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Review Article

The Commercial Mentality in the Low Countries in the 15th Century

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Abstract

This master's thesis, entitled The Mercantile Spirit in the Netherlands in the 15th Century, was supervised by Professor Dr. Xosé Manuel Sánchez Sánchez of the Department of History (Medieval History), University of Santiago de Compostela.

We aim to demonstrate how the emergence of a market economy in Europe found its earliest expression across vast regions of the Low Countries during the closing decades of the Middle Ages. Owing to particular geographic conditions, most notably the continuous subsidence of the terrain, which gave rise to a dynamically shifting landscape—economic activity became predominantly oriented toward the trade of land, labor, capital, and goods. This phenomenon, combined with a high literacy rate among the populace, likewise attests to the consolidation of a robust civil society, supported by institutions actively engaged in political life. Furthermore, the pronounced market integration and the resulting low transaction costs fostered what contemporaries would identify as a koopman geest, a mercantile ethos characteristic of social strata known as Poorters or burghers.

In conclusion, the Sonderweg of the Netherlands—that is, their deviation from the classical Marxist paradigm of conflict marking the transition from feudalism to capitalism—manifests instead in a distinctive Volksaart defined by its mercantile spirit.

Keywords: Capitalism; Poorer; Koopmangeest; Subsidence; Trade

Introduction

Objectives and methodology

Our objective is to demonstrate that the Dutch economic takeoff was anticipated in its beginning in the final decades of the Middle Ages, facilitated by certain geographical, socio-economic and cultural factors, refuting the classic theses that placed said takeoff at the moment when Amsterdam became a true Stapel. Market around 1585 and the subsequent moment of splendor of the Dutch Golden Age.

Both print and digital sources were used in the preparation of this work. The Bronnen repertoire is particularly noteworthy. for Dutch Geschiedenis, of the Huygens Instituute [33], especially the sources referring to trade with France (Bronnen total of History der handel met Frankrijk) [24], which contain notarial deeds of commercial contracts signed between owners and merchants, primarily in the ports of La Rochelle and Bordeaux. The Archival Records have also been consulted. for Maritime Geschiedenis der Netherlands.

For trade with the Baltic, known as the mother of all business in Dutch circles, especially when merchants and sailors visited the ports of Lübeck, Danzig, Königsberg and Riga, we have a privileged source such as the Sound Toll Registers, which document the toll paid by ships crossing the Strait of Sound, and other data such as the date of registration, the ship's master's place of origin, port of departure, port of arrival, cargo composition, and tax. It is worth mentioning that, in addition to the digital edition, two histori-

ans, such as Nina Ellinger, Bang and Knud Korst have published the printed work in seven volumes under the title Tabeller over skibsfart og varetransport genem Oresund, known as the bible as a source on this subject [1].

The bibliography used has been as comprehensive as possible, even extending, where relevant, beyond the strictly defined chronological framework for the 15th century. Regarding the toponyms appearing on the historical maps, the decision was made to retain the original spellings of the cartographic sources consulted, thus respecting the historical use of place names.

A chapter has been included dedicated to the determining influence of the geographical characteristics of the Netherlands on the emergence of a characteristic mentality, following the analysis model carried out by Jan Elinger and Ad van der Woude [8], in his study covering a chronological arc between 1500 and 1800 (Nederland 1500-1800. De Eerste Ronde van Moderne Economische Groei), published in 1995, in which they explicitly break with the tradition of linking Dutch historiography with German historical science, specifically with the line that goes from Pringsheim via E. Baas to the research of the professor at the University of Utrecht JG Van Dillen, and instead follow the methodological principles of the French Annales School and the "new economic American history, which substantiate the influence of geographical, social and economic factors on historical processes.

Finally, the theoretical orientation of this research is based on the classic models of economic growth formulated by authors such as Colin Clark, Rondo Cameron, Paul Bairoch, and WW Rostow. These models were studied in depth during seminars taught by Professor Antonio Eiras Roel during the final year of the undergraduate program.

Brief state of the art

The choice of this research as a Master's Thesis reflects the interest in delving deeper into the economic and social history of the Netherlands, a field that, until recently, has received little attention in Spanish historiography. One of the few notable exceptions is José Alcalá-Zamora y Queipo de Llano's work, España, Flandes y el Mar del Norte (1618-1639), based primarily on sources preserved in the General Archive of Simancas. However, an approach that incorporated Dutch documentation and bibliography was necessary, a goal that this thesis aims to achieve.

