

THE DEMOGRAPHY OF THE LOW COUNTRIES 1500-1990: FACTS AND FIGURES

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THE PRESENT SPECIAL ISSUE OF THE *CJNS* contains essays on economy, history, philosophy, music, painting and sculpture covering almost four centuries. In examining, as editor, these varied contents, the following questions began to suggest themselves: What is actually known of the size and population taking part in the economic and cultural activities described? How was this population divided over the different provinces and regions of the country? And what was the proportion between rural and urban areas?

The sources for the following data are derived not only from historical surveys and atlases, but also from travel guides, calendars, journals and newspapers. They are of varied quality, but together they do give a fairly coherent picture. For the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries not many population sources were available. The Southern Netherlands, moreover, could unfortunately not be considered at all. In the past, Flanders and Brabant always were more densely populated than Holland. With regard to the East Indies (present-day Indonesia), most of the available sources cover the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Because of the importance of the East, their inclusion seemed essential.

At present, the Netherlands covers an area of 41,864 square kilometers, with a population of 15.1 million. Before ca. 800 A.D., the Dutch delta was actually larger than it is now. As the result of a series of floods during the Middle Ages, the landmass diminished considerably. The most noteworthy of these inundations was the St. Elisabeth Flood of November 18-19, 1421. In Holland and Zeeland many villages disappeared and the Biesbosch came into existence. As to the Dutch population, until the latter half of the last century it was only a fraction of its present size.

Much emphasis has been placed on the study of the Golden Age, ca. 1600-1675. This era covers less than one fifth of the entire period considered in this issue. The economic and artistic flowering associated with the Golden Age took place in a limited geographical area and benefitted a relatively small population (cf. the article by Peter Ford). Around 1500, twenty-nine percent of the Dutch lived in the county (*Graafschap*) of Holland. By 1650 this percentage had risen to forty-eight. Here less than half of the inhabitants lived in the countryside — even for European standards an unusual degree of urbanization. Holland was very much a region of small and medium-sized towns and villages, with the exception of Amsterdam. The urban centers were surrounded by intensively cultivated agricultural lands, providing food and other crops used in a variety of industries. The indispensable supplies of wheat and wood depended largely on the Baltic and Russian trade. Wood was essential for construction and for the huge shipbuilding industries.

It has been generally accepted that during the Golden Age most of the activities in manufacturing, shipbuilding, trade and commerce to the Baltic, the Mediterranean, South

East Asia, and the Americas were generated in the west of the country. To a large degree this also accounts for the unusual and brilliant developments in city planning, architecture, painting and sculpture.

The most prosperous region was demarcated along the coast by the towns of Rotterdam, The Hague, Leiden and Haarlem. Further inland it was bordered by Amsterdam, Utrecht and Dordrecht — covering some eighty sq. km. Beyond this central area the country was difficult to traverse, and many of its provinces remained isolated. As late as the year 1820, the province of Utrecht remained virtually inaccessible because of the long rains during the winters and summers. This presented a very serious handicap because of Utrecht's central location. The provinces of Groningen, Friesland, and Overijssel did not have a single paved road. During the winter months they remained cut off from the rest of the country. A town such as Amersfoort, for example, only 48 kilometers to the east of Amsterdam and nowadays a fifteen-minute train ride to the east of the city of Utrecht, was until the nineteenth century remote and difficult to reach. Its walled-in area measured 800 meters across, whereas the embankments of the IJ in Amsterdam were 3,5 km. long.

Populations were sparse. It took Friesland nearly three centuries, between 1511 and 1795, to double its inhabitants from 80,000 to 161,500. In Overijssel, between 1475 and 1795, the population only increased by 82,300, from 53,000 to 135,300 inhabitants. Most of the increases took place in the eighteenth century. As late as 1795 Drente counted merely 39,000 inhabitants. The "landschap" was not represented in the States General and its inhabitants were almost completely dissociated from the Republic. Only in 1815 did Drente obtain the status of province. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Gelderland, since 1339 a Duchy, counted slightly more inhabitants than Amsterdam.

