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1. Of Councils and Companies

Institutions and Agency in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Empire

Albert Coenraetsz. Burgh was a doctor who had studied medicine in Leiden and who operated a flourishing practice in the ever-growing city of Amsterdam. However, his occupations stretched beyond mere medicine as he had also been a member of the city's council since 1618 and a director of the West India Company (WIC) since at least 1622, as well as being a member of the Council of State in 1639 and a member of the Delegated States of Holland in 1640-1642, and later being a councilor on Amsterdam's Admiralty board in 1644-1647.⁹⁵ On February 1, 1643 he was elected as one of the city's four mayors.⁹⁶ This was the second time he had been elected as a mayor – having previously held the same position in 1638 – and his election was a personal triumph. Every year the city's council elected four mayors. Unlike many other cities in the province of Holland, or even the rest of the Republic, the Amsterdam council could decide the elections by itself, without needing to obtain the stadholder's consent. Amsterdam was thus the perfect example of a self-ruling urban republic, where the oligarchy ruled the city in its own best interests and also represented those interests at the higher levels of government. In combining his 'day job' and his positions in various bodies of state, Burgh was in many ways a typical embodiment of the oligarchs who ruled the city – and much of the Republic – in the seventeenth century.

Burgh occupied the mayoralty with three colleagues – Jan Cornelis Geelvinck, Gerbrand Claesz. Pancras and Cornelis de Graeff – and the four new mayors did not lose any time in using their newfound position of power to attempt to exclude a bitter rival from future appointments. On February 6, five days after the election, the council voted to appoint former mayor Andries Bicker to a three-year stint as a member of the Delegated States of Holland in The Hague. This was a narrowly veiled attempt by the mayors to rid themselves of the powerful head of the Bicker faction.⁹⁷ The Bicker family had been acquiring ever more power and positions in the city and by putting the patrimonial head of the family in The Hague for three years, and thus excluding him from the Amsterdam mayoralty, the new mayors hoped to break the family's power. This behavior is illustrative of Julia Adams's analysis of patrimonial power in the Dutch Republic in her *Familial State*, as discussed in the Introduction. The new mayors of Amsterdam were at the head of the city's government, which was ultimately ruled by a council consisting of a further thirty-one individuals, as shown in Table 1.

⁹⁵ Elias, *De Vroedschap van Amsterdam, deel 1* (N. Israel: Amsterdam 1963, reprint) 327-328.

⁹⁶ W. Frijhoff, M. Prak and B. Bakker, *Geschiedenis van Amsterdam: Centrum van de wereld, 1578-1650* (SUN: Amsterdam 2004) 242. Elias, *De vroedschap*, 327-328.

⁹⁷ Elias, *De vroedschap* XCII.

Table 1: Mayors and Council Members in Amsterdam, 1643

ID	Name	Chartered Company	Occupation	Capital
1	Albert Coenraetsz. Burgh (B)	WIC, 1628,	Doctor	
2	Jan Cornelis Geelvinck (B)		Merchant, ship-owner	150,000
3	Gerbrand Claesz. Pancras (B)		Soap boiler	
4	Cornelis de Graeff (B)	VOC, 1640-1643		227,000
5	Dr. Jan ten Grootenhuys		Merchant	100,000
6	Adriaen Pietersz. Raep		Merchant	
7	Simon Willem van der Does	Noordse Comp., WIC, 1625	Merchant, ship-owner	
8	Antony Oetgens van Waveren			130,000
9	Dr. Andries Bicker	VOC, 1641	Merchant	
10	Dr. Nicolaes Tulp		Doctor	280,000
11	Dr. Gerard Schaep, Lord of Kortenhoef			
12	Willem Backer	VOC, 1640-1643		
13	Diederick Tholinx	VOC, 1625-1643	Merchant	
14	Ernst Roeters		Merchant	
15	Pieter Hasselaer Pietersz.	VOC, 1641		
16	Hendrick Reynst	VOC, 1636		
17	Simon de Rijck	VOC, 1625-1643	Merchant	380,000
18	Joan Huydecoper			
19	Allard Cloeck		Merchant	170,000
20	Hendrick Dircksz. Spiegel	VOC, 1659	Soap boiler	
21	Jan Claesz. van Vlooswijck		Merchant	320,000
22	Dr. Frans Banningh Cocq		Lawyer	200,000
23	Mr. Hercules Roch		Lawyer	
24	Wouter Valckenier			
25	Dr. Albert Bas	WIC, 1645	Lawyer	180,000
26	Mr. Gerard Schaep, Pietersz.			
27	Albert Dircksz. Pater	WIC, 1645	Brewer	
28	Mr. Joris Jorisz. Backer	VOC, 1647		
29	Jacob Willekens			
30	Cornelis Jacobsz. Wever			
31	Franck van der Meer			
32	Jacob Claesz. Van Harencaspel	Noordse Comp.		
33	Mr. Wilhelm van Ruytenburgh			
34	Cornelis Witsen	WIC, 1645	Merchant	
35	Roelof Bicker	VOC, 1647		

Source: Elias, *De Vroedschap van Amsterdam, deel 1*, 327-435. The mayors (or burgomasters) in 1643 are shown at the top of the list, with (B) after their names.

Some of the individuals in this list are well known even today: Frans Banningh Cocq, for example, is the main protagonist in Rembrandt's *Nachtwacht*. Likewise, Nicolaes Tulp was

immortalized in Rembrandt's painting of one of his anatomical lessons. Cornelis Witsen had a rather different relationship with the famous painter as it was his demand for repayment of a loan in 1658 that caused Rembrandt's bankruptcy. Burgh meanwhile had had himself immortalized by Thomas de Keyser in his previous role as burgomaster. This was in 1638, when Queen Maria de' Medici visited Amsterdam on the first royal visit to the city, and the four burgomasters regarded the moment as important enough to have it preserved in paint.

Figure 1: Thomas de Keyser, *The Four Burgomasters of Amsterdam Learning of the Arrival of Maria de' Medici on September 1, 1638*



Source: Mauritshuis, inv. no. 78. Albert Coenraetsz. Burgh is shown third from the left.

As Table 1 begins to make clear, the members of the Amsterdam city council were not full-time politicians. Besides their roles in civic government, they had 'day jobs' as lawyers, doctors, merchants, ship-owners or soap boilers. They also sat on the boards of directors of the chartered trading and whaling companies. Additionally, albeit not shown in the table, they also combined their day jobs and their roles in the municipal administration and in the local chambers of the companies with positions in provincial and national government. As such, this group of individuals is perfect for the purposes of this chapter: to explain the constitutional structure of the Republic and the relationship between these companies and the state, and to illustrate the interconnectedness of personal and familial agency with these institutional arrangements. This chapter thus seeks to set out a baseline for the reader by describing the institutional arrangements of the Dutch state at its various levels of government in Europe, and the relationship between the state and the chartered companies. However, focusing on these institutional arrangements without integrating a perspective of individual and group agency would lead to a fragmented view

of the early modern Dutch empire. In practice, the disparate and institutionally distinct parts were closely tied together through the personal interests of the individuals who managed them. Thus, while the chartered companies were, formally speaking, organizationally distinct from the admiralty boards and the urban magistracies, they were, in reality, closely connected, given that the same individuals who held sway in the one would often govern the other. Like board interlocks between modern companies, ideas, experiences and strategies, as well as personal antagonisms and familial rivalries, could thus spread between these overlapping parts of the Dutch state and trading companies. This supports the argument that decision-making within these companies and the composition of their boards should be analyzed more from the perspective of (patrimonial) politics than from commerce. This chapter will thus make the case for the existence of a closely interconnected colonial elite with interests in ventures in both East and West and, by consequence, an early modern Dutch colonial empire. At each point of description, various members of the 1643 council of Amsterdam will be presented as examples of how these interlocks could work in practice. The year 1643 has been chosen somewhat randomly; it represents the last full year of Johan Maurits in Brazil, and was also a year in which Rijckloff van Goens progressed to the rank of merchant in the Dutch East India Company (VOC). It was thus a year in which the political composition of the Amsterdam board would have been of consequence to both their careers. Another reason for choosing 1643 was because of the figure of Albert Coenraetsz. Burgh, who had nominated Johan Maurits for the position of Governor-General in Brazil some seven years before.⁹⁸ The choice to follow the individuals in the Amsterdam council was inspired not merely by the city's great importance in the Republic, which is sometimes overstated, but also by the fact that Johan Engelbert Elias's seminal work on the council of Amsterdam means it is feasible to do this exercise for Amsterdam, but not for other cities.

This chapter will proceed to examine the structure of the Dutch state from the ground up, starting at the level of the urban and rural administrations, before progressing to the level of the holders of nominal sovereignty or, in other words, the provinces. The Generality and its offices will be examined next, thus setting the stage for a transfer of focus from the Generality to the companies that it chartered. These companies then take us full circle as the examination of their chambers, investors and directors will return us to the level of the cities, which is where this chapter began.

Urban politics: parties, factions and family networks

The creation of a new state in the Northern Netherlands from the 1570s onwards centered in many ways on the urban administrations. At the time, Holland and Zeeland, which were at the heart of the new state, were among the most urbanized parts of Europe. In this new state, a product of resistance to central government, as much power as was feasible was devolved to the city governments, and in the countryside to the nobility and rural councils. Cities were central to the Republic, so much so that Marjolein 't Hart has dubbed it 'a state of fifty-eight cities'.⁹⁹ This section will briefly examine day-to-day politics and governance in the cities of the Republic. Drawing from the example of the Amsterdam council of 1643, I will show how individuals were shaped by this institutional mold and how their actions impacted on the institutions. Although

⁹⁸ A point that will be elaborated in chapter two.

⁹⁹ M. 't Hart, 'Cities and statemaking in the Dutch Republic', *Theory and Society*, 18:5 (1989) 663-687, 666.

most attention will be devoted to the cities in the west of the country, some examples will be given from city administrations in the east and north so as to show how these administrations differed.

In principle, most cities in the Republic ruled themselves, in effect forming small, self-governing republics. As in the case of Amsterdam in 1643, the burgomasters formed the core of the daily administration. These individuals were chosen by the members of the *vroedschap* or *raad*, for which the English word ‘council’ is the closest approximation. Membership of the council could thus ensure access to the reigns of municipal power. Though membership of the council was itself unpaid, it signified accession to the city’s elite and could allow election to the mayoralty or other lucrative positions, such as the admiralty boards, which would in turn anchor the members’ powers of patronage. The number of councilors varied from city to city: in 1643 Amsterdam had thirty-six, while Leiden had forty, as did Hoorn. Zierikzee in Zeeland had a different arrangement, whereby forty-three positions were held mostly by thirty individuals.¹⁰⁰ Since the council and burgomasters often appointed civic leaders such as the captains of the militia, leaders of the guilds and the *schepenen* (aldermen), a position on the council was a lucrative opportunity to extend the reach of one’s patronage. A position as a burgomaster was even more lucrative from a social capital perspective. In cities with four mayors, each of the four would have a three-month period of the year during which he could appoint individuals to civic positions that became available during that period. In this way, a mayor such as Burgh could use this position to ensure that his clientelage obtained civic positions, thus further cementing his role at the head of these networks. Unsurprisingly, many individuals served as mayor for multiple consecutive periods.¹⁰¹ Lastly, council members had a role in assigning public works to contractors.¹⁰² The *schepenen* were not necessarily members of the council, although they could be. The *schout* was often a son of a council member and would later ascend to the council himself. In 1643, the *schout* was Joan van Waveren, Lord of Waveren, Botshol and Ruige Wilnis, and the son of council member Antony van Waveren (number eight in Table 1). Joan himself became a council member in 1659.¹⁰³ There were more familial connections within the council itself: Roelof Bicker was a younger cousin of Andries Bicker and the same familial relation existed between Gerard Schaep, Pietersz. and Gerard Schaep.

