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Maarten Prak, *The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century: The Golden Age*. Translated by Diane Webb. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. Pp. xii + 317. CDN\$90 (cloth). ISBN: 978-0521843522.

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First published in Dutch in 2002, this book is an English translation made by Diane Webb of the work of a Utrecht professor and specialist in eighteenth-century Dutch history. It is one of a series of historical works overseen by Maarten van Rossem. While the author freely admits his debt to the works of other historians, the text is remarkably free of scholarly apparatus, although the list of sources has been updated. The result, however, is a wonderfully readable account of the history of the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth century that one feels was intended for a non-specialist audience, even one that has a limited reading knowledge of Dutch.

The approach taken is somewhat traditional, for example with only very brief chapters on Dutch science and philosophy and Dutch painting. All chapters are short and probably not intended for professional historians. In the chapter on religious diversity, the influential work of Ben Kaplan is referenced as is the important work of Jonathan Israel and Wiep van Bunge on intellectual life in the Republic. While in the chapter on religion includes a good account of the Gomarus/Arminian controversy within the Reformed church, no mention is made of the remarkable story of the Rijnsburg Collegiants of the seventeenth century. Also one would search in vain for a chapter on Dutch witch hunting and witch trials along with the remarkable controversy around Reformed minister Balthasar Bekker. Since the author focuses on political, military, and economic history, we find no chapters on the position of Dutch women in the republic or on such matters as medicine, astrology, Newtonianism, theater and literature, food history, weather and environmental history, or dress history. Environmental matters are, however, touched upon in Prak's excellent explanations of poldering, land use, and urban expansion. But not all can be said in a short general history.

The author begins with what he calls "The Enigma" of the Dutch Republic: how could a country small in size and of limited population become a world power in economic prosperity, trade, navigation, and military affairs and able to challenge large national monarchies in these areas? The answer, in brief, is that the Republic achieved an excellent balance between urban-national particularism, on the one hand, and a working national government and common military on the other. The Republic was in many ways the ideal of the late medieval-early modern state eclipsed only by the rise of the powerfully centralized modern state. While the Dutch revolt looms large in this history, it did not overwhelm local and regional freedoms. It was fought in many cases to maintain the latter.

The revolt is much discussed, especially in terms of its political, military, and religious aspects. The military conflicts of the Republic get much space, as does the Republic's growing market economy,

world trade, urban population growth, and immigration from Flanders and Brabant, local government, and the Stadtholderate. Religious plurality, cultural and intellectual life (although here a bit too much space, relatively speaking, is devoted to Spinoza), the growth of the cities, especially the ones in Holland, all are treated at length. The loosely-woven fabric of the Republic's state structure and the ability for compromise to prevail in issues of national importance made the republic a success especially in matters of trade. It is pointed out that one failing of this structure was that it was much easier for things to be prevented than for actions to be taken. The international aspect of the Republic's political and military struggles is admirably discussed, with the powers of Spain and Britain determining many Dutch decisions. Not the incipient "modernity" of the Republic's state and economy but the effective way such a structure could find success in the early modern world is stressed, and the weakness of this structure in the face of modern large-scale warfare, centralized monarchies, and growing modern capitalism all are beautifully portrayed.

While not much is new in this book, especially in light of the great many specialized studies of the Dutch Republic published in just the last twenty years, and while this account does not rank with the classics of Geyl, Parker, Price, or Israel, this is a very readable, accurate, and insightful account of the Republic in its Golden Years.