

# Writing Doom: Old and New Perspectives on the Dutch Republic and its Disaster Year (1672)

ARTHUR DER WEDUWEN

Quintin Barry, *From Solebay to the Texel. The Third Anglo-Dutch War, 1672-1674*, Helion & Company, 2018, 128 pp. ISBN 9781911628033.

Theo Basoski, *Voor de Heer en voor Oranje. Simon Oomius en zijn orangistische bazuinen (1672-1674)*, Verloren, 2020, 208 pp. ISBN 9789087048242.

Renger de Bruin, Lodewijk Gerretsen, and Willem te Sla, *Branden of Betalen. Kasteel Amerongen en Slot Zuylen in het Rampjaar*, W Books, 2022, 64 pp. ISBN 9789462584938.

Arnout van Cruyningen, *1672. Het rampjaar van de Republiek*, Omniboek, 2022, 192 pp. ISBN 9789401918862.

Wouter van Dijk, *Soldaten in de Vechtstreek, 1672-1673. Sporen van het Rampjaar in het archief*, Waanders/Regionaal Historisch Centrum Vecht en Venen, 2022, 96 pp. ISBN 9789462624610.

Arjen Dijkstra and Joop Koopmans (eds.), *Verzet en Vrijheid. Het Gronings ontzet van 1672 en de universiteit*, University of Groningen Press/Universiteitsmuseum Groningen, 2022, 119 pp. ISBN 9789403429823.

Anne Doedens and Liek Mulder, *Moordbranders in de Republiek. Het Rampjaar door de ogen van Andries Schoemaker, juni 1672-november 1673*, Walburg Pers, 2022, 197 pp. 9789462497986.

Anne Doedens, Liek Mulder, and Frits de Ruyter de Wildt, *Agenten voor de koning. Engelse spionage tijdens het Rampjaar, 1672-1673*, Waanders, 2022, 176 pp. ISBN 9789462623934.

Ineke Huysman and Roosje Peeters (eds.), *Johan de Witt en het Rampjaar. Een bloemlezing uit zijn correspondentie*, Catullus, 2022, 272 pp. ISBN 9789492409720.

Sunny Jansen, *De vrouw die Friesland redde. Albertine Agnes en het Rampjaar 1672*, Balans, 2022, 320 pp. ISBN 9789463822060.

Jacob Knegtel and Jos Cuijpers (eds.), *Rampjaar of jubeljaar? Brabant in 1672-74*, Zuidelijk Historisch Contact/Pictures Publishers, 2022, 128 pp. ISBN 9789492576606.

Olaf van Nimwegen, *De veertigjarige oorlog (1672-1712). De strijd van de Nederlanders tegen de Zonnekoning*, Prometheus, 2020, 416 pp. ISBN 9789044638714.

Leen Ouweneel, *Regenten en de Waterlinie in het Rampjaar. Hoe de Hollandse Waterlinie tot stand kwam*, Historische Uitgaven Schoonhoven, 2022, 267 pp. ISBN 9789082309553.

Luc Panhuysen, *Rampjaar 1672. Hoe de Republiek aan de ondergang ontsnapte*, Atlas Contact, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2022 (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 2009), 476 pp. ISBN 9789045045429.

Wout Troost, *Hiëronymus van Beverningk tijdens het Rampjaar 1672*, Walburg Pers, 2021, 170 pp. ISBN 9789462497900.

Daan Wolfert, *Een ramp voor de Vechtstreek, 1672-1673*, Verloren, 2022, 247 pp. ISBN 9789087049980.

Many years in Dutch history – including 1584, 1675, 1795, 1807, 1842, 1879, and 1940 – have at some point received the moniker *Rampjaar* (Disaster Year, or Year of Disaster). Yet only a single year, 1672, does not need any numerical qualification: *Het Rampjaar* will suffice. The sudden invasion of the Dutch Republic by a French-led coalition and its near destruction, combined with unprecedented political turmoil and the brutal lynching of the brothers Johan and Cornelis de Witt, have made this dramatic year synonymous with the phrase.

The term *Rampjaar* can be traced to the seventeenth century, but only gained widespread currency in the early decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> Before then, 1672 was

<sup>1</sup> In 1686, Elisabeth Koolaart-Hoofman wrote a poem for her brother entitled 'Herdenking aan het Rampjaar 1672'. See her *De Naagelaatene Gedichten* (Haarlem: Jan Bosch, 1774), 73-78. I am grateful to David van der Linden and the *EMLC* editorial board for commissioning this review essay, and especially to Nina Lamal and Kerrewin van Blanken for their efforts in providing me with the numerous books required.

referred to as a year of many things: troubles, revolution, transformation, desperation, unrest, worry, or divine punishment. Most of all, contemporaries readily recognised it as a year of change, principally marking the end of stadtholderless government and the *Ware Vrijheid* (True Freedom), and the rise to power of Prince William III of Orange. With the benefit of several decades of hindsight, it also marked the beginning of a lengthy period of conflict with France, seen by some contemporaries as a ‘Forty Years’ War’, lasting until 1713. It was only natural that contemporary chronicles would use 1672 as a caesura in their histories, a practice that many historians of the period have understandably maintained since. Yet it was only from the 1840s onwards that 1672 was regularly referred to as ‘the great Year of Disaster’ or ‘the Disaster Year 1672’. It was drilled into the minds of millions of schoolchildren as a key date in history lessons in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, a useful reminder of the dangers of unbridled republicanism. In 1891, a Social-Democratic writer pleading for the reform of public education grumbled that ‘when 1672 was mentioned, we all shouted: Disaster Year; with myself and others fully convinced that at least half the world must have been destroyed then’.<sup>2</sup>

Today, 1672 is not one of the fifty topics highlighted in the historical ‘Canon of the Netherlands’ used for national public education, but it continues to hold a prominent place in similar regional or municipal ‘canons’, and in the wider public imagination.<sup>3</sup> It has recently come to the fore as part of the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Disaster Year in 2022, with ‘Disaster’ also chosen as the theme for the annual History Month of October in the Netherlands. A seven-part documentary television series on 1672 was released in the autumn of 2022, and numerous museums and societies devoted exhibitions, talks, and activities to the Disaster Year throughout the year as part of broader commemorative efforts.<sup>4</sup> The 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary has also prompted a flood of new publications, sixteen of which are reviewed here.<sup>5</sup> With such an impressive new output of works on the Disaster Year, this essay seeks to highlight what themes unite these books, and to what extent they contribute new insights into the history of 1672. The new haul of publications also raises important questions about the process of writing history, and how moments of intense public interest shape the way that history is remembered.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Ons onderwijs in de lagere scholen’, *Recht voor allen* 13, 23 November 1891, 1: ‘Bij 1672 riepen wij allen in koor; Rampjaar; ik en anderen in de stellige meening verkeerende, dat toen op zijn minst de halve wereld vergaan was.’ Unless otherwise noted, all translations are the author’s.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.canonvannederland.nl/> (Accessed on 1 January 2023).

<sup>4</sup> The co-ordination of commemorative events has been spearheaded by the *Platform Rampjaar Herdenking*, <https://rampjaarherdenking.nl/> (Accessed 2 January 2023).

<sup>5</sup> Most of these were published in 2022, with several appearing in anticipation of the commemoration between 2018 and 2021. The sixteen works reviewed here do not represent the total haul of new publications: 2022 also saw the publication of Ineke den Hollander, *Een Schricklijk Jaer. De oorlog van 1672 in het noordoosten van de Republiek* (Van Gorcum), not reviewed here because the publisher did not respond to requests for a review copy; Joost Kingma, *Ruiter voor de republiek. Ignatius van Kingma, een Friese kolonel in het rampjaar 1672* (Noordboek), which appeared too late to be included; and Noline van der Sijs and Arthur der Weduwen (eds.), *Franse tirannie. Het Rampjaar 1672 op school* (Waanders), not included because of the present author’s involvement in that publication. Several journals and magazines also devoted special issues or articles to 1672, such as *Holland. Historisch Tijdschrift* (2022).

