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The prize of neutrality

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1 Introduction

1.1 A time of changes

The end of the *ancien régime* has attracted the attention of many great historians, who have tried to create a framework within which the developments of this era can be understood. The period at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century was an era of violent revolutions and continental wars in the western world, which were forerunners of the global atrocities of the twentieth century. The shift from mercenaries to great armies of conscripts and volunteers democratized the cruelty and insanity of war. On the American continent the United States appealed to *natural rights* to abjure their sovereign. In Europe the newly formed French Republic could no longer find justification for its expansionist wars in dynastic jealousies. The abstract ideas *liberté, égalité, fraternité* replaced the traditional Christian mottos on the banners on the battlefields.

The political events of the era shaped the borders of national states in Europe into the broad outlines as they retain today. France, England and Prussia struggled for hegemony. A little later Napoleon was to find out that the Russian Empire was just too large to be conquered by military means, as all his later imitators were to rediscover. It was the period when the power of the Dutch Republic was reduced to a status which stood in a better proportion to its actual size. The fourth Anglo-Dutch War, 1780-1784, the internal factional strife and finally the French occupation reduced what used to be a respected military and economic power which had had considerable influence in international affairs, to a languishing lesser state, cherishing dreams of lost glory. On the other side of the Atlantic Ocean the new republic of the United States of America emerged out of a war of independence, which foreshadowed later colonial wars in its incapable leadership and lack of understanding on the side of the colonial power, in this case the English, and the incredible determination and endurance on the other side, in this case of the American people.

The end of the 18th century also laid the foundation for what we now regard as "modern behavior" of citizens. We see large numbers of civilians claiming the rights of assembly and free speech, demanding influence on government and in some cases even openly revolting against the government. What Palmer called "the age of democratic revolution" may be re-

garded as the birth of modern man, assembling to look after their interests, no longer subjects of a monarch, but citizens in a constitutional government.¹

New methods of mass production led to changes which so thoroughly affected whole societies that historians speak of the dawn of the industrial revolution. In international trade the heyday of the Dutch Staple market and the hegemony of Amsterdam were past. Dutch merchants were still very active on the markets, but they no longer dominated the market as they had a century earlier. Only in the financial market did they succeed in holding on to their important position for a longer time. First of all London overtook Amsterdam, the commercial center of the Dutch Republic. But also French harbors, and even Hamburg, Oostende, and, after the reopening of the Scheldt, Antwerp became serious competitors to what the Dutch poet Vondel once called *the pearl of Europe*.

One of the striking aspects of the change in commercial relations is the shift of the center of gravity of Dutch commerce from a North-South axis -from the Baltic to the Mediterranean- on which traffic in the Golden Age revolved, to the East-West axis -from the Atlantic and the Caribbean to the Rhineland²- of modern times, which would bring about the rise of Rotterdam, which is much better located for this trade. Amsterdam had a difficult connection to the open sea via the Zuider Zee with its numerous shoals, which became more and more problematic. In the third decade of the nineteenth century a solution would be attempted by digging new canals providing better connections to the North sea, like the "Groot Noordhollands Kanaal", and much later the more direct connection via the "Noordzeekanaal". But the tide could not be turned, and Amsterdam slowly sank to the status of a minor harbor in the twentieth century. The loss of the colonial trade in the 1940's and 50's and the final blow from the oil-crisis of the 70's and the closing of all shipyards reduced the harbor to a size which allows housing projects to be built on sites where once ocean liners docked. Only for the trade in cocoa and wood does the harbor still have some international status.

The end of the eighteenth century saw the rapid rise of a newcomer in the commercial arena: the United States of America.³ After the War of Independence, which could probably not have been won without the inventive smuggling practices of American ship masters and privateers, the United States of America was free from all the restrictive regulations that had

¹ R.R. Palmer and J. Colton (1950),353

² J. de Vries en A. van der Woude (1995), 580

³ J. Chamberlain (1961)

inhibited the development of official commercial connections in colonial times. Within two decades the United States became the second maritime power in the world, only second only to Great Britain.⁴ In a short period of time they gained a major part in the trans-Atlantic and began to dominate the West Indian trade. How they did that will be one of the questions I will try to answer in this book.

In this study I will focus on the changing roles of the Dutch Republic and the United States in their commercial ties. I will concentrate on the commercial ties between the main port of the Dutch Republic, Amsterdam, and its American connections mainly relying on Dutch sources and literature. However, to put these relations in perspective it is necessary to describe Amsterdam's other commercial relations. A complete reconstruction of the imports of Amsterdam for the year 1742, and for the period 1771 - 1787 will serve as a framework within which the importance of the American trade can be understood.

With regards to the United States I will examine how the developments of the last years of the Colonial period affected their connections with the Dutch Republic. I will show how the war of Independence (1776-1783) intensified their relations and how the Fourth Anglo-Dutch war (1780-1784) interrupted a trend which was to regain momentum afterwards. However, the core of this research will deal with the developments on this side of the Atlantic Ocean. With regards to the Dutch Republic, I will show how the developments after 1784 were disrupted by the French Revolution and its repercussions in the Netherlands. The political circumstances made it impossible for the Dutch Republic in its last years, as well as later for the Batavian Republic, and still later for the Dutch Kingdom under Louis Bonaparte to uphold the policy of neutrality, which it had adopted when it no longer had the power to force its will on others. After the naval disasters of the fourth Anglo-Dutch war the Dutch republic was reduced to a minor naval power, no longer capable of a policy of *armed neutrality*. The continuing sequence of war-years in which the Dutch always found the superior English naval power in the enemy camp forced great numbers of Dutch captains to register their ships in until then insignificant harbors, to be able to sail under the flag of neutral powers. In some years it seemed that half the fleet of Amsterdam was registered in

⁴F. Gilbert (1961)

Emden!⁵ I will try to show that this prolonged period of non-neutrality culminating in the annexation by France was the definite blow to the role of Amsterdam in commercial affairs.