Although positions on the council were not formally hereditary, the members of the council co-opted their own members in the event of a vacancy. These were moments of intense factional struggle, with the outcome of votes for new members serving to identify whether old alliances stood firm and could guarantee the continuity of their influence. Even within the tightly-knit familial networks, however, continuation of old alliances was not a given. This was because networks were highly personal, and discord over issues such as religion or the division of an inheritance could create rifts in long-established networks.¹⁰⁴ Coenraed Burgh’s abandonment of

¹⁰⁰ M. Prak, *Gezeten burgers: de elite in een Hollandse stad, Leiden 1700-1780* (De Bataafsche Leeuw: Amsterdam, 1985) 30-31; H. van Dijk and D.J. Roorda, *Het patriciaat van Zierikzee tijdens de republiek* (Koninklijk Zeeuws Genootschap der Wetenschappen: Middelburg 1979) 4-5.

¹⁰¹ P. Bourdieu, ‘Ökonomisches Kapital, kulturelles Kapital, soziales Kapital’, in: R. Kreckel (ed.) *Soziale Ungleichheiten (Soziale Welt Sonderband 2)* (Göttingen 1983) 183-198, 191-195.

¹⁰² L. Kooijmans, *Onder regenten: de elite in een Hollandse stad, Hoorn 1700-1780* (De Bataafsche Leeuw: Amsterdam 1985) 29-31.

¹⁰³ Elias, *De vroedschap van Amsterdam, deel 1*, 509.

¹⁰⁴ Kooijmans illustrates this with the example from the Della Faille family. Of the five sons in the Della Faille household, only Marten remained a Roman Catholic and was thus appointed as his father’s successor at the head of the family business. This was unusual since he was not the eldest son. Kooijmans, *Vriendschap*, 9-10.

the Pauw faction in the 1620s is an example of how networks were not set in stone and of how the individual ideas and preferences of members could make or break them.

In contrast to Amsterdam, some cities could not decide their mayoral or council elections by themselves, but instead had to propose two or sometimes three options to the stadholder or, in the case of Veere and Vlissingen, to the first nobleman of Zeeland, who was also the stadholder.¹⁰⁵ It was only in 1618, 1650 and 1672 that the stadholder in Amsterdam could exert any real influence on the composition of the council. In Holland, the guilds and the urban militias did not have a real vote in urban politics after a 1581 ruling by the States of Holland forbade the councils from seeking the advice and consent of these bodies.¹⁰⁶ In the eastern provinces, a second council (*Gezworen Gemeente*) represented the militias and the guilds, who were elected by their members. Although this *Gezworen Gemeente* elected the mayors from among the council members, intermarriage and patronage meant that the members of the *Gezworen Gemeente* came to be included in the regent classes and so no longer acted as a check on regents' power.¹⁰⁷ Access to urban councils was restricted to the wealthy and well-connected, although even individuals of comparatively humble origins could be included among the regents if they played their cards right. Frans Banningh Cocq, for example, was the son of an apothecary clerk, but rose to the dignity of burgomaster. D.J. Roorda has stressed the importance of well-chosen marriages for this kind of social rise.¹⁰⁸

The provinces: building blocks of the federal state

In the new state formed after the rebellion against the Habsburg overlord of the Netherlands, sovereignty rested with the provinces, at least nominally. The Provincial States took over all the positions and dignities that had previously been part of the sovereign powers of the Habsburgs in their roles as counts, dukes and so on of the separate provinces. The Provincial States were thus crucial meeting places for discussing the interests and concerns of the cities and rural areas in each province. Issues could either be decided and enacted at a provincial level, or passed on to the Generality for debate among all allies. Certain cities in each province had acquired a vote in their Provincial States, although the exact value of this vote varied from one region to another. In the case of Holland – or, formally, *Holland and West-Friesland* – there were eighteen cities that each cast a single vote in the Provincial States. The nineteenth vote was cast by the delegates of the province's nobility, who were expected to speak on behalf of rural areas, villages and cities without voting rights. The cities with voting rights are shown in Figure 2. It is important to note that Amsterdam's vote was only one among nineteen. To maintain a favorable balance of power in the Provincial States, it was thus in the interests of the Amsterdam regents to form alliances with like-minded regents in other cities. These alliances were often reinforced by marriage ties and regularly assumed a particular party-political affiliation.

Cities could also appoint some of their own representatives to positions in the provincial government. The provinces had a number of important duties, with the first of these being the task of raising capital to pay for expenditure at a general level. Although they often referred the practical side of the matter to the cities or areas of the province, the Provincial States was where

¹⁰⁵ Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall 1477-1806* (corrected edition, Oxford and New York 1998), 488.

¹⁰⁶ De Nijs and Beukers (eds.), *Geschiedenis van Holland*, 25.

¹⁰⁷ Ibidem, 127-128.

¹⁰⁸ D.J. Roorda. 'Eeuw tegen eeuw', in: D.J. Roorda and A.J.C.M. Gabriëls (ed.), *Rond prins en patriciaat: Verspreide opstellen door D.J. Roorda* (Fibula-Van Dishoeck: Weesp 1984) 54-67, 56, 65.

the internal division of this tax burden was negotiated. Rather than being contributed to a general fund, funds for the army were allocated to units specifically put on the provincial repartition. Often, the Provincial States could appoint or propose officers for the units on its repartition. The provinces also had a number of executive roles, including in infrastructural works and some important fortresses or naval ports that were the responsibility of the provincial authorities. These provincial appointments were also well represented in the Amsterdam council of 1643. Coenraetsz. Burgh himself had served as a delegated councilor of the States of Holland in 1640-1642. This delegated council formed the day-to-day government of the province in the periods when the full States was not in session. Burgh also served in the provincial body that oversaw the pilotage and fire beacons for the benefit of navigation.¹⁰⁹ Altogether, there were five individuals in the Amsterdam council of 1643 who served, had served or would in future serve on the delegated council of the province of Holland. Their number included the disgruntled Andries Bicker, who had most definitely not sought the position. Besides Burgh, Cornelis Witsen also served on the committee for fire beacons. Interestingly, the two members of the Schaep family both served in the provincial accounting office, Dr. Gerard Schaep from 1631 to 1633, and Gerard Schaep Pietersz. from 1647 to 1649. The regents of Amsterdam could thus play important roles in the provincial government, alongside their roles in the municipal government. There were, however, some important provincial offices that were beyond their reach, including most notably that of the *landsadvocaat*, later *raadspensionaris*, who was officially the secretary of the meeting of the Holland nobility (the *ridderschap*), but also Holland's deputation to the States-General. The nobility, incidentally, also co-opted its own members, much like the city councils.¹¹⁰ The *raadspensionaris* was also responsible for compiling the minutes of the meetings of the States of Holland. This combination made it a potentially highly powerful position, certainly if the occupant could back up this power by access to the right networks. This was evident in the case of Johan de Witt, who was able to acquire the support of the powerful Bicker family in Amsterdam by marrying Wendela Bicker.¹¹¹

The members of the Amsterdam council of 1643 were certainly important for the administration of the province, as indeed Amsterdam was important to Holland. But this importance should not be overstated. Marjolein 't Hart expressed it as follows: '*However, though still significant, Amsterdam's share was less than is assumed usually. Amsterdam, too, needed the cooperation of other major cities, or could be checked by a coalition of other cities in Holland.*'¹¹² This need for cooperation made it highly important to forge alliances of like-minded city magistracies to push through a certain course of action. Marriages, contracts of correspondence or the forging of party affiliations could all serve this end. The change of one urban magistracy, or even one magistrate, could upend such alliances, however, and thus disrupt the voting balance in the entire States of Holland. The companies could also use this system to their advantage, for example to lobby for a favorable vote among the cities.¹¹³ The level of the province was also where some individuals went for support for their

¹⁰⁹ Elias, *De vroedschap*, 327.

¹¹⁰ Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 279.

¹¹¹ H.H. Rowen, *John de Witt, Grand Pensionary of Holland, 1625-1672* (Princeton University Press, Princeton 1978) 100-101.

¹¹² M. 't Hart, 'Cities and statemaking in the Dutch Republic, 1580-1680', *Theory and Society* 18:5 (1989) 663-687, 677.

¹¹³ An example of this is shown in the minutes of the Dutch West Indies Company in Amsterdam from February 1635, when two directors were sent to Purmerend, Edam and Monnikendam to further the company's cause. On this occasion they received a positive reply. NL-HaNA, 1.05.01.01 inv. no. 14.

business enterprises by seeking provincial monopolies or patents, for example.¹¹⁴ The province could also support or legitimize organizations representing the interests of a particular branch of the economy. Throughout the 1570s and 1580s, for example, Holland supported the newly founded *College van de grote visserij en haringvaart in Holland en West-Friesland* (committee for the great fisheries and herring fisheries in Holland and West-Friesland) by authorizing it to issue such statutes and rules as it found necessary to promote and protect the fisheries.¹¹⁵ This willingness to transfer authority over certain branches of economic life to specific supra-local organizations will be encountered again, when we consider the founding of the chartered trading companies. Brielle, Schiedam, Rotterdam, Delft and Enkhuizen could each appoint deputies to the meeting of the committee. These were places where the herring fisheries were of great economic significance, and which enjoyed voting rights in the Provincial States (by reason of which Vlaardingen and Zwartewaal were excluded). Since Amsterdam did not have these rights, there were no entanglements between the members of the 1643 council and the fisheries committee.

Similar patterns of provincial organization prevailed in most other provinces, albeit with some important variations. In Zeeland, the composition of the Provincial States changed quite dramatically as a result of the revolt against the Habsburgs, who had privileged Middelburg over the other cities in the province. In the old States, each of the cities, the first noble and the abbot of the abbey in Middelburg had a vote in the States.¹¹⁶ After the revolt, however, the first noble, in the form of the stadholder, retained a vote, but this was now only one of seven votes, with the others being given to the cities of Middelburg, Goes, Tholen, Zierikzee, Vlissingen and Veere. Nevertheless, the first noble of Zeeland, always a Nassau stadholder, had considerable power within the cities of Vlissingen and Veere as, in these cities, he was allowed to choose the members of the council. As in Holland, a committee of *Gecommitteerde Raden* was instated for day-to-day management and to prepare the meetings of the full States.¹¹⁷ Additionally, as in Holland, the years 1618 and 1672 saw an increase in the stadholder's influence on the composition of the urban councils, with the stadholder acquiring the right to elect new members from a list of three candidates.