### *Commemoration, Imitation, and the Canon of 1672*

In contrast to 2022, the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Disaster Year in 1972 was subdued, even if it was accompanied by a respectable and valuable selection of new studies.<sup>6</sup> The recent surge of interest in 1672 can be partially explained by a more general public obsession with calamity, disaster, and catastrophe. The Covid-19 pandemic and other contemporary crises, from climate change to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, have led to many attempts to place the current experience of crisis in the context of those in the past. This attention to history should be welcomed, even if it leads to occasional stretched comparisons that say more about present concerns than past society. Can 1672 and 2020 truly be considered as similar years because there were closures of shops and businesses?<sup>7</sup> Should the French invasion of the Republic in 1672 be likened to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022?<sup>8</sup> While such comparisons try to encourage people to imagine themselves in the shoes of their seventeenth-century Dutch ancestors, they do underscore how different society was in 1672: Romeyn de Hooghe's engravings are not the same as TikTok videos shared by soldiers on the Donbas front.<sup>9</sup>

Official commemorations are especially in danger of fuelling such comparisons, as it is in their essence to prove the relevance of the event or person being remembered. Yet the 350<sup>th</sup> commemorative efforts of the Disaster Year have succeeded in bringing early modern history to a widespread public: in print, on stage, radio, and television, and at many cultural and academic institutions. The commemoration has emphasised that the year 1672 had immense political ramifications for the Dutch Republic and its people; that this was a national crisis, but one experienced differently throughout the provinces that made up the Republic; and, above all, that the Disaster Year is a thrilling and fascinating historical episode.

The historian's craft is the art of telling stories, and 1672 lends itself to an excellent tale. A country ill-prepared, divided, outnumbered and overrun, miraculously clings to survival. Admiral Michiel de Ruyter, by any account the most likeable of all Dutch naval heroes, defends the coast of the Republic with dashing manoeuvres and characteristic courage. Heroic acts of defence (as at Groningen) and ingenious feats of engineering and self-sacrifice (the flooding of vast tracts of Dutch farmland to halt enemy advances) secure breathing space for a nation under siege. The Dutch people rise up against their leaders,

6 This included two general works, and more specialist studies on Bodegraven, Friesland, Groningen and Münster, Gelderland, and Arnhem: Daniel J. Roorda, *Het Rampjaar 1672* (Bussum 1971); Robert Fruin, *De oorlog van 1672* (Groningen 1972); J.F.A. Modderman, *Bodegraven in 1672* (Bodegraven 1972); J.J. Kalma and Klaas de Vries (eds.), *Friesland in het rampjaar 1672. It jier fan de miste kânsen* (Leeuwarden 1972); A. Westers (ed.), *Groningen constant. Groningen-Munster 1672* (Groningen 1972); Wouter Kotte, *Gelderland in het rampjaar 1672* (Zutphen 1972); Wouter Kotte, *Van Gelderse bloem tot Franse lelie. De Franse bezetting van de stad Arnhem, 1672-1674, en haar voorgeschiedenis* (Arnhem 1972).

7 See the preface by Pieter Verhoeve in Troost, *Hiëronymus van Beverningk*, 9.

8 See de Bruin, Gerretsen, and te Sla, *Branden of Betalen*, 4-5; Dijkstra and Koopmans (eds.), *Verzet en Vrijheid*, 15-16.

9 A point echoed by Koen Kleijn, reviewing the Disaster Year exhibition at the Haags Historisch Museum in *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 11 August 2022.

bringing the illustrious dynasty of the House of Orange back to power, and spark the rise of one of the finest warrior-statesmen the country has ever seen in William III. His erstwhile tutor and chief opponent, Johan de Witt, is brutally murdered in a sinister plot, his body and that of his brother mutilated, cannibalised, and displayed as if they were sides of beef within viewing distance from De Witt's former offices. The winter of 1672 brings hardship and devastating French raids, but the country holds out and counterattacks, cutting off French logistical supplies and forcing their retreat. At great cost, the Dutch Republic is saved and embarks on a lengthy period of warfare and a temporary role of supreme prominence on the world stage that it has never replicated since.

With a story of this quality to tell, the first thing that stands out in the corpus of new publications is their hesitancy to move away from the conventional account. Only two of the sixteen books are general histories of the Disaster Year (Panhuysen's *Rampjaar 1672* and Van Cruyningen's *1672. Het rampjaar van de Republiek*), but many of the others devote a significant number of pages to the general narrative of 1672. This narrative has changed little since the late seventeenth century, when the first Dutch publishers produced chronicles of the Franco-Dutch War, and it has been reiterated repeatedly since. Although many of the new books bring forth interesting insights, what one might see as the paratext of these studies – the introductions, background, illustrations, and many of the sources – is far less original.

One can understand that these new books devote substantial portions to explaining what is a complex and rich narrative of events, especially given that most general readers interested in Dutch history might only acquire a few of these titles. Luc Panhuysen's book, first published in 2009, but reprinted regularly since and now revised and republished in hardback for the commemoration, offers by far the best and most readable account. Panhuysen is a master storyteller, and his gripping prose ensures that what is the longest book under review here is also the most engaging. With the pen of a novelist, Panhuysen tells the story of 1672 through the eyes of one elite Dutch family caught in the maelstrom of events: Godard Adriaan van Reede van Amerongen, his wife Margaretha Turnor, and their son Godard. Each offers a valuable perspective. Godard Adriaan spends the Disaster Year abroad, in the Holy Roman Empire, labouring desperately to secure German alliances for the Dutch, while his son is at the Dutch front, a colonel in the army of William III. Margaretha flees their castle in Amerongen (in Utrecht) and spends much of her time in 1672 as a relatively comfortable but anxious refugee in Amsterdam and The Hague, devoting herself to writing letters to her husband and son and passing on information from Holland.

The focus on the Van Reedes means that the reader sometimes longs to hear more about the experiences of other Dutchmen and women, particularly those of lesser means than the protagonists (the Van Reedes were among the wealthiest in the entire Republic). This is nevertheless an overwhelmingly successful book. The family's profile allows Panhuysen to highlight several themes in the story of the Disaster Year that are left out by others: the importance of international aid and alliance to Dutch fortunes; the challenges faced by the Dutch army and their efforts to remedy them; and the paramount influence of news, rumour, and uncertainty in shaping the political reality of 1672. Underpinning this all is admirable and original scholarship, not least through the use of hundreds of unpublished



Fig. 1 Adam Frans van der Meulen, Louis XIV crossing the Rhine at Lobith, 1672-1690, oil on canvas, 103 x 159 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.

letters exchanged by the Van Reedes, exposing a valuable new source base for the study of the Disaster Year.

With a survey of Panhuysen's calibre available, the far slimmer volume offered by Arnout van Cruyningen pales in comparison. It provides a brief chronological narrative of the political situation in the Republic under the First Stadtholderless period and during the Disaster Year, followed by equally brief and conventional biographies of important men involved in the conflict: William III, Johan de Witt, Louis XIV, Charles II, Michiel de Ruyter, and others. Van Cruyningen is an experienced and capable writer, and has made a specialty of producing short historical overviews of important people and events in Dutch history (2022 also saw the appearance of his account of the year 1572).<sup>10</sup> Yet if he had decided to forego publication of 1672. *Het Rampjaar van de Republiek*, our knowledge of the Disaster Year would not be any the poorer.