Who took over from the Dutch? I will show that the spectacular growth of the Atlantic trade was not caused by an increase in the direct West Indian trade but by a steep rise of the trade with the United States of America. Next I will show that--at least in Dutch-American and Dutch-West Indian trade--the United States adopted the traditional Dutch role with great agility: they became the transporters of all sorts of cargo in neutral vessels. But even in the European coastal trade the Americans--maintaining their neutral status as long as possible--began to play a role.⁶ The resemblance to the part the Dutch had played before is rather striking. I will suggest that most of the American Atlantic and West Indian trade was built on the entrepot function of New York, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Boston and not on a sudden rise in American domestic exports. Although the sources are scarce, there are good indications that most of the goods in American ships were re-exported goods from the West Indies and even from China.

But describing the developments mentioned above is not the sole aim of this study. The development of this project has fundamentally changed my views on historical research. The original idea was to do a traditional historical study. Once the central question had been formulated, the necessary sources would have to be found and processed to find the information relevant for the questions posed. But that is not how this project developed. The point of departure was a rich source, the *havenboeken van de heffing van het Paalgeld te Amsterdam*, which at first glance revealed such a plethora of data that the excitement of the discovery was quickly followed by growing desperation: it was not possible to process these data within a lifetime and also write a book about it. The only solution could be found in processing the data automatically. However, even this approach was so time consuming that it inevitably led to a concentration on this source alone and left little time for comparative research. This changed the design of the study to a more *descriptive* character. This does not mean that I did not try to test the hypothesis formulated before. But when I discuss Charles

⁵L. van Nierop (1924)

⁶K. Veraghtert (1983)

Harvey's proposed paradigm⁷ for historical research, I will show that a source-oriented descriptive method does not necessarily exclude an analytical approach.

So this book will have two main themes. On the one hand it will be a traditional historical study, focusing on the results of research about the development of the Dutch-American commercial relations in the last quarter of the 18th century and the first fifteen years of the nineteenth century, covering the period from 1771 to 1817, almost fifty years. I will show how political events influenced the commercial activities. In the colonial period trade was almost non-existent, but as the tension in America increased, Dutch merchants did not hesitate to enter the profitable trade in all the goods that the rebellious colonies needed, contraband or not. This trade, which was centered on the Dutch Caribbean island of St. Eustatius, where the flag of the United States of America flying from the masts of the vessel *Andrew Doria* received its first official salute by a foreign nation on November 16, 1776.⁸ This gesture and the continuous trade with the American rebels provided the motive to the English to declare war on the Dutch Republic in 1780. The war was caused by the completely different interpretations of *neutrality* of the two powers. The Dutch argued that free ships carried free cargoes, the English claimed that ships carrying goods which they had declared to be contraband could be seized according to international law. Hoping to regain some of the ground lost to the English and overestimating their own naval strength, the Dutch merchants welcomed the possibilities of a war and were confident that French support would guarantee a positive outcome. In 1779 they openly supported the American captain John Paul Jones, who used Dutch harbors for his raids on British shipping and hoped to damage Anglo-Dutch diplomatic relations beyond repair. When the British obtained proof of Dutch-American negotiations of a treaty, they demanded satisfaction from their ally. Although the Dutch semi-monarch, the stadtholder William V, had traditional ties to Great Britain and although his faction was reluctant to go to war, he was unable to force the merchants of Amsterdam into compliance and war could no longer be averted. The war developed disastrously for the Dutch. Since the hands of the French were tied in their own struggle with Great Britain and in their effort to support the rebellious American colonies, French support for the Dutch war effort was restricted to verbal encouragement. In the end both allies made their separate peace with the British. In 1782 the States-General accepted John Adams's

⁷C. Harvey (1992)

⁸B. Tuchman (1989)

letters of credence and the United States and the Dutch republic entered into official diplomatic relations.

The prince of Orange, who was in charge of the military affairs of the Dutch republic, was held responsible for the bad outcome of the war. Losing the war sowed the seeds of the discontent that would bring the Dutch republic a failed revolution, and a Prussian intervention in 1787. Just eight years later a French intervention would turn the tables again and bring the revolutionaries into power.⁹

The Fourth Anglo-Dutch War had reduced the Dutch to a minor maritime power. The harbor of Amsterdam still attracted a respectable number of ships, but could no longer compete with the other great European ports and in the long run had to give way to Rotterdam as the nation's leading harbor. But though the activity was waning, Amsterdam still conserved its position in the 1780's. The first years after the French revolution even saw a slight rise of activity and the first years of the Batavian Republic, the successor to the Dutch Republic, tailored after a French model and brought about by a French invasion, profited from an increasing number of ships coming from the French West-Indies and from the United States. However, there was a striking difference with earlier periods of prosperity: an ever increasing number of ships did not wave the Dutch banner. Dutch shipping lost its prominent position, which had a negative effect on the other branches of trade. At first the French occupation was not as detrimental to trade as has been claimed; it was only the annexation by France and the full implementation of the continental blockade by the English and Napoleon's Continental System, that brought trade to a complete standstill, as far as can be gathered from official Dutch sources. However, the complete absence of data for the years of French annexation suggest the possibility of yet undiscovered sources.