Among the international authors who have addressed the economic development of the Netherlands, Jonathan Israel [13,14] stands out. In his seminal work, published in 1990, The Dutch Primacy in World Trade (1585–1740), analyses the emergence of Amsterdam as a hub of world trade after the fall of Antwerp in 1585. This process was part of the Dutch Golden Age, a period marked by cultural events (Rembrandt in painting, Vondel in poetry), economic events (the founding of the East India Company, VOC) and financial events (the creation of the Wisselbank in 1609). The Netherlands established itself as a global maritime power, with its characteristic freeboats sailing the Atlantic, the North Sea and the Baltic, earning it the nickname "carriers of the sea".

A specific reference author for the purposes of this study is Hans Kernkamp. Professor in Utrecht under the direction of Otto Alexander Oppermann and Hendrik Bolkestein subsequently practiced in Rotterdam and Leiden. His doctoral thesis (proefschrift) entitled De handel op den vijand (1572–1609), completed in 1937, provides a rigorous analysis of the commercial activity carried out by Dutch rebels with the Southern Netherlands and Spain, sometimes through the use of forged passports. The study reveals the existence of smuggling networks and Dutch agents operating in the main ports of the Iberian Peninsula.

No less interesting is the work of German Jiménez Montes, entitled A Disimulated Trade. Northern European Timber Merchants in Seville (1574-1598) describes the presence of Dutch, Flemish and German merchants in the shipyards of the port of Seville, whose main activity was the wood trade.

The economic boom of regions such as the Netherlands and Zeeland was based on a long-standing capitalist structure, whose roots date back to the Middle Ages. The integration of markets for land, capital, labor, and goods transformed the Netherlands into a pioneering example of a market economy. It is not surprising, therefore, that authors such as Jan de Vries and Ad van der [6] Woude have defined this region as "the first modern economy," an issue to which we have referred in the work of both authors cited above.

This research is also based on the interpretive model formulated by Maarten Prak and Jan Luiten van Zanden [19,20] under the name of Poldermodel established in 2013, in their work Nederland en het poldermodel. Social economic geschidenis van Nederland

1000-2000, according to which a strong corporate institutional framework existed in the Netherlands since the Middle Ages, capable of negotiating with public authorities. The debate centers on whether this institutional model was a prerequisite for economic growth or rather a consequence. The institutions involved include the open field communities, polder boards, merchant and craft guilds, urban militias, municipal and provincial governments. In short, three fundamental characteristics define Dutch uniqueness: low social inequality, a robust civil society, and a consensus-based political culture. This study proceeds from this perspective, paying particular attention to the mentality of the urban bourgeoisie as an emerging class within the framework of the tripartite functional division characteristic of the medieval system.

Geographical determinants of an entrepreneurial spirit

The Netherlands is located in a low-lying region dominated by Quaternary deposits overlying a Mesozoic and Paleozoic sedimentary basement, visible only in the southeastern corner of the country (Limburg). Recent geological evolution has been determined by glacial and periglacial processes, as well as intense fluvial -marine and marsh dynamics during the Holocene, in addition to significant anthropogenic transformation since medieval times.

The absence of mountains in the Netherlands and the marked flatness of its territory have their origin in an intracratonic tectonic context, characterized by stability relative structural and by prolonged subsidence processes during the Cenozoic and, especially, the Quaternary. Thus, from a geodynamic point of view, the Netherlands is located on the western margin of the Eurasian Plate, far from the main plate boundaries and zones of active orogeny. This position within the European craton implies that the territory has not been affected by recent compressional processes such as those that generated mountains like the Alps or the Pyrenees. The only major tectonic structures are ancient Paleozoic and Mesozoic faults, locally reactivated during the Cretaceous and Tertiary, but without recent orogenic manifestations.

The current morphology is strongly conditioned by the development of the Southern North Sea Basin, a long-evolving tectonic depression that began to form in the late Carboniferous. and has been active until today. This basin developed on a lithosphere thinned during the rifting process. Variscan and subsequent subsidence (Ziegler., *et al*. 1989) [32]. During the Mesozoic and Cenozoic, the accumulation of large volumes of marine and continental sediments in this basin increased subsidence (isostatic subsistence), favoring the preservation of a very low relief (Van Balen., *et al*. 2000) [26]. In the Quaternary, the combination of slow tectonic subsidence with eustatic ascent Postglacial erosion and the compaction of organic sediments (peat) reinforced the depressed character of the Dutch territory. This phenomenon explains why more than a quarter of the country is below mean sea level, with no real mountainous unit, even at medium altitude, except for some residual hills (such as the Veluwe or the Limburgse Heuvels) originated by ancient fluvial deposits or Pleistocene moraines.