As a former Duchy, Gelderland was formally the first in rank among the United Provinces, and also illustrates the first important variation on the theme of a meeting of the States with *Gecommitteerde Raden* for day-to-day management. Whereas the Duchy of Gelders was formerly divided into four parts, the province of Gelderland was divided into three administrative districts or quarters: the Quarter of Nijmegen, the Quarter of Veluwe (with Arnhem as its seat) and the Quarter of Zutphen. The fourth part of the old Duchy, Upper Gelders, was located on the Meuse around the cities of Roermond and Geldern. This part remained Spanish after the revolt and so was not associated with the Republic, although the province of Gelderland advocated vociferously for its annexation. The quarters of Gelderland were jointly ruled by the nobility and the cities, each having three votes.¹¹⁸ The three quarters met at the *landdagen*, where

¹¹⁴ The relevant Dutch terms are *octrooi* and *patent*. These could either be given for an invention, such as the late-sixteenth-century invention of the wind-powered sawmill, for which its inventor was granted a patent for several years, or for certain trades, or even for a provincial monopoly on the printing of certain popular books or atlases.

¹¹⁵ A.P. van Vliet, *Visserij en kapers: De zeevisserij vanuit het Maasmondgebied en de Duinkerker kapers (ca. 1580-1648)* (Stichting Hollandse Historische Reeks: The Hague 1994) 35-38.

¹¹⁶ Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 280. R. Fruin and H.T. Colenbrander, *Geschiedenis der Staatsinstellingen in Nederland tot den val der Republiek* (second revised edition, The Hague 1922) 241-243.

¹¹⁷ Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 281.

¹¹⁸ *Ibidem*, 283.

the positions the province would take in The Hague were discussed. The internal structure of the province changed after 1672, when the stadholder achieved a greater degree of control by being able to choose the urban magistrates from the usual lists of three candidates.

The only province where the church maintained a vote after the revolt was Utrecht. Although the old chapters of the Catholic church in Utrecht were reformed, they retained a say in the States. After being nominated by the city of Utrecht, the province's delegates were chosen by the smaller cities and the nobility, with the stadholder's consent, and then appointed for life.¹¹⁹ The second group in the States was the nobility. To be admitted into the nobility, an individual needed to be from the province, of noble descent and in possession of a *ridderhofstad*, a knightly estate. These estates were listed in 1536, when there were considered to be fifty-five such places, a number that increased slightly in later years.¹²⁰ The nobility itself elected suitable new members if and when necessary. During the seventeenth century a network of relations came into existence between various noble families from Utrecht, notably the Van Reedes, and factions within the Amsterdam city council. The Van Reede family provided important support for Stadholder William III when Utrecht was readmitted into the Union in 1676. The third vote in the States was formed by the cities, specifically Utrecht and the smaller cities of Amersfoort, Rhenen, Wijk bij Duurstede and Montfoort. In this process of readmission, the stadholder acquired more rights to choose regents from the usual lists of three suggestions.¹²¹

Early in the revolt Overijssel was a war zone, and this hampered the setting-up of a comprehensive provincial government. Ultimately a combination of Provincial States with Delegated States (comparable with the *Gecommitteerde Raden*) was set up. Votes were divided between the nobility from the three parts of the province, on the one hand, and the three major cities (Deventer, Zwolle and Kampen) voting together, on the other.¹²² After 1672, the stadholder acquired the right to choose the urban magistrates, like in Gelderland and Utrecht.

The biggest variation on the theme of provincial government was in Friesland, which had been a 'free lordship' in the later Middle Ages, lacking a single sovereign head. With the revolt, the *Hof* (court) that had been established by the Habsburgs lost power. This power reverted to the rural areas, which were divided into thirty administrative blocks called *Grietenijen*. Through local elections, each *Grietenij* would send two delegates to the meeting of the quarter in which it was located.¹²³ After the revolt, the province was divided into four administrative 'quarters'; three rural regions represented through the *Grietmannen* Oostergo, Westergo and Zevenwolden, and the eleven cities that together acted as one (see Figure 2).¹²⁴ Each quarter cast one vote in the full meeting of the Provincial States.¹²⁵ Executive power rested in the Delegated States, organized along the lines of the Holland model. Here, the cities had one third of the votes in reflection of their share of the province's population.¹²⁶ The *Grietenij* system changed in 1640, when it was decided to attach votes in local elections to ownership of certain farms. Although this was an

¹¹⁹ R. Fruin and H.T. Colenbrander, *Geschiedenis der staatsinstellingen in Nederland tot den val der Republiek* (Nijhoff: The Hague 1901) 244-245.

¹²⁰ *Ibidem*, 245.

¹²¹ S.J. Fockema Andreae, *De Nederlandse staat onder de republiek* (Noord-Hollandsche Uitgevers Maatschappij: Amsterdam 1961) 57.

¹²² *Ibidem*, 62.

¹²³ Fruin, *Geschiedenis der staatsinstellingen*, 248-250.

¹²⁴ The eleven cities were Leeuwarden, Dokkum, Franeker, Harlingen, Bolsward, Sneek, Stavoren, Sloten, Workum, IJlst and Hindeloopen.

¹²⁵ Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 281-282.

¹²⁶ *Ibidem*, 282.

attempt to combat corruption in these elections, it had as an unintended consequence the fact that one individual could cast multiple votes if he owned more of the listed farms. This ultimately advanced the creation of a closed political oligarchy.¹²⁷ The influence of the rural *Grietmannen* in affairs touching upon overseas trade is revealed by the charter granted by the Provincial States of Friesland in 1642 for the creation of a Frisian East India Company. The men named as the beneficiaries of the charter were predominantly *Grietmannen*, rather than merchants.¹²⁸ Finally, Stad en Lande (literally: city and countryside, and sometimes also referred to as Groningen) would occasionally clash with Friesland over dominance among the northern provinces. As a province, Stad en Lande was a new construct that was devised in 1595 after the successful reduction of the city of Groningen in the preceding year. The new province was a construct comprising the formerly pro-Spanish Drenthe city of Groningen and its lands to the east and the (predominantly Frisian) countryside to the north, which had sided with the Republic. In the new Provincial States, each part could cast one vote and so hold the other in balance.

The provinces of the Dutch Republic thus varied in their internal organization. In all the provinces, however, the meetings of the Provincial States (also called *landdagen* in some provinces) served as a platform where local concerns and interests were voiced and negotiated. In some cases, the provinces could take action themselves by offering provincial charters or monopolies, or lending provincial support to organizations that represented the interests of a particular branch of the economy, as in the case of the *College van de grote visserij* in Holland.¹²⁹ This latter organization was also of interest as it resembled, in some ways, the transfer of specific authority from the (in this case, provincial) government to a supra-regional body representing a specific set of interests. In short, therefore, the kind of arrangement clearly seen in the chartering of the trading companies, though this took place at the level of the Generality.

¹²⁷ Fruin, *Geschiedenis der Staatsinstellingen*, 249.

¹²⁸ A manuscript version of the charter is kept in the National Archives in The Hague: NL-HaNA 1.01.02, States-General, inv. no. 12563-22.

¹²⁹ A.P. van Vliet, *Visserij en kapers: De zeevisserij vanuit het Maasmondgebied en de Duinkerker kapers (ca. 1580-1648)* (Stichting Hollandse Historische Reeks: The Hague 1994) 34-38.

Figure 2: Political map of the Republic in its borders of 1621



Source: Erik Odegard, 2015.

The Generality

The individual provinces came together in the meetings of the States-General, from which the Dutch central government derived its name: *the Generality*. In many ways the meetings of the States-General replicated the role of the Provincial States. Instead, however, of individual cities and the nobility casting votes, each province had a vote. In theory, if not in practice, each province had an equal vote. But Holland could at times use its large contribution to the Generality budget to force the other provinces to adhere to its views. This budget was used mainly for two things: paying the armed forces and paying the interest on accumulated debts.¹³⁰ Most of the decisions taken at the level of the Generality had thus to do with warfare or diplomacy in one way or another. This meant that Holland, which contributed almost sixty

¹³⁰ J.L. Price, 'A State Dedicated to War? The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century', in: A. Ayton and J.L. Price, *The Medieval Military Revolution: State, Society and Military Change in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (London and New York 1998)183-200, 190. Price quotes figures gathered by M. 't Hart.

per cent of funds to the Generality, had a strong position in the federal government of the Republic.¹³¹ Indeed, authors have claimed that the province of Holland was in competition with the Generality because a weak Generality meant that the Provincial States had more freedom to set their own course of action. This point of view has been criticized as Holland stood to profit, no less than the others, from effective governance at the level of the Generality.¹³² Although decisions on spending were taken by a majority vote in the States-General, the Generality did not enjoy independent rights of taxation. Instead, money to fund agreed expenditure was raised by the individual provinces as they saw fit. The provinces often delegated the matter to cities and other local administrations. This placed considerable power in the hands of bodies, such as the Amsterdam council of 1643, which were responsible for raising ‘the sinews of war’ that would pay for the Republic’s fleets, armies and diplomatic efforts.

These diplomatic efforts were also actively pursued by the members of the Amsterdam council. Albert Coenraetsz. Burgh himself, for example, died in Novgorod in 1647 during his second diplomatic mission to the Court of the Tsar of Muscovy, while having also gone on a diplomatic mission to Denmark in 1639. Besides Burgh, at least four other individuals who had a seat on the Amsterdam council in 1643 undertook diplomatic missions during their careers in the municipal government. The most active in this regard was Andries Bicker, the man banished to the States of Holland in 1643. Two years before, when he was still a mayor, he had undertaken a diplomatic mission to Denmark, Sweden and Poland. Indeed, most of the diplomatic missions undertaken by the Amsterdam council members were to one or more of the Baltic powers. The balance of power in the Baltic was of great importance to the grain trade, which was a cornerstone of Amsterdam’s welfare. The city had thus acquired the right to appoint one of its own as a diplomat when missions to Baltic states were undertaken. This delegation of foreign affairs was not unique to Amsterdam: in the negotiations with England after the Third Anglo-Dutch War (1672-1674), the VOC was allowed to send a number of its directors to the peace conference as negotiators to ensure the company’s interests were not compromised.¹³³

Three members of the Amsterdam council of 1643 also served as delegates to the States-General for Holland at some point in their career, with Andries Bicker taking on this role in 1646-1648, for example. The other important body in the Generality was the Council of State, which oversaw the organization of the army and the fortifications. Albert Coenraetsz. Burgh served on the Council of State in 1643, while Gerard Schaeap, Lord of Kortenhoef, did so in the late 1650s. Service on the Council of State would have brought Burgh into regular contact with Frederik Hendrik, the stadholder and perhaps the single most powerful ‘servant’ of the Generality. Indeed, the 1640s and 1650s were a period when the stadholder’s position in the Dutch political constellation was heavily debated.

The Stadholders

In Habsburg times, the stadholders (literally ‘place-holders’) had been the lord’s representatives in a province when the lord himself was absent. Thus the office should have disappeared with the abjuration of Philip, and the shift of sovereignty to the individual States. This did not happen, however. Instead, the office changed its role and character, and became a prerogative of two

¹³¹ Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 286.

¹³² See criticism in: J.C. Boogman, ‘The Union of Utrecht: its genesis and consequences’, *BMGN* 94:3 (1979), 399-400.