The best aspect of Van Cruyningen's book is its elegant lay-out and lavish use of illustrations, many of them in colour (there are exactly 93, in a work of 192 pages). It is noteworthy that it shares these qualities with the other books under review. Most are beautifully published and are a feast for the eye. Yet with several notable exceptions – and here I single out the works by Ouweeneel, Doedens and Mulder, Knegtel and Cuijpers, and Dijkstra and Koopmans – the use of illustration is also highly derivative. Certain paintings, such as Adam Frans van der Meulen's epic but contrived depiction of Louis XIV crossing

<sup>10</sup> Arnout van Cruyningen, 1572. *Een kanteljaar in de Tachtigjarige Oorlog* (Utrecht 2022).

the Rhine, appear in almost every new book on 1672 (fig. 1).<sup>11</sup> While the advent of digital technology has rendered it simpler for book publishers to include a larger number of illustrations at little cost, authors are nudged towards using the same illustrations as many cultural institutions continue to demand reproduction fees for the use of images. The Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam deserves generous praise for its decision to digitise in high quality its collection and to allow users to reproduce these scans for free: the result, however, is an endless cycle of the same historical images, used in books and articles as if they were stock photos.

While the books might look appealing, the repeated use of identical illustrations is also to the detriment of our perception and historical understanding. This is especially so as most illustrations are not only reproduced from the same institutions, but from the same sources. In a previous review essay for this journal, Judith Pollmann noted the influence of ‘Hogenberg’s Ghost’, the evocative and highly selective illustrations made by the artist Frans Hogenberg, on the history of the Dutch Revolt.<sup>12</sup> The ghosts that haunt the Disaster Year, in turn, are two other artists, Isaac Sorious and Romeyn de Hooghe. In 1674 and 1675, Sorious produced a series of thirteen etchings of ruined castles, manors, and villages, based on drawings he made during a visit to Utrecht (fig. 2). These were published



Fig. 2 Isaac Sorious, French troops march through the ruins of the village of Nigtevecht while looting and shooting, 1672-1676, etching, 16 x 26 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.

<sup>11</sup> On Van der Meulen, see S. de Vries, ‘Adam-Frans van der Meulen (1632-1690), hofschilder van Lodewijk XIV, in de Republiek, 1672-1673’, *Jaarboek Monumentenzorg* (1990) 134-147; Harriet Stone, *Crowning Glories. Netherlandish Realism and the French Imagination during the Reign of Louis XIV* (Toronto 2019) 57-65.

<sup>12</sup> Judith Pollmann, ‘Hogenberg’s Ghost. New books on the Eighty Years’ War’, *Early Modern Low Countries* 4 (2020) 124-138.

as a series, and also used as illustrations in contemporary printed chronicles.<sup>13</sup> The stark depictions of burned-out shells of buildings, some houses imaginatively still on fire, with ominous clouds looming above, epitomised the destruction wrought on the Republic by the invaders. Sorious's etchings remain widely reproduced, and feature in nearly all new books on 1672 published last year.

The impact of the versatile Romeyn de Hooghe on our understanding of the Disaster Year is even greater.<sup>14</sup> The young artist became the leading engraver in the Republic at the end of the seventeenth century, in part because of the Franco-Dutch War. He stamped his mark on the conflict by producing numerous illustrated broadsheets depicting notable events, sieges, and the triumphs of the Prince of Orange. His most influential creations were those of 'French Tyranny', illustrating horrendous cruelties, assault, and murder inflicted by French soldiers on the Dutch population, and of the murder of the brothers De Witt. The various compositions made by him to document these scenes were endlessly reproduced and copied in other broadsheets, school prints, books, paintings, and medals.

Romeyn de Hooghe was in particular demand among contemporary book publishers. His engravings, or those modelled on his, were inserted into various competing contemporary histories of the Disaster Year and the Franco-Dutch War, published from the autumn of 1672 onwards.<sup>15</sup> The graphic illustrations made by De Hooghe for Abraham de Wicquefort's *Advis fiddle* (1673), a polemic account of the French invasion and atrocities in the Dutch Republic, helped secure a lasting legacy for this work and its numerous adaptations and translations. While De Wicquefort and other contemporary chroniclers, such as Tobias van Domselaer and Pieter Valckenier, have always been accused of serving as propagandists of William III, their accounts have proved irresistible for anyone seeking to write the history of 1672. They are widely cited in both the older and most recent literature on the conflict.

What has not yet been fully appreciated is the extent to which the numerous contemporary chronicles of the Disaster Year that appeared in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic imitated one another. The many different authors, printers, and titles involved in the chronicling of 1672 give the appearance of diversity, but this was almost non-existent. The Dutch were able to produce so many histories because they mostly copied content from one another. Even if some of their stories can be corroborated in the archives, such as that of the heavily pregnant Waverveen refugee Leuntjen Chielen, the repetition of the rather limited set of anecdotes that appears in these works continues to shape our understanding of the history of the Disaster Year.<sup>16</sup>

**13** Isaac Sorious, *Series of thirteen images of villages and castles in the province of Utrecht destroyed by the French in 1672, 1672-1678*, etchings, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum (RP-P-OB-59.667).

**14** On De Hooghe and the Franco-Dutch War, see most comprehensively Henk van Nierop, *The Life of Romeyn de Hooghe, 1645-1708. Prints, pamphlets, and politics in the Dutch Golden Age* (Amsterdam 2018) 89-113.

**15** For an early exploration of these chronicles, see Arthur der Weduwen, 'Druk, lees en huiver. Vroege herinneringen aan het Rampjaar', *Holland. Historisch Tijdschrift* 54 (2022) 193-202, published as part of my British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship, for which I investigate the early writing of the history of 1672 and the Franco-Dutch War.

**16** On Chielen, see Arthur der Weduwen, 'French Tyranny at School. The Disaster Year (1672) and the *Nieuwe Spiegel der Jeugd*', *Jaarboek voor Nederlandse Boekgeschiedenis* 29 (2022) 60-108, at 76; Van der Sijs and der Weduwen (eds.), *Fransse tirannie*, 45, 178-180. The story is also outlined prominently in Wolfert, *Een ramp voor de Vechtstreek*, 7-9, 12, 15, 201.



One of the new books demonstrates that the influence of these chronicles was already pervasive in the early eighteenth century. Anne Doedens and Liek Mulder highlight the unique manuscript account of the Disaster Year penned by Andries Schoemaker (1660-1735), a Mennonite textile merchant from Amsterdam, now held in the Royal Library in The Hague. Schoemaker was a prolific collector of coins and medals, and was fascinated by Dutch history: despite having no formal education, he wrote some one hundred manuscripts on the Dutch Republic, including a three-volume text on 1672. The book by Doedens and Mulder presents Schoemaker's history of the Disaster Year as the account of a twelve-year old, as it contains some personal memories of a panicked Amsterdam. Yet Schoemaker wrote his history more than fifty years later, and for this reason made use mostly of the contemporary chronicles published in the 1670s. This shows very clearly in his descriptions of the invasion and the experiences of the Dutch under occupation, which are highly conventional.

Schoemaker's account is distinctive, however, because of his extensive travels through the Dutch Republic. Later in his life he made numerous colourful drawings of the places he visited in Holland, Utrecht, Gelderland, Overijssel, Friesland, and the Generality Lands, and these add a playful and intriguing touch to what is otherwise a dry encyclopaedic survey. Doedens and Mulder have offered us an interesting egodocument from the eighteenth century, but it is not very usable or reliable as an account of what took place in 1672. The choice to translate Schoemaker's text into modern Dutch, but only to publish an otherwise undefined 'majority' of the text, without explaining what was omitted or using any system of referencing, makes the publication seem incomplete, and gives the impression that it was rushed into print to add to the commemorations.