It was precisely during the Pleistocene that the north and east of the current Dutch territory were affected by the advances of ice sheet Fennoscandinavian, in particular during the Elster (ca. 480–400 ka BP) and Saale (ca. 300–130 ka BP) glaciations, when the ice front reached the northeast of the country (Zagwijn, 1986 [31]; Busschers., *et al*. 2007) [5]. These episodes left behind typical deposits such as till (glacial deposits) as well as glaciofluvial sands and gravels. The Hondsrug linear hill system constitutes an outstanding example of linear glacial morphology associated with ice flow (Weerts., *et al*. 2005) [30].

In contrast, during the last glaciation (Weichselian, ca. 115–11.7 ka BP), ice did not cover the Netherlands, but a periglacial environment (cold environment with ground freezing) dominated the landscape, with extensive loess deposits (wind-blown sediments laid down as sheets on the ground) in the south (Limburg), aeolian dune fields and cryoturbation processes (Kasse and Aalbersberg, 2019) [15].

The transition to the Holocene brought about a profound reconfiguration of the landscape. Rising sea levels and climate stabilisation enabled the expansion of deltaic systems, tidal flats, marshes and, above all, bogs of various types (Kiden, 1995) [16]. Raised bogs (ombrotrophic), fed exclusively by rainwater, developed on former dune ridges and poorly drained areas, while lowland bogs (minerotrophic, in which the moisture supply comes from surface runoff) formed on the floodplains of the Rhine and Meuse. These covered large areas of the west and north of the country (North Holland, Friesland, Utrecht), making agricultural use difficult due to anoxia, low fertility and high water table (Borger, 1992) [3].

Middle Ages onwards, a radical transformation of the territory took place through the design of an artificial hydraulic system unparalleled in Europe. The Dutch built a complex network of dikes,

canals, sluice gates and windmills dedicated to pumping water. water (later mechanical pumping stations), with the aim of draining peat bogs and other wetlands to convert them into arable land, giving rise to the well-known polders (Van de Ven, 1993) [27]. These polders, such as those of Beemster or Schermer, are anthropized landscapes reclaimed from the sea or from former inland marshes, and were managed by hydraulic cooperatives (waterschappen).

However, this intensive activity had significant ecological and geotechnical consequences. Drainage of the peatlands led to rapid oxidation of the organic matter, which in turn led to soil compaction and to decline from the soil surface up to several meters in some areas (Schothorst, 1977; Erkens., *et al*. 2016 [9]. In addition, from the 13th century onwards, peat extraction for fuel (called veenafgraving) became widespread, especially in the provinces of Holland, Utrecht and Overijssel. Peat was also used as a building material and soil amendment, which led to intense soil degradation. ecosystems, some of which became artificial lakes (such as the Haarlemmermeer), which were then also drained and turned into polders.

Currently, more than 25% of the country lies below sea level, and water management remains a structural component of the Dutch territory, especially in the face of the risk of subsidence and sea level rise due to climate change.

The natural conditions of the Netherlands—a low-lying territory prone to flooding, with difficult soils and a temperate-humid climate—historically forced its inhabitants to develop a proactive, collaborative, and highly technological attitude toward the environment. This relationship was not merely adaptive, but may have been one of the causes of the development of an entrepreneurial mindset and a commercial and mercantile vocation that eventually became a defining characteristic during the Modern Age.

First, the need to control water to ensure arable land generated a social organization based on cooperation. From medieval times, waterschappen (water management cooperatives) emerged, in which peasants, artisans, and burghers had to coordinate to maintain canals, dikes, and pumping stations. This early practice of technical and community self-governance favored the emergence of local self-governance structures and a culture of collective problem-solving (De Vries and Van der Woude, 1997) [7].

Secondly, the scarcity of traditional natural resources (minerals, forests, large fertile agricultural areas) led the Dutch to seek alternative sources of wealth, including maritime trade, the industrial processing of imported products (such as cod, flax, and spices), and the rational exploitation of the land through hydraulic engineering. Peat, initially an obstacle, became an economic driving force as an energy source in the 13th –17th centuries.

Furthermore, its strategic position at the mouth of major European rivers (the Rhine, Meuse, Scheldt) and its connection to the North Sea also contributed to the development of river and sea ports, such as Amsterdam and Rotterdam, consolidating a privileged logistics space for international trade.

This set of geographical factors (environmental restrictions, the need for technical management of the environment, river and sea access) fostered a mentality based on practical rationality, technical ingenuity, and a strong work ethic. Although Dutch Calvinism imposed a rigorous and exclusive religious and moral framework, which strongly influenced the internal life of communities, a pragmatic and functionalist attitude prevailed on the economic and diplomatic levels. Thus, commercial coexistence with foreigners, the exchange of scientific and technical ideas, and a certain structural openness towards the West were facilitated. useful, even if it was ideologically alien. This duality contributed to the Dutch Republic becoming a refuge for persecuted minorities (such as Sephardic Jews or Huguenots) and a key hub of the modern world-economy (Braudel, 1984) [4].

