptoir. Van der Heim prepared these recommendations. Because these cut proposals were not carried out, the – very necessary – reforms in the fields of politics and tax, proposed by Secretary of the Council of State (*secretaris van de Raad van State*) Simon van Slingelandt, were rejected and since taxes were not raised because tax rates were already huge, statesmen did not have much room to manoeuvre. They were left with no choice but to 'keep muddling', as De Vries and Van der Woude described it. It had its impact on the overall policy, both fiscally as well as in foreign politics.

The foreign policy of the time was to keep out of international matters as much as possible. However, it was impossible to escape it entirely. Liquidating the Company of Ostend (*Compagnie van Oostende*) was necessary for the States' trade position. However this was only possible by guaranteeing Austria the Pragmatic Sanction (*Pragmatieke Sanctie*). Because of the agreement the Republic did become involved in the large European conflict about the Austrian succession in the long run. The early recovery was destroyed by the War of Austrian succession and natural disasters. The complex international relations demanded a leader capable of taking up politics discretely and patiently. The same demand came from increasing national unrest which was caused by the prince of Orange, who aspired to become general in those days. Antonie van der Heim was chosen to fulfil a leading position.

The Van der Heim family in the Republic

The Van der Heim family came from the city of Hamm in Westfalen, Germany and fled to Rotterdam and Delft because of the violent Thirty Years' War. It is uncertain when they arrived exactly but it was most likely in the third decennium of the seventeenth century. Family head Rutger van der Heim was a member of the Hamm elite and a member of the city council. Members of his family were remarkably fast in connecting with prominent Delft families. Probably, the Van der Heims

had an elaborate network in the city thanks to their business contacts in the beer industry. However some of them returned to Hamm after 1648. Rutger's youngest son Gerrit remained a brewer in Delft and became a member of the town council (*lid van de vroedschap*) after the change in government in 1672. His brother left for Schiedam in 1648, was successful and soon became a member of the *vroedschap*. It seems that Gerrit's son Anthonie sr. continued the brewery in Delft but eventually preferred an administrative function. He acquired several lucrative *buitenambten* (government officials on provincial or generality level) in The Hague. He became Councillor at the Supreme Court (*Raadshere in de Hoge Raad*) and accountant at the domains of the counts of Holland (*Rekenmeester van de Grafelijkheidsdomeinen*) in 1687. In 1690, he moved to the Lange Voorhout in The Hague. His apparent financial talent reappears in his son Anthonie. The family exerted an increasing amount of influence from the time it moved to the Republic until it became extinct in the nineteenth century. Thus the history of the Van der Heim family is a success story. Anthonie even became Grand Pensionary (*raadpensionaris*).

Antonie van der Heim

Antonie was born on 29 November 1693 in The Hague as the youngest child of Anthonie sr. and Catharina Heinsius, a famous *raadpensionaris*' sister. In fact, he continued his father's official career. He was already appointed secretary with the *Generaliteitsrekenkamer* during his short legal education (1709-1711) in Leiden. These years proved to be very important for his development as financial expert. Later in his career he would use the ideas he got in this period. He seemed a gifted young man with good relationships and a bright future.

Antonie turned out to be very punctual and, in particular, very solid. He was always well informed because he prepared files about important subjects. It seemed he did not want to overestimate his talents, which he told others. He liked to consult others, especially about subjects he was not familiar with. However, he did not hesitate with regard to financial matters.

Antonie could get along with many people and did not encounter a great deal of resistance. His contemporaries give witness of his social involvement. For example, the representative of Friesland to the generality, Van Burmania, said he compared positively to the 'sour and difficult to approach' Simon van Slingelandt. Other contemporaries praised his integrity and called him 'honest', 'hard working', but also 'worthy'. A political opponent, Van Itsma from Friesland, called him 'an honest man', one of the few in the Dutch government. It is possible that this is the reason why six provinces voted for him to be the successor of resigning registrar Fagel, who was an amiable person. Perhaps they thought Van der Heim was a similar kind of man. It seems that the combination of the characteristics listed above gave him the opportunity to play a central part in his own way.