The volume on Schoemaker inadvertently teaches us that repetition has long been and remains at the core of the history of the Disaster Year. Most of the new studies invoke the phrase *redeloos, radeloos, reddeloos*, a shortening of *Het volk was redeloos, de regering radeloos en het land reddeloos* ('The people were irrational, the government distraught, and the country beyond salvation').<sup>17</sup> This evocative alliterative phrase has, like the term *Rampjaar*, become synonymous with 1672, and was first popularised in the middle of the nineteenth century. After it was employed by Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer in his *Handboek der geschiedenis van het vaderland* (1843), and then taken up by Jacob van Lennep in his novella *Eene vergadering der Staten van Holland in 1672* (1847), it has embodied the essence of the Disaster Year at schools and in books, magazines, museums, and the media for over 150 years.<sup>18</sup> But to what extent can we say that the phrase is actually true? Does it accurately describe the reality of the Disaster Year, or is it, like Romeyn de Hooghe's engravings, a carefully arranged and appealing composition that has been burned into Dutch national consciousness but reflects only a small portion of the historical truth?

<sup>17</sup> 'Radeloos' is especially evocative as it can imply both 'desperation' and 'the absence of remedy or direction'.

<sup>18</sup> Van der Sijs, 'De Taal van de *Nieuwe Spiegel*', in Van der Sijs and Der Weduwen, *Fransse tirannie*, 70, following Jaap Engelsman, *Bekende citaten uit het dagelijks taalgebruik* (Den Haag 2004) 370-372. The phrase can also be ordered as 'radeloos, redeloos, reddeloos' (as Van Prinsterer originally wrote it), but 'redeloos, radeloos, reddeloos' is now more common. Petra Dreiskämper also used the phrase as the title of her general history of the Disaster Year: *Redeloos, radeloos, reddeloos*. *De geschiedenis van het rampjaar 1672* (Hilversum 1998).

Although the new studies chime *redeloos*, *radeloos*, *reddeloos*, their content actually suggests something else.

### *Devastation, Resilience, and the Redeloos Fiction*

It is not often acknowledged that the story of 1672 is one that is mostly written from a Hollander's perspective. A Hollandocentric view of the Dutch Republic affects its history more generally, but is especially noticeable in the account of the Disaster Year. That Holland looms large in 1672 is in part because it was one of the few provinces that remained unoccupied, and because it became a formidable military barrier against French expansion. It was the scene of the greatest civic unrest, and of the best documented French atrocities, in the infamous destruction of Bodegraven and Zwammerdam, which have always attracted attention (fig. 3). Holland also occupied pride of place in the history of the Disaster Year because the first histories of the crisis were written by authors in Holland and printed on Holland presses. Much of the documented information on 1672 was first sorted, compiled, and printed in print shops in The Hague or Amsterdam, and its most enduring images were first cut in Romeyn de Hooghe's workshop on the Dam.

In the aftermath of 1672, Holland also tried its best to extend its dominance over the unfortunate landward provinces. Gaspar Fagel, appointed Grand Pensionary of Holland on the same day as Johan de Witt was killed, suggested that Utrecht, Gelderland, and Overijssel should not be re-admitted to the union, but treated as additional Generality Lands.<sup>19</sup> While William III shrewdly ignored this suggestion, the 1670s did see the appearance of many pamphlets in Holland that criticised the landward provinces for their supposed cowardice, ill-preparation, and ready subservience to France and Münster under the occupation.<sup>20</sup> Although some contemporaries who experienced occupation did their best to salvage the reputation of the supposedly 'treacherous' provinces – most famously Bernard Costerus, the burgomaster of Woerden – early historical accounts of 1672 were mostly critical of the leadership of Utrecht, Gelderland, and Overijssel.<sup>21</sup>

In the seventeenth century, the hardships suffered by citizens of the occupied provinces were cited gleefully by Holland's propagandists to emphasise the cruelties and greed of the French.<sup>22</sup> The experiences of invasion and occupation are also a major theme of the official commemorations of the Disaster Year and the accompanying output of books. There is a concerted effort to recount how ordinary Netherlanders lived through the Disaster Year, moving beyond the actions of the great men of Van Cruyningen's narrative, and to look

19 Wouter Troost, *Stadhouder-koning Willem III. Een politieke biografie* (Hilversum 2001) 113.

20 Arthur der Weduwen, *State Communication and Public Politics in the Dutch Golden Age* (Oxford 2023) 298.

21 Bernard Costerus, *Historisch verhaal, ofte Eene deductie van zaaken, raakende het formeren van de Republique van Holland ende West-Vriesland, de veranderinge in de regeringe zedert den jaare 1572. Ende het geene dezelve Republique in den jaare 1672 is overkomen* (Utrecht: Willem vande Water, 1707). An expanded second edition appeared in 1736 and 1737.

22 A good example is provided by *Journael ofte dagh verhael, van dat tot Uytrecht en Woerden bij de Franschen is voorgevallen* (Amsterdam: Jan Claesz ten Hoorn, 1674).



**SPEIGEL DER FRANSSE TYRANNY,**  
Gepleeght op de Hollandsche DORPEN.

**N**ieuwland heeft de Fransse macht overhaalt... **H**et is de Fransse Tyranny... **E**xtract... **D**e Borgers... **A**l... **E**nde...

EXTRACT

**D**e Borgers is het recht... **A**l... **E**nde... **E**xtract... **D**e Borgers... **A**l... **E**nde...

Fig. 3 Adam Thomas Verduyn and Romeyn de Hooghe, Spiegel der Fransse Tyranny, gepleeght op de Hollantsche dorpen, 1673, newsprint, 53,8 x 42 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.

beyond the borders of Holland. Here the new contributions build on an admirable base of scholarship: already in the early twentieth century there appeared a variety of studies that paid systematic attention to the occupied provinces, as well as the critical northern front of 1672, where the forces of the Bishop of Münster assaulted Friesland and Groningen.<sup>23</sup> Such efforts culminated in the excellent survey by Jan den Tex of the occupied territories in the Republic between 1672 and 1674, which I was surprised to see little consulted in the new corpus.<sup>24</sup>

The study of the occupied territories is especially interesting, because unusually for seventeenth-century Europe, large parts of the Republic had been sanitised of occupation and a military presence for decades before 1672. The Dutch Republic was a martial state, almost continuously at war, and it was a significant producer and exporter of weapons. Yet it also prided itself on its order and supposed peacefulness, and idealised peace as the greatest source of wealth and freedom. The fact that in 1672 a land war returned to the entire Republic for the first time since the 1570s certainly contributed to the sense of shock, panic, and disbelief shared by most Dutch people in the first weeks of the invasion. Not yet two weeks into the invasion, thousands of people took flight from the advancing path of the foreign armies, mostly pouring into the towns of Holland.

The properties of these refugees were easy targets for the invaders. As legal occupiers who had signed agreements with the States of Utrecht, Gelderland, and Overijssel, the occupiers argued that citizens from these provinces fell under French or German jurisdiction, even if they had fled. Refugees were therefore ordered to return and contribute to the series of taxes levied by the occupiers. When they did not, they would have their properties confiscated or destroyed. One of the new studies, by Renger de Bruin, Lodewijk Gerretsen, and Willem te Sla, *Branden of Betalen*, explores this phenomenon extensively, by focussing on the different fates of two great Utrecht manors, and the experiences of their owners, the Van Reedes (also described in Panhuysen's book) and the Van Tuyll van Serooskerkens.