Society, economy and mentality in the low countries in the 15th century: The Merchantile bourgeoisie in a time of change

The European maritime expansion of the 15th century, accompanied by remarkable technical development, marked a crucial moment in the formation of a global image of the world by humankind. Science, cosmography, and cartography were closely integrated into voyages of exploration and discovery. Navigation began to incorporate advanced astronomical instruments, such as astrolabes and quadrants, heralding a new era in human history. However, Western Europe still maintained structures characteristic of the medieval period. In this context, a new economic system also emerged: capitalism. In this process, the Netherlands played a pioneering role.

The so-called Dutch Sonderweg, understood as a unique trajectory in the construction of its political and economic identity, departs from the predominant model of a unified monarchy in Western Europe. The idea of a specific national character (volksaard), supported by the existence of polders and a particular form of water management (Dutch water management), has been challenged by historians who highlight more complex and plural processes in the emergence of Dutch modernity.

Other historiographical approaches place the origin of this singularity in the Late Middle Ages, a period in which factors converged that favored the development of an embryonic capitalist economy, especially the construction of ships that combined technological innovation and increasing efficiency during the course of the 13th to 16th centuries and which served as the basis for the economic and cultural development that preceded the so-called Dutch Golden Age.

The transition from feudalism to capitalism, understood as a process of economic rationalization and modernization, found an early manifestation in the Netherlands. This transition took place in a fragmented territorial context, characterized by the coexistence of principalities, counties, and lordships, which were successively integrated into the Duchy of Burgundy and later into the Habsburg Empire. Despite its marginal position in Western Europe, the region was notable for its high urbanization and productive specialization.

At the beginning of the 16th century, around 40% of the workforce was engaged in industrial activities, 20% in the service sector, 15% in fishing and peat extraction, and only 25% in agriculture. This distribution reveals a markedly urban economy, not centered on agricultural labor.

The early economic development of the Netherlands—a true late medieval jump-start— is not unanimously interpreted as an indication of sustained growth. According to De Vries and Van der Woude, only in the 17th century can we speak of a genuine economic modernisation according to the Kuznets model, which presupposes an increase in per capita income accompanied by structural transformations.

In contrast, Van Leeuwen and Van Zanden argue that the increase in urbanization between 1348 and 1514 reflects sustained economic growth, especially after the Black Death. They cite the city of Leiden as an example, whose expansion in sectors such as the textile industry, fisheries, brewing, and river transport coincided with this phase of urbanization. In relation to the textile industry, we would like to mention NW's classic work, Posthumus. The history of Leidensche lakenindustrie (The Hague, 1908) which constituted his doctoral thesis and also his six-volume work Bronnen total of Geschidenis der leidsche textile nijverheid (1910-1922) [24] and we will cite as an appendix the article by Roos van Oosten, Het vestigingpatroon der laken trade. Drapiers in Wevers in Textil Stad Leiden (1498-1748), interesting in many respects such as the statement that from 1580 the oude draperies, in which wool is used primarily as a raw material, give way to the nieuwe draperies in which wool was already used in combination with linen, cotton and silk, as well as the observation that both semi-finished and final products were subject to rigorous control.

Throughout the 15th century, wage labor gradually displaced serfdom, a phenomenon explained by the weakness of feudal structures in the region. By the 16th century, between one-third and one-half of the working population was already wage-earning.

The first phase of Dutch capitalism took place in rural areas rather than in urban centers. From the mid-14th century and especially in the 15th century, non-agricultural activities developed, such as the production of bricks, lime, chalk, and cheese; hemp processing; cloth bleaching; fishing; navigation; and shipbuilding. This productive diversification consolidated an export-oriented economy.

Products such as bricks and tiles were exported to England, Denmark, and the Baltic Sea. The textile industry developed in cities such as Leiden, The Hague, Amsterdam, and possibly also in Alkmaar, Hoorn, and Gouda. Herring was also traded in England, while Dutch cheese was popular in the Rhineland, supported by urban investors who invested in fixed capital.

The boom in herring fishing increased the demand for salt, which explains the presence of Dutch vessels in Bourgneuf and Brouage. In the last third of the 15th century, innovations such as the Haringbuis and new preservation techniques emerged. Brielle is also important, with its Baltic trade connections and a later central role in the rebellion against the Spanish Monarchy.