I will conclude this part of my book by trying to answer the question how Dutch trans-Atlantic trade recovered after the Napoleonic era by examining the data concerning the period to 1817.

⁹S. Schama (1977)

1.2 History and computing

The second aim of this study is to elaborate on the methods and techniques which produced the evidence for this study. I will show that the introduction of information technology to historical research has far-reaching consequences. The most expected benefit is increased speed of the process of historical research, but this is a myth caused by the misunderstanding of the complex problems of the introduction of computing to all stages of the historical research process. The speed with which a simple PC can process vast amounts of data is indeed astonishing, but the processing of the data is only one of the stages of the whole project, however time consuming it may be. The problems of data-capture and data modeling are not trivial. They are the most serious obstacles for large scale historical data processing and it is of major importance to discuss them thoroughly, because until recently very little has been published about these topics in relation to historical research.

The progress of information technology in the humanities has not been steady. Although word processing quickly became the most used application of computers after the introduction of microcomputers, humanists were slow to discover the possibilities of the new medium. When information technology inevitably entered the arts faculties, it was the linguists and not the historians who were in the vanguard of new users. How can we explain this? Is the computer less suited for historical research than for linguistic research or are the causes to be found in tradition, mentality and training? What are the factors that have retarded the quick introduction of computing to history?

The computer was developed within the sciences and the ties between arts and sciences have not always been as tight as they increasingly are becoming. For some time humanists viewed the computer as just another toy of the sciences like telescopes, radar, x-rays, calculators and all the other instruments they did not need or understand. The sciences have always tended to empiricism: testing and experimenting are the ways to provide proof for theories. These tests have required the use of increasingly complicated equipment. The computer did not introduce a new way of thinking to the sciences. Formalizing theories in order to be able to test them and applying statistics for measuring test-results has been scientific practice for a long time. Humanists on the other hand had little use for complicated equipment for their studies; a sharp pencil, some paper, a good archive, and a well-filled library were their only prerequisites. Some have quickly understood the advantages of using the computer to organize their data, for word-processing, to maintain consistency in their

texts, and recently for communication with fellow humanists via the Internet. But viewing the whole of known historical data as the subject matter and the data that still may be uncovered in the future as additional test-material in a sense that would be normal in sciences, and using computers to do these tests, is not and probably will not be the practice of historians. It is not the data themselves that are the core of history, but the historians interpretation of these data. There are no objective measures for the importance of data, it is the historian who decides what is important and what is not.

Since time-traveling is a topic for science-fiction and not for serious history, historians will not be able to test their theories in the way that sociologists can. Unlike the sociologist, the historian, who studies periods that cannot be covered by *oral-history*, cannot go back to the originator of his sources and ask for clarification of questions. Using his knowledge of the period gathered from all sources, the historian will produce an interpretation of the past. He will formulate a plausible causality for the historical facts. So the causality of history is always the outcome of a historical interpretation and is always a probability, and not a proven certainty. Historians have focused on *understanding* or on *explaining* the past, rather than *recreating the past*.¹⁰ Attempts at *recreating the past* are regarded as fiction rather than solid science. Although an almost literary style is usually admired and is sometimes seen as a prerequisite among historians,¹¹ crossing the indistinct border between writing history and writing historical fiction is not. Counterfactual reasoning and model making are usually rejected by pointing at the fact that things simply did not happen that way and hence denying the value of this approach. Besides that, model making requires formalization: the rules of the model and the weights of all the variables have to be specified. Most historians will deny the possibility that one may ever discover *the historical reality* in this way and seriously doubt if such an exercise would improve our understanding of the past. The majority seems to have given up the idea that we could really objectively know what has happened in the past: the few facts that are accepted *objectivities* are regarded as uninteresting.¹² The researcher who sets out to discover as much new factual information about the past as possible by laborious investigations of primary sources instead of developing a grand view of history based on secondary sources, runs the risk of being labeled *stamp collector* or *naive neo-positivist*. His

¹⁰ L. Noordegraaf (1990), 18-24

¹¹ F.R. Ankersmit (1995)

¹² A. Schlesinger Jr. (1962)

work will only be regarded as valuable if it contributes to more comprehensive views of history.

The historical discipline has no tradition of testing, rather it gathers and interprets. And there is a pecking order to these activities: interpretation is esteemed much more than gathering. Actually, gathering the factual information has a very low prestige. It is done by the *underlings* of the historical trade. The first-team historians first reads the studies of their second-team colleagues and use these for synthesis into a grander view. So when computing finally found its way to historical research, the claim of its practitioners that they were *source oriented* did little for their reputation. Recently this has led to an opposite tendency to move away from *source orientation* to *object orientation*, while at the same time stressing the need to produce tangible results, preferably in statistical form. This tendency will only assimilate the group of computing historians with the *quantifiers*, who, after a short period of success, have also found their place on the periphery of the historical trade since recent social-economic history wants to see real people as the actors in history and not abstract trends.¹³

In addition to this cultural reason, historians lacked the training to be able to work with computers. Programming computers was and still is a complicated and tedious job, which requires a lengthy specialized training which is not offered within the standard history curriculum.¹⁴ Linguists were quicker than historians to understand the possibilities the computer offered for testing their theories about style and structure of language. Computing languages like SNOBOL, ICON and LISP have been explicitly designed to suit the needs of linguists, but no computing language has yet been designed for the historical sciences.¹⁵ The entwinement of information technology with linguistics has become so tight that it has given birth to computational-linguistics, an esteemed sub-discipline of linguistics. But other linguistic endeavors such as corpus-based linguistics, stylometrics and lexicography are now inconceivable without the aid of the computer. Some aspects, e.g. natural language processing and automatic translation, have even received great attention from industry.

