

The Atlantic Republican Tradition: The Republic of the Seven Provinces

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A CONFERENCE WAS HELD AT the Clark Memorial Library in April 2009, under the title “The Limits of the Atlantic Republican Tradition.” This inescapably carried some normative implications. It was assumed that participants in general agreed on what this “tradition” was and aimed to look at its “limits,” though it was less clear whether the aim was to fix them, to look beyond them, or to dissolve them. There further hung over the conference the implication—though this was affirmed by nobody—that there existed an entity, alternatively a concept, of “republicanism,” which might be better defined, whether as a theoretical category or as a historical phenomenon, in some ways than in others. The conference avoided sterile disputations, but—as is common and indeed healthy on such occasions—the subject with which it had dealt was rather discovered in retrospect than agreed upon in advance. This article offers such a retrospective view and argues that the conference dealt on the whole with two historical narratives, different to the point where they might almost invite the metaphor of the elephant and the whale; but that these organisms (to continue the metaphor) shared a common evolutionary history with some comparable outcomes.

“The Atlantic republican tradition” continued—perhaps in consequence of the impulse to set “limits” to it—to be defined much as it was in *The Machiavellian Moment*, published in 1975 with the subtitle “Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition.”¹ The writer of this essay, as author of the original title, reports that he has in some ways re-narrated

¹J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975; reissued with a new afterword, 2003).



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the history it offered in a more recent study entitled *The First Decline and Fall*,² elements of which are taken up and employed here. Common to both volumes, however, is the thesis whose “limits” were to be explored at the conference: how certain narratives about Roman history, entailing an ideal of “republican”³ government and the historic causes of its transformation into a principate, were formulated (not originated) in Florence during the last century of its “republican” history; taken up in England during its brief experiment with “republican” government and elaborated into a history of west European landed property and free citizenship; restated in England and Scotland after the revolution of 1688 as a critique of the military-fiscal state and commercial civil society that “Britain” now became; and imported into the English colonies beyond the Atlantic, where they helped to engender a debate between “ancient” and “modern” concepts of liberty important in the foundation and history of the American federal republic. This narrative—which by the way supplied the word “Atlantic” with such meaning as it bears in the title of *The Machiavellian Moment*—has been and still is debated in American historiography. The conference in 2009, however, did not continue that debate so much as set up and explore another narrative of republican history, which sets “limits” to the “Atlantic tradition” simply by presenting itself as the latter’s other.

This alternative “republican” tradition (or “republicanism”)—elephant, it might be suggested, to the Atlantic whale—takes shape on the borders of the Hohenstaufen-to-Hapsburg medieval “empire,” as certain cities and groups of cities—Swiss, Hanseatic, and especially Dutch—claim sovereignty for themselves within or without empire. These cities encounter one of the classical problems of the city state, ancient and medieval: that of the relations between the “few” and the “many” within the citizen body; and their lay and clerical elites, steeped in the obsessive neoclassicism of Latin Europe, are well aware that they share a history with Greco-Roman antiquity and draw upon it. It is of far-reaching importance in the history of the European vocabulary that the majority of these independent cities are ruled by merchant patriciates, and that these denote their sovereignty, liberty, and social power by using a set of synonyms of the French *bourgeoisie*. This is the source of the pre-Marxist, Marxist and post-Marxist usage that denotes mercantile, capitalist and industrial social practices as “bourgeois,” with the implication that the triumph of the economic in defining the polity is the work of the freemen of corporate towns, a thesis a little difficult to present in English where there is no collective noun equivalent to *bourgeoisie* and the growth of capitalism is not originally the work of such a class’s rise to power. This has to do with the problematic of “the Atlantic republican tradition”; but it was not clear, at the Clark Library conference, just how far there remained a persistent desire to represent “republicanism,” “liberty,” and “enlightenment” as “bourgeois” in origin, thus setting “limits” to the “Atlantic” alternative.