These provinces, including Zeeland and the *Generaliteitsland* Brabant, knew very gradual changes. They did not truly take part in a Golden Age. What were the consequences of their slow development on the structural and political shape of the country as a whole? For the sake of a more balanced approach to Dutch history, these other regions deserve more attention. Not every Netherlander identifies exclusively with the history of Holland.

From the last quarter of the seventeenth century onwards the country experienced a slow but steady decline. The nadir was reached in the decade between 1830 and 1840. That no recovery took place during the first half of the nineteenth century was due to the general exhaustion resulting from the Napoleonic wars until 1813, and the Belgian war of 1830-1839. By the middle of the last century the kingdom of the Netherlands belonged to the most retarded areas of Western Europe, far behind Belgium and England, and even Germany.

Early indications of this decline are found in pauperization and a decrease in the population. In the period between 1680 and 1795 the number of inhabitants of Holland diminished by 93,000 people, from 887,000 to 794,000. More specific examples may be quoted for Leiden and Haarlem. In 1675 the former counted 65,000 inhabitants, by 1795 there were 31,000, a staggering loss of 34,000 citizens. During the same period Haarlem's population decreased from 37,000 to 21,000, a loss of 16,000 inhabitants. After 1660, through immigration, the population of Amsterdam remained stable at ca. 200,000 citizens.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the greatest number of these immigrants came from Germany, East Prussia and Silesia — 118,272 people in all. During the French occupation (1795-1813) the number of citizens decreased by one-seventh, which amounted to 28,500 inhabitants. It left ca. 172,000 people living within the city walls. By 1809 half of this population depended partially or entirely on social welfare (*bedeling*). Only after 1860 did the city begin to expand beyond the fortifications which had been laid out in 1658. The above facts and figures may give some indication of the receding fortunes of the Netherlands until the middle of the nineteenth century.

In any presentation of Dutch historical facts and figures, it is necessary to include the East Indies. From 1602 until the middle of our century the *Gordel van Smaragd* played a crucial role in the history of the Netherlands. Between 1840 and 1870 one fifth of its state budget derived from the East Indies, representing 800 million guilders annually. In the years prior to the Japanese invasion of 1942, 35 percent of all Dutch engineers worked in the East. And more than one million Chinese there had obtained Dutch citizenship.

The present geographic area of Indonesia covers 1,919,443 sq. km., stretching almost one sixth around the equator. Its 285 million people inhabit 13,660 tropical islands. These Indonesian boundaries are very much a product of past Dutch military and economic exploits and administrative policies. In 1800 Java alone counted five million inhabitants, while the Netherlands had just over two million.

After 1950 the trauma of the loss of the East Indies was so great that the Dutch almost erased its history from their memory. But the centuries-old links even now have a considerable impact on the Dutch economy, culture and taste. Ten to fifteen percent of the Dutch have at least one East Indian ancestor. Together with the Ambonese this amounts to 350,000 people.

The Demography of the Dutch Republic until 1795 and the Kingdom of the Netherlands 1813-1990

1500	The Northern Netherlands has 930,000 inhabitants
1600	The Dutch Republic has 1.5 million inhabitants
1585-1630	Some 850,000 people immigrate from the Southern Netherlands to the Dutch Republic
1608-1610	The Dutch merchant fleet is estimated at 16,280 vessels with 159,825 seamen
1650-1750	Almost half of world trade is transferred through Dutch ports The Dutch population does not rise from the level of 1.9 million inhabitants
After 1750	Considerable improvements in agriculture take place. Wealthy townspeople acquire large areas of land which they in turn lease.