Historians were not trained to see the possibilities of the computer and entered the computing stage a bit later, so that the term *computational history* is still virtually non-

¹³ P.K. Doorn (1994). L. Noordegraaf (1990), D. Greenstein (1997)

¹⁴E. Mawdsley and T. Munck (1993)

¹⁵ M. Thaller's program Kleio was meant to be an all-purpose database management system for the historical disciplines, but it is mainly used in Europe. Thaller (1989)

existent.¹⁶ However, since the sixties there has been growing interest among historians in the possibilities of the computer for historical research.¹⁷ Medievalists, historical demographers and social and economic historians were the first to attempt computer applications to their fields. The traditional philological approach of the medievalist has always been more influenced by the new methods and techniques from general philology. When computers were introduced to text-analysis there, it was only a matter of time before the crossover to history would be made. Furthermore, medievalists have a tradition of respect for the craftsmanship of the discipline; knowledge of Latin and paleography are regarded indispensable. Medievalists must acquire these skills before they can get to the core of their research, the historical information to be gathered from the sources. This may explain why they as a group have been more willing to accept computing skills into their training.

But for long the most notorious group of computer-using historians were those who believed that quantification and the use of statistics would produce better insights in long term historical changes: *la longue durée*.¹⁸ Usually this same group of historians hoped that the use of computers would also introduce a stricter methodology--like that of the social sciences--to the study of history. This attitude may have impeded the acceptance of information technology within the historical discipline on a larger scale. First of all, the emphasis on the computational possibilities of the computer have alienated those historians who believe that only trivial matters can be quantified. "*As a humanist, I am bound to reply that almost all important questions are important precisely because they are not susceptible to quantitative answers*", Arthur Schlesinger wrote in 1962 and the majority of historians would probably still agree with this statement.¹⁹ Since the debate on *cliometrics*, the application of econometric models to history, the use of computers has been associated with a form of *neopositivism*, for which most historians have lost appetite since *historism* rules, although some still believe in the possibility of a conciliation.²⁰

¹⁶ In G.M. Welling (1995), 90-99. I have explained why the term "computational history" has not caught on.

¹⁷ S. Thernstrom (1970), E. Shorter (1971), G.M. Welling (1995), 92

¹⁸ R.P. Swierenga (1970)

¹⁹ A. Schlesinger, Jr. (1962), 770. Quoted in: R. P. Swierenga. (1970), xi

²⁰ L. Noordegraaf (1990), D. Greenstein (1994)

Even historians that do not shun quantitative analysis do not always give full credit to importance of the computer for their research. In the Introduction to their much debated *Time on the Cross*, Fogel and Engerman mention the use of *high-speed computers* as a prerequisite for their study, but not even in the Evidence and Methods supplement do they discuss the implications of the use of computer technology, or give any insight into the programs they used.²¹ Likewise it is obvious that Clé Lesger's fine study about Hoorn relies heavily on computer analysis of data, yet one will search in vain for a discussion of the computer methods used.²² Thera Wijzenbeek-Olthuis acknowledges that her study *Achter de gevels van Delft* could not have been completed without the programs that were written especially for her research-project, but banishes an eleven-page cursory discussion of these programs to the appendices of her book.²³ The recent dissertations of Patricia Alkhoven and Onno Boonstra may illustrate that it is possible to discuss the implications of computer analysis of historical data within a well written historical study.²⁴

Why do most historians refrain from discussing the implications of using computers? There are a number of reasons. The most important is, that it is not respected within the historical tradition to dwell on matters that have no direct relation to the narrative: the historian is still much more a story-teller than a scientist.²⁵ There is a great Anglo-American tradition of writing history that emphasizes narrative style. History may be scholarly but more important historical books must be written beautifully. It is not only a language barrier that has impeded a wider popularity of Dutch historical writing in the English speaking world, but rather a difference of tastes. A large number of Dutch historical studies are solid scholarship, but are written like the annual reports of banks: the information is there, the references are correct, the graphs and tables are all in the right places, but they are not entertaining. Only renowned narrators like Huizinga and Kossmann have made a lasting impression in the Anglo-American world. Jonathan Israel implicitly suggests that Dutch historiography is too

²¹ R.W. Fogel and S. L. Engerman (1974), 4

²² C.M. Lesger (1990)

²³ Th. Wijzenbeek-Olthuis (1987), see page 9 for the acknowledgement and pages 473-484 for a discussion of the computer programs.

²⁴ P. Alkhoven (1993), O.W.A. Boonstra (1993)

²⁵ L. Stone (1979), 3-24

specialized and lacks a broad enough view to have wide appeal and this is not because of the object of study.²⁶

As an extreme example of the Anglo-American school of *historical narrators* we find Barbara Tuchman. Her study *The First Salute*²⁷ reads like a novel, and does not shun a number of sweeping statements, generalizations and even anachronisms to keep the narrative going, while at the same time providing references and an impressive bibliography as proof of scholarly intentions. The gap between this sort of popular history and the more respected school of narrative history is smaller than it may seem. They share the emphasis on the narrative and very seldom explicitly discuss methodology.