¹³³ Van Dam, *Beschryvinge van de Oostindische Compagnie, eerste boek, deel 1* (Martinus Nijhoff: The Hague, 1927) 221.

branches of the Nassau family. In this way, the stadholders provided a courtly aspect in the otherwise strictly republican state. Strictly speaking, the stadholders were appointed by the provinces. As such, there was never just one stadholder for the entire Republic. The phrase ‘stadholderless period’ (as used to describe the period 1650-1672) applies to all provinces except Friesland, which always appointed stadholders from a different branch of the Nassau family than Holland. The ‘western’ stadholder also always held another important office: Captain-General of the army and Admiral-General of the fleet. Although the stadholder rarely ventured out to sea, effective command of the army rested with him. A successful strategist could therefore reinforce his position in the Republic through military victories. The successes of Frederik Hendrik (1584-1647) in the 1620s and 1630s allowed him to make the office of stadholder more royal in pretensions, despite his keeping a considerably smaller court than even minor German electors.¹³⁴ The marriage of Frederik Hendrik’s son William II (1626-1650) to the English princess Mary Stuart underlines these semi-royal aspirations. In diplomatic contacts outside Europe, the stadholder was sometimes presented as a royal head of state in order to facilitate diplomatic relations.¹³⁵ The stadholders obviously also tried to use their positions of privilege and patronage to further their own familial interests. Their ultimate aim can perhaps be regarded as a wish to achieve a fully hereditary status of the stadholdership and formalization of the semi-monarchical status, an aim that was not achieved until 1813, with the creation of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. To further these goals the stadholders had a potentially valuable and powerful network of patronage relations at their disposal. As we have seen, the stadholders could select members for appointment to the urban councils. They could also support specific factions within city councils. Burgh himself had been installed in 1618 after the intervention of stadholder Maurits (1567-1625), although in this case the appointment did not result in long-term loyalty to the Orangist, counter-remonstrant cause. In addition, as senior field commanders, the stadholders had a decisive say in the appointment of army officers, especially during campaigns. Another valuable patronage tool was the right to appoint commanders of important fortresses. Through their scattered holdings across the Republic, the stadholders could also grant honorable and rewarding positions in places such as Breda, Zeeland (Veere and Vlissingen) and Lingen. The court of the stadholder presented opportunities for patronage as well.¹³⁶ The social chess game surrounding appointments becomes all too clear from the diaries of the Frisian stadholder Willem Frederik (1613-1664), who mentioned, for example, that when asked for favors or appointments, he always made the situation seem much more difficult than it actually was. This was meant to induce gratitude in the client and thus ensure the reciprocity that was the foundation of the patron-client relationship.¹³⁷ In contrast to other European powers, the stadholders, representing the monarchical element in the *respublica mixta* of the Republic, often had good relations with the various boards of nobility in the provinces.¹³⁸ Nobles stood to gain influence on the Generality if they could gain the trust and ear of a strong stadholder. The

¹³⁴ J. Duindam, ‘Tussen tafellaken en servet: Het stadhouderlijk hof in dynastiek Europa’, *BMGN, Low Countries Historical Review* 124:4 (2009) 536-558, 546-547.

¹³⁵ M. Meuwese, ‘The States General and the Stadholder: Dutch Diplomatic Practices in the Atlantic World before the West India Company’, *Journal of Early American History* 3 (2013) 43-58.

¹³⁶ J. Duindam, ‘Tussen tafellaken en servet: Het stadhouderlijk hof in dynastiek Europa’, *BMGN* 124:4 (2009) 536-558, 549-551.

¹³⁷ G.H. Janssen, *Creaturen van de macht: Patronage bij Willem Frederik van Nassau (1613-1664)* (Amsterdam 2005) 11.

¹³⁸ For the term *respublica mixta*, see J.D. Tracy, *The Founding of the Dutch Republic: War, Finance, and Politics in Holland 1572-1588* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 2008) LXI-LXVIII.

Van Reede family, for example, succeeded in doing this after 1672: Johan van Reede van Renswoude became a chief advisor of William III (1650-1702) in the 1670s, and in 1676 announced Utrecht's readmission to the Union from the steps of the Utrecht city hall. In 1688 Godard Adriaan van Reede-Ginkel, from another branch of this large family, followed William to England and was entrusted with military command in Ireland. Success there meant naturalization and ennoblement in England as the first Earl of Athlone. Van Reede-Ginkel was able to combine roles in his native Utrecht with military commands in Flanders and his position as a nobleman in England, which is clear testimony to the value of being a client to a mighty stadholder-king such as William III.

The events of 1672 and the conditions stipulated for the readmission of Utrecht, Gelderland and Overijssel to the Union considerably reinforced the position of the stadholder. Especially in the three readmitted land provinces, the stadholder's influence was lastingly strengthened, whereas William III encountered difficulties with opposing urban regents in Holland and Zeeland as early as 1673.¹³⁹ The army could become a bone of contention between the stadholder, who had an interest in creating a large army whose victories would reflect well on its commander and which would extend his powers of patronage, and the cities that would in large part be required to pay for this army. This issue became especially acute during the 1640s, when it became apparent to many regents in Holland that extending the territory of the Republic would serve only to dilute Holland's weight at the level of the Generality. Thus there existed a conflict of interest between the stadholder and the senior army commanders on the one hand, and the regents of Holland, primarily Amsterdam, on the other. The question of army strength and size will surely have been debated by the council and burgomasters in 1643, although none of these individuals seems to have served on the front as a 'delegate in the field' (the States-General's plenipotentiaries entrusted with advising the army commanders and, where necessary, checking their actions). By contrast, the council of 1643 was very deeply involved in the running of the navy.

Security at sea: admiralties, directories and private companies

As mentioned earlier, most of the States-General's energy was directed at the business of war, both on land and at sea. While the army was truly an organ of the Generality, commanded by the stadholder, naval administration presents a rather different picture. Providing safety at sea in the face of the onslaught of Habsburg attacks from the southern Netherlands would prove to be a crucial task for the new state if it was to survive. The focus in the initial phases of the revolt lay on securing Dutch coastal waters. Spain lost control of these waters after the Battle on the Zuiderzee (1573) and the Battle of Bergen op Zoom (1574) and never regained it.¹⁴⁰ This initial period was of great importance as it had a formative effect on the creation of naval institutions in the Republic. Because of the divisions within the nascent Dutch state in these formative years, the single admiralty of the Habsburg lands, established at Veere (whose warehouses and stocks were captured by the rebels early in the revolt), gave way to a much more complicated organization.¹⁴¹ The localized character of the early years of warfare and the broken connections between the maritime regions resulted in regional admiralty boards being established in various

¹³⁹ Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 811.

¹⁴⁰ J.P. Sigmond, *Zeemacht in Holland en Zeeland in de zestiende eeuw* (Verloren: Hilversum 2013) 168-172, 202-207.

¹⁴¹ For the Habsburg admiralty in Veere, see L. Sicking, *Neptune and the Netherlands: State, Economy and War at Sea in the Renaissance* (Brill: Leiden and Boston 2004). For Veere as a naval base, see especially 410-419.

regions and provinces. Ultimately, the province of Holland alone had three admiralties, with the admiralty of *De Maze* (the Meuse), headquartered in Rotterdam, representing the cities of the southern quarter of Holland. This was the oldest and most senior admiralty board, and the most senior admirals in the service of the Republic were consequently always appointed by this admiralty and their flagships were invariably built by De Maze. The admiralty of *Het Noorderkwartier* (the Northern Quarter – Holland north of the IJ), headquartered in Hoorn and Enkhuizen, represented the West-Frisian cities. Lastly, the richest and most important admiralty of the three was headquartered in Amsterdam, the only city to have an admiralty board all for itself. Besides these three boards in Holland, the provinces of Zeeland and Friesland also had admiralties of their own.¹⁴² Although these boards were established in specific regions or towns, they were – importantly – instruments of the Generality, not of the individual cities or provinces. Admiralty boards in one region sometimes placed one or more of their members on other boards to check those boards' actions. In the case of the Amsterdam admiralty, members were sent to the Noorderkwartier and Zeeland, with Gerard Schaep Pietersz. being an outside member of the admiralty of Zeeland in 1643, while Jacob Willekens went to the Noorderkwartier.

Table 2 shows the Amsterdam council members' strong representation on the admiralty board located in that city. Indeed, despite the nominal status of the admiralties as general institutions, they were in practice very much integrated in the urban scene of offices and patrimonial politics. The fact that the Amsterdam city council appointed members to the admiralty boards, and naturally chose from within its own circles, has traditionally been seen as a negative aspect of the Dutch admiralty organization as the local elites had no proper sense of 'national interests' and pursued only their local interests, even at the expense of the interests of the Republic at large.¹⁴³ There were certainly many instances of infighting between the admiralties, as well as instances where specific boards' objections to general policies were primarily based on their specific regional interests and position. In the 1630s, for example, the Admiralty of Amsterdam led the fight against the 'general rendezvous' in Goedereede for the fleet of ships blockading Dunkirk. The latter initiative was supported by stadholder Frederik Hendrik, who wanted to create an effective operational port for the fleet. Since the provisioning and maintenance of the fleet would be done in Goedereede, the cities risked losing out on the activity generated by having an admiralty yard within their walls.¹⁴⁴ Another example was Amsterdam's resistance to building larger warships, as proposed by Lieutenant-Admiral Tromp during the First Anglo-Dutch War (1652-1654), on the grounds that the city was afraid that the larger ships would not be able to enter or exit its difficult port.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² C.T.F. Thurkow, *De Westfriese Admiraliteit* (Fas Frisiae: Enkhuizen 1945), 7-21, gives an interesting political background to the separation between the admiralties of the Noorderkwartier and Amsterdam.

¹⁴³ Bruijn, *The Dutch Navy of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (University of South Carolina Press: Columbia, 1990) 5-12.

¹⁴⁴ Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 295.

¹⁴⁵ J.E. Elias, *De vlootbouw in Nederland, 1596-1655* (Noord-Hollandsche uitgeverij: Amsterdam 1933) 99-114.

Table 2: Members of the Admiralty Boards on the Amsterdam Council in 1643

ID	Name	Admiralty Board
1	Albert Coenraetsz. Burgh (B)	Amsterdam 1644-1647
2	Jan Cornelis Geelvinck (B)	Amsterdam 1642
3	Gerbrand Claesz. Pancras (B)	
4	Cornelis de Graeff (B)	
5	Dr. Jan ten Grootenhuys	
6	Adriaen Pietersz. Raep	Amsterdam 1621-1624, Noorderkwartier 1628-1639
7	Simon Willem van der Does	
8	Antony Oetgens van Waveren	Amsterdam 1652
9	Dr. Andries Bicker	
10	Dr. Nicolaes Tulp	
11	Dr. Gerard Schaep, Lord of Kortenhoef	
12	Willem Backer	
13	Diederick Tholincx	
14	Ernst Roeters	
15	Pieter Hasselaer Pietersz.	Amsterdam 1640-1643
16	Hendrick Reynst	
17	Simon de Rijck	
18	Joan Huydecoper	Amsterdam 1653
19	Allard Cloeck	
20	Hendrick Dircksz. Spiegel	
21	Jan Claesz. van Vlooswijk	
22	Dr. Frans Banningh Cocq	
23	Mr. Hercules Roch	
24	Wouter Valckenier	
25	Dr. Albert Bas	Amsterdam 1648-1649
26	Mr. Gerard Schaep, Pietersz.	Zeeland 1639-1648
27	Albert Dircksz. Pater	
28	Mr. Joris Jorisz. Backer	
29	Jacob Willekens	Noorderkwartier 1639-1648
30	Cornelis Jacobsz. Wever	
31	Franck van der Meer	
32	Jacob Claesz. Van Harencaspel	Noorderkwartier 1648-1649
33	Mr. Wilhelm van Ruytenburgh	
34	Cornelis Witsen	Amsterdam 1654-1657
35	Roelof Bicker	

Source: Elias, *De vroedschap van Amsterdam deel 1*, 327-435.