Of these leagues of post- or ex-imperial cities and their regimes a unique place belongs to that which became the quasi-federated republic of the Protestant Netherlands. Not a city-state but a confederacy of cities aware of their municipal and imperial origins, it had perhaps less need of the image of the Roman republic than we shall see was the case with Florence. More

² J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, vol. 3, *The First Decline and Fall* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

³ Recent literature has raised two questions respecting the changes of meaning from *res publica* denoting a governed society of any kind, to denote (a) the Roman regime that preceded the establishment of the Augustan principate, (b) a form of government specifically opposed to monarchy. These changes should be historically examined, but are presupposed in the present article. See James Hankins, ed., *Renaissance Civic Humanism: Reappraisals and Reflections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

immediately to the history of republics in Europe, it grew, through its alliance with the Princes of Orange, into a powerful military actor in the wars of religion and the growth of a European states system; and through the mercantile energies of Holland and Zeeland, into a maritime empire on an oceanic scale, with slave-worked colonies in the Caribbean, a small but momentous colony of settlement at the Cape of Good Hope, and an empire in Indonesia equal in extent to that the British acquired in India. None of these seems to have entered into dialogue and dialectic with the metropolis as did the English and Iberian colonies in America; the political thought of the Dutch Republic centered on its European self. In the history of “republicanism”—assuming there to be such an entity—the primary characteristic of its theory and discourse is that these are in the full sense of the word *bourgeois*: they assume the city to be a mercantile corporation and citizenship to be an engagement in trade.⁴ For a “golden age” coinciding roughly with the seventeenth century C.E., the provinces forming the Union of Utrecht developed an urban consumer culture of extraordinary self-confidence, within which, however, they debated often bitterly the distribution of sovereignty among themselves and between themselves and the unique institution of the stadholderate identified with the Princes of Orange. They also debated Calvinist theology and culture in ways that became involved with the former debate. The presence at the Clark Library conference of a group of scholars skilled in Dutch intellectual history caused it to become the principal alternative presented to “the Atlantic republican tradition” in the history of republican thought.

At this point there arose the problem of the elephant and the whale. The two “traditions”—if that word is to be used—differed in context and ideology, if not always in vocabulary and content. In the Dutch (as in the Swiss and Hanseatic) “traditions,” there was to be heard the speech of actual republics endeavoring to explain themselves to themselves and to others; whereas in the “Atlantic tradition,” the republic was increasingly—until the American Articles of Confederation—a concept and historical construct, employed to criticize and ultimately reorder the structures of the early modern state. It followed that concepts of property, liberty, commerce, and arms were very differently deployed in the two (if there were not more than two) cases. The Clark Library conference successfully avoided the trap of setting up a sterile competition between incommensurables; but there remained the question of whether there could be found a history in which the two “traditions” diverged from shared positions and contexts.

It seems possible to establish such a scenario, part historiographical and part historical. Leonardo Bruni, writing the first book of his *History of the Florentine People* in the early years of the fifteenth century, articulates a major theme of European historiography.⁵ With the expulsion of the kings, he says, the Roman people gave themselves liberty, and there followed the astonishing explosion of human energy that became known as *virtus*. This energy took a conquering form, and Roman liberty was the cause of its empire over others. Bruni, a naturalized Florentine from Arezzo, was not sure this had been beneficial; Etruscan culture had maintained many free cities and alliances, and it might have been better if these had continued to practice their several liberties, rather than the world’s becoming subject to the single *virtus* of Rome. It is not clear whether Bruni thought of the Etruscan cities as trading with one another, but he is presenting an

⁴ I pass over the distinction between the words “burgher” and “bourgeois,” in which the former implies a political capacity diminished in the latter. See Wyger R. E. Velema, *Republicans: Essays on Eighteenth-Century Dutch Political Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 82–84.

⁵ James Hankins, ed. and trans., *Leonardo Bruni: History of the Florentine People*, vol. 1, *Books I–IV* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, vol. 3, chap. 8.

early instance of the idea of a league or *Bund*, which Montesquieu was to rephrase as that of the *république fédérative*. He goes on to relate the story, already told by Roman historians, of how liberty acquired an empire greater than the institutions of liberty could control, how liberty was corrupted by empire, and how the republic fell under the rule of emperors. In destroying *libertas*, however, the Caesars destroyed the *virtus* needed to defend the empire it had acquired, and there followed Roman weakness in the face of the conquering barbarians. Bruni proceeds to outline the narrative Gibbon was to inherit as “the triumph of barbarism and religion.” In the barbarized western provinces of the former empire, the popes attained monarchy over the western church and were moved to set up a new empire with which they competed through the medieval centuries. The history moves to the point where the collapse of the Hohenstaufen and the captivity of the papacy at Avignon left the cities of Tuscany and northern Italy free to pursue the precarious and faction-ridden autonomy that is to be the theme of Bruni’s history and of Florentine historiography after him.