The regions of Flanders and Brabant, especially in the northern part, displayed advanced urban economies. Fairs such as those in Bergen and Zoom and 's-Hertogenbosch were the hubs of Dutch

merchants. The vertical integration of fishing companies and the organization of convoys reflect modern forms of productive coordination.

Increased specialization and the existence of legal institutions guaranteeing economic freedom allowed the Netherlands to create a system of commercial cooperation without major class conflicts or violent expropriations, as proposed by the Marxist model.

The low cost of maritime transport, along with a solid proto-industry and the low incidence of the Black Death—according to Jansen—favored population growth and a market-oriented economy that other European countries would not achieve until the 19th century. The capital market, less sophisticated than in Flanders or northern Italy, was based on broad participation by small investors, who had access to long-term loans.

Van Zanden argues that between 85% and 90% of agricultural and industrial products were destined for highly integrated markets.

Dutch communities were organized into horizontal structures: autonomous cities, marken, guilds, drainage boards, or provincial councils. The Tiel merchants' guild, a precursor to later collective action, and religious or charitable organizations (parishes, asylums, hospitals) formed networks of solidarity and investment. The wage gap between skilled and unskilled workers was minimal, probably the lowest in Western Europe.

Essential sources for the study of the Dutch economy are the Enqueste of 1494 and the Informacie of 1514, which were investigations into the level of wealth and well-being in cities and rural areas for the establishment of a tax or Verponding.

Around 1470, during the first phase of industrialization in Holland, Leiden's textile industry exported to Naples, Cyprus, Spain, and Constantinople. Linen production in Haarlem was also significant, as were peat and beer exports from Delft, Haarlem, and Gouda.

Several structural factors contribute to explaining this evolution: the regime of partial ownership of land regulated by the Pachtcontracten (De Vries and Van der Woude, 1997) [7], the role of urban craft guilds led by patriciate magistrates, labor mobility, religious tolerance, and personal freedom.

De Vries and Van der Woude (De Vries and Van der Woude (1997) [7] identifies three key features of civic life in the Republic of the Seven United Provinces: independence, individuality, and rationality. These qualities contributed to making the western region a hotbed of educational and religious innovation, particularly through the Devotio Moderna movement and the introduction of the printing press by German artisans from 1470 onwards.

In short, Dutch economic expansion in the 16th and 17th centuries can be explained by two factors: an internal one, based on ecological factors and the availability of non-agricultural labor; and an external one, linked to the progressive integration of markets.

From a historical sociology perspective, Charles Tilly [25] distinguishes between states based on coercion (such as Russia, Prussia, or Spain) and those based on capital, such as the Netherlands, where monetary resources were managed by urban elites.

Michel Mann [18], for his part, provides a key distinction between despotic and infrastructural power. The Republic of the Seven Provinces constitutes a paradigmatic example of the latter, thanks to its widespread literacy, monetary and metrological standardization, and efficient communication networks.

Urban society, justice, and the birth of a commercial mentality

Huitzinga, in his work The Autumn of the Middle Ages, described the chivalric ideal that predominated in the Middle Ages, the lifestyle of the nobility was what the whole society should imitate, however in the Netherlands, the high proportion of urban population motivated the inhabitants of the cities to assume a new ideal, based on materialism, practical sense, and a new morality anchored in rational and pragmatic behavior, the exercise of free professions through the combination of intellectual capacity and independence, in an urban environment in which a sense of self-determination is present, arising from an original myth (oorsprong mithe). In short, an active life, as opposed to the contemplative life that characterized the man of the Middle Ages. Despite being a very urbanized society, feudal institutions still persisted, such as the Grondher or landed aristocrat, who, together with the high clergy, had a lot of power, not only territorial, but could also appoint officials of justice and public order such as the Schout and Schegenen, next to them were the Rakkers who were police agents and finally the nachwachts or night watchmen.

As for the social structure at its most humble levels, it is composed of peasants who work small plots of land such as the Keuters and agricultural laborers who did not own land, called Landloze.

In management, the justice and public order officials have a special role; namely: Schout, Schepenen, Baljuw, Meier, Amman, Drost, Drossard, Shout bij nacht. In general terms, the Schouts can be considered municipal officials with administrative, judicial and public order functions. They are at the head of the district's judicial apparatus, preside over courts of justice, and are also public prosecutors (openbare). anklager), in the Anglo-Saxon world the corresponding position is Sheriff.

The Schepenen, whose name comes from the Latin Scabinus, in French echevine, the people who hold the position must be free men, of good morals and instructed in laws, is a police chief at the same time that he commands his agents or Rakkers.

The baljuw is a position commonly known as bailiff or bailli in French, usually members of the lower landed nobility, and they ensure public order, they are both manorial and municipal officials, highlighting the so-called great bailiff (grootbaljuw).