Not much is known about his personal life. He seems to have been a devoted husband and father. His weak health was a disadvantage which he mentioned from the beginning when he was approached for the job of *raadpensionaris*. His health could prevent him from carrying out his tasks adequately. It is impossible to determine whether he was referring to heart problems. However, his health did deteriorate in the course of the years, which does indicate heart failure. His ability to work decreased and it was hard for him to produce the energy necessary to keep governing the country in the turbulent year 1746.

Van der Heim as financial officer

With regard to financial policies, Van der Heim was not a modest man. He felt self-assured when it came to financial business. Because of this inherited talent he was appointed secretary of the *Generaliteitsrekenkamer* when he was 16 years old, even before his promotion in 1711. No doubt his uncle, raadpensionaris Heinsius, played an important part in this assignment. Anthonie was preferred over his elder colleague Johan de Veer in a committee of the *Generaliteitsrekenkamer*, which was installed to prepare cut proposals for the Union's office (*Uniekantoor*), the comptoir-general (*comptoir-generaal*) and the colleges of the admiralty (*Admiraliteitscolleges*). He informed the *Tweede Grote Vergadering* about the advice of the *Generaliteitsrekenkamer*. It included general cuts in staff, holiday pay and travelling allowances as well as in office supplies and the sale of estates owned by the *Generaliteit*. And then there was the regular work. Analyses of data from the minutes of the *Rekenkamer* showed that the 18th-century practice was rather different from the original setup of the *Generaliteitsrekenkamer*. There is no sign of the intended separation into two different chambers, each with its own tasks and secretary. The secretaries often carry out assignments together, de *Generaliteitsrekenkamer* committees are established ad-hoc. In the period studied it was Van der Heim who wrote most part of the minute resolution book. Most part of the work was done by him. His colleague De Veer did not write in the book much and the minutes of his successor Van der Goes only become more prominent after Van der Heim left in 1727. We have to limit ourselves to the period 1716-1727; we cannot discuss the time before this period because the minute registers are missing.

Van der Heim continued to be involved in financial policies after 1727 as treasurer (*thesaurier-generaal*). All *thesauriers-generaal* insisted on reducing the financing deficits in this period. It started with *thesaurier-generaal* Hop, who compared the state to a dying person in 1710. In 1730, Van der Heim asked all provinces for more discipline in consenting. Apparently without success since his successors kept complaining. Not only was he involved in financial policies in a broad sense, he also got involved in details and his knowledge of files helped him. In 1735, he showed how capable he was by giving resident Van Assendelft a lesson in calculating.

Van der Heim turned out to be creative in coming up with cut proposals. He was strict during 1730's General Petition (*Generale Petitie*) with regard to the provinces' consenting discipline, reacted in a pedantic manner when 'someone who does not seem to be very good at arrhythmic' made an error and proved to be creative in the introduction of the *Personeele Quotisatie* (see below) in 1742 which was meant to tackle the financial problems.

Van der Heim as raadpensionaris and politician

After Van Slingelandt died in 1736, Van der Heim became his successor as raadpensionaris. Most regents thought he was the right man for the job. He himself had his doubts. He considered himself inexperienced in politics, said he had insufficient talents and he suffered from physical problems. At the same time, however, he had a critical mind with regard to the limitations in his instruction. In the end he was persuaded, mostly by Johan Hendrik van Wassenaer Obdam. He needed to pay a great deal of attention to the financial politics of the Republic. His expertise in the field came in handy ... He wanted to create a financial reservoir in order to have money in reserve for tough finan-

cial times and to do repayments. This reservoir was made possible thanks to the introduction of a sort of income tax: the *Personeele Quotisatie*. To his horror he noticed that during the War of Austrian Succession, debts rose higher than he expected despite his relentless calculation of estimated income and expenses. This was not only due to the war efforts but also to other setbacks, such as extra expenses (because of a worm which caused the blowout of the dikes), cattle plague and harsh winters. Moreover, the *Personeele Quotisatie* did not produce as much income as he had hoped for.