Three centuries after Bruni, Edward Gibbon, seeking a subject after his visit to Rome, took up the story from this point, relying on Lodovico Antonio Muratori for the narrative of how the Lombard and Tuscan cities had allied with papacy against empire in pursuit of independence from both. He did so, however, as part of a project of writing a history of liberty of the Swiss;⁶ and we are at a point where the “republicanism” that grew out of independence from the medieval empire shares a history with the “Florentine political thought” that moved into “the Atlantic republican tradition.” Gibbon had little or nothing to say of the Dutch; but from this point we begin to enquire into the apparent divergence of Dutch thought from that of the “Machiavellian moment.” Among the Tuscan and Lombard cities, and especially in Florence, Bruni shows developing an intense concern with Roman history, that of the republic—as the regime of *senatus populusque* came to be called—and its mutation into the principate and the rule of the Caesars. This was a framework in which to present and perhaps explain the processes by which Italian cities were passing under the rule of *signori* and *principi*—among whom the Medici at Florence were a special case—though none of them duplicated the expansion of empire that had been fatal to the *libertas* of Rome. The interpretation of Florentine politics, from Bruni down to Machiavelli and Guicciardini at the end of the city’s *libertà*, came to involve an interpretation of ancient history so intense and passionate that those who wrote it identified themselves with the narrative they were relating, and Machiavelli can be seen as presenting politics as a series of problems attending action in history.⁷ The thesis that the republic occupies a “Machiavellian moment” originates from this point.

Machiavelli looked behind the thesis that *libertas* had been destroyed by the empire it acquired to a further explanation of its destruction, also acquired from Roman and Greco-Roman historians: the narrative of the *lex agraria*, according to which Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus had failed to prevent the destruction of a landholding citizenry and the consequent degeneration of the Roman armies into landless mercenaries following warlord politicians.⁸ This is one of a number of points at which the history of land tenure enters the vocabulary of European politics. Though Florence was a manufacturing and banking center and Venice a mercantile and

⁶ Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, vol. 2, *Narratives of Civil Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 381–86.

⁷ J. G. A. Pocock, “Machiavelli and Rome: The Republic as Ideal and as History,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli*, ed. John M. Najemy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

⁸ Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, vol. 3, chaps. 3 and 10.

maritime empire, the histories of politics developed by the leading intellectuals were not, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, histories of the growth of commerce in medieval Europe. They were histories of Rome in which Italians saw themselves, carried down to the point where Machiavellian understandings of *repubbliche* and *principati* gave way to Tacitist understanding of the politics of princely courts, in which the individual struggled to maintain his own integrity and counsel the prince against degenerating into a tyrant.⁹ When the ducal Medici failed to repeat the pattern of Julio-Claudian history, Florentine political thought came effectively to an end. It is the Machiavellian-Tacitist sequence that we look for, but apparently do not find, in the history of Dutch political thought.