The drost or Landrost is a manorial official with functions of maintaining public order, legislation, and justice. The Amman is an authority with administrative and judicial functions. Finally, the Meier administers and operates a Vroonhoeve, also called Vroonhof or Curs, on behalf of his lord. Curstis in Latin, agricultural and livestock exploitation.

The commercial activity of the Netherlands in the 15th century

The merchants of the northern Netherlands used a remarkable variety of vessels, although for much of the 15th century, shipbuilding techniques and the organization of the industry remained rudimentary. It wasn't until 1460 that a qualitative leap occurred that allowed Dutch shipyards to reach technical levels comparable to those of other European powers.

To understand the Dutch mercantile mentality of the 15th century, it is essential to examine the role played by the Hanseatic League, of which many cities in the northern Netherlands were members. These included Kampen, Zierikzee, Brielle, Middelburg, Arnemuiden, Dordrecht, Amsterdam, Enkhuizen, Wieringen, Harderwijk, Zutphen, Elburg, Deventer, Stavoren and Hindeloopen, all of which were part of the trade circuit (Kringloop) between the North Sea and the Baltic.

Around 1200, the Hanseatic League established a major trading post in Novgorod (Peterhof), connected by a trade route that ran from Lübeck to Visby. This route constituted one of the first axes of Hanseatic expansion, although it was closed in 1494 by order of Tsar Ivan III.

Another important route connected the regions of Westphalia and Cologne with England, following the course of the Rhine to London.

A third key route headed to Flanders, specifically to the city of Bruges, which in the 13th century had become the main commercial center of Western Europe and a hub for trade with the Mediterranean, a gateway for Asian goods. Goods from all over Europe were traded in Bruges: timber, iron, wheat (from Normandy), salt, Gascon wine, wool textiles, leather, and precious stones. In 1478, the Hanseatic League established a trading post there. The subsequent silting up of the Zwin Canal led to the decline of Bruges and the rise of Antwerp as a new commercial center around 1520.

A fourth trade route connected with the Norwegian city of Bergen, which specialized in the trade of grain and hake, the Scandinavian kingdom's main export product.

The kontoren (Hanseatic factories) served multiple functions: diplomatic, administrative, and commercial. The main products that consolidated the Hanseatic League's economic power were furs and wax, followed by textiles, copper, iron, salt, fish, and beer.

We have previously mentioned the importance of the economic sector of shipbuilding in the Netherlands in the Middle Ages, and indeed the oldest medieval sources already tell us about vessels such as the Scapha used on voyages to Galicia, but throughout this period various types were used, a list of which can be found in the Maritime Geschidenis. der Nederlanden in digital edition and which are the following:

- Het Stenroer
- From Tuigage
- Kiel is widely used together with Hulk in the wine trade in the Rhine, Maas and Scheldt regions.
- From Kogge the boat known as Coca.
- From Hulk the urca.

- From Karveel
- From Kraak la nao in Portuguese.
- From Galei the galley
- Of boeier
- From Buis, especially the haringbuis used for fishing and salting herring.
- From Dogger
- De Hoeker
- From Pink
- De Schult
- Boogschuters
- Spiesen
- Bussen

From balengiers in French balenier, whose etymology suggests a relationship in origin with the capture of the whale (walvis), also very present in the Hundred Years' War between the English and the French.

De baarze, this vessel and the previous one together with the urca and the galley were the ones that participated in the war between the Hanseatic League and the Dutch and Zealanders.

Shipping companies could belong to several owners (Parteienrederei), and not only sailors and merchants participated in them, but also kleine burger with modest capital, and this formula is particularly frequent in the 15th century.

As for cartography, since the Dutch Cartographic School emerged in the 16th century, it must be said that the medieval descriptions of the Mediterranean coast, as well as the Atlantic coast, both south and north, and the Baltic Sea, of Italian origin, must be taken into account as fundamental to the evolution of maritime navigation, which was learned through practice.

Amsterdam: "gateway in norden"

In 1611, Johannes Pontanus (1571–1639) wrote his chronicle Rerum et urbis Amstelodamensium historia, which together with the later Geschiedenis van Amsterdam can be considered one of the first scientific histories of the city. In chapter VIII of his work, Pontanus deals with the war against the Wendish cities, following the Divisie Cronik, a late medieval chronicle written by Cornelius Aurelius (1460–1531), an Augustinian scholar from Gouda and one of the first Dutch humanists. This work was used as a school textbook until the 19th century.

Although the aim here is not to provide a complete history of Amsterdam, it is important to note that its origins are linked to the drainage of peat bogs. The first documentary mention of the city dates back to 1275, when a toll was imposed on men. manentes apud Amstelledamme. According to Prak and Van Zanden, international trade is not documented until 1323 [19,20].