Jan Glete has recently criticized these views as being overly pessimistic. Although the organization of the Dutch navy was perhaps inefficient from a modern-day perspective, the organization's dispersed, federal nature was, in Glete's view, highly effective in terms of mobilizing resources for naval warfare. The seventeenth-century Dutch fleet was very large compared to the population of the Republic, and this strength was not explained solely by the

wealth of the Republic. Instead, Glete claimed, the localized nature of the Dutch naval organization, coupled with the strong links between the local regents and the admiralty boards, as well as the clear focus on protecting commerce, meant there was a great willingness among the regional elites and the various merchant groups to pay for the navy.¹⁴⁶ In brief, the regents of Amsterdam and the political and economic alliances in the city that they represented were willing to pay taxes to the admiralties because they themselves were responsible for spending these funds, often in their own city and on their own products and services. This meant, according to Glete, that the Republic could mobilize resources relatively efficiently and thus maintain a strong navy. In Glete's terms, the Republic was good at *interest aggregation*: in other words, at aggregating various local and regional interests behind the interests of the Republic as a whole. Rather than trying to explain Dutch naval successes *despite* its dispersed naval organization, Glete sought to attribute these successes specifically *to* this organization.¹⁴⁷ Although this more positive perception can be seen as an important corrective to the overly negative narratives of older historiography, it should not, in itself, be taken too far: though the interest-aggregation argument works well in explaining the willingness of local merchants to pay the customs duties (*convoyen en licenten*) that provided the regular or 'ordinary' cash flow to the admiralty boards, it did not prevent the frequent clashes in the States-General and the Provincial States about the payment of 'extraordinary' subsidies to equip more warships. Until the fall of Dunkirk in 1646, extra money was needed to provide more escorts and cruisers to stave off privateers. After the outbreak of the First Anglo-Dutch War, extraordinary funds were also voted for in order to construct the larger line of battleships required.¹⁴⁸ The naval organization of the Netherlands should thus be judged on its own merits, without falling into the trap of being either too negative or too positive. Although the organization often worked well, it could also fall victim to internecine strife and inertia. Personal ties were of crucial importance in compelling the boards to cooperate effectively. Johan de Witt stands out as the best example of this in that he was able to effectively coordinate action by the admiralty boards because of having contacts in each of them.¹⁴⁹

The admiralty boards that were part of the apparatus of the Generality were not, however, the only organizations responsible for safeguarding Dutch commerce in 1643. Three other types of organizations were responsible either for specific geographic areas or for convoying specific trades that were not part of the state at all. The *College van de grote visserij*, which has already been mentioned in another setting, acquired the right to commission escorts (*buisconvoyers*) to the fishing fleets during the 1620s. The local branches of the *College* appointed captains and recruited crews, and were made responsible from 1625 for speaking justice in cases concerning the convoys. Earlier, in 1620, the local branches had already acquired the right to rule on all cases involving damage to the fisheries or fishing vessels.¹⁵⁰ Nor was this the only case of

¹⁴⁶ P. Brandon, *War, Capital and the Dutch State (1588-1795)* (Brill: Leiden and Boston 2015) 62-63; the first and second annexes on pages 323-385 specify the members of the admiralty boards, their positions in the local administration and their connections to the companies.

¹⁴⁷ For the idea of interest aggregation, see J. Glete, *War and the State in Early Modern Europe: Spain, the Dutch Republic and Sweden as Fiscal-Military States, 1500-1660* (Routledge: London and New York, 2002) 52-54, 154-155, 167-171.

¹⁴⁸ J. Glete, *Navies and Nations: Warships, Navies and State Building in Europe and America, 1500-1860, Volume one* (Almqvist and Wiksell International: Stockholm 1993) 153-154.

¹⁴⁹ Being married to Wendela Bicker connected De Witt to the very influential faction led by the Bicker family in Amsterdam, for example.

¹⁵⁰ A. Bijl, *De Nederlandse convooien dienst 1300-1800: De maritieme bescherming van koopvaardij en zeevisserij tegen piraten en oorlogsgevaar in het verleden* (The Hague 1951) 63-71. Regrettably, there appear to be no monographs on the *Grote visserij*

‘privatization’ of the task of commerce protection. As losses to Dunkirk privateers mounted in the late 1620s, and with the admiralties stretched to provide sufficient escorts, merchants demanded to be allowed to provide escorts of their own. In the cities of Amsterdam, Hoorn, Enkhuizen, Edam, Medemblik and Harlingen local *directies* – urban directories – were consequently formed to equip ships to escort the fleets bound for Norway and the Baltic. These were governed by the burgomasters of the relevant towns, together with representatives from the merchant communities. The costs were covered by extra duties imposed on the merchantmen involved. Thus, the lengthy debates and indecision in the States-General were avoided, and money was found to place extra warships in the water when and where they were needed most.¹⁵¹ These privately held warships could be mobilized for battlefleet actions when necessary, as in 1639 and 1652, but also for expeditions to ‘show the flag’, as in Witte de With’s voyage to Denmark and the Baltic in 1645.¹⁵² These directories were directly controlled by the urban governments of the cities where they were established. This meant that the Generality and, by extension, the stadholder as the nominal head of both the army and the navy did not enjoy a clear monopoly on violence. If conditions so required, cities and boards such as the *College van de grote visserij* were perfectly able and empowered to organize their own naval forces.

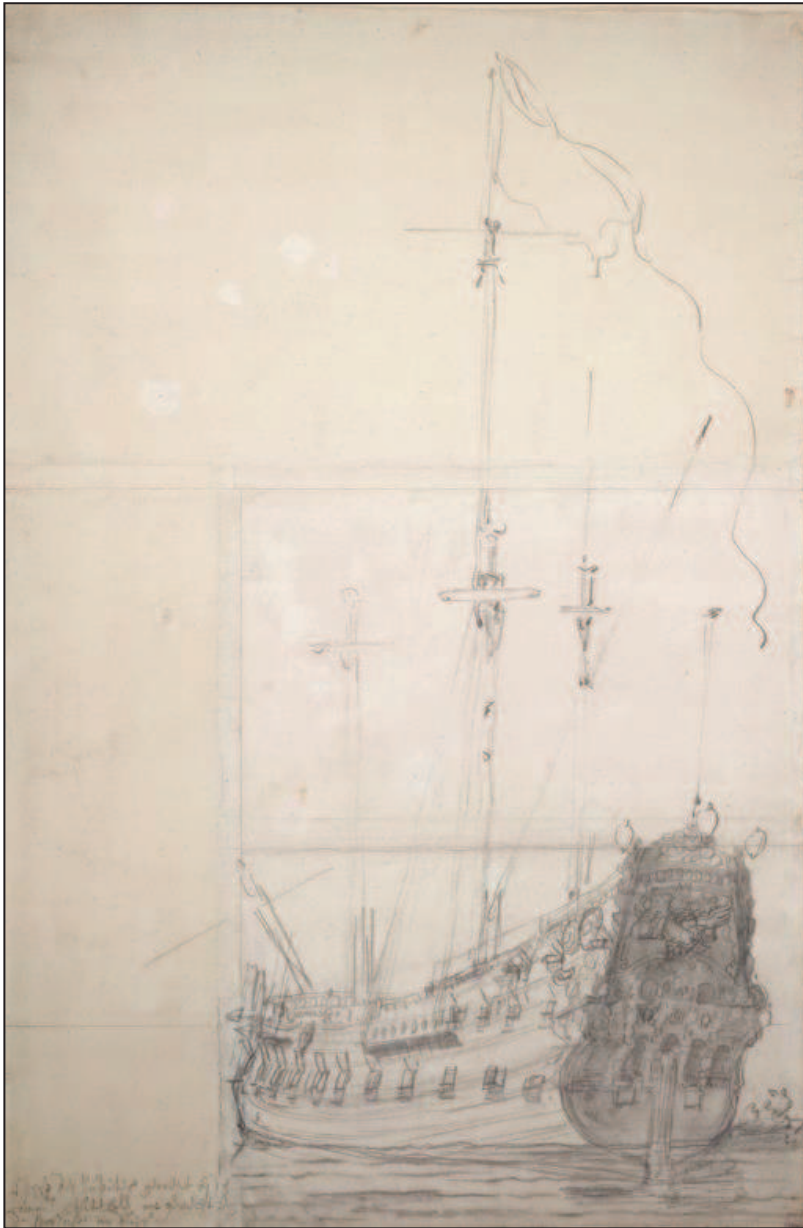
The two chartered companies, the VOC and WIC, were the third type of naval organization operating in addition to the admiralties and the private escorts organized by merchant directories and the fisheries board. These companies were made responsible for protecting their own shipping in their respective charter areas, as well as for organizing their own *offensive* fleets. Consequently, many of the WIC’s ships, for example, should not be seen primarily as merchantmen, but rather as warships, and sometimes very large ones at that. The Jupiter (see Figure 3), armed with forty guns, was one of the larger and more heavily armed ships at the Battle of the Downs (October 31, 1639).

that focus on its role as a supplementary admiralty or court of justice. The more recent works on the Dutch herring fisheries are more interested in the ecological history.

¹⁵¹ Bruijn, *The Dutch Navy*, 27-28.

¹⁵² G.W. Kernkamp, *De sleutels van de Sont: Het aandeel van de Republiek in den Deensch-Zweedschen oorlog van 1644-1645* (Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague 1890) 323-325.

Figure 3: The *Jupiter*, a WIC ship, flagship of Cornelis ‘peg-leg’ Jol at the Battle of the Downs (1639)



Source: National Maritime Museum, Greenwich UK, inv. no. PAI7251.

These examples from the realm of warfare at sea show that the Dutch Republic was a state deeply comfortable with the idea of ‘privatizing’ certain tasks that would in other circumstances be considered as traditionally part of the central state. In the Republic, the Generality could not act by itself as it did not fully control the institutions that were responsible for implementing policy. This meant that, in some instances, it was difficult for the Republic to act as a whole. The institutional solution for this problem was to devolve authority downwards to organizations that allied the interests behind certain activities. This was the case both in the *College van de grote visserij* and that of the chartered companies. The remainder of this chapter will examine the Dutch side of these companies’ organization from an explicitly *political* perspective. I will argue that, in the Dutch case, the chartered company was an institutional solution not to the problem of long-distance trade, but to the problem for a federal Republic of exercising political authority overseas.