The Dutch republic that emerged in the course of the Eighty Years War was a league or confederacy, like that envisaged in Bruni's Etruscan counterhistory, dominated by one province, Holland, and one city, Amsterdam. Its "republican" discourse, therefore, like that of the Swiss confederacy, was much concerned with the relations between sovereign and quasi-sovereign entities in what Montesquieu later called a *république fédérative*, a realm of discourse that does not arise in the "Atlantic tradition" until the English colonies in America declare themselves states. In another perspective, though Machiavelli was not much interested in cities of merchants, the mercantile character of Amsterdam tends to align it with his "commonwealth for preservation," oligarchic, prudent, and likely to employ mercenary soldiers, of which the exemplary modern case is Venice; there is an authoritative study of the "myth of Venice" in Dutch republican thought.¹⁰ It may further be suggested, however, that there is a way in which the Roman model might have, perhaps may have, been applied in Dutch political and historical thinking, though to do so is to flirt dangerously with the counterfactual. The republic possessed, this hypothesis proposes, an analogue of the Roman senate in the States of Holland and/or the States General; an analogue of the Roman *imperator* in the office of stadholder, hereditary though elective in the dynasty of the Princes of Orange, and commanding a powerful and largely mercenary army. The States commanded the power of the purse, and this no doubt explains why the relations between the two, while unstable, intermittently violent, and complicated by religious divisions, never reached the condition described by Tacitus, in which one subdues the other and both become corrupt. To say that it never became disastrous, however, is not to explain why it should not have been debated; and it is possible to ask whether, in the great Netherlands culture of classical and juristic scholarship, there was ever formulated a Dutch reading of Roman history or a Roman reading of Dutch.¹¹ Should the answer be negative—should it be established that no such literature exists—it might well be in vain to ask why not; historians are averse to explaining why something did not happen; but we should be in a position to say that Roman history, and the conflict of political values it entailed, were very differently formulated, and very differently related to the early modern political structure, in the republic of the Netherlands, from what was the case in the "Atlantic republican tradition"; and in the classically obsessed culture of early modern Europe, where the authority of Rome was as great and as problematic as we know it to have been, to say that is to raise some points of substance.

Let us reiterate the narrative of *The Machiavellian Moment*. In the English kingdom under the Stuart dynasty, the history of land tenure became important in, though it did not cause, the ideological disputes before and during the drift to civil war. After the catastrophes of armed

⁹ *Ibid.*, chap. 2 and pp. 266–75.

¹⁰ E. O. G. Haitsma Mulier, *The Myth of Venice in Dutch Republican Thought* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1980).

¹¹ There was (and is) an extensive literature of Dutch Tacitism, which should be better known to anglophone scholars.

conflict and regicide, there were brief but momentous experiments in kingless government; and it was during these that James Harrington was led to formulate his “Machiavellian meditation on feudalism.”¹² He took up Machiavelli’s account of the *lex agraria* and used it to suggest that the Romans lost both liberty and empire because they ceased to be an armed and landholding citizenry. The rule of the Caesars rested on a mercenary army; this became increasingly barbarized, and there followed the centuries of the “Gothic balance,” inherently unstable because neither king nor barons controlled enough land to outweigh the other. The Tudor kings had undermined the barons and themselves by emancipating the vassals from the control of the lords,¹³ and England was now governed by a revolutionary army of freeholders, capable of becoming a republic. The failure of Harrington’s euchronic vision permitted his history of land, arms, and liberty to be restated on new foundations.

For the next step in the dual history we are tracing, we proceed to the “Anglo-Dutch moment” of 1688–89 and the decades following, so illuminatingly studied by historians from Jonathan Israel to Lisa Jardine.¹⁴ The crucial figure here is that of William, third Prince of Orange by that name to hold the office of stadholder and third king of England to reign by that name since the Conquest. He is an extraordinary figure in both Dutch and British history, with whom the historians of both nations had difficulty in coming to terms. In Dutch historiography, of which this essay does not presume to say much, he is an ambiguous figure, seen perhaps as launching the republic on a career that proved more than it could handle; in British, as the latter has turned from its Whig and constitutionalist preoccupations to become a history of empire until its twentieth-century decline, he appears a revolutionary actor as well as an extraordinary gambler.¹⁵ He obliged both states to take part in a major European war against the monarchy of Louis XIV, which became a series of wars for global empire between Britain and France in which the Dutch republic ceased to play a major role. Within this grand narrative a history of republicanism can be seen going on.

William is a revolutionary actor in English history because, in compelling the regime founded in 1689 to fight a European war for its survival, he set England on the road to becoming “Britain,” a powerful military-fiscal state in European and global politics. A crucial step in this process was the creation of a “standing army,” a professional (rather than mercenary) force that became a permanent arm of the state and so transformed its nature. This brought to an end the era in the history of political thought of Hobbes and Locke (as well as Harrington) in which dissolution of government was a possibility and the individual might be obliged to take up arms in consequence of an appeal to heaven. It was made possible by the institution of a bank authorized

¹² J. G. A. Pocock, ed., *The Political Works of James Harrington* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); J. G. A. Pocock, ed., *Harrington: “The Commonwealth of Oceana” and “A System of Politics”* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, chap. 11; Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, vol. 3, chap. 13.