While he was in Berlin, Godard Adriaan van Reede received letters from the Duke of Luxembourg, asking for 3,000 guilders to save his castle in Amerongen from being burned to the ground. His wife considered paying the sum (in contravention of edicts issued by the States-General), but the French torched the castle before she had made up her mind. After the occupation, however, the Van Reedes would be compensated by the Dutch state to the tune of 40,000 guilders' worth of state bonds. Although this barely covered half the costs of rebuilding their castle, Amerongen would rise from the ashes. Another Utrecht nobleman, Hendrik Jacob van Tuyll van Serooskerken, did pay to save his manor, Castle Zuylen. In exchange for 4,000 guilders the French protected it, but Van Tuyll still noted 26,000 guilders worth of damage to the property at the end of the war, and received a

23 J.S. Theissen, 'Voor Vrijheydt ende Vaderlandt'. *Stad en Lande in 1672* (Groningen/Den Haag 1922); H. van Dalen, 'Bijdrage tot de geschiedenis van de overgang van Overijssel aan de vijand in 1672', *Bijdragen voor Vaderlandsche Geschiedenis en Oudheidkunde*, 6th series, 1 (1924) 148-162; Willem E. van Dam van Isselt, *De verdediging van Friesland in 1672-1673* (Den Haag 1931); Suzanna C.J. Jessurun-ten Dam Ham, *Utrecht in 1672 en 1673*, PhD diss. Utrecht University, 1934; J.A. de Wolf, *De katastrofe van 1672 in Overijssel en haar achtergronden*, MA diss., University of Amsterdam, 1957.

24 Jan den Tex, *Onder vreemde heren. De Republiek der Nederlanden, 1672-1674* (Zutphen 1982).

mortgage from the Court of Utrecht to repair it. The renovated Castle Zuylen came to feature a new fresco depicting the fall of Phaeton, celebrating the retreat of the Sun King.

The experiences of the Van Reedes and Van Tuyll underline the fact that no matter the scale of the destruction, the wealthiest in the Republic could rebuild after the invaders had left. The city of Groningen also recovered speedily. When in May 1674 the student Coenraad Ruysch visited Groningen on his way to Germany, he was surprised to find ‘no or little damage to the walls and the houses’, as they had been repaired so quickly after the siege.<sup>25</sup> Yet recovery seems to have been deeply unequal. As Andries Schoemaker found on his travel years later, many rural areas and villages were still desolate, languishing in ruins. In June 1674, the Amsterdam wine merchant Isaac Pool observed that the village of Zwammerdam was ‘so desolate that one could barely find one house [still standing]’.<sup>26</sup> Towns in Utrecht, Gelderland, and Overijssel struggled to recover from population flight and extreme taxation, demanded first by their occupiers and then by their liberators. As late as 1687, the town of Doesburg was given a discount on its annual financial contribution to the provincial States of Gelderland, as it had been ‘left barren and plundered by the French’.<sup>27</sup> Charitable giving collapsed in Utrecht and Zwolle after the occupation.<sup>28</sup> The town of Kampen was reduced to advertising in Dutch newspapers free citizenship to anyone who would settle there in the aftermath of the occupation.<sup>29</sup>

We have thus far little knowledge about the effect of the Disaster Year on urban communities in the unoccupied provinces (especially in Zeeland), but the increasing tax burden must have been keenly felt there too. In Amsterdam, the percentage of destitute people rose from 8.5 percent in 1670 to 12 percent by 1675.<sup>30</sup> Certainly, worst affected were the farmers, as the *Waterlinies* (‘waterlines’, stretches of land deliberately flooded to create an impassable defensive barrier) in Holland, the Generality Lands, Friesland, and Groningen would take years to drain, and the land would take even longer to recover. The Vechtstreek, on the border between Holland and Utrecht, was one of the most devastated areas: those parts of the land that were not inundated became a fierce battleground between French and Dutch expeditionary forces and raiding parties. The occupied Holland villages in the Vechtstreek suffered greatly, because they did not fall under the

25 Cited in Alan Moss, ‘Comparing Ruins. National Trauma in Dutch Travel Accounts of the Seventeenth Century’, in Lotte Jensen (ed.), *The Roots of Nationalism. National Identity Formation in Early Modern Europe, 1600-1815* (Amsterdam 2016) 217: ‘Wij vonde geene of weijnich scaden aen de wallen gelijk oock aen de huijsen.’

26 Cited in Laurence Duquesnoy and Jeroen Salman (eds.), *De handelsgeest van Isaac Pool. Dagboek van een Amsterdammer in de Gouden Eeuw* (Hilversum 2018) 112: ‘Soo disselaat was dat men nouwelijcx en huys meer vinden kost.’

27 Griet Vermeesch, *Oorlog, steden en staatsvorming. De grenssteden Gorinchem en Doesburg tijdens de geboorteeuw van de Republiek (1570-1680)* (Amsterdam 2006) 228.

28 Daniëlle Teeuwen, *Financing Poor Relief through Charitable Collections in Dutch Towns, c. 1600-1800* (Amsterdam 2015) 150.

29 *Amsterdamsche Dingsdaegse Courant*, 28 August 1674. See also Arthur der Weduwen and Andrew Pettegree, *News, Business and Public Information. Advertisements and Announcements in Dutch and Flemish Newspapers, 1620-1675* (Leiden 2020) 519.

30 Erika Kuijpers, *Migrantenstad. Immigratie en sociale verhoudingen in 17e-eeuwse Amsterdam* (Hilversum 2005) 316-317.

contracts of payments made between the States of Utrecht and the French, while the States of Holland, as formally ‘unoccupied’ territory, would not make any arrangements. Local communities therefore had to provide for Dutch garrisons, but if the Dutch troops fell back, the villagers were also forced by the French to raise exorbitant contributions under threat of fire and sword.

Two of the new books, by Wouter van Dijk and Daan Wolfert, respectively, concentrate wholly on the Vechtstreek. There is much overlap between them, and they both emphasise without undue exaggeration the sheer scale of destruction in the region. Many Vecht villages would remain devastated for years, and some were never rebuilt. Van Dijk’s shorter volume is the more effective and original, as it is based mostly on archival finds in the Vecht and Venen archive, while Wolfert’s longer study is more conventional, and relies to a far greater extent on contemporary chronicles. Van Dijk’s archival investigation of the town of Weesp is particularly striking. Weesp was on the front line, but even though it was never looted or occupied by the French, over a third of the members of the town’s Reformed Church had fled by June 1673. Van Dijk offers a rich array of human stories from those who remained in Weesp, like the burgomasters who sold their silverware to help raise taxes for the war effort. Many soldiers were stationed in Weesp, and they arranged care-takers for their families when the front moved and they had to travel on. They also swore oaths before notaries to obey and support their commander ‘till the last drop of blood’. Archival records bear witness to tales of drunkenness and ill-discipline, but also of soldiers marrying local girls, beginning new lives in a time of conflict. The book makes a fine addition to the study of ordinary letter-writers from 1672 as described in Judith Brouwer’s excellent *Levenstekens*, which showcases to a similar degree how Dutchmen and women lived through the turbulence of the Disaster Year.<sup>31</sup>

Reading these new studies, it becomes clear that the notion of a *redeloos* Dutch public can be put to bed. The Dutch people were mostly credited to be *redeloos* because they murdered the brothers De Witt, while in fact the mob that lynched Johan and Cornelis was comprised of a small group of The Hague citizens. Since the publication in 2013 of the excellent investigation by Ronald Prud’homme van Reine into the murder of the De Witts, the traditional debate on the lynching, which saw much ink spilled from the seventeenth century onwards, has also come to a conclusion.<sup>32</sup> Prud’homme van Reine convincingly demonstrated that the murder was orchestrated by high-ranking members of Dutch society, many of whom were close to William III. The prince may not have given the direct order, but he certainly turned a blind eye and in the aftermath of the event protected and rewarded its ringleaders. While it is tempting to see the demise of the De Witts as a spontaneous outburst of public anger, it was in fact a carefully organised assassination. Dutch citizens committed this murder, but that does not mean that the Dutch people were by extension a *redeloos* rabble.