Van der Heim's political career start was hesitant. This faltering attitude is mainly mentioned by foreign representatives. We also see it in the historiography. It contributes to the different images he has. As he was new to the field he found a trusted advisor in Amsterdam pensionary (*pensionaris*) Jacob de la Bassecour. He frequently corresponded with the old *pensionaris*, who was kind to him and assisted him continuously, especially in the beginning, in the matters he had to deal in with regard to Gulik and Berg, Eastern Friesland and the Austrian Netherlands.

The close contacts with De la Bassecour gave Amsterdam the opportunity to exert influence on which policy was to be implemented. Since Amsterdam was an important player in the States of Holland (*Staten van Holland*), its support was calming to Van der Heim. He missed the charisma and persuasion of his predecessor and had to acquire leadership by working hard and having thorough knowledge of all files. Slowly he gained prestige, as would become clear by his re-election in 1742.

He did not only receive support from Amsterdam. Van der Heim's way of doing politics was related to that of his uncle, raadpensionaris Heinsius. He felt a strong commitment to consulting in the 'conclave', an informal committee, where he disclosed his plans before they were discussed in the *Staten* so he could verify whether a majority would be in favour. If not, he had to create a majority by means of persuasion. This way of doing politics and having one's ideas accepted fitted him perfectly. Some historians have asked whether Van der Heim played a central part in the 'conclave' or whether Amsterdam ruled through this body. One of the members gave a clear answer: Haarlem pensionary Jacob Gilles. He said: 'Van der Heim was the pivot, the centre of everything'.

Van der Heim had a clear vision on foreign policy. He continued Van Slingelandt's politics with vigour. Tenaciously he repeated the reasons why the alliance obligations had to be met.

Cooperation with England and Austria was most important. A new trade treaty with Austria had to be concluded with regard to the liquidation of the Austrian Netherlands *Compagnie van Oostende*; a treaty he considered to be beneficial for England as well. However his allies did not always make life easier for him. For example, a treaty with Austria would definitely be linked to support for Maria Theresia's succession. He did not know what to think of the fact that George II, king of England, supported Maria Theresia wholeheartedly, while as king of Hannover he concluded a neutrality treaty with France, which was detrimental to Maria Theresia. Van der Heim still insisted on an alliance with England. Problems with Prussia and France remained. Prussia threatened the Republic in its sphere of influence in the east by making claims on Gulik and Berg and Eastern Friesland. France remained a threat in the south, even though a defensive treaty was concluded between the two nations.

In his works *Effecten* and *Reflectien* the raadpensionaris explains why a neutrality treaty with France is not necessary. The everlasting defensive treaty with Paris made a new treaty superfluous. Furthermore it would alienate the Republic's allies; the Republic would lose their protection. And if France then turned out not to be trustworthy, the Republic would stand alone. The way he conducted politics was characterised by prudence and looking for safety among traditional allies. He could not re-

nounce his true nature and kept establishing connections between politics and finance: what if imprudent politics, especially towards France, made unacceptably large expenses to enlarge the army necessary?

At home, the other provinces did not seem to be willing to cooperate. Therefore Van der Heim decided to put his position available at the end of his first term as *raadpensionaris* in 1742. He felt disappointed because in several fields no results were attained and he experienced counteraction from the *Staten*. In a critical speech he gave the *Staten van Holland* he confronted them by summing up everything that went wrong in his opinion. He mentioned leaking information abroad, a strong sense of self-interest among provinces and *Staten*-members, the absence of true cooperation and the absence of trust. Still the *Staten van Holland* voted unanimously that Van der Heim was the one person to guide them through difficult times and wanted him to stay. Once again, Van der Heim was persuaded.

Van der Heim and Oranje

The stadtholder (*stadhouder*) of Friesland, Groningen and Gelderland and heir to Willem III, Willem Carel Hendrik Friso, meanwhile tried to restore the lost influence of Oranje. During Van der Heim's term of office this happened in two ways: first he tried to become *stadhouder* of Holland, Zeeland, Utrecht and Overijssel. This only became topical because of international tensions in 1747. Before that, the armed forces were extended as a result of increasing international pressure and Willem had the possibility to become general. His allies, and especially Willem Bentinck in 1743, joined forces to support him in his quest.