¹³ At this point Harrington is following Francis Bacon’s *History of Henry VII*.

¹⁴ Jonathan Israel, ed., *The Anglo-Dutch Moment: Essays on the Glorious Revolution and Its World Impact* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477–1806* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Lois G. Schwoerer, ed., *The Revolution of 1688–89: Changing Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Dale Hoak and Mordechai Feingold, eds., *The World of William and Mary: Anglo-Dutch Perspectives on the Revolution of 1688–89* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); Lisa Jardine, *Going Dutch: How England Plundered Holland’s Glory* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008).

¹⁵ J. G. A. Pocock: “The Fourth English Civil War: Dissolution, Desertion and Alternative Histories in the Glorious Revolution,” in Schwoerer, *Revolution of 1688–89*, 52–64; “The Significance of 1688: Some Reflections on Whig History,” in J. G. A. Pocock, *The Discovery of Islands: Essays in British History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 114–32.

by parliament and a national system of public credit, in which the individual was encouraged to invest capital, the return of which fluctuated in value according to the rise and fall of confidence in the future of the regime;¹⁶ a confidence that the military-fiscal structure was intended to reinforce as the danger of civil war disappeared and that of foreign invasions lessened.

This was a revolutionary step in English and Anglo-British history, with profound consequences in the history of political thought. It would be valuable to have—or do we possess?—a comparative history contrasting it with that of the army financed by the States and commanded by the Princes, whose relation to the Dutch political structure, political thought, and writing of political history may or may not have been different. In the history of English and Scottish political thought it is next argued that the criticism of standing army and public credit provided a new history of what we term “republicanism.” A convenient moment from which to pursue that history has always been the publication in 1698 of the Scotsman Andrew Fletcher’s *Discourse of Government in Relation to Militias*, one of a number of tracts aimed at a reduction or disbandment of William’s army now that the European war was over.¹⁷ Fletcher presented a post-Harringtonian or anti-Harringtonian history of arms in Europe, dating from both a Greco-Roman past of arms-bearing hoplite citizens and a Gothic past of landed warriors, who, whether or not the vassals of their lords, had kept arms and liberty in the hands of the subject. It was in that sense that the past had been republican; but with the advent of commerce, navigation, print, and learning—Fletcher drew on Bacon in a sense adverse to Harrington’s—the subject had acquired leisure and culture that distracted him from the maintenance of his liberty. To such arguments Daniel Defoe replied that he was better off under commerce and cultivation, when he could pay soldiers to defend him and elect representatives to defend his liberty. The debate had become one about a profound historical change in the meanings of European politics.

In the reign of Anne, which followed William’s in British history, the debate generated a thesis about the alleged growth of a new ruling class. This was said to include three possibly adverse components: a “landed interest” composed of the county gentry, a “trading interest” composed of the great investors in the London-based and parliament-guaranteed merchant companies, and a “monied interest” composed of those who had invested in government stock and were trading in it as an index to public confidence in the future of the regime.¹⁸ The last of these were denounced as “stockjobbers,” creditors who commanded the state and used their power to promote the corruption of parliament by officeholders and a standing army engaged in expanding warfare, first in Europe and later in the Caribbean, America, and India.¹⁹ The three “interests” stood for a progressive movement away from real property toward mobile, until a point was reached where property had been transformed into credit and material reality into paranoid fantasy. The climax of the analysis was reached in David Hume’s essay “Of Public Credit” (1754), when he imagined a society where the value of all property was the value of its indebtedness, and concluded that all social relationships would be subsumed into credit and

¹⁶ It seems important to emphasize at this point that a commercially based regime was established in England by a parliamentary monarchy. That a commercial vision of republican government existed during the Commonwealth’s conduct of the First Dutch War has been reemphasized by Steven Pincus and Arthur H. Williamson; see the latter’s *Apocalypse Then: Prophecy and the Making of the Modern World* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2008), 98–99.