<sup>31</sup> Judith Brouwer, *Levenstekens. Gekaapte brieven uit het Rampjaar 1672* (Hilversum 2014). Brouwer has also contributed an essay on news of the siege of Groningen in letters from 1672: ‘Gronijngen kondt stant, beholdt van het landt’, in Dijkstra and Koopmans (eds.), *Verzet en Vrijheid*, 38–57.

<sup>32</sup> Ronald Prud’homme van Reine, *Moordenaars van Jan de Witt. De zwartste bladzijde van de Gouden Eeuw* (Utrecht 2013).

It is also worth emphasising that most other rebellious men and women who rose up against regent rule in the name of the Prince of Orange were urban Hollanders, with smaller numbers of agitators in Zeeland and Friesland. The term *redeloos* ignores the far greater number of Dutch people who remained loyal to the authorities, who answered the call to march out with their militia companies to defend the country, helped with the flooding of polders, saw a doubling of their tax burden, took Dutch or allied soldiers into their homes, and those who lived for more than a year under French or German occupation. No one could claim that the 150 Groningen University students who volunteered to defend the city under bombardment and were posted on the most dangerous section of the walls were anything else than courageous and self-sacrificing.<sup>33</sup> War brings out different qualities in a population, but it seems that the Disaster Year inspired among the Dutch a far more resolute and orderly spirit than is commonly presumed.

### *Regents, Religion, and the International Disaster Year*

In the traditional depiction of a world turned upside down, the rebellious Dutch people are contrasted with the hapless leadership of *radeloos* regents. The regents are deemed to have been indecisive, cowardly, and weak in the face of the invasion. This trope continues to be repeated widely, even if in many instances the evidence points to the contrary. The regents of the True Freedom, in particular Johan de Witt, are certainly to be blamed for their overreliance on amicable relations with France, especially after attracting the ire of Louis XIV in the later 1660s. War was expected already in 1671, but military preparations came too late, and with too little haste. Conflicts between the provinces, exacerbated by the boisterous anti-Orangism of Holland, hampered effective organisation. Yet one cannot blame the regents too greatly for their shock at the speed of the country's collapse, as it took everyone by surprise, including the invaders.

The fact that the States of Holland despatched official negotiators to Louis XIV to ask for his demands in the summer of 1672 is often noted as a clear sign of the desperation of the regents. Yet it is not always remembered that only two Holland towns, Leiden and Gouda, favoured surrender. The other towns, when they heard the outrageous terms demanded by Louis, were staunch in their defence. So were the States of Groningen, whose resoluteness in the defence of their capital is still celebrated every year on 28 August.

A welcome focus of some of the new studies is the role played by the authorities and individual regents during the Disaster Year. The latest edited volume of Johan de Witt's letters, a product of the excellent *Correspondence of Johan de Witt* project, shines a revealing light on the final year of De Witt's life.<sup>34</sup> De Witt's personal archive contains 750 extant letters written to or by him in 1672, and they portray the Grand Pensionary and many of the other regents in the country as consumed by frantic efforts to defend the country and

<sup>33</sup> Arjen Dijkstra, 'De academische gemeenschap in staat van beleg. De rol van Nederlandse studenten in 1672', in Dijkstra and Koopmans (eds.), *Verzet en Vrijheid*, 69-70.

<sup>34</sup> Two previous edited volumes published by the project and edited by Huysman and Peeters have focussed on De Witt's correspondence with England (2019) and France (2020).

react to the invasion. On 4 June, De Witt wrote to Hieronymus van Beverningk that ‘I write this with great haste, without having had a meal, even if it is already nine o’clock in the evening’ (9).<sup>35</sup> This moving collection of correspondence comes to an end on 12 August, the date of De Witt’s last surviving letter, in which he recognises that he has become the scapegoat for the disastrous state of the country.

Wout Troost’s political biography of the Gouda regent Hieronymus van Beverningk, an important ally of De Witt during the period of True Freedom and one of the Republic’s most gifted diplomats, moves decisively away from the vision of *radeloos* regents cowering before the Prince of Orange. Following Daniel J. Roorda, Troost sees disenfranchised factions of regents as a critical factor in the fomenting of popular unrest and the election of William III.<sup>36</sup> He seeks to diminish the political impact of the broader ‘citizen movement’ portrayed by Michel Reinders’s study of 1672, but in this respect is less convincing.<sup>37</sup> Troost’s study of Van Beverningk does illustrate persuasively that many regents worked or co-operated closely with William III. Van Beverningk was a lynchpin between the stadtholder and the regent class, because of his intimate knowledge of the De Witt regime, his diplomatic experience, and his pragmatism. Not everyone forgave Van Beverningk for his earlier support of Johan de Witt, and he went briefly into hiding in the autumn of 1672 after receiving several threats of violence. Yet he had a stellar career after the Disaster Year, and was one of William III’s principal allies until the later 1670s, when he played a leading role in advancing the peace with France at Nijmegen. This drew much criticism from William’s camp, but as Troost demonstrates, it never came to a true break between the prince and Van Beverningk.

What this biography shows is that Dutch regents were very capable of effective co-ordination and pragmatic political alignment. Few were simple devotees of Johan de Witt, or of William. Most famously, Gaspar Fagel, one of the strongest proponents of the Perpetual Edict of 1667 that abolished the stadtholderate in Holland, became William III’s staunchest ally. Most regents acted according to their interests, and in these interests usually prioritised their own family, town, and province over anything else: happily, however, those interests often aligned closely with the fate of the Republic. A similar perspective is provided in Leen Ouweneel’s study of the implementation of Holland’s *Waterlinie*, the strategic inundation that halted the French advance into Holland. This excellent study, based on systematic archival research, clearly shows that without the sustained efforts of numerous regents and water board officers who directed the inundations, not to forget many companies of soldiers and citizens, the Republic would have been lost. Their frenetic activity demonstrated the absolute inverse of *radeloos* and *reddeloos*.

*Rampjaar or jubeljaar*, edited by Knegtel and Cuijpers, is one of the most original volumes to appear for the commemoration, as it pays attention to the *Waterlinie* in a part

35 ‘Ick schrijve dese met grooten haest, sondernoch eene maeltijt huyden te hebben gehouden, alhoewel het nu is ontrent negen uyren in den avondt...’.

36 Daniel J. Roorda, *Partij en Factie. De oproeren van 1672 in de steden van Holland en Zeeland, een krachtmeting tussen partijen en facties* (Groningen 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1978).

37 Michel Reinders, *Printed Pandemonium. Popular Print and Politics in the Netherlands, 1650-72* (Leiden 2013).



of the Republic that was used to the depredations of warfare: the Generality Lands. The fortress towns of North Brabant and the south-eastern stretches of Holland and Zeeland are usually forgotten in the narrative of the Disaster Year, but they played a critical role in defending the country, and attracted much attention from Louis XIV's troops. The rapid flooding of the *Zuidelijke Waterlinie*, stretching across much of modern-day North Brabant, completed a wall of water that ran uninterrupted from Amsterdam to Den Bosch. As in Holland, those who gained most from the inundations were the burghers of fortified cities such as Den Bosch, their safety guaranteed at the cost of the destitution of the villagers and farmers of the Generality Lands.