The waterways through the Zuiderzee connected Amsterdam with cities such as Gouda, Haarlem, and the cities of Brabant and Flanders. Trade links were soon established with northern Germany and the Baltic Sea. For most of the 15th century, Amsterdam occupied the fifth position in the urban hierarchy within the County of Holland, behind Dordrecht, Haarlem, Leiden, and Delft. With a population of around 3,500, its size was modest compared to the industrial centers of Flanders and Brabant.

However, this small port city had well-connected international merchants and a close relationship with its rural surroundings. Within a century, Amsterdam went from being a flink dorp (an important village) to become a Stapelmarkt (a warehouse market) for global products, and the capital of the most prosperous nation in the world in the 17th century. In this regard, it is worth remembering the broad debate that has existed since the last century about the importance of the arrival of immigrants from Antwerp, after the conquest of this city by the Duke of Parma and the subsequent closure of the Scheldt River. These immigrants had various characteristics such as their capitalist spirit, significant sums of liquid capital, modern commercial techniques and important trading networks, which would give a strong boost to the city of Amsterdam as a center of world trade; However, authors such as Gelderblom point out that emigration from Antwerp would begin around the year 1540, and between 1578 and 1630 the number would be around 800 merchants, young and with few resources, and on the other hand, two endogenous factors such as the specialization of Dutch agriculture and the possession of a large commercial fleet. Finally, it should be noted that other towns in the county, such as Rotterdam, Gouda, The Hague, Alkmaar, Enkhuizen, and Hoorn, had populations between 10,000 and 15,000. Smaller towns such as Schoonhoven, Medemblik, and Schagen completed the region's urban network.

The war with the hanseatic league (wendische oorlog)

The commercial strength of Dutch cities led to a progressive displacement of the Hanseatic League, even affecting traditionally

Hanseatic cities such as Kampen, Deventer, and Zwolle. Between 1438 and 1441, war broke out between the provinces of Holland and Zeeland and the Hanseatic cities, a conflict that ended with the Peace of Copenhagen. The last two years of the conflict were devoted to diplomatic negotiations.

This conflict marked the consolidation of Holland as a maritime power. Until the mid-14th century, Dutch shipping was limited to coastal shipping in inland waters, and there was no military fleet as such. It was only in 1438 that Holland began to have war-ready vessels, despite already having a significant commercial fleet.

In addition to open hostilities, acts of piracy and trade boycotts were also recorded, especially in later years, such as the episodes that occurred around 1451, a true Kaperoorlog or pirate war.

The emergence of the merchant bourgeoisie. The Poorters

Karil Tilmans has pointed out that, towards the end of the Middle Ages, Dutch towns were composed essentially of two large social groups: on the one hand, the Poorters or Poorteressen, bourgeois citizens who followed the classical republican ideal, whose civic ethics implied the duty to contribute to the common good (res publica); on the other, the manual craftsmen.

The urban bourgeoisie, or patriciate, acted as guarantors of both institutional authority and civic freedom against feudal power. Its members were mostly merchants, possessed political, economic, social, and legal rights, and constituted an elite within the municipal community. However, at the end of the 15th century, their status was still defined more by administrative than legal criteria, and their legitimacy was based outside the feudal order.

This social configuration reveals a strong internal discontinuity within the urban fabric. The term Burger (or borger) designated those who practiced borgden, that is, the activity of credit management, which highlights the importance of merchants as key players in the processes of circulation and economic production.

The mercantile mentality of the Dutch bourgeoisie was also manifested in the world of art, as can be seen in the images shown below, which correspond to the work of Pieter Aertsen (1507/08-1575), a painter born in Amsterdam who dedicated part of his artistic production to the representation of market scenes, although with a religious background.

Merchant bourgeoisie of the Hansa. A pivotal factor in the European economy at the end of the Middle Ages

In a recent study, Bert Looper [17] critically analyzes the traditional image of the Dutch cities integrated into the Hanseatic League. In particular, he examines their role as a Scharnier, or "hinge," in the system of trade between the Hanseatic League itself and the territories of Holland and Flanders. This intermediary position was evident, above all, in the annual markets held in the IJssel River region. The area between the Rhine, the IJssel, and the city of Keulen (Cologne), together with the so-called IJsselsteden (IJssel towns), constituted a powerful economic region.

The decline of the Hanseatic League and the progressive rise of Holland as a commercial power coincided with the shift of the commercial center from Antwerp to Amsterdam, which would eventually become the hub of Atlantic trade in the following centuries.

