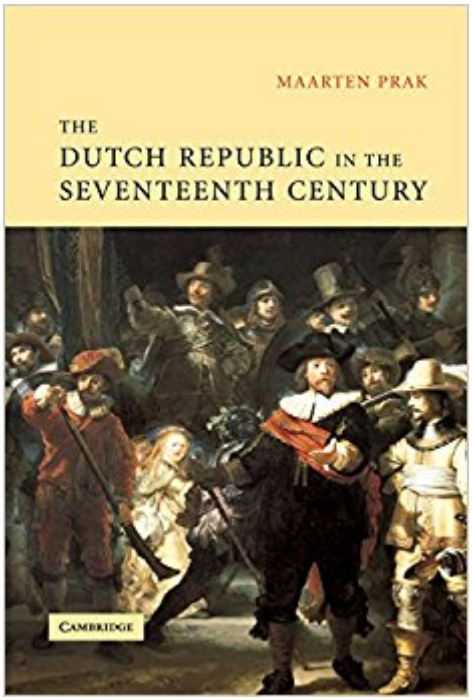
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The Dutch Republic In The Seventeenth Century: The Golden Age



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Synopsis

The Dutch are 'the envy of some, the fear of others, and the wonder of all their neighbours'. So wrote the English ambassador to the Dutch Republic, Sir William Temple, in 1673. Maarten Prak offers a lively and innovative history of the Dutch Golden Age, charting its political, social, economic and cultural history through chapters that range from the introduction of the tulip to the experiences of immigrants and Jews in Dutch society, the paintings of Vermeer and Rembrandt, and the ideas of Spinoza. He places the Dutch 'miracle' in a European context, examining the Golden Age both as the product of its own past and as the harbinger of a more modern, industrialised and enlightened society. A fascinating and accessible study, this 2005 book will prove invaluable reading to anyone interested in Dutch history.

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Customer Reviews

Excellent overview of a remarkable country's Golden Age in the 17rh Cenbtury and of the various

factors that shaped this facinating slice of its history

In The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century, Maarten Prak explores the Golden Age of the Dutch Republic. He tries to discern why it was a golden age and why it collapsed. Prak also raises the issue of this golden age's tie to Modernity. The book is a broad synthesis of the secondary literature on this period of Dutch history, and Prak investigates numerous aspects of Dutch history including politics, art, and religion. Prak's goal is not to be exhaustive; rather he wants his book to emphasize "the way society functioned" (6).Prak locates the strength of the Dutch Republic in its political system, an institution that he claims most other historians view as the weakest aspect of the Republic. The Republic's political system does not reflect modern institutions; it did not have the level of centralization or bureaucracy that many other countries were moving towards. Instead, the Dutch Republic allowed for a more decentralized form of government, giving provincial administers more authority. Prak views this system as a balance between necessity and cooperation. This freedom to operate was possible because of the relatively short distances involved. Prak notes that even though the government was decentralized, citizens still had great confidence in it because they continued to invest in its bonds even though these bonds had the lowest interest rates in Europe. The fact that the business minded Dutch continued to invest in their government proves that this government was not as weak as historians have supposed it to be. It was not weak, it was simply different from the modern.Prak also portrays the Dutch as a very practical people. Pragmatism played a key role in many of the decisions facing the republic. Most interesting, Prak claims that the Dutch were not tolerant by principle, but that it was practical. This view of the Dutch seems at odds with some of the other literature, but it is persuasive. The problems facing the Dutch from competing religious groups were solved on the spot in a way that was practical. Prak's discussion on the issues concerning marriage being both a state and a church institution seemed representative. Thus, Prak's Dutch are less noble than the tolerant Dutch of other historians; rather they merely dislike trouble. Of course this pragmatism was not an across the board phenomenon. Religious leaders put pursuit of truth before pragmatism in the Remonstrant's controversy, but the political leaders seemed to shoot for diffusing the situation through pragmatic gestures.Prak's book is helpful for the student of Dutch history. His goal is to address the Dutch of the seventeenth century on their own terms, not trying to draw analogies or precursors to Modernity. He focuses on the distinctives of the Dutch Republic, giving his reader a sense for how such a small country managed to accomplish so much in such a short period of time.

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