In social history and even more in economic history discussions of methodology are not as rare, but this has gained the products of these approaches a reputation for being unreadable. In social and economic history the use of quantitative methods and computers is well

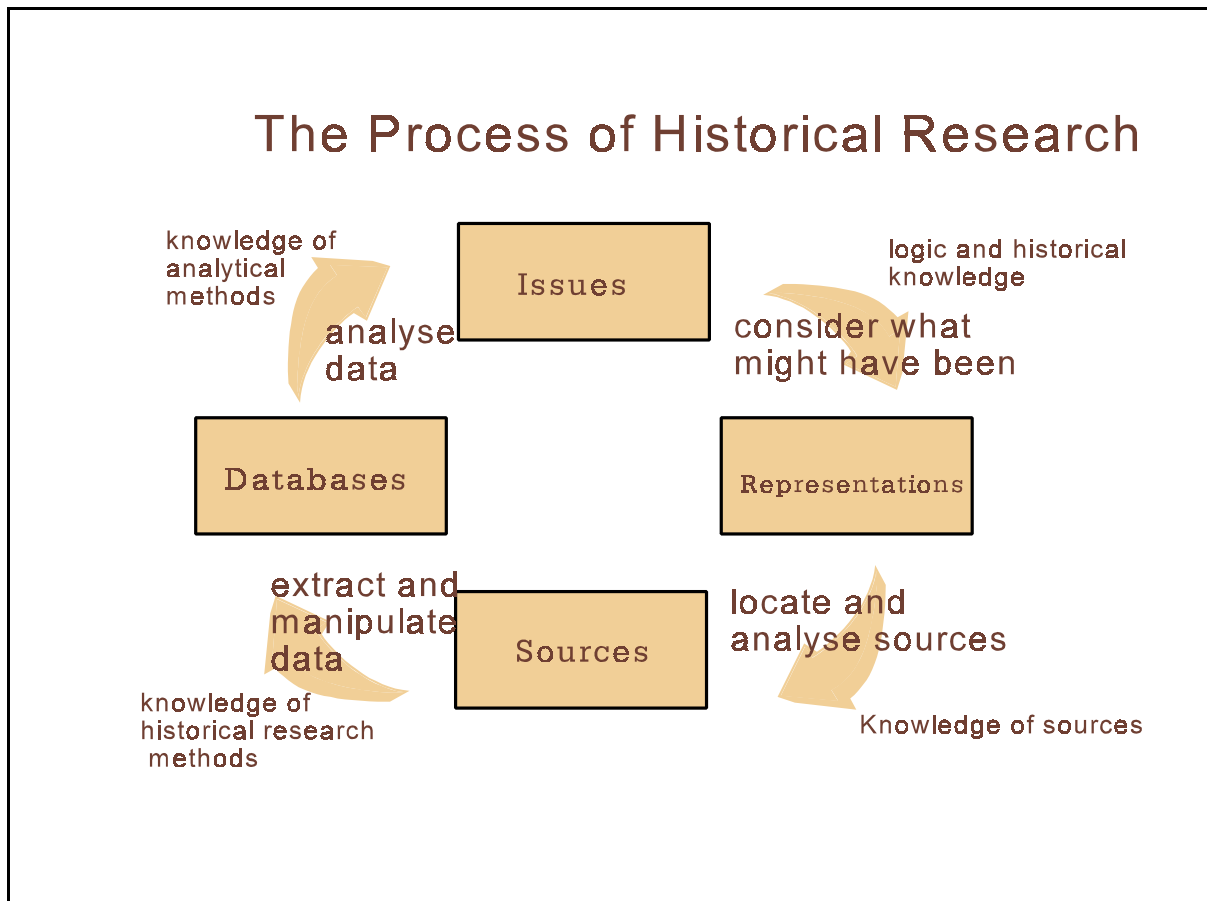


Figure 1 The process of historical research according to Harvey (1992)

²⁶ J. Pollman (1994)

²⁷ B. Tuchman (1989)

accepted. Statistical analysis implies the use of computers, since the sheer quantity of data and the complexity of calculations are prohibitive to manual treatment. It is obvious however, that this has often led to a division of labor between the historian and the statistician.²⁸ The majority of historical studies are written by a single individual. It seems that teamwork can hardly be integrated with the traditional view of historical research as an almost artistic individual creative activity. A number of historians who work with this division of labor and who rely on material prepared and gathered by assistants, have trouble acknowledging that a part of the analysis was not done by themselves. They are like architects pretending that they have built buildings all by themselves. Of course there are a number of historians who cannot accept this division of labor. They have two options: to restrict themselves to the traditional historical approach, or to invest large amounts of time to acquire skills necessary to handle computers. The first choice leads to traditional historical studies, on which I shall not elaborate here. The second choice leads to a serious dilemma; how much time must be invested in acquiring skills which until recently have been regarded as unrelated to the study of history? This brings us to a number of problems.

Time is a scarce commodity and time devoted to other subjects will always be at the expense of the time we can spend on our historical research. However, the regular academic curricula leave very little room for new subjects and--in a time of severe cuts in the funding of universities--adding extra time to the curricula is out of the question. On the other hand, it is doubtful whether the traditional academic training of historians is a good preparation for a self-guided expedition into the realm of computers.²⁹

First of all a paradigm for the study of history is needed in which there is a clear-cut position of computing. In 1992 Charles Harvey has attempted a formulation of such a paradigm, in which in some ways he reverts to an older source-oriented paradigm, that predates the presently accepted paradigm, which is borrowed from the social sciences.³⁰ This social-sciences oriented paradigm can be formulated as follows:

there are historical issues, which lead to questions. To answer these questions a hypothesis is formulated, which will indicate the direction of further research. To

²⁸ D. Aberson (1994), 54-73

²⁹ M. Thaller (1992)

³⁰ Ch. Harvey (1992)

test this hypothesis historical evidence must be gathered and analyzed. The results of this analysis lead to the acceptance or rejection of the hypothesis.