In their recent work, Pioneers of Capitalism, Maarten Praak and Jan Luiten van Zanden discuss the historical conditions that made possible the emergence of capitalism as a socioeconomic system qualitatively distinct from the feudal regime. In this context, the Netherlands occupies a central position as a territory where the market economy became, early on, the predominant mode of exchange. One of the distinctive elements of the Dutch ethos would have been its commercial vocation, in contrast to the agrarian orientation predominant in most of Western Europe during the Middle Ages.

In his famous work on the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism, Max Weber had already warned of the transition from a courtly culture, founded on the privilege of birth and landed property, to a new mentality in which professional work—conceived as a vocation—and individual economic success are interpreted as signs of divine predestination.

This cultural transformation invites us to reflect on the specific physical and geographical conditions of the Dutch territory. Indeed, the presence of wetlands and peat bogs made intensive farming difficult, which drove the population to seek alternatives in the secondary and tertiary sectors. Towards the beginning of the 15th century, the Netherlands had a population of approximately 765,000, mostly fishermen, sailors, and merchants, although there were also farmers and livestock farmers. The context was therefore ripe for the economic "takeoff"—in the terms of W. W. Rostow—that would lead to sustained growth throughout the 15th to 17th centuries.

Between 1350 and 1500, a significant transformation of the urban economy took place, largely due to the high level of human capital. Literacy was widespread, with little difference between genders and between rural and urban populations. This fostered a labor force skilled in reading, writing, and calculating, a key element for the development of trade.

The Dutch institutional system was also structured to favor entrepreneurship. The urban bourgeoisie—the so-called Poorters—were able to take on entrepreneurial functions, either individually or in small associations. Within a few decades, these sectors became key intermediaries in international maritime trade, operating routes connecting the Atlantic with the Baltic, Russia, France, the Iberian Peninsula, and ultimately the eastern Mediterranean, reaching ports in Italy and Turkey.

Within this framework, export-oriented activities intensified, especially in the beer and textile sectors, despite competition from Flemish towns such as Hoogstraten and brewers from the southern Netherlands.

Conclusion

As a conclusion to this work we can establish that the construction of a bourgeois identity, which has as its main characteristic the existence of a specific Koopmaan geest, or mercantile spirit, is the cornerstone of a process that leads the Netherlands to anticipate the establishment of a capitalist economic and social system, also taking into account all the factors that have been previously mentioned, such as the particular characteristics of the geographical environment, degree of urbanization, literacy or the institutional framework of the cities.

Regarding the bourgeois character of late medieval Dutch society, Johan Huizinga (12), from an essentialist point of view of the history of his country, in 1934 in the first printing of his work Nederlandse Geestesmerk stated that "we Dutch are all bourgeois, from the notary to the poet, from the baron to the proletarian[1] it would therefore be consubstantial with tradition, although compared to the German Bildunsgburgerturm, the Dutch would be a narrow-minded petty bourgeoisie (bekrompen en benepen) kleinburgerlij), the urban samenleving would be supported by local historical chronicles, in collective rituals such as those of a religious nature (processions).

Finally, there are urban elites in which the patriciate and the nobility (stadadel) tend to merge. The patricians are a social group that dominates the economic, political and administrative life of the city. In third place are civil servants such as notaries, secretaries, and Latin teachers. Others who did not enjoy civil rights were the geletters or halfgeletters, who were moderately educated, followed by the functionally illiterate and finally printers, artists, and other groups at the bottom of the social ladder.

Summary

The present Master's Thesis entitled The Mercantile Spirit in the Low Countries in the 15th Century, has been tutored by Professor Doctor Xosé Manuel Sánchez Sánchez, from the Department of History, Medieval History area, of the University of Santiago de Compostela.

We intend to show how the emergence of a Market Economy in Europe had its earliest manifestation in large areas of the Netherlands during the final decades of the Middle Ages. Due to the particular geographical conditions, especially the subsidence of the land, which favored the existence of a shifting landscape, in addition, economic activity was fundamentally oriented towards the trade of land, labor, capital and goods, this together with a high literacy rate of the population, the existence of a civil society strengthened by institutions that participated in political activity is also noted. On the other hand, the high degree of integration of the markets and the low costs of transactions favored the existence of a koopman geest, a mercantile spirit typical of sectors of the population known as Poorters or bourgeoisie.

In conclusion, the Sonderweg of the Netherlands, as a territory in which the classic Marxist model of conflict in the process of transition from feudalism to capitalism has not been concretized, has been concretized in a Volksaart defined by its mercantile spirit.

[1]Cited by Aerts, R. and Tevel, H. in their work De Stijl van de Burger. Over Dutch burgers culturr van middeleeuwen. ed.Agora.1998.page

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