¹⁷ John Robertson, ed., *Andrew Fletcher: Political Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

¹⁸ Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, chaps. 12–15.

¹⁹ In a paper presented to the Clark Library conference, Margaret Jacob described a Dutch invective against stockjobbers in which they were identified as Portuguese-Jewish petty speculators. If this is all, the rhetoric belongs in the history of anti-Judaism, not as in England to a history of change in property and power.

imagination. In the critique of credit, the critique of commerce was never more than a middle term; it was admired as reinforcing reality on the one hand, denounced as subverting it on the other. Far too many readers of *The Machiavellian Moment* have supposed it to be a history of opposition to commerce, whereas it expressly concerned itself with an ambivalence in the response to investment, generating a new history and a new historicism. So do its successor volumes.²⁰ In this English-generated history of property, liberty, and culture—which may be pursued into the growth of Scottish stadial history and political economy—a crucial role was played by the image of the ancient Mediterranean republic. In that state of society the citizen knew himself as public being, free by virtue of his property and arms and equal in his relations with other citizens similarly qualified. As he (it was a separate story to relate how she) moved into the multiplicity of social relationships generated by commerce and culture, there were huge gains to liberty but a corresponding growth of dangers to it; as there were more and more ways of being free, it grew harder to maintain the autonomy of the self in whom liberty must reside if it was to be known and exercised. Hence the debate between ancient and modern liberty, to be found in Britain a century before it was taken up by Benjamin Constant. It was a debate by no means uniquely British, but in the form it took in Britain a class of free landholders, whose history could be traced back through Gothic to classic and Greco-Roman times, played a crucial role. The image of the republic, it needs repeating, was not presented as a norm to be imitated; it was a benchmark for the interpretation of history, for measuring the gains and losses of movement away from it. There was a tension in the meanings of virtue itself, very evident in the debates over the founding of the American federal republic.

It was a historical narrative containing a number of value judgments, rather than a normative project for the institution of a modern republicanism; but it raised the question of whether a republic was possible under modern conditions, and what its modern character might be. As history, however, it could not take shape without a narrative of how the Roman republic had failed for agrarian reasons and been replaced by the principate, how the failure of the latter had led to the establishment of barbarian kingdoms based on varying forms of land tenure, and how states so based had developed into military-fiscal powers capable of commerce and empire.²¹ This narrative, shaped by a succession of historians from Bruni to Robertson, developed concurrently with a “philosophic” history of human (but European) society, based on the stadial sequence from hunter-gatherers to merchants and capitalists and culminating in the political economy of Adam Smith. In this complex historiography, the role of medieval leagues of merchant republics, Lombard, Hanseatic, and Dutch, was important but problematic; and it is here that the anglophone and Atlantic reader, rightly or wrongly, finds the key to the problem of Dutch republican thought.

A recent volume of essays by Wyger Velema²² has continued the debate over the political and historical thought of the last century of the republic, vigorously conducted by Margaret Jacob, Wijnand Mijnhardt,²³ Nicolas van Sas, and others writing mainly in Dutch. From this it

²⁰ J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Pocock, *Discovery of Islands*.

²¹ *Narratives of Civil Government*, volume 2 of *Barbarism and Religion*, offers an account of this historiography.

²² Velema, *Republicans*.

²³ Margaret Jacob and Wijnand Mijnhardt, eds., *The Dutch Republic in the Eighteenth Century: Decline, Enlightenment, and Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992). For work in Dutch, Velema’s bibliography should be consulted. See also Leonard Leeb, *The Ideological Origins of the Batavian Republic: History and Politics in the Dutch Republic, 1747–1800* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1977).