Companies and the state; companies of state

Merchants operating from the Northern Netherlands had been trading with Asia since the mid-1590s. The famous *Eerste Schipvaart* (first voyage) of 1595-1597, though unprofitable, proved that the problems of navigating the long voyage could be overcome. This provided the setting for a boom in Dutch-Asiatic shipping. Within a few years, companies active in the Asian trades were operating in or being founded in Amsterdam, Enkhuizen, Hoorn, Delft and Zeeland. This inevitably caused friction as these companies were all active in the same areas and all chasing after the same products. To give an example: Steven van der Hagen, who sailed to the East in 1599 for the Old Company (of Amsterdam), was instructed ‘always to keep in mind, that the Zeelanders are enemies to our work, and should not be trusted lightly.’¹⁵³ The reference to ‘the Zeelanders’ probably means the four ships of the Middelburg Company, which had set sail in 1598. In the longer term, this rivalry caused spice prices in the Netherlands to slump, owing to a sharp rise in the quantities supplied. But even before the commercial effects of competition among Dutch firms became apparent, talks had begun in The Hague to see whether a merger of the Asian trading interests could be effected.¹⁵⁴ The prime motivation for achieving a merged company was thus more political than economic. Rather than representing the invention of a new corporate form, as is often argued for the VOC, the chartering of the new company in 1602 was a careful political compromise that placated all the parties interested in the new trade.¹⁵⁵ The Generality’s interest in this new company was its wish to avoid commercial rivalries between cities and provinces spilling over into everyday politics and the risk of disunion in the Republic.

The newly chartered company was also entrusted with looking after its own defense. This served a threefold goal for the Republic. Firstly, the admiralties would not be burdened with protecting the company’s shipping in Asia. Secondly, the future VOC was turned into a self-financing instrument of the global war against the Republic’s Habsburg foe. Thirdly, it meant there was now a reservoir of large, well-armed warships that could be mobilized in times of crisis. Indeed, many of the admiralties’ largest ships were transferred to the new company in the following decades, leaving the admiralties to focus on smaller ships for cruising and escorting in European waters. In this way, the VOC became the Republic’s representative in Asia, and it is worth contemplating what alternative constructions could have looked like. Although direct diplomacy from the Generality would have been possible, the interests in Asia were not spread equally between all provinces, but were instead concentrated in the maritime provinces of Holland and Zeeland. Using the Generality budget to pay for entanglements in Asia could thus have angered the land provinces, which were still at the frontline of the war against Spain. Delegating authority to a self-financing company was thus politically more prudent. This background is confirmed by the internal structures of both the VOC and the WIC, being their cameral organization.

¹⁵³ J. Aalbers, *Rijckloff van Goens. Commissaris en veldoverste der Oost-Indische Compagnie, en zijn arbeidsveld 1653/54 en 1657/58* (Groningen 1916) 3.

¹⁵⁴ J.G. van Dillen, *Het oudste aandeelhoudersregister van de kamer Amsterdam der Oost-Indische Compagnie* (Nijhoff: The Hague 1958) 12-13.

¹⁵⁵ Gaastra, *De geschiedenis van de VOC*, 23. Steensgaard, ‘The Dutch East India Company as an Institutional Innovation’, in: M. Aymard (ed.), *Dutch Capitalism and World Capitalism* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 1982) 235-257, 239.

Chambers of the companies

Both companies were organized along lines that will immediately seem familiar from the earlier discussion of the Republic's political organization. Instead of creating a single company centered in a single city, the companies were themselves federal entities, resembling the Republic itself. The VOC was in fact a merger between existing companies that had already sailed to Asia or were in the process of organizing such voyages.¹⁵⁶ The urban interests behind these ventures were protected by establishing a *chamber* in each relevant city: Amsterdam, Middelburg, Rotterdam, Delft, Hoorn and Enkhuizen. Although the 'united company' that was set up in this way did not take over the capital of the previous companies, it did build on the existing infrastructure and know-how by, for example, offering a position in the VOC's ranks of directors to the directors of the existing companies, with their numbers gradually being reduced to the numbers prescribed by the united company's charter. As the charter itself has previously been examined in depth, this will not be repeated here. However, the common assertion that the VOC was the first modern joint-stock company has been criticized by Henk den Heijer as this assertion rests purely on the way that the capital was raised.¹⁵⁷ It is noteworthy, however, that the majority of the stipulations in the VOC charter of 1602 dealt with the organization of the company in the Netherlands.¹⁵⁸ Apparently, organizing intercontinental trade was deemed less cumbersome than ensuring equity between the various trading towns in Holland and Zeeland. The company was organized in 'chambers', each of which had its own shipyards, auctions and directors. The company as a whole thus comprised a joint venture of these chambers. Operating as a single company in one city, as in the case of the East India Company in London, would have been impossible in the Dutch political context. Jan Glete's idea of interest aggregation can be fruitfully applied to the chartering of the VOC. Aggregating sufficient political interests behind the company required allowing multiple cities and regions in Holland and Zeeland to join the new company. In turn, this aggregation of interests protected the Republic's monopoly on trade with Asia, which was a condition for the company to operate as a political and military representative of the whole Republic in Asia.

In the view of Femme Gaastra, the chambers of the VOC can be seen as the executive arm of the company, responsible for fulfilling the orders issued by the central management (the *Heren XVII*, named after the number of directors on this body).¹⁵⁹ This represents an evolution of the original relations between the chambers, as laid down in the charter of 1602. Initially the VOC resembled a loose joint venture of five independent municipal companies. During the first charter period (1602-1623), however, this strong division caused the smaller chambers to encounter liquidity problems and, as a result, the company gradually became a much more coherent whole.¹⁶⁰

The cameral organization of the WIC followed slightly different lines than the VOC, and this had certain important ramifications. The WIC's organization did not build on previous firms and neither, significantly, did it adopt earlier firms' directors. As a result, it failed to integrate

¹⁵⁶ J.G. van Dillen, *Van rijkdom en regenten: Handboek tot de economische en sociale geschiedenis van Nederland tijdens de republiek* (The Hague 1970) 111-122.

¹⁵⁷ H. den Heijer, *De geotrooieerde Compagnie: De VOC en de WIC als voorlopers van de naamloze vennootschap* (Kluwer: Deventer 2005) 213-217.

¹⁵⁸ Gaastra, *De geschiedenis van de VOC* (seventh revised edition, Zutphen 2002) 20.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, 159.

¹⁶⁰ R. Schalk, J. Jonkers and O. Gelderblom, 'Schipperen op de Aziatische vaart: De financiering van de VOC kamer Enkhuizen 1602-1622, *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review* 127:4 (2012) 3-27.

some of the knowledge and experience of trade and warfare in the Atlantic that was already available in the Republic. The question also arose as to where chambers should be located, with the initial drafts of charters mentioning only four chambers: in Amsterdam, the Noorderkwartier, De Maze and Zeeland.¹⁶¹ Friesland had been ignored in the creation of the VOC in 1602, and now the province, alongside Stad en Lande, lobbied for the WIC to include a northern chamber. This met resistance from Reinier Pauw, one of the burgomasters of Amsterdam and who also represented that city in the States-General. The weakening of his position in Amsterdam was probably, therefore, the reason for his ultimately consenting to a northern chamber for the WIC, as long as the northerners could muster half a million guilders to fund the company.¹⁶² This set the scene for some northern infighting, the result of which was that the city of Groningen, after raising the necessary capital, was granted the fifth chamber.¹⁶³ This was only one of multiple problems faced by the new chambers of the company, and which included fierce infighting in the Noorderkwartier about how shipbuilding should be divided between the participating cities.¹⁶⁴ Similar divisions had to be overcome in the formation of the chambers of Zeeland and de Maze, with the latter having separate sub-chambers in Dordrecht, Delft and Rotterdam. Ironically, since the chamber would later be headquartered in Rotterdam, Dordrecht and Delft contributed more to the chamber.¹⁶⁵

The question thus arises as to whether Gaastra's observation about the chambers of the VOC in relation to the central management is also true for the WIC. The answer, unambiguously, is 'no'. Rather than drawing closer together over time, as happened with the VOC, the WIC increasingly fractured into its constituent parts: the chambers. This even spilled over into the overseas world, where specific chambers were allocated responsibility for specific colonies. Zeeland administered the Wild Coast and Tobago, and New Amsterdam had exclusive responsibility for managing the possessions in New Netherland, while in 1628 all chambers received exclusive trading rights along the coast of West Africa.¹⁶⁶ This tendency to fracture is also borne out in the archives of the States-General, which contain many complaints from one chamber of the company against one or more others. A good example is the conflict over the distribution of gold from the Gold Coast of Africa in the 1640s.¹⁶⁷ This disagreement centered on the question of whether all the chambers should share in the proceeds from the incoming gold, or only those that had sent the ships to Africa. Amsterdam claimed the gold since it arrived on Amsterdam vessels, but Zeeland disagreed, arguing that Amsterdam had not sent its share of ships to Brazil. This conflict eventually ended up in the Generality's lap as the chambers were unable to resolve it internally.

¹⁶¹ Hallema, 'Friesland en de voormalige Compagnieën voor den handel op Oost en West', *West-Indische Gids* XV:1 (1934) 81-96, 89-90.

¹⁶² P.J. van Winter, *De Westindische Compagnie ter kamer Stad en Lande* (The Hague 1978) 6.

¹⁶³ *Ibidem*, 7-8.

¹⁶⁴ A. Bick, *Governing the Free Sea: The Dutch West India Company and Commercial Politics, 1618-1645* (unpublished PhD thesis, Princeton 2012) 113.

¹⁶⁵ C. van Lintum, 'De kamer der West-Indische Compagnie te Delft', *Bijdragen tot de taal-, land- en volkenkunde* 63:1 (1910) 93-108, 99-100.

¹⁶⁶ P. Emmer, 'West India Company', in: L. Blussé and F. Gaastra (eds.) *Companies and Trade: Essays on Overseas Trading Companies during the Ancien Régime* (Leiden 1981) 71-96, 78.

¹⁶⁷ HaNa 1.01.02 States-General inv. no. 12564.23, *Extract uit de resoluties van de Staten-Generaal over de verdeling van het goud pas aangekomen uit Guinee*.