- 1795 The Dutch population counts 2,078,691 people. 837,304 of these live in cities and towns, two-thirds, 1,241,387 are in the countryside. These are largely agricultural labourers.
- 1800-1830 There exists enormous stagnation in the Dutch countryside. By far the larger part of the farmers do not wish to introduce modern agricultural practices, as is done in neighbouring states.
- 1833-1923 Land reclamation: During this period there is a decline of wasteland from 906,000 hectares to 450,000 hectares, thus 456,000 hectares have been gained for agriculture.
- 1840 The population is 2,800,000.
- 1850 The population is 3,000,000
- 1849-1920 The population increases by 125% to 6,750,000. The growth of the population in industry is 177% and in agriculture 94%.
- After 1880 There occurs a serious crisis in agriculture, the prices of all products decline drastically. This results in great unemployment and massive emigration to North America.
- 1882 This is the peak year for emigration to the United States.
- 1889 The first Dutch census is taken. 32% of the Dutch population is occupied in industry and ca. 32% in agriculture.
- 1898 The population of the Netherlands has increased to 5 million inhabitants.
- 1909 Census: 35% of the Dutch population is occupied in industry, 27% in agriculture, and 19% in commerce and communications.
- 1914 The population is 6 million.
- 1920 There are 6,750,000, 38% work in industry and 23% in agriculture.
- Feb. 1934 470,000 Dutch labourers (one third) are unemployed
- 1936 414,000 people are still without work.
- 1940 The Netherlands has 8.8 million inhabitants.
- 1971 The Dutch population is 13,270,000.
- 1990 The Dutch population is 15,100,000.
- 1971 10%-15% of the Dutch have at least one East-Indian ancestor.
This amounts to ca. 350,000 people including Ambonese.

The County or Province of Holland 1500-1795

- 1500 29% of the Dutch population lives in Holland. This is 270,000 people.
- 1514 Holland has 275,000 inhabitants.
- 1600 Half of the population does not live in the countryside anymore.

1622	Holland has 672,000 inhabitants.
1650	48% of the total Dutch population lives in Holland. This is 780,000 people.
1680	Holland has 887,000 inhabitants. Since 1622 there has been an increase of a quarter of a million people.
1795	The population has declined to 794,000. This is a loss of 93,000 people since 1680.

No such population explosion took place in the other Dutch provinces.

Friesland	1511	80,000	inhabitants
	1689	129,000	
	1795	161,500	
Overijssel	1475	53,000	
	1675	71,000	
	1795	135,300	
Groningen	1795	114,600	
Drente	1795	39,600	
Gelderland	1795	223,200	
Utrecht	1795	97,100	
Zeeland	1795	114,600	
Noord Brabant	1795	260,200	
Limburg	1795	138,115	

Amsterdam

The surface of the city:

Along the IJ, the harbour, from the Haarlem Gate to the Muider Gate the distance was 3.5 km. From the Schreiers Tower on the IJ to the Weteringschans (the present Rijksmuseum) the distance was 2.5 km.

The surface of the largest Dutch city was ca. 6 sq. km. One-third of this consisted of water. On the 400 hectares remaining lived 200,000 people. This is 500 people per hectare.

The spectacular growth of the city of Amsterdam within less of a century can be amply demonstrated by the following figures:

1570	30,000	inhabitants
1620	100,000	
1660	200,000	

- 1650-1795 Until at least 1795, because of unsanitary conditions, many more people died annually than were born. This decrease in the population was counterbalanced by immigration. Immigrants often came from outside the country. As a result, the population of Amsterdam remained stable between 1650 and 1795 at 200,000 inhabitants.
- 1795-1813 During the French occupation the population declined by one-seventh, or 28,500 people. There remained ca. 172,000 inhabitants.
- 1809 Approximately half of the Amsterdam population lived partially or wholly from social welfare (*bedeling*).
- 1819-1825 Start of the North Holland Canal to Den Helder, the first direct link between Amsterdam and the North Sea -Atlantic Ocean.
- 1858 Living conditions: 23,655 people, 8.5% of the total population, live in more than 5000 basement dwellings.
- 1809-1860 The population increases by 60% or 108,000 persons.
- 1860 Total population 280,000 persons.
- After 1860 Only now the city begins to expand beyond the fortifications which had been laid out in 1658.
- After 1870 The city becomes the main trading center of the Netherlands and the world staple market for tobacco, tea, coffee, sugar, and rubber.
- 1873 The percentage of basement dwellings has declined to 7.48%
- 1 Nov. 1876 Sees the start of the land reclamation of the IJ polders west of Amsterdam. This involves very important changes in the economy of the whole region as well as of the dike systems and water management.
The North Sea Canal (Noordzee Kanaal) is begun. This constitutes a crucial short link between Amsterdam and the sea at IJmuiden (24 km.).
- 1876 The University of Amsterdam is established.
- 1880 Foundation of the Free University.
- 1881 Amsterdam establishes its first telephone link with the aid of English financing.
- 1885 The new building of the Rijksmuseum is opened — architect P.J.H. Cuypers.
- 1889 The Centraal Station is opened — architect P.J.H. Cuypers.
- 1900 Amsterdam has approx. half a million inhabitants. 13% or 1/8th of the population live in dwellings with no more than one room.
- 1903 Queen Wilhelmina opens the Beurs (Stock Exchange) built by H.P. Berlage.