would seem that classical history was energetically employed in relating the corruption and decline of republics both ancient and modern. The ancient republic, that is, the Roman, was recognized as the birthplace of civic virtue as still recognized, but at the same time dismissed as founded on slavery rather than free labor, and so capable of conquest but not of commerce. This was to fall into line with Montesquieu, and after him with Gibbon and Smith (whatever the role of the two latter in Netherlandish historiography and philosophy). Dutch literature of the eighteenth century, however, is concerned with the decline of the modern republic, as the commercial supremacy of the “golden age” shrank and disappeared; the threatened virtue of the citizen was defined in burgher terms that were not those of antiquity; and the process of decline was perceived as replacing commerce by patronage, the republic of merchants by a corrupt oligarchy of officeholders and stockjobbers. Here is a striking similarity with the Tory and Commonwealthman indictment of the Whig military-fiscal order in England, and it is intriguing to find William III attacked for his expansion of patronage, just as Catherine Macaulay and Tobias Smollett were to single him out for enlarging the “influence” of the Crown at the same time as setting limits to its “prerogative.”²⁴ By 1776 it was possible for Whigs like Burke and Fox, and radicals like Thomas Paine, to suggest that George III had achieved despotic power by monopolizing patronage, and it seems that exactly the same charge was brought against William IV and V by Dutch Patriots. The problem of corruption was anything but absent from the mindset of the commerce-based *anciens régimes*.

From the recent historiography available in English, however, it would seem that the civic virtue threatened with corruption was conceived in exclusively burgher terms; it was the Weberian austerity and the public spirit of the participants of the golden age that was being undermined by stockholders and officeholders in a process for which *staatsgezinden* and *prinsgezinden* blamed each other. Here we encounter a possible point of divergence between the Atlantic and Netherlandish “traditions.” The narrative of virtue and corruption developed in the former was not possible without the images of ancient liberty possessed by the hoplites and quirites and Gothic liberty possessed by the free tenant, whether or not he had needed emancipation from a feudal lord. From this had developed a complex narrative of European history, showing how the liberty of real property had been the precondition of the growth of the trading cities; and an equally complex philosophical history of political economy, in which agriculture and commerce developed together, as sedentary cultivators entered into exchange relationships in an expanding geopolitical space.

All this was the common possession of Enlightened historians and philosophers, and was certainly as accessible in the Netherlands as elsewhere. We seem, however, to lack a study of how (whether?) it was reformulated by Dutch thinkers of the *perrukentijd* and *patriottentijd* to explicate the problems of the declining republic. In France and Britain, there was intensive debate as to how the history of Roman-Frankish and Anglo-Norman land tenure had figured in the relations between liberty and authority, property and commerce. What role, the reader wishes to enquire, was ascribed to the ancient liberty of the Batavians? Was their occupation of land, or that of their Frankish and Burgundian successors, related to the growth of the trading cities, or did these take shape in a water world shaped only by rivers giving access to the sea? And—the anglophone reader preoccupied with the relation of land to liberty is tempted to ask—what of the eastern Netherlands, where a landed minor nobility historically Orangist became in one or

²⁴ J. G. A. Pocock, “Catharine Macaulay: Patriot Historian,” in *Women Writers and the Early Modern British Political Tradition*, ed. Hilda L. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 243–58.

two cases Patriot enemies of regents and princes alike? It was the easterner Johan Derk van der Cappelen who had Fletcher's *Discourse* translated into Dutch; did he think he was living in a history where burgher virtue had no historical preconditions?

The Anglo-American history of liberty is based on the gains and losses derived from the departure from a primeval concept of the "republic," itself based on an occupation of land, of which history has been both the elaboration and the abandonment. In eighteenth-century thought, this history could not be stated without presenting ancient liberty as lingeringly barbaric and modern liberty as potentially corrupt. How and whether the revolutionary republic and its liberal successors went about escaping from this historicism is a question to which the Dutch passage from republic to parliamentary monarchy is evidently relevant. The question asked in this article is whether the eighteenth-century Dutch possessed a narrative of their own history or that of society that could be applied to these problems. If so, what was it? If not, what were the consequences?

This question is asked in the context of an ultimate paradox. In the Netherlands, the greatest of the burgher republics declined and died—largely, it would seem, of a loss of belief in itself—and after a Bonapartist interlude was replaced by a parliamentary monarchy. In the colonies of English America, revolt against the rule of a parliamentary monarchy led to the foundation of a republic combining deep roots in the past with a character altogether new, for which a recent symposium on "Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage"²⁵ finds no place. If there is to be a historiography of republicanism, its future seems to be one of increasing complexity. [A]

²⁵ Martin van Gelderen and Quentin Skinner, eds., *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).