Even a renowned narrator like Simon Schama³¹ provides an example of this approach in the introduction to his "The embarrassment of riches": he formulates his hypothesis and says how the evidence was gathered to test it. Even a study that claims to be *descriptive and non-analytic*, like A.Th. van Deursen's *Mensen van klein vermogen*,³² cannot do without an *extraduction*, in which all the questions that normally would have been formulated in the introduction, which is missing in this book, are answered. Only very seldom, like in the case of Kossman's *De lage landen*³³ do we find a completely chronological descriptive approach. Kossman starts his story in 1780 and stops in 1940 and sees no need for an introduction or an *extraduction* or conclusion. This study resembles Barbara Tuchman's *The First Salute* in that respect that they both implicitly claim to tell the story *as it really was*.

In his closing lecture of the 1992 International Congress of the Association for History and Computing in Bologna, Charles Harvey has formulated a new paradigm which can incorporate the earlier mentioned approaches.³⁴ Most historians would agree that the historical discipline is engaged in an endless discussion, because all historical work leads to new questions and because every historical study in itself is a historical source about the mentality of time that it was written. Harvey concludes that history is a circular process with four stages. Usually the historical issues are the starting point, and they lead to a process of considering what might have been, based on the logic and theoretical knowledge of the historian. This produces representations of concepts of the past, which must be tested. To test these representations historical sources must be located and analyzed, for which knowledge of historical sources and the skills to gather these are necessary. This third stage of source-preparation is followed by a process of selection, extraction and manipulation of these sources, based upon the historian's knowledge of historical research methods. This produces data-collections or databases which are prepared to produce insight in the issues that triggered the whole process. Using all his knowledge of analytical methods the historian will produce

³¹ S. Schama (1987)

³² A. Th. van Deursen (1992)

³³ E.H. Kossmann (1976)

³⁴ Ch. Harvey (1992)

answers to the questions raised and at the same time formulate new historical questions, which bring us back to a new round in the cycle of historical research. This whole sequence of phases is not really new, but Harvey's final conclusion is; if the historical research process is truly circular, then we may start from any of the four phases, because a circle has no begin or end. Here he offers a way out of the dilemma that confronts the classical source-oriented historian, who starts out studying some historical source for undefined reasons. This study of and processing of the source leads to the formulation of questions, which lead to further research. So the source-oriented historian just stays a little longer on the merry-go-round making one and a half turn, as opposite to the issue-oriented historian, who only does one turn. Theoretically this circular model may not be as attractive as the linear approach of the social sciences, but it is a fairly accurate description of much historical practice.