Figure 4: Map of the Dutch Republic showing chamber cities of VOC and WIC and cities with directors



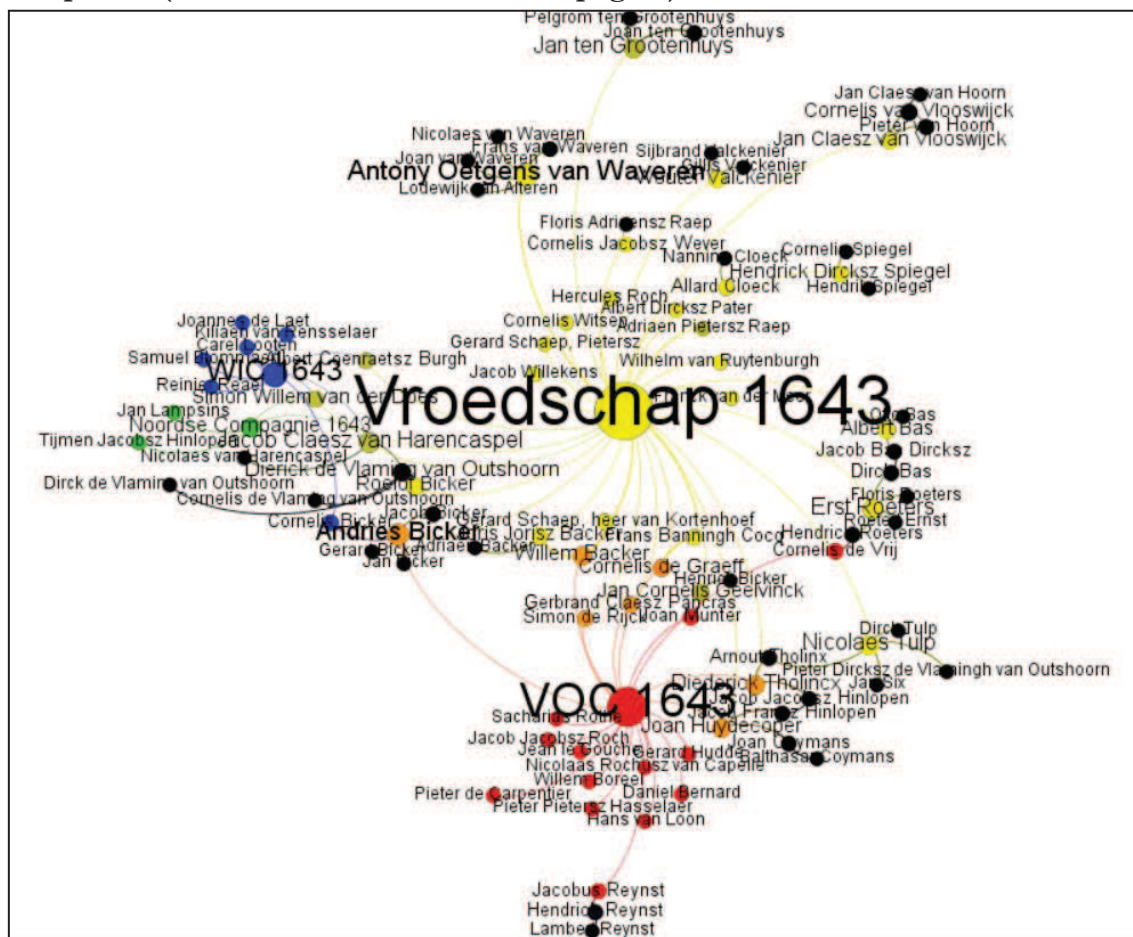
Source: Erik Odegard, 2015. Based on the description in Gaastra, *De geschiedenis van de VOC*, and Den Heijer, *De geschiedenis van de WIC*. The Republic (1621 borders), showing the cities with a stake in either or both of the chartered companies. Red denotes VOC involvement, while blue denotes WIC involvement. Chamber headquarters are underlined in the respective company colors. Cities with a directorship are connected by colored lines to the chamber headquarters in which they had a seat.

Directors and investors: a colonial elite

In their procedure for electing directors, the companies were clearly influenced by the way in which appointments to the magistracies of the cities of Holland were made. In the event of a vacancy at the VOC, the remaining directors would propose three new potential candidates. Under the charter, the Provincial States of Holland and Zeeland would then choose a new director from these three; in other words, the same kind of mechanism for nominations in *drietallen* (groups of three) as already seen in the discussions of the urban magistrates. In Holland, this authority was quickly devolved by the States to the magistrates of the cities with a company chamber. In the case of Zeeland, this did not happen until 1646 because the cities of Middelburg,

Veere and Vlissingen were previously in disagreement on how to divide the directorships of the chamber.¹⁶⁸ Ultimately, therefore, city councils were in charge of electing new directors of the companies. This meant that although the institutions of the companies and the city councils were organizationally distinct, in practice they overlapped to a considerable degree. Of the thirty-five identified members of the Amsterdam council of 1643, no fewer than seventeen were directors of the VOC, the WIC or the chartered whaling company at some point in their career. It is interesting to note that the VOC was much better represented among these individuals than the WIC. In 1643, seven members of the council were also VOC directors (orange dots in fig. 5), while only three WIC directors were also members of the council (yellow-green nodes). Two of these directors, Simon Willem van der Does and Jacob Claesz. Van Harencaspel, were also directors of the Noordse Compagnie, the chartered whaling company. It would be worthwhile making these analyses for longer periods to see whether the VOC was consistently much better represented on the Amsterdam council than the WIC.

Figure 5: Connections between the city council of Amsterdam and the three chartered companies (VOC, WIC and Noordse Compagnie)



Source: Erik Odegard 2016. Image made with Gephi software. Based on Elias, *De Vroedschap van Amsterdam, deel 1*, passim.

Gaastra has drawn attention to the fact that the company chambers' close associations with the urban elites carried the risk that directors would increasingly be drawn from the ranks of rentier

¹⁶⁸ Gaastra, *De geschiedenis van de VOC*, 31.

regents, instead of active merchants. Various attempts were made to reduce this risk by pledging to appoint merchants at the next possible opportunity.¹⁶⁹ Given, however, the important political ramifications of holding a directorship, these attempts were destined to be futile. Ironically, they were initiated by individuals who themselves owed their positions to their political connections.

However, there was also another risk arising through the close association of company and urban interests. The city councils in the Republic were vulnerable to occasional systemic shocks, as seen in 1618, 1650 and most clearly in 1672-74. City councils were occasionally purged for reasons relating to internal politics of the Republic. The dismissal of council members in the cities could also mean loss of their positions in the companies, or in their subsequent replacement by members of the newly dominant factions. Indeed, the great political upheavals of the seventeenth century greatly affected the composition of the boards, most notably in 1672.¹⁷⁰ The regent elite's close association with the company management, as is apparent from the Amsterdam council of 1643, holds true for other cities as well. In the case of the VOC chamber in Rotterdam, for example, twenty-nine of the forty-eight directors who were appointed between 1602 and 1700 were mayors of the city.¹⁷¹ This close association between municipal levels of government and the VOC did, of course, create grounds for a range of complaints, as will be made apparent in the section on the *participanten*. The Amsterdam chamber consequently instated a rule in the early 1680s that no more than half of the company's directors were allowed to sit on the city council, and this rule was followed until 1700 at least.¹⁷² Arthur Weststeijn has argued that some in the Republic saw this close association as a threat to the institutions of state, with the company being able to behave as if it were a 'state within a state' and subverting rules for its own benefit.¹⁷³ But is also possible that this influence worked in the opposite direction, and so from the city councils to the companies.

The elite composition of the VOC directors also entailed another risk, and specifically the risk of how normal investors could know whether the directors were actually looking after the company properly and not fleecing the investors. The policy of the *Heren XVII* in the early years to plow back all the profits from Asia into the company attracted considerable criticism. This included criticism of the lack of proper dividend payments and the decision not to liquidate the company after ten years, as had been planned in the charter. However, the critics encountered the following problem: all the places they could have turned to with their criticism, whether in municipal government, in the admiralties, the provinces or the Generality, were occupied by directors of the company. This gave rise to the following complaint: '*If we complain to the Gentlemen of the Cities Schepenbanken, there are the Directors, as a formal party [in function]. To the Admiralties, there are the Directors. To the States-General, there are the States-General and the Directors at the same time and in the same place, as a formal party.*'¹⁷⁴

This criticism mounted in the years leading up to the renewal of the VOC's charter in 1622, with the printing of many pamphlets and counter-pamphlets advocating the cause of the

¹⁶⁹ Ibidem, 31-32.

¹⁷⁰ F. Gaastra, *Bewind en beleid bij de VOC 1672-1702* (Walburg Pers: Zutphen 1989) 33-41.

¹⁷¹ Gaastra, *De geschiedenis van de VOC*, 32.

¹⁷² Ibidem, 32-32.

¹⁷³ A. Weststeijn, 'The VOC as a Company-State: Debating Seventeenth-Century Dutch Colonial Expansion', *Itinerario* 38:01 (2014) 13-34, 22.

¹⁷⁴ As quoted [*translation: EO*] in: Gaastra, *De geschiedenis van de VOC*, 34. '*Soo wij klagen aan de Heeren van Steden en Scheep Bancken, daar sitten Bewinthebbers, Formele Party. Aan de Admiraliteyten, daar sijn Bewinthebebrs. Aan Staten-Generaal, daar vindt men Staten-Generaal en Bewinthebebrs tegelijck, en op eenen tijt, Formele Party.*

directors or the investors.¹⁷⁵ This was a formative period for both companies as the debates on the rights of shareholders and the powers of the directors had a significant effect on the way in which the WIC's charter was drawn up, while the VOC's charter was modified upon its renewal in 1623 so as to appease shareholders who wanted a say in the company's management. In *The First Imperial Age*, Scammel has the following to say about this episode: 'When the VOC's charter came up for its first renewal the unseasonable views of shareholders seeking a say in its affairs were declared treasonable by the state.'¹⁷⁶ But this assertion is not, in fact, true. The charter was modified in two ways: the directors' payment system was changed, and three new committees, consisting of main shareholders, were instituted to control the actions of the directors. Main shareholders (*Hoofdparticipanten*) were those who had invested the minimal amount needed to be eligible for election to a director's position (6000 guilders in Amsterdam and 3000 guilders in the smaller chambers). The first of these committees (the *rekeningopnemers*) was responsible for checking the general accounts, which were drawn up every four years, starting in 1622. These accounts were intended to provide shareholders with a better understanding of the company's finances. The second committee (the *keurvorsten*, or electors) operated in each chamber and had to compose the list of three nominees from which a new director would be chosen in the event of a vacancy. The final and most important new body was the nine-man committee of *Bëëdigde Hoofdparticipanten*, or 'sworn main investors'. As well as being present at all meetings of the *Heren XVII* and able to cast an advisory vote, these investors obviously reported back to the other investors on what had been discussed at the meetings. The first two of these new committees were elected by all the investors in the company, while only the other main investors elected the third committee.¹⁷⁷

The initial appointment of directors to the WIC chambers was more difficult than in the case of the VOC. Whereas the VOC started out with established local networks and appointed the directors of the merging firms as its first directors, the WIC not only had to raise capital, but also to devise a system for appointing directors. The provision in the charter that any city that subscribed for at least 100,000 guilders could obtain a directorship in a chamber is a clear indication that the WIC tried to reach out to new potential investors, outside the chamber cities.¹⁷⁸ Indeed, the city of Deventer was able to obtain a directorship in the Amsterdam chamber in this way.¹⁷⁹ On another level, and using the analysis of Glete, this provision may also be seen as an attempt at interest aggregation behind the goals of the new company. As warfare was to be an important task of the company, broad political support would be essential. The formation of chambers was also a highly political act as the chambers did not represent solely their own interests, but broader provincial or regional interests as well. Thus Zeeland's chamber had to accommodate the bickering cities of Middelburg, Vlissingen, Veere and Tholen, while De Maze's chamber represented not only Rotterdam, but also Delft, Delfshaven and Dordrecht, and the Noorderkwartier chamber contained not only Hoorn and Enkhuizen, but also Alkmaar, Medemblik, Edam and Purmerend. Within these composite chambers, a mechanism had to be found for allocating directorships, as well as for dividing shipbuilding and victualing activities.