Sunny Jansen's biography of Albertine Agnes (1634-1696), Regent-Stattholder of Friesland, Groningen, and Drenthe in 1672, shows that the Frisian *Waterlinie*, as well as the Frisian branch of the House of Nassau, were also of critical importance to the salvation of the Republic. Jansen's book is highly readable and original in its focus on a neglected figure, one of the daughters of Stattholder Frederik Hendrik and the widow of Willem Frederik, Stattholder of Friesland and Groningen. In an attempt to prove the importance of Albertine Agnes, Jansen does occasionally exaggerate the anarchy of the Republic, the indecision of the regents of Friesland, and the political subjugation of women. Although Jansen does not stress the point, her book establishes clearly that at a time of crisis, the divided States of Friesland were happy to relinquish some of their power and allow the organisation of the war effort to devolve mostly to Albertine Agnes, who was ably assisted by her late husband's secretary, Philip Ernst Vegelin, and General Hans Willem van Aylva. Although much is known about the bickering particularism of the Republic's towns and provinces, it is remarkable how rapidly a decentralised collective of authorities could centralise political decision-making. The same occurred in Groningen in 1672, where the magistrates of the city and the Council of Ommelanden, who regularly battled each other in peacetime, laid aside their differences to protect their shared fatherland.<sup>38</sup> Only when peace was made with the Bishop of Münster in 1674 did the Groningers return to their internal quarrels.

When on 13 June 1672 the regents of the States of Friesland came to the unanimous decision to defend their province at all costs, expending all their 'means and blood', they did so 'to maintain [their] religion and freedom, their hearths and altars' (167).<sup>39</sup> The role of religion is a curious near-absence in the new publications, and aside from several articles published in the last thirty years, religion remains an underexplored aspect of the Disaster Year.<sup>40</sup> While the commemorative efforts of 2022 emphasised that the defence of the Republic was a fight for liberty (and some organisers in anachronistic confusion claimed it as a fight for toleration), many contemporaries saw the conflict as a struggle to

38 See also Der Weduwen, *State Communication and Public Politics*, 203-225.

39 'Goet en bloet [...] tot behoudt van religie en vrijhey, voor haardsteden en altaren.'

40 See in particular J. Erdtsieck, 'In' t Catholycke gelove herstelt. Het kerkelijke leven in de rampjaren 1672-1674', *Zwols Historisch Tijdschrift* 11 (1994) 129-136; Angela Vanhaelen, 'Utrecht's Transformations. Claiming the Dom through Representation, Iconoclasm and Ritual', *De Zeventiende Eeuw* 21 (2005) 354-374; Bertrand Forclaz, "'Rather French than Subject to the Prince of Orange'. The Conflicting Loyalties of the Utrecht Catholics during the French Occupation (1672-3)', *Church History and Religious Culture* 87 (2007) 509-533.

defend the Reformed faith. Given that the invasion was spearheaded by a Catholic monarch and two Catholic German prince-bishops, one can understand such sentiment. Even if the subsequent wider Franco-Dutch War saw Catholic powers fighting on the side of the Dutch, and Protestant Sweden on the side of France, the invasion of the Republic was heavily influenced by religious sentiments.<sup>41</sup> The fact that the invaders granted public worship to Dutch Catholics, and that Louis XIV restored the Utrecht Dom to Catholic splendour amidst much publicity, only confirmed to Dutch Protestants that their faith was under attack.

It is therefore a shame that little attention is paid to religion in 1672. Incidental vignettes provided in the new literature offer richly revealing detail: a Catholic priest saves the village of Abcoude from destruction by appealing to the faith of French officers, while tensions flare up in Bergen op Zoom, where the Dutch garrison is reinforced by a contingent of Catholic Spanish soldiers.<sup>42</sup> The only book that delivers a sustained insight into the role of religion in the Disaster Year is by Theo Basoski, who focuses on the writings of Simon Oomius, a preacher in Holland's Purmerland in 1672. Oomius was a characteristic orthodox Reformed minister of the seventeenth century, fiercely Orangist, and ready to turn to his pen as well as his pulpit. He was good friends with other firebrand ministers who frequently irritated the regents of the True Freedom. To Oomius, Protestantism and politics were inseparable.

Between the autumn of 1672 and the spring of 1674, Oomius was responsible for five substantial pamphlets, all playing on the title of 'Basuyn' (Trumpet). In these *Trumpets*, Oomius addressed the Dutch people, urging courage, loyalty to the Prince of Orange, and (less appealingly to many) a responsibility to pay their heightened taxes. He also commented on French atrocities at Bodegraven and Zwammerdam, and above all instructed his readers to trust in God for a righteous war and the survival of the Republic. The most interesting aspect of Oomius's publications is his theological pragmatism. He legitimised the popular violence against the brothers De Witt, but also called on citizens to be dutiful subjects and obey their regents.

Oomius's pamphlets must have resonated in some circles, because in 1674 he became a field preacher in the Dutch army, and later received a promotion to Kampen, possibly on the recommendation of William III. Basoski suggests that the prince was possibly involved in the publication of Oomius's *Trumpets*, but this seems unlikely. William is often claimed to have had a hand in the publication of pamphlets in the Disaster Year and the Franco-Dutch War, but there is no hard evidence for this beyond his involvement in blackening the name of Johan de Witt, and of disseminating anti-French literature in England.<sup>43</sup> Writers such as Oomius and artists such as Romeyn de Hooghe needed little official encouragement to produce pamphlets that flattered the Prince of Orange and denounced

<sup>41</sup> On this subject more broadly, see David Onnekink (ed.), *War and Religion after Westphalia, 1648-1713* (Farnham 2009).

<sup>42</sup> Van Dijk, *Soldaten in de Vechtstreek*, 36-38; Knegtel and Cuijpers (eds.), *Rampjaar of jubeljaar?*, 19.

<sup>43</sup> Kenneth H.D. Haley, *William of Orange and the English Opposition, 1672-4* (Oxford 1953); Ingmar Vroomen, 'Mediastrategie', in Huysman and Peeters (eds.), *Johan de Witt en het Rampjaar*, 221-228; Der Weduwen, *State Communication and Public Politics*, 293-295.

the French: these were, after all, the pamphlets most likely to resonate with the Dutch public from the summer of 1672 onwards.

In an otherwise admirable study, Basoski does not offer any remarks on the circulation of Oomius's pamphlets, or the broader market for political-religious print during the Franco-Dutch War. His statement that 'one can reach almost anyone with a pamphlet' is nonsensical in the context of Oomius's writings, which were lengthy and relatively dense.<sup>44</sup> We have learned much about the role of print in the Disaster Year in recent years from the work of Michel Reinders, Donald Haks, Roeland Harms, and Ingmar Vroomen, yet outside these specialist studies the subject of pamphlets remains one that is dominated by generalised statements.<sup>45</sup>

That information, news, and public opinion played a significant role in the unfolding events of the Disaster Year is undeniable. Joop Koopmans and Judith Brouwer demonstrate the importance of rumour, letter-writing, and newspaper reporting in the coverage of the siege of Groningen.<sup>46</sup> The Republic's highly integrated news transmission ensured that the Disaster Year could be experienced locally as a national crisis. Other studies reinforce the prominent role played by news in sowing panic, mobilising popular support for the Prince of Orange, and bolstering the resolve of Dutch resistance during the Franco-Dutch War.<sup>47</sup> Information, as Anne Doedens, Liek Mulder, and Frits de Ruyter de Wildt show in their new book, was also of critical importance to the Republic's enemies. *Agenten voor de koning* presents in Dutch translation dozens of letters and extracts of correspondence sent by Silas Taylor, port master of Harwich, to Joseph Williamson, England's chief government intelligencer. These letters were filled with information gathered by Taylor's network of agents in the Republic, and heavily supplemented by news and rumour carried on the Harwich postal barge, the principal news connection between England and the Republic. Like the volume by Doedens and Mulder on Schoemaker, *Agenten voor de koning* lacks references, an index, and a methodological justification for the selection of the letters, which renders the book less useful for the scholar. The subject, however, is a fascinating one, especially as it concentrates heavily on the months leading up to the war, and the logistical preparations made on both sides of the conflict. Planning a naval war, the letters indicate, was an exercise in managing uncertainty and endlessly evaluating contradictory rumours.