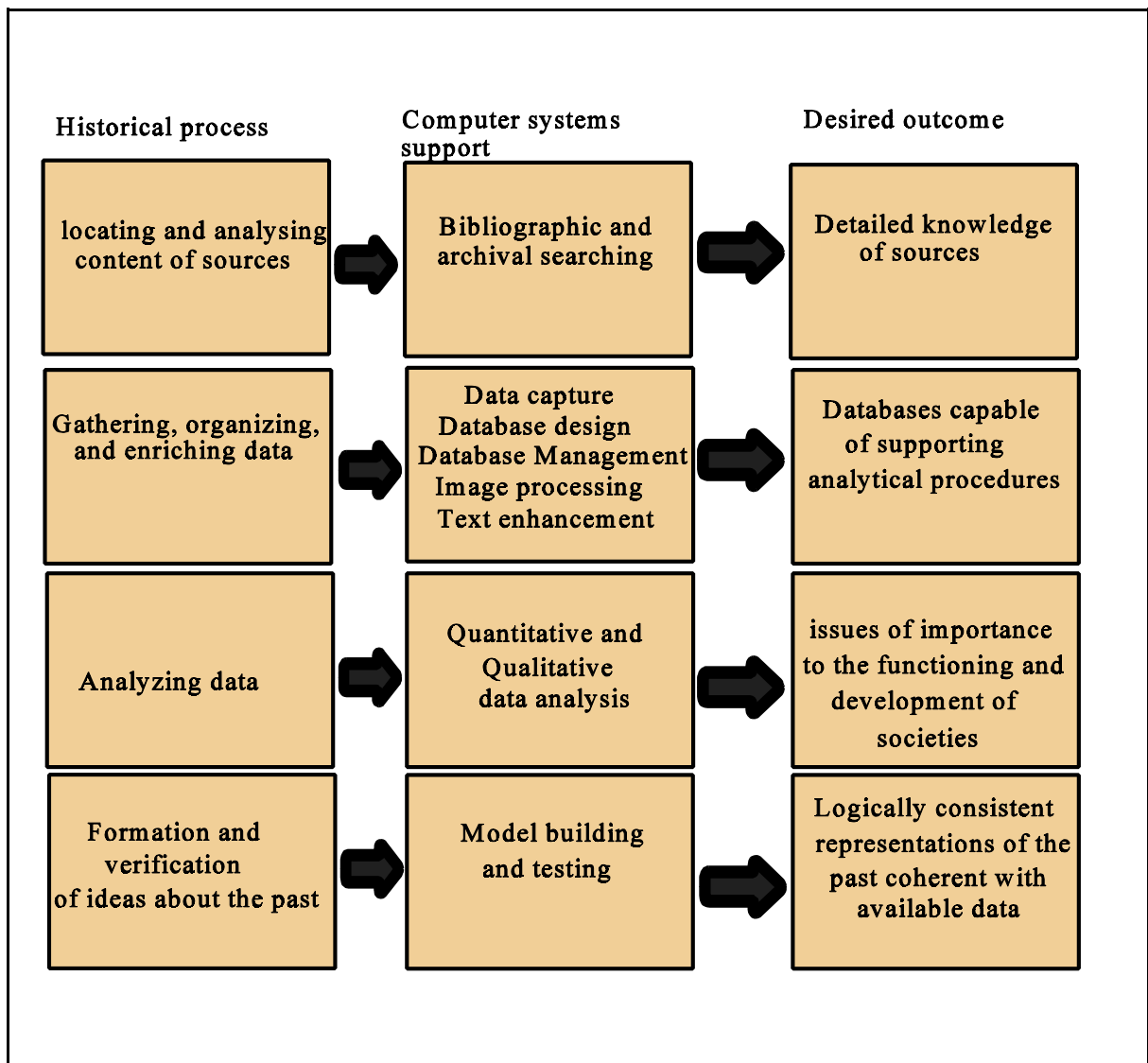


Figure 2 The role of computing in the historical process according to Charles Harvey (1992)

The great merit of Harvey's model however lies in his formulation of the role of computing in all stages of the historical process.(see figure 2) Bibliographic software and on-line facilities for searching archives can help the historian in locating and analyzing the content of sources, producing the detailed knowledge of the sources that is necessary for further analysis. In the next stage data are gathered, organized and enriched. All sorts of data-capture techniques, like OCR and input acceleration techniques, are used to collect the selected data. In order to organize these data collections, structures for databases are designed and database management systems are implemented that allow the historian to manipulate the data. If the data are of a graphic nature image processing software can be used to store it and improve its quality. Texts can be marked up for further analysis. The desired outcome of this stage of the process are databases capable of supporting analytical procedures. In the next stage computer programs for statistical analysis and text analysis will help producing insights in the functioning and development of individuals, groups or whole societies. This will lead to the final phase of formulating concepts about the past and the verification of these concepts through model building, simulation and testing, producing logically coherent representations of the past.

Accepting this approach, one can only agree with Harvey's next proposition: databases or data-collections are central to practical historic research. In all four stages of the research project extensive use is made of data collections, of which some are required as a prerequisite for the whole process and some are the product of the process. Data collections are consulted for gathering bibliographic information or information about archival

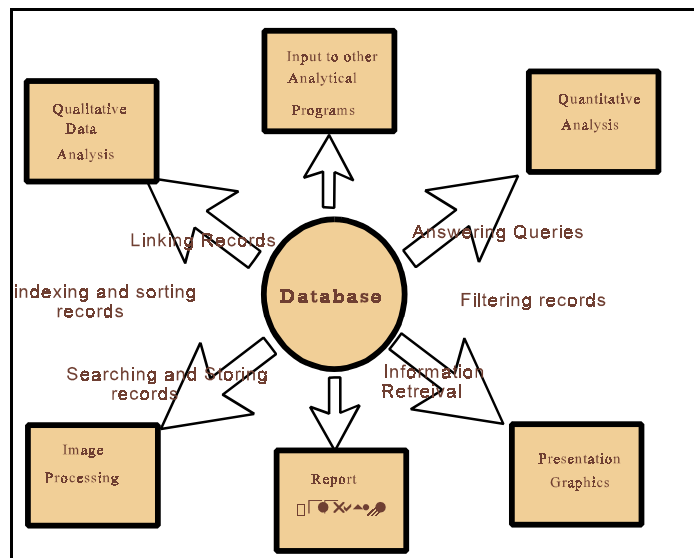


Figure 3 The centrality of databases in the historical process according to Charles Harvey (1992)

The products of these queries are stored in data collections. By ordering and searching these data the historian decides which sources are relevant for his research. He will then collect data from these sources in a manner which will facilitate the next stage of analysis. Data from several sources must be connected and inconsistencies must be resolved. After analysis the results will be presented as a collection of insights gained by the author,

combined with relevant parts of the collected data to found the arguments. Deliberately I have avoided to use the word *database* and have used *data collection*, in order to concede that all these phases can be done manually. But anyone with any experience with databases and database management systems will see that their superior facilities for search and retrieval make them much better suited for these processes.

In retrospect Harvey's paradigm fits the research-methodology of this study, which is centered around the production and analysis of a machine-readable transcription of the *havenboeken van de heffing van het Paalgeld te Amsterdam*. This study has multiple foci. First of all it should be an attempt at the production of historical knowledge. But at the same time it is a critical electronic source-edition of parts of the port-books mentioned above. Furthermore, it is an experiment in the extensive use of computers in historical research.

The wish to compare the data gathered from the portbooks of the levy of the *Paalgeld* in Amsterdam with older data sets inevitably led to making machine readable transcripts of these publications. This has produced some new insights in the quality of some of these works. Since a number of them have been the foundation of much historical analysis, I have taken some time to elaborate on their evaluation.