1909 There are still 2707 basement dwellings.
1972 Amsterdam has 807,750 inhabitants.

Other towns in Holland

After 1675 The economy of the Dutch Republic declined
1675-1795

<i>Inhabitants</i>	1675	1795
Leiden	65,000	31,000
Haarlem	37,000	21,000

1795 Only Rotterdam and The Hague counted more inhabitants than in 1675.
1750 During the eighteenth century the increasing poverty of the Dutch city population placed a heavy burden on the finances of the towns and cities. So much so that by 1750 the debts of the charitable institutions such as orphanages, hospitals, old age homes and poor houses surpassed the budgets of the towns several times.

Classes and Groups in the society/population of the Dutch Republic during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries

- A. The Rabble/The Mob* Het Grauw, Het Gemeen: Vagabonds, Beggars, Paupers
Varying from 10% to 20% of a city's population
- B. The Humble People* Schamele Luyden: Servants, Sailors, Soldiers
Annual income: wages to 200 guilders
After 1750 this group in particular became impoverished as a result of crop failures. The distinction between A and B diminished
- C. Substratum of the Bourgeoisie* Tradesmen, Artisans, Shopkeepers
Annual income between 200 and 400 guilders
During the seventeenth century this class represented 20% to 25% of the population of the towns. As a result of poverty they declined to 10%-15% in the eighteenth century.
- D. The Middle Class/Bourgeoisie* De Brede Burgerij: Shopkeepers, Businessmen, Boatmasters, Lower officers, Civil servants, Certain Clergymen.
This class possesses private property up to a value of 10,000 guilders. Their annual income ranged between 400 and 1200 guilders.

E. The Upper Middle Class
Haute Bourgeoisie

Rich Merchants, Businessmen, Higher Officers, Clergymen, Doctors, Lawyers, Solicitors, Renters. The class is not clearly distinguished from the next:

F. The Patriciate/Het Patriciaat

De Regenten: The Regents. The top stratum of the governing class in Dutch cities. The classes of E and F were often related by marriage. These two classes never presented more than 3% or 4% of the total population.

[Source: J. De Jong: *Een deftig bestaan*, 1987]

The Netherlands East-Indies/Indonesia 1602-1949

1800	Java counts six million inhabitants. The Netherlands only two million.
1900	Java has 28 million inhabitants. The Netherlands 5 million. Enormous social development takes place. The cities expand greatly with new social structures and new castes, among whom are the Chinese and Indo-Europeans.
1940-1942	Japanese occupation. Many Indonesians are killed as a result of enforced labour. All Europeans are imprisoned. Decolonization period with rising nationalism — against whites, Indo-Europeans, and Chinese.
1971	The Indonesian Republic has 120 million inhabitants Java 76 million Sumatra 20,800,000 Celebes 8,500,000 Madura 2,447,000 Bali 1,783,000
1976	Indonesia has 129 million inhabitants
1980	Indonesia has 147 million inhabitants, Java 91 million
1987	Indonesia has 160 million inhabitants. 10%-15% of the population of the Netherlands has at least one East Indian ancestor.

Ernst Zahn observes that even now in the Netherlands a satisfactory and systematic study dealing with the colonial period, in which besides the historic facts also the social problems are treated properly, is lacking altogether (1991, 86).

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