Anthonie van der Heim had close relationships with people close to the prince, among others John Duncan and Orangist regents (*regenten*). He already had these contacts during his time as *thesaurier-generaal*. However, Van der Heim never strongly encouraged Willem's promotion. In literature the argument can be found, among others in Geyl, that Anthonie was 'suspect' in republican circles, as he was Heinsius' cousin and son in law of Orangist Van der Waeyen.

No clues were found in the sources to prove Anthonie was an Orangist. The archives of Willem IV and Van der Heim do not contain regular letters between the court in Friesland and the *thesaurier-generaal* and, later on, *raadpensionaris* of Holland. In the inventory of the archives of the *stadhouders* of Friesland, Van der Heim's name is nowhere to be found. In his archive we find four letters from the *stadhouder* of Friesland. There was no close relationship between the two. On the contrary, one of his confidants was the fiercely anti-Orangist Van Wassenae Obdam. In 1735, Van der Heim turned down Johan Duncan and thus prince Willem. Very kindly, it must be said! Recently, Mrs. Bruggeman proved that Willem did not expect much of Van der Heim when he succeeded Van Slingelandt. Anthonie did object to a number of articles in his instructions, however, not to the article which had him promise to leave the government without *stadhouder* intact. In 1742, Van der Heim and the 'conclave' did Willem a proposal to become lieutenant-general, while they knew he would not accept. Two years later the lobby again did not succeed. Van der Heim's acts send a clear message. Promoting a member of the Oranje family to general was seen as stepping stone to becoming *stadhouder*. Despite his 'Orangist' uncle and father in law, he was in favour of the government without *stadhouder* and did not participate in overrating Willem.

Civil servant or politician?

Should we consider Anthonie van der Heim a civil servant or a politician, according to the distinction made by, among others, Van Deursen and Groenveld? An explanation with regard to this distinction should be given: a civil servant was occupied with administration and participated in the bureaucratic process, a politician took part in preparing policies. It is beyond dispute that, from the time he was young, Van der Heim developed into a qualified civil servant. As *thesaurier-generaal* he was actively involved in formulating and implementing policies. Especially when he was *raadpensionaris* he became involved in politics. When his career started he was forced by inexperience in the field to lean on the advice of others, among whom De la Bassecour. Once he became more familiar with the subject he became more confident. In 1742, there was a turning point. Despite criticism, the *Staten* unanimously wanted him to continue in his position. He had developed a personal, consistent political voice, mostly characterized by a combination of foreign and financial policies and aimed at the guarantee of peace in Europe. He did have ambition as a politician, which also shows in his attitude with regard to the Oranje family.

In the end, his policy did not lead to many positive results. He was not the only one to blame. His heritage was a poor financial situation which he was not able to improve, despite his expertise. As for his foreign policy, he felt forced to negotiate with France. At that time he had to give up control because of his worsening illness.

This brings us back to the place historians gave Van der Heim. His contemporaries and those after them knew and recognized him for his often relentless commitment, because he held on to his political policies and his financial expertise. They shared their appreciation with the *Staten*, the body that re-elected him in 1742. But because his results were limited, he disappeared from public memory in the nineteenth century. This was mainly because 'his' century had become the century during which the wealth of the Golden Age (at that time glorified by the new nationalist movement) was supposedly bartered away. Only in the late nineteenth and especially the twentieth century there was renewed attention for information sources and more details about Van der Heim were brought to light. However, these details were very different from each other and were reported by different authors. They did not give a general idea about Anthonie's behaviour. In the previous chapters we tried to present such an idea based on the numerous sources. To us, Van der Heim is a skilled civil servant who focused especially on financial challenges and had a good view on them. However, we also conclude that he acquired a central position in political policies, especially in the years he served as *raadpensionaris*. Anthonie was civil servant and politician at the same time. Because of these two roles the function of *raadpensionaris* was especially hard, as he said several times. This also contributed to the fact that the results of his policies remained limited. But even a politician who does not achieve his goals is still a politician!