The volume by Doedens, Mulder, and De Ruyter de Wildt is a welcome addition to the new literature on 1672, because it is one of the few texts that pays attention to the

<sup>44</sup> Basoski, *Voor de Heer en voor Oranje*, 11.

<sup>45</sup> Reinders, *Printed Pandemonium*; Donald Haks, *Vaderland & Vrede. Publiciteit over de Nederlandse Republiek in oorlog* (Hilversum 2013); Roeland Harms, *Pamfletten en publieke opinie. Massamedia in de zeventiende eeuw* (Amsterdam 2011); Ingmar Vroomen, *Taal van de Republiek. Het gebruik van vaderlandretoriek in Nederlandse pamfletten, 1618-1672*, PhD diss., Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2012.

<sup>46</sup> Brouwer, 'Gronijngen kondt stant'; Joop Koopmans, 'Bommen Berend in het Nederlandse nieuws van 1672', in Dijkstra and Koopmans (eds.), *Verzet en Vrijheid*, 17-57.

<sup>47</sup> Michel Reinders, "'The citizens come from all cities with petitions". Printed Petitions and Civic Propaganda in the Seventeenth Century', in Femke Deen, David Onnekink, and Michel Reinders (eds.), *Pamphlets and Politics in the Dutch Republic* (Leiden 2011) 97-118; Der Weduwen, *State Communication and Public Politics*, 281-307; Haks, *Vaderland & Vrede*, chs. 3-6.

context of the Disaster Year beyond the borders of the Dutch Republic. Here we must also acknowledge an admirable article on the impact of the campaign of the Bishop of Münster on north-western Germany between 1672 and 1674, in the edited volume *Verzet en Vrijheid*, Quintin Barry's new synthesis of the naval campaigns of the Third Anglo-Dutch War, as well as Olaf van Nimwegen's very useful broader study on the Dutch Republic and the Forty Years' War (1672-1713).<sup>48</sup> These works, reinforced by Luc Panhuysen's account, emphasise the length and impressive scope of the conflict unleashed in 1672. It is worth stressing that the Disaster Year did not end on 31 December 1672: much of the Republic was only freed from occupation in the spring of 1674, while Maastricht remained in French hands until 1678.

Barry also helpfully notes the global dimensions of the Disaster Year, and offers a reminder that the Dutch made considerable advances in the British Caribbean and North America. His work, and that of Van Nimwegen, demonstrate that against great odds and general presumptions, the Dutch military machine was a formidable force at sea and on land. By the end of the Forty Years' War, as Van Nimwegen notes, Dutch troops were unrivalled on the European continent in terms of training and discipline. His study places the events of 1672 in a much longer and broader framework of international conflict, and also pays attention to the significant foreign contingents in the States army that helped secure Dutch borders and take the fight far beyond them.

A broader vision of the Disaster Year emphasises that this was a European conflict, fought on a global scale, that simply began in the Dutch Republic. It is important also to remember that without the assistance of Spain, Brandenburg, and the Holy Roman Emperor, there would have been no salvation for the Dutch Republic. From the perspective of France, the invasion of the Republic was intended strategically more as an attack on Spain than on the Dutch Republic: it is often forgotten that Louis XIV's ultimate priority was to incorporate the Southern Netherlands into France, not to become the ruler of the Dutch Republic. His attack on the Republic in 1672 was provoked largely by the Dutch-led Triple Alliance (1668), which thwarted his total conquest of the Flemish and Walloon provinces.<sup>49</sup> In 1673, the French offered peace to the Republic on the basis of receiving parts of the Generality Lands or fortresses in the Southern Netherlands. Ironically, the Dutch had offered even more generous terms the year earlier, which would have involved handing over virtually all Dutch territory bordering the Southern Netherlands, including the fortress of Maastricht.

The greatest error made by Louis XIV was to refuse this offer, as it would have seen him encircle the Southern Netherlands. He compounded his mistake by demanding absurd peace conditions in 1672, which included an annual ritual humiliation of the Dutch Republic in perpetuity. Louis XIV had become a victim of his own success, exemplified further by the generous but reckless release in the summer of 1672 of Dutch prisoners-of-war, who then played an important role in manning the *Waterlinies* and securing the frontiers of Holland, Friesland, and Groningen.

<sup>48</sup> Benjamin van der Linde, 'De gevolgen van de veldtocht van Bernard van Galen langs de Eems tijdens de Tweede Munsterse Oorlog (1672-1674)', in Dijkstra and Koopmans (eds.), *Verzet en Vrijheid*, 82-103.

<sup>49</sup> See the excellent study by Paul Sonnino, *Louis XIV and the origins of the Dutch War* (Cambridge 1988).

## Conclusion

There is an irony to the relative lack of attention to the international dimensions of 1672 and the motivations, aims, logistics and failures of the Republic's opponents and allies. A focus on the Dutch Republic alone plays into an ancient narrative, first propagated by Abraham de Wicquefort, Romeyn de Hooghe, and other seventeenth-century writers and artists, that the Dutch Republic was the principal victim of the unbridled aggression of the Sun King. This narrative, which coincided with the branding of Louis XIV as a monarch hell-bent on universal domination, was in part created to attract foreign allies for the Republic, and was disseminated abroad in French, English, and German to make publicity for the Dutch cause.

The tensions generated by the True Freedom regime and the exclusion of the Prince of Orange is always heavily stressed in the conventional Dutch account of the Disaster Year: the NPO documentary on 1672 devoted an entire episode to this political prelude. Ultimately, however, both the cause and resolution of the Disaster Year lay abroad, not at home. Even if a major contribution of the 350<sup>th</sup> commemoration of the Disaster Year and the new publications is an enhanced knowledge of local Dutch perspectives, especially those outside Holland, it should not be forgotten that the Disaster Year was an international crisis. The devastation wrought on the Southern Netherlands and parts of Germany in the Franco-Dutch War would ultimately be greater than those in the Republic between 1672 and 1674, but this is rarely mentioned or studied.<sup>50</sup>

Many of the new publications on 1672 show that thanks to sustained research and archival investigations, valuable insights can emerge that help shift our historical perspective. The commemorative publications also demonstrate that we are constantly in danger of reinforcing older stereotypes even as we seek to write new stories. Our views continue to be shaped by seventeenth-century publishers, and by publishers today, who see a natural financial hook in commemorations, and delight in presenting heavily illustrated books that end up overlapping substantially with one another. In the future, we would do well to continue to nuance the canonisation of 1672 by expanding our gaze abroad; by searching for a larger and more diverse corpus of illustrations; and, most of all, by agreeing to retire the triad of *redeloos*, *radeloos*, *reddeloos*, consigning this inaccurate and distracting phrase to the dustbin of history.

<sup>50</sup> A great exception is George Satterfield, *Princes, posts and partisans. The army of Louis XIV and partisan warfare in the Netherlands (1673-1678)* (Leiden 2003).