My approach to this whole process of research has led to a lack of balance between the time invested in data gathering and the time invested in data analysis. Creating a data set of the dimensions of this project and at the same time developing new methods to do so, has been so time-consuming that the limits of what is acceptable for an academic research project were in sight. Producing critical editions of historical sources used to be respected as an academic activity. No one would question the value of Nina Bang's work on the Soundtoll registers, or Nicolaas Posthumus Dutch Price history, though they only produced primitive and rather unpractical databases.³⁵ Creating machine readable transcripts of historical sources, which greatly improves the possibilities for analysis, has not yet achieved such a status.

The data set that I have produced has so many aspects and touches on so many other historical studies, that it would take another fourteen years to put all my findings in their full context. I do not have that much time and parts of my analysis may suffer from this. On the other hand I am offering a data set which has so much detail that it can be used to treat historical subjects that I have not even thought of. My analysis of the data set is just one example of how it can be used and I am certain that better historians will be able to get more

³⁵ N.E. Bang (1904-1933), N.W. Posthumus (1943)

out of it than I have done. I would like present the data set, the methodological discussion, and my analysis of the data set as one entity.

In the second chapter I will discuss recent views on the economic history of the Dutch Republic in the eighteenth century, for which the century will be divided into three periods, based on the political role the Dutch Republic played: ally of England, neutral party, and enemy of England. From this perspective I will also outline the development of Dutch-American relations from colonial times to the end of the Napoleonic era. The emphasis will be on the political and economic relations.

The third chapter will provide a critical discussion of the main source of this study: *de havenboeken van de heffing van het Paalgeld te Amsterdam*. A short history and a complete description of the source will be provided and I will compare the quality of this source with other sources that have been used by other authors. I will prove that the portbooks of the *Paalgeld*-levy are a reliable source for economic history.

The fourth chapter will deal with the methodology of this study. I will explain the choice for an unabridged transcription of the source instead of a sample. The process of data capture and the techniques developed to accelerate this process will be discussed, as well as the data-modeling method used to create the machine-readable transcription of the source.

The fifth chapter will provide the framework within which the American trade must be understood: there I will provide a complete reconstruction of the imports to Amsterdam for the year 1742, and the period 1771 - 1787, based on the parts of the portbooks of the Levy of the *Paalgeld*, that deal with the European trade. In this chapter I will discuss the main trends of Amsterdam's trade. However, a representation of the complete analysis of the data set would be so extensive, that I have decided to provide an electronic version of all the tables that have been produced for this part of my research, which can be accessed via the Internet, instead of adding thousands of pages as appendices to this study. There is a number of good reasons for this. First of all, the production of this book would be become too costly if all appendices would have to be printed. Secondly, a printed version would not improve the academic discussion on this subject, since the sheer amount of data would deter understanding. So, if the only way to get some overview of this extensive data set requires the use of a computer, the sensible thing to do is to provide the data in a form which can be immediately processed with a computer.

In this chapter I will only use a selection of the whole analysis to serve as background for the next chapter: however, the electronic publication of the complete set of tables of the analysis should be considered to be an integral part of this study.

The analysis of the data on the trans-Atlantic trade with the West-Indies and North and South America will be provided in the sixth chapter, where also some additional evidence will be provided to support the outcome of the analysis. In the final part of this chapter I will go into most detail in the description of the trade of Amsterdam with the United States of America. Here I will show how a number of political events can be clearly traced in the data. I will also suggest that there has been a significant difference in the development of the trade between Amsterdam and northern and the southern parts of the United States. The southern ports mainly exported the great commercial crops of the south: tobacco, rice, indigo and later cotton. The northern ports were much more involved in re-export of West Indian and even East Indian and Chinese goods.³⁶ I will show how Amsterdam's trade with North America, which was relatively insignificant at the beginning of the period, became of vital importance during the era of the Batavian Republic, the Kingdom of Holland, and the annexation by France. After Napoleon's defeat there was an overall revival of trade. The North American trade also recovered, but the peak years of 1805-1807 would not be duplicated.

The seventh and final chapter will be the conclusion of this study, in which I will show that the evidence confirms our hypothesis that the political impossibility to maintain its policy of neutrality was calamitous for Dutch commerce, just when it seemed to recover from a period of decline. The traditional way to circumvent the restrictions on belligerents, flag-flight, was unfeasible because of the continental nature of the conflicts. In this situation the United States of America, who succeeded in remaining a neutral party during most of the conflict, took over the position the Dutch had had in the Atlantic trade. During the War of 1812 some Bostonian merchants even took Portuguese papers to sail under a neutral flag, just like Amsterdam's ships had been nominally registered in Emden in years of war.

Finally a list of appendices will be given. In these appendices the complete statistical analysis of the *Paalgeld* portbooks will be presented, allowing a detailed view on all aspects of the imports of Amsterdam in the period. However, as argued before, presenting the appendices in print would make little sense. Even if they would be printed using a very small font, they would easily cover over 2000 pages. Furthermore, a printed version would not offer the possibilities for searching and reinterpretation that an electronic version would have.

³⁶ C.P. Nettels (1962)

Hence I have decided to make the appendices available in electronic form on the Internet. Access to this data will be via the World Wide Web. The URL for the appendix is:

<http://www.let.rug.nl/~welling/paalgeld/appendix.html>

The appendix consists of the complete standardized data-set, the code-lists and all the sources of which I have made electronic transcripts for this study. A number of small utility programs will also be added, which will allow quick recoding of the data. These electronic appendices will allow verification of the claims made in this study, as well as further detailed study. The appendices are available in such a form that they can be either viewed on-line via a Web-browser, or downloaded for local use.