¹⁷⁵ Examples include: *Placcaet ieghens seecker famens libel, geintituleert, Nootwendigh discours, ofte Vertoogh aende [...] Staten Generael, vande participanten der Oost-Indische Compagnie, tegen de bewinthebbers*, Koninklijk Bibliotheek, pfl 3349 and *Korte aemysinghe der bewinthebbers regeringe*, Koninklijke Bibliotheek pfl 3353.

¹⁷⁶ G.V. Scammel, *The First Imperial Age: European Overseas Expansion c.1400-1715* (London and New York 1989) 102.

¹⁷⁷ Gaastra, *De geschiedenis van de VOC*, 35-36.

¹⁷⁸ A. Bick, *Governing the Free Sea: The Dutch West India Company and Commercial Politics, 1618-1645* (unpublished PhD thesis, Princeton 2012) 111.

¹⁷⁹ J. Acquoy, *Deventer's participatie in de West-Indische Compagnie* (Deventer 1922) 11-12.

The WIC charter included some important differences compared with the stipulations concerning directors in the VOC charter. In the first place, the provinces in which the chambers were situated had the right to choose directors from a list of three candidates (each of whom was a *hoofdparticipant*) compiled by the other *hoofdparticipanten*.¹⁸⁰ As in the case of the VOC, the States quickly delegated this authority to the cities. This was a direct response to the conflict between the directors and main investors of the VOC, which attracted a lot of attention at that time. For the same reason, the larger chambers introduced a new office: the *hoofdparticipant-bewindhebber* (main investor – director). These men, one from Zeeland and one from Amsterdam, were elected by the directors of those chambers from the usual list of three nominated by the other main investors.¹⁸¹ The main investors of these two chambers also held regular meetings to discuss the company's affairs. The minutes of these meetings represent a valuable addition to those of the chambers and the central management (the *Heren XIX*).

The central management; XVII and XIX

The central management of the VOC and WIC comprised the meetings of the 'Gentlemen Seventeen' and the 'Gentlemen Nineteen', or XVII and XIX for short, respectively. In principle, these central boards of management set policy for implementation by the chambers. Although practice generally followed principle in the case of the VOC, the chambers proved more willful in the case of the WIC. The VOC's body of seventeen directors met three times a year for periods of up to five weeks. During these meetings the reports from the East were read and the voyages for that year prepared. The central management would then issue instructions for the chambers to put into practice. The XVII met for six consecutive years in Amsterdam, and subsequently in Middelburg for two years. Since the XVII did not have any independent staff but instead relied on the host chamber's personnel, the site of the meetings was of great importance. Voting by the XVII was divided among the chambers, with eight seats for Amsterdam, four for Zeeland and one for each of the smaller chambers. The seventeenth vote was cast by one of the smaller chambers.¹⁸² The only permanent employee of the XVII was the secretary. Since this individual could occupy the position for long periods and so become the 'institutional memory' of the XVII, he could become very powerful indeed. Pieter van Dam, whom we shall yet encounter, held the position from 1652 until his death in 1706 and was perhaps the most powerful occupant of the role. Indeed, since Van Dam read all the incoming letters, he may have been the best-informed person in the Netherlands on the situation in Asia.¹⁸³

The WIC equivalent of the *Heren XVII* was the *Heren XIX*. However, the composition and role of this body differed from the VOC's practice in certain significant ways. Like its counterpart, the WIC central body was composed of the delegates of the chambers constituting the company, based on a division into nine parts (*negensleutel*). Under this system, Amsterdam delegated eight directors to the meetings of the XIX, Zeeland four and the other chambers two each. The final seat was taken by a delegate of the States-General, which had invested in the company as a stock-holder.¹⁸⁴ This contrasts with the Generality's involvement in the VOC. In 1602 and later years, the Generality had supported the VOC by providing loans, ships and

¹⁸⁰ Acquoy, *Deventer's participatie*, 6.

¹⁸¹ Bick, *Governing the Free Sea*, 113.

¹⁸² Gaastra, *De geschiedenis van de VOC*, 154.

¹⁸³ *Ibidem*, 151.

¹⁸⁴ Den Heijer, *De geschiedenis van de WIC*, 31.

cannon, but did not become a shareholder itself. It is likely that the slow sale of WIC shares prompted the Generality to buy shares in 1621. Alexander Bick has studied the composition of the XIX in greater detail and asked ‘How many is nineteen?’, given that there were always more than nineteen people at the ‘meetings of the nineteen’. Although multiple delegates cast a single vote, they all participated in the discussions, which of course increased the influence of the faction they represented.¹⁸⁵ A good example is the single vote that the representative of the States-General could cast. At the meeting of the XIX in February 1638, the States-General were represented by nine men jointly able to cast a single vote.¹⁸⁶ This lends credence to the claim by Henk den Heijer that the Generality’s influence on the management of the company increased as the latter’s prospects became more troubled.¹⁸⁷

What cannot be accepted, however, is his statement that the WIC’s central management greatly resembled that of the VOC and that the main difference between the two lay in the composition of the charter areas.¹⁸⁸ Despite the similarities on paper, there was a great difference in how the two bodies, the XVII for the VOC and the XIX for the WIC, evolved over time. By the time the WIC was chartered in 1621, the VOC’s central management had become a central managerial body that set general policies, determined the size of fleets sent to Asia and declared the dividends to be paid out to shareholders.¹⁸⁹ This was a slow, evolutionary process that took place during the first charter period of the VOC. In the initial charter granted in 1602, the VOC had not been much more than a joint venture of five independent firms. However, the evolution of the XVII allowed the chambers to forward money and goods to each other so that all would pay and receive their fair share.¹⁹⁰ This contrasts sharply with the role played by the XIX in the case of the WIC. Whereas the XVII had been able to overcome provincial and urban differences, the WIC was unable to do so, and the chambers frequently clashed on issues relating to payments of fleets and dividing the trade goods received. To resolve the disagreements between them, the chambers turned to the States-General directly, thus giving the latter an even greater say in the management of the company than before. Plans to reform the WIC in the late 1640s and early 1650s went so far as to state that ‘*the problems which have developed here in the management of the company, have principally had their origins from the fact that the respective chambers have not been held to their responsibilities, and the resolutions, made at the meetings of the XIX, have not been duly observed*’ [translation: EO].¹⁹¹ Over time the WIC fractured along the lines of the chambers, with the main chambers of Amsterdam and Zeeland administering separate regions of the Atlantic charter area.¹⁹² The only affair that was truly undertaken by the company as a whole was the attack on the Portuguese South Atlantic system, which gave an extra sense of importance to this affair, as we shall see. At the same time, the fracturing of the company made it more difficult to manage this joint effort

¹⁸⁵ Bick, *Governing the Free Sea*, 121-127.

¹⁸⁶ NL-HaNA 1.01.02, States-General, inv. no. 12564.6.

¹⁸⁷ Den Heijer, *De geschiedenis van de WIC*, 33.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, 33-34.

¹⁸⁹ R. Schalk, J. Jonkers and O. Gelderblom, ‘Schippers op de Aziatische vaart: De financiering van de VOC kamer Enkhuizen 1602-1622, *bmg* – *Low Countries Historical Review* 127:4 (2012) 3-27, 24-26.

¹⁹⁰ Gaastra, *De geschiedenis van de VOC*, 159.

¹⁹¹ NL-HaNA, States-General, inv.no 12564-37, ‘De meeste swaricheyden, derwelcke hier te landen, inde directive vande Compagnie sijn ontstaen, hebben principalijck daer uyt haer oorspronck gehadt, dat de respective Cameren vande selve Comp. niet genoechsaaam tot hunne deivoir sijn gehouden, ende de resolutien bij de vergadering vande XIX.e succesvelijcken genomen, niet naer behooren hebben geobserveert.’

¹⁹² P.C. Emmer, ‘The West India Company, 1621-1791: Dutch or Atlantic?’, in: L. Blussé and F. Gaastra (eds.) *Companies and Trade: Essays on Overseas Trading Companies during the Ancien Régime* (Leiden University Press: Leiden 1981) 71-96, 78-79.

properly. The WIC, far more so than the VOC, remained a joint venture of local interests that were less aggregated behind a central goal than in the case of the VOC. In practice, therefore, the companies' similar organizational models hid considerable differences.

Conclusion

This chapter has laid the groundwork for understanding the actions of the representatives of the early modern Dutch trading companies overseas by looking at the way in which the Republic itself functioned. By integrating the example of the Amsterdam council of 1643 in a perspective of the political and institutional organization of the Republic and the companies, it has shown that while the various bodies of state and companies were institutionally quite distinct, they were in practice closely intertwined since the same individuals were often in charge. The links between the various levels of government, from the city councils to the Generality and the companies, were composed of the *personal* networks of individuals. Although these individuals were confined in their freedom of action by institutions, both of an organizational nature and in the form of the norms and unspoken agreements that structured personal relations, their actions helped shape these institutions. Rather than a fruitless 'either or' debate on the primacy of institutions or agency, this chapter shows the interactive nature of agency and institutions: individuals were shaped in their behavior by the institutional world in which they operated, while their actions in turn also helped shape the institutions, either reinforcing them or weakening them. In this interconnected world, personal connections were crucial. Family and friendship were the channels through which political power, privilege, as well as ideas and capital flowed. Networks of power that were constituted around familial interests in the cities of the Republic also inhabited the directorships of the chartered companies. The chartered companies were devised as political compromises, aggregating the interests of different regions and cities behind a single goal, without encumbering the political process of the entire Republic. This transfer of competencies from the state to a collective of interests fits a pattern in Dutch state formation. It echoes the transfer of powers from the state to bodies such as the *College van de grote visserij* and the directories. In the case of the companies this transfer of powers was attached to a specific geographic scope, and not limited to a certain set of activities. Since the Generality did not have the institutions to forge a colonial policy, 'outsourcing' this to private, self-financed organizations was a sensible solution. These points have various consequences, as shown in the careers of Rijckloff van Goens and Johan Maurits discussed in the subsequent chapters. The companies were political constructs, and their internal conflicts should be seen as a reflection of larger political conflicts, as much as they were a reflection of commerce and trade proper. In making a career overseas, servants of the companies had to be aware of the political conflicts within and between the chambers, which for a very large part overlapped with the political conflicts in the chamber cities, their provinces and the Generality itself. Ingratiating themselves with specific factions within the urban oligarchies that dominated the councils and the companies could result in a meteoric rise through the companies' ranks. Given the closed-off nature of the urban oligarchies, it is interesting to observe whether a successful career in the companies could result in social mobility, whether in a single lifespan, or 'multigenerational' social mobility.¹⁹³ Given the importance of family as noted by Adams, the multigenerational aspect might be of great

¹⁹³ For the concept of multigenerational social mobility, see: P. Burke, *History and Social Theory* (Polity Press: Cambridge 1992)63-67.

importance indeed. However, the close connection to Dutch domestic politics also had a dark side: political crises in the Republic that were themselves unconnected to the companies could also be quickly transmitted through these networks to the worlds of the companies, with potentially dire consequences for the careers of the servants of the companies overseas, as the following chapter will make clear.