

Karin Tilmans

THE DUTCH CONCEPT OF THE CITIZEN: FROM THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES TILL THE 21ST CENTURY¹

Much has been and continues to be written about burghers in the Netherlands, but few of these studies concern conceptual history. The fine collective studies in *De stijl van de burger* (Aerts and Te Velde 1998) and *Beschaafde burger: Burgerlijkheid in de vroegmoderne tijd* (Hendrix and Meijer Drees 2000) are recent manifestations of this ongoing interest, which is present in the Netherlands as well. Both collections deal mainly with bourgeois culture in the Netherlands after 1500. The volume in conceptual history about the Dutch burgher concept, – the fourth in the Dutch series on conceptual history published by Amsterdam University Press – of which the present article gives an overview, is inspired first and foremost by German studies, especially the collections *Bürgerschaft. Rezeption und Innovation der Begrifflichkeit vom Hohen Mittelalter bis ins 19. Jahrhundert* (Koselleck and Schreiner 1994), and *Bürgertum. Bürger in der Gesellschaft der Neuzeit* (Puhle 1991). The concepts of ‘Bürger’ in the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* (Brunner 1992) and *citoyen-sujet-civisme* in the *Handbuch politisch-soziale Grundbegriffe in Frankreich 1680-1820*

(Book 9) were other models for a diachronous national conceptual history. With all due respect for the German project on conceptual history, we have elected to pursue our own Dutch course, like our predecessors in *Vaderland* (Van Sas 1999), *Vrijheid* (Haitsma Mulier and Velema 1999) and *Beschaving* (Den Boer 2001), although our research starts well from the Middle Ages and considers even the twenty-first century. Moreover, the contributions are not written from a historic perspective only, but also from the perspective of Dutch linguistics, history of law and art history.

The term ‘burgher’ and the Dutch synonym *poorter*, which was more widely used into the fifteenth century, were the equivalent of the Latin concept *civis*. A burgher was a member of the *civitas*, the established political community. This community, however, was not circumscribed by the territory of the sovereign. Even the oldest sources from the Netherlands, both those in Latin and the ones in the local vernacular, associate burghers with cities. Burghers were regarded first of all as members of the municipal community. This membership was not yet legally defined, let alone established in an administrative context. It did, however, carry a political-legal claim to a measure of sovereignty. The status and legitimacy of cities and burghers were no cause for philosophical contemplation at the time. Any understanding of the ideas about burghers and cities – or perhaps the term feeling would be more accurate – requires a digressive approach. Piet Leupen has done just that in his analysis of the early city seals (Leupen 2002). This approach is very informative, as the design of city seals reveals how such cities view themselves and wish to be perceived. In his research, Leupen shows that the early cities often featured a fortification on their seal: a gate, a citadel or a surrounding wall. The image did not necessarily depict an existing reinforcement, and many of the cities featuring them did not even have fortifications at all. Fortifications were not, especially not primarily, intended to represent reality but symbolized awareness of an individual identity. Cities chose the symbol of a gate or a citadel to indicate their claim to autonomy despite legal subordination to the sovereign. The interests of the sovereign did not prevail, as the city had concerns of its own. The seal symbolized a legitimacy outside the feudal order.

This metaphor, in which an enclosed fortification symbolized the claim to autonomy, obviously reflected a very established practice. In addition to serving a strategic objective, an impressive citadel conveyed the owner's sense of independence. And when the members of the emerging elite in the initially homogeneous cities claimed control, they built city castles as spatial embodiments of their special status.

Marc Boone has explored the consequences of this social differentiation (Boone 2002). Two different city groups became increasingly pronounced: on the one hand an elite that usually owned the land in the old city centre, traded across vast distances and ran the city industry and on the other hand the manual craftsmen. This made for a semantic differentiation in the burgher/*poorter* concept, which henceforth not only denoted the city population in general but specified the upper crust as well. Around 1300, when the guildsmen became more powerful in cities in the Southern Netherlands (the focus of Boone's research), the two groups rivalled for recognition as the purest personifications of citizenship. This formation of identity thrived when both groups formed supra-municipal alliances against the ruler on the one hand and against economic intruders on the other hand, which in turn gave rise to some sort of socially differentiated national awareness.

These claims to essential citizenship were determined by the contribution to the well-being of the community, the *bien publique*, the *res publica*. What was deemed more important: the initiatives and investments by the upper crust or the skilfulness and diligence of the manual craftsmen? This association of the burgher/*poorter* concept with the notion of the interest of the city as a whole was probably not new but did become explicit in the course of the fourteenth century. This change was of major conceptual-historical significance. First, it added a moral connotation to the political-historical one of the burgher concept. Citizenship – or the status of burgher – entailed obligations in addition to rights. Moreover, this connotation legitimised the burgher concept with the highly respected papers of the classical republican burgher ideals from the Antiquity. This rediscovered tradition would long dominate ideas about burghers and citizenship and was obviously especially appealing to the representatives of the urban patriciate: the classical ideal was designed

for the upper crust. On the other hand, manual craftsmen rightly argued that their thrift, careful management and moderation were more illustrative of the public interest than royal and aristocratic squandering. These associations were to become embedded in the burgher concept as well.

The link with the classical tradition thus reflected an economically-oriented perspective of the public interest that hardly figured in the classical burgher ideal. This was hardly surprising: unlike the Roman aristocracy, the Medieval citizens who resolved their legitimacy quandaries by invoking the classical tradition subsisted from the economically-based networks of the trading and industrial cities. This economy required a measure of flexibility in the stipulations for admission to citizenship. Sometimes promoting arrivals from outside was desirable, while at other times the general interest demanded their exclusion. Therefore the requirements for citizenship were rarely formulated in ironclad legal terms. The tendency to ascribe citizenship to heritage, however, illustrates that becoming a citizen meant assuming obligations.

The individual legitimacy that city life demanded thus gave rise to a specific bourgeois ideology. Literature, especially following the invention of the printing press around the middle of the fifteenth century, did much to proliferate this ideology. Herman Pleij relates the depiction of burghers in contemporary narrative literature in his contribution (Pleij 2002).

First, he observes the shift in terminology. In the literature, like in non-literary texts, the terms *poorter* and burgher were long used interchangeably, although *poorter* prevailed at first. In the fifteenth century, the term burgher became far more widely used in literary contexts and gained the upper hand in the sixteenth century. At the time, the conventional term was in fact *borger* rather than burgher. Pleij ascribes this change to the general impression that residents of the city were merchants, i.e. people who *borgden*, meaning extended credit. (Likewise, the term *poorter* might have dominated as long as living within the city gates was regarded as the distinguishing characteristic of burghers.² Admittedly, burghers in late Medieval literature were invariably merchants; guildsmen, though not entirely absent, were not depicted as burghers.

The message conveyed in the literary burgher texts is therefore perfectly compatible with the new ideology that Marc Boone identified for the upper crust. On the one hand, in the majority of cases, the literature continuously warned about the corruptive power of money and property. The awareness that citizenship entailed an obligation to serve the public interest was all too easily suppressed whenever an opportunity arose to serve personal interest, and this danger increased where merchants adopted royal airs. These texts were therefore not directed against the class as such but took issue with estrangement from its origins. This moral admonition was historically legitimised with the statement that all large cities in the Antiquity did succumb to avarice and opulence. Other texts presented burghers in a more favourable light. Merchants were praised for their rational conduct, emotional restraint and pragmatism. In this respect, they even served as role models – in the literature! – for aristocratic circles.

Up to this point, the depiction of the burghers in the literature was similar to that in non-fictional texts. In addition, however, Pleij has identified a type of literary city resident unknown to us. These shrewd adventurers, often of humble origins, baited society by claiming a rigid individual autonomy. They applied the virtues of planning, economy and undaunted entrepreneurial spirit solely to serve their personal interest. Unlike the reprehensible merchants, however, these burghers were merely struggling to survive in a cruel world. These rogue stories were justified within the contemporary moral standards as warnings: beware of these chaps! The style in which they were written and their popularity, however, suggest that they were also welcomed as a challenge to the established burgher ideals. While adventurers did not necessarily reside in the city, cities did offer the variegated, dynamic surroundings for their kind to thrive. In this respect, rogue stories are as relevant as the moralizing texts about merchants to the need of the burgeoning cities for adapted ideological standards.

The Early Humanists: *Civis* and *Poorter*

Up to the second half of the fifteenth century, the history of the burgher concept could be inferred only from its use in practice; no

definitions of or observations about citizenship circulated in the Netherlands yet. With the Renaissance in the Italian city states, political philosophy started to thrive and led to an ongoing interest in the role of burghers in society. These observations derived great inspiration from the republican burgher ideals of the classical Roman writers. This made for a strong moral component in the burgher concept: the *civis* participated in the government of the city, and the *res publica* (the public interest) took precedence over personal interest; he was receptive to the needs of the community and prevented the potentates from abusing their power; finally, he led a life of virtue and was a role model to the surrounding society. This ideal presumed a social independence, both ideally and materially. The concept of the Roman burgher was therefore by definition an aristocratic one (Tilmans 2002).

We have learned that classical views had taken root in the Netherlands as well. As a result, the concept of *poorter* or burgher had already acquired comparable connotations prior to theorization here. A well-formulated, transparent conception of such citizenship, however, was not forthcoming until the final decades of the fifteenth century, when civil humanism gained ground in the Netherlands. These early political thinkers, about whom – except for Erasmus – very little research has been conducted, are explored in the volume. They expressed their ideas in treatises, ruler doctrines and especially chronicles. All these texts were in Latin; no philosophical discourses about burghers were written in the vernacular yet. Nor had Ciceronian burghers surfaced in the literature yet either.

The first text where I found observations about citizenship reflecting classical views was a dialogue on loneliness by the humanist Jacobus Canter of Groningen from 1491. The text was not an appeal for solitude: in fact, Canter defended the civilized city life. He was particularly interested in burghers who ran their city judiciously, educated as they were in the *studia humanitatis*, the pedagogical humanist curriculum inspired by the values of the Antiquity. Canter does not appear to have been very influential and was definitely less so than Erasmus, whose impressive stature dwarfed all other thinkers soon afterwards. Moreover, Erasmus's observations about burghers were directed more toward the wise ruler, who felt privileged to rule over free subjects with their consent – he described the mythical

Batavian King Baeto as such as ruler – than toward the burghers themselves. The most noteworthy theoretician after Erasmus was the Bruges lawyer and politician Franciscus Goethalsius. Shortly after the mid-sixteenth century, Goethalsius picked up where Canter had left off, with an appeal for a radical humanist republicanism. His ideal of the republic was a Venetian version of the free city state, where freedom, free trade and civil self-administration guaranteed happiness and prosperity. He emphasized, however, that studying prudence and *humanitas* in the sense of civilization were indispensable to achieve this end and therefore recommended that Latin schools be established. The supreme objective should not be external glory but justice and virtue within the community.

All humanist contemplation associated the idea of the burgher primarily with political freedom. The established order, where sovereignty remained the purview of the ruler, was not challenged as such, although the autonomy of the city was an axiom. This formulation embodies the restricted geographical dimension of ideas about the burgher republic. The idea of a supra-municipal citizenship was well beyond contemporary ideological horizons.

This traditional connection of burghers with the city may have become less self-evident in the new political reality, where ‘the’ Republic was definitely not a city state in its conventional manifestation. Pieter de la Court, one of the leading republican thinkers of the seventeenth century, for example, regarded burghers as members of any political community whatsoever. This community might be a city or a state, a republic, or even a monarchy (Blom 2002).

De la Court never expressed any explicit philosophies about burghers. His interpretation of the concept is to be distilled from his political writings, as Hans Blom does in his contribution, revealing that De la Court modernized classical-republican burghers into enterprising merchants. This association of burghers with merchants was by no means new, of course. The substantial merchants were traditionally regarded as the upper crust of the bourgeoisie. In Medieval texts, burghers are almost always merchants. In the republican burgher ideal inspired by the classics, however, the commercial activity of burghers had receded into the background, due to the emphasis on their selfless political role. Here, De la Court

appears to have exchanged the classical ideal for the current reality, which was that of the bourgeois capitalism of the Dutch Republic. His remarks about burghers are therefore descriptive rather than normative.

De la Court's burghers were not principally different from other classes; the only essential contrast was with respect to 'strangers', those who did not form part of the community. The 'most excellent' among the burghers were obviously the ones in charge of the political organization, although De la Court also explicitly acknowledged the importance of the non-aristocratic, hardworking burghers, the 'common folk'. As the backbone of society, they personified the public interest in some respects. Here, too, we find the ideology already expressed in the Middle Ages. In De la Court's work, however, it was embedded in a modern political conception, in which the ideal of the virtuous republican burgher was dismissed as naive. First, lack of civic purpose figured in all layers of the bourgeoisie, including the circles of officials. Nor did virtue intrinsically guarantee prudent governance. This conclusion led him to a political philosophy embraced and elaborated only by thinkers in later periods, concerning the political order structured to ensure that it was in the interest of the governing individuals themselves to consider the well-being of the population. This did not mean leaving society at the mercy of prevailing interests. Both the power of the officials and their regulatory means were to be arranged through effective forms of organization. De la Court believed that political virtue meant the presence of virtuous institutions.

While these ideas appeared to herald the end of moral heritage, De la Court stopped short of this measure. Upon examining what constituted such well-being, he discovered that more was involved than material affluence alone: in addition to 'merchanthood' and 'wealth', 'erudition', 'arts' and 'virtues' appeared on his list. Like the humanists, he deeply valued education as a source of knowledge and virtue. In his well-reasoned view, the burghers that benefited most from education and were consequently the best equipped to bring prosperity to the community were the affluent entrepreneurs. By situating this group at the centre of his social theory, De la Court transformed the 'classical' burghers of humanism into the 'modern' burghers of the seventeenth-century trading nation.

This was the surrounding theory. Meanwhile, citizenship had become an official status. This status was still reserved for city residents and would remain so until the end of the eighteenth century. Not all city residents were burghers; there were also established residents without civil rights, ‘inhabitants’ and temporary ‘strangers’ or ‘outsiders’. These categories dated back to the Middle Ages. As the cities grew, they became less cohesive and comprehensive. The same happened to the core of that community, the actual bourgeoisie. Maarten Prak and Erika Kuijpers have investigated how the enlarged scale of Amsterdam, a growth city *par excellence*, affected the nature of citizenship and how, conversely, citizenship affected the different social groups. As the extensive study by Prak and Kuijpers makes clear: the group with civil rights was more socially diverse than is often assumed (Prak and Kuijpers 2002).

Citizenship entailed legal, economic, political and social privileges. Though officially the same for all burghers, they differed in practice. Holding office was among the political rights but was in fact restricted to prominent families. Still, the accessibility principle had some significance. As a civil right, it reminded the regent that he was a representative of the community. This symbolic legitimacy imposed obligations. Nor were all civil rights reserved exclusively for burghers. Ordinarily, practising a craft or trade required joining a guild, which in turn required civil rights. Substantial sectors of the economy, however, were not guild-based. In 1668 the official status of ‘inhabitant’ was introduced. This status did not signify citizenship but did allow holders to join a guild. Nonetheless, citizenship retained its important symbolic meaning as the specific bond with the municipality. It instilled a sense of responsibility and thus conferred status. The fact that this system was not a mere formality is demonstrated by the practice of deleting individuals from the *poorter* register for conduct ‘unworthy’ of civil rights.

Those who had not acquired civil rights by birth or by marriage therefore had reason to buy into it. Doing so also made them eligible for provisions for orphans and the elderly. Prak and Kuijpers have analysed purchases of citizenship. Understandably, most were acquired by inhabitants who worked as artisans or were self-employed within the guild system. Still, the connection between guild membership and ‘*poorterschap*’ was not exclusive. A substantial

number of the new burghers practised occupations not organized in guilds. In fact, remarkably many came from the lower social echelons: seafaring journeymen, soldiers and all kinds of workers. This was a new, seventeenth-century phenomenon and should be considered in light of the rapidly growing labour market in Amsterdam, where wages were relatively high. Especially with seasonal and high-risk occupations outside the guild system, becoming a *'poorter'* must have been an attractive option because of the social insurance that came with it. The ensuing financial burden on the city moreover forced the government to raise the *poorter* fees repeatedly, which probably reduced the number of requests accordingly.

The image of burghers in the rapidly growing city of Amsterdam is rather paradoxical. The bourgeoisie probably accounted for little more than ten percent of the population and was therefore a small minority. Nonetheless, this minority exceeded 20,000 people by the end of the seventeenth century and was quite numerous from this perspective. The new burghers comprised people from all ranks and classes, from international merchants to labourers and sailors. The combination of a financial threshold and economic privileges appears to have interested the traditional middle groups of owners of small businesses and entrepreneurs in becoming *'poorters'* as well. Their prominent presence is probably why references to the bourgeoisie in texts from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries primarily concern this group.

Burghers, *Societas Civilis* and Virtue

Placing the burghers of the sixteenth and seventeenth-century political thinkers in their social context requires examining the urban upper crust of the affluent entrepreneurs. Burghers or the burgher community have traditionally comprised artisans and tradespeople. Some have even suggested that this group was the backbone of society. In the seventeenth century, at least in the large cities of the Northern Netherlands, individuals with *poorter* rights were more socially diverse than ever. Simultaneously, however, as described above, the notions embodied in the term 'burgher' and especially comprehensive

designations such as ‘the burghers’ and ‘the bourgeoisie’ become more indicative of the middle class. The next question is whether this development carried over into art, particularly the art most accessible for conceptual history research: literature. Does the literature reflect the transformation of the Medieval merchant into the modern small entrepreneur?

The research by Marijke Meijer Drees reveals that the relation between burghers and literature in the seventeenth century was far less obvious and straightforward than the standard designation bourgeois in literature historiography suggests (Meijer Drees 2002). First, the word burgher and derivative terms appear rarely and if at all only in passing in literary texts and exclusively with the comprehensive meaning of city resident. The adjective bourgeois is similarly unspecific and refers to a structured community, the classical *societas civilis*. This community is depicted as being hierarchically structured in four tiers: at the top were the political potentates, next came the large merchants, then the manual craftsmen and shopkeepers and finally the uncivilized remainder, the ‘common folk’. The texts reveal very little about the divisions between the different tiers; nor do the few explicit social strata from this period indicate more rigid criteria. Clearly, however, cultural and moral factors were considered in addition to power and wealth.

In fact, the seventeenth-century literature is bourgeois only in that it serves explicitly to maintain and perfect the *societas civilis*. The values continuously emphasized are universally valid without restrictions: honesty, virtue and courteousness. The harmonious bourgeois society is based on order and rights and as such is diametrically opposed to the barbarian state of nature. This harmony is to be pursued within and among the social tiers and from the outer circle of society as a whole to the inner circle of miniature society: the family. This last setting and especially its emphasis is an element not encountered earlier.

This message dedicated to maintaining the *status quo* did not target a specific group. Nonetheless, the ongoing warning against trying to exceed one’s status was obviously directed more toward the lower than toward the upper classes. The frequency of this admonition was obviously associated with the opportunities for social advancement that the burgeoning seventeenth-century cities provided.

The seventeenth-century burgher ideal was exclusive in that the element of ‘common folk’ was viewed more as an external threat to bourgeois society than as a part of it. Only in the late eighteenth century would a national civilization ideal arise that encompassed this group as well.

This eighteenth-century ideal is explored by Joost Kloek and Wijnand Mijnhardt (Kloek and Mijnhardt 2002). They believe the ideal emerged from the international ideology of Enlightenment, which held that mankind and society were creatable. This led to the internationally prevalent concept of a ubiquitous moral bourgeois universe theoretically open to everybody, and offered a democratic alternative to the elitist classical *civis* concept. Like the *civis* tradition, the new concept revolved around virtue. But this perception of virtue was based on the means available to a reasonable and sensitive person in the eighteenth century, irrespective of his state, and not on those of Roman patricians or their modern embodiment: the affluent Amsterdam entrepreneurs. The bond between burghers and the city, which had never been abandoned altogether, was permanently severed at this point, at least in terms of political and moral philosophy. Burghers were members of ‘the community’, a concept generally interpreted as a national community in practice. The term burgher acquired its own meaning in each country, depending on the national political and social constellation. In the Netherlands, the political embodiment of the burgher concept, in the sense of a political citizenship, was difficult to bring about, could be accomplished only with assistance from the French and then eroded rapidly, even after 1813. In the Dutch tradition, the practice of input through requests and of settlement and compromise does not appear to have been a breeding ground for revolutionary political alternatives. Moreover, as people grew interested in the new burgher ideal, they also focused more on the seventeenth century as an escape route from the imminent degeneration. This outlook did not encourage political radicalism either.

The inclusive moral citizenship, in which full recognition as a human being prevailed over class and means, was presented as a realistic prospect in the literature, especially in the literary genres that evolved outside the classicist tradition, such as novels, bourgeois drama and – somewhat later on but overwhelmingly at that point –

domestic lyrics. The 'domestic' characteristic symbolized the domestic setting of such literature. The iconic significance already known since the seventeenth century became far more meaningful here: the harmony of the family, where all members knew their place and responsibilities, symbolized society as a whole. This pedagogical approach surfaced in another type of assistance for new burghers: the popular-scientific and moralistic literature. In religious observance also, the shift in focus to joint experience as a family loosened the bond between the state and the public church. In the moral-bourgeois universe, what one believed specifically mattered less than that one believed in God.

For the first time, the citizenship ideal came to accommodate the uncultured 'folk' or the *'woeste gemeen'* (rugged common folk), as they were known at the time. The *Maatschappij tot Nut van het Algemeen* (Society for General Welfare) embodied this unprecedented expansion of horizons. In addition to providing instructive moral treatises, this society understood that elementary civilization required basic social provisions and adequate healthcare. Introduced during the revolutionary years around 1800, this programme is sure to have encouraged the conservative spirit of 'the Netherlands as one big family' that prevailed during the early decades of the nineteenth century: the Dutch model, after all, substantiated such a national sense of cohesion. In the course of the nineteenth century, however, the desire for art and culture to be understandable and broadly applicable made for discontent among artists and art connoisseurs.

Burgheresses and *Poortereses*

The traditional female equivalents of burghers and *poorters* were burgheresses and *poortereses*. Explicit references to them were usually incidental and passing and had only a legal connotation. In two periods, however, the references to burgheresses became more pronounced, especially in the final decades of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. Both were times of political turmoil, and in both instances the main question was to what extent previously excluded groups might be granted political responsibility. Were they

properly equipped in intellectual, cultural and moral respects? Myriam Everard and Mieke Aerts have traced the intermittent appearances of burgheresses and have demonstrated that the female term was far from meaningless: its use reflected the active role of women in public debate (Everard and Aerts 2002).

We have observed how during the eighteenth century the ideal burgher of the undefined 'community' or *societas civilis* evolved into the concrete citizen of the 'homeland'. In this new conception, which mobilized the entire population, burgheresses had a place of their own as well. The eighteenth-century burgher ideal, however, was based on cultural and moral considerations, rather than on political ones. The burgheress was depicted as pivotal in Dutch family contexts. The Batavian revolution, however, converted all cultural ideology into politics, leading not only to male *homines novi* but also to burgheresses entering public life in unprecedented numbers that were not to recur for over a century and a half. In addition to their supporting roles in providing care and ornamentation, women banded together in clubs and wrote articles for the political press. In speeches and articles their presence was assumed self-evident in the address 'Burghers and Burgheresses'. This terminology adopted from revolutionary France primarily symbolized class equality, although the context of the political connotation that the burgher concept and the entire lexicon derived from the term had acquired included a claim to political equality as well. This claim was stated explicitly at gatherings and in articles and extended beyond the demand for the female voice to resound at national assemblies to include an unconditional political say for burgheresses.

Like many Batavian-revolutionary phenomena, this radical, self-confident and relatively massive onset of burgheresses was both spectacular and short-lived. The upheaval in 1798 heralded a restoration and the end of the period in which burgheresses seemed to be regarded as the political equals of burghers. The term burgheress again was limited to political-legal contexts and resurfaced only in the 1880s, when some started to view women's input in society as a political issue. By then, the public manifestation of the Batavian women appeared to have lapsed into oblivion. The reintroduction of the burgheress in the Netherlands resulted not from the Dutch revolution but from the French Revolution via its heir the Commune.

Still, the term burgheress, like the term burgher, was never used strategically as a form of address and self-designation among leftists in general. One of the main reasons was the opposition in Marxist doctrine between the terms bourgeois and proletarian. The term burgheress appears to have been particularly controversial because of a leftist tribal dispute. The embrace of parliamentary socialism by the SDAP and the concurrent abandonment of revolutionary ideas and parlance obliterated it from the political debate.

Meanwhile, the term was reincarnated within the rapidly growing women's movement. 'Burgheress' was never used here as a form of address or self-designation, undoubtedly because the term was frequently associated with the social middle class – where married women retained the status of '*juffrouw*' (meaning 'Miss'). Like their predecessors in 1795, the members of the women's movement demanded legal equality for women, albeit within the established order. Moreover, this legal equality had now crystallized into a demand for equality before the law, as fully recognized citizenesses. Unlike in 1795, the main issue here was citizenship in political-legal terms, a concentration motivated by the struggle for suffrage. As is known, this struggle concerned universal suffrage, i.e. exclusively for men. Once women obtained suffrage as well in 1919, the term burgheress disappeared again, this time for good. The term did not recur in the subsequent equalization debates and was not reactivated with the rise of feminism either. In any case, anything remotely associated with bourgeois had become tainted at that point. One sign of this attitude – and a small piece of conceptual history *ex negativo* – is that feminist campaigns eliminated the '*juffrouw*' form of address and designation from Dutch.

The 'burgheress' was the female counterpart of the burgher of the state. The term was therefore prevalent mainly during the two periods that the political rights associated with this citizenship were claimed by and for broader segments of the population. After the French Revolution, the term burgher remained a core concept in the debates about political requirements and constitutional structure. Its traditional social and cultural connotations also became more defined in this time period. After 1800 'burgher' became an ambiguous concept, as its civil conception clashed with its political one. Political citizenship was fundamentally inclusive. Civil citizenship involved

social, economic and cultural exclusivity. This ambiguity had not been totally absent in the past; we have observed how even during the *ancien régime*, in the major cities the group with the legal status of burghers was only a minority of the urban community as a whole. In the nineteenth century, however, universally applicable civil rights and obligations became far more invasive on the one hand, while on the other hand the group of political representatives of the people was far smaller and more restrictive than the former bourgeoisie had been. Paradoxically, the circumscription of this group was consistently formulated in terms of social, economic and cultural exclusivity. In a sense, therefore, burghers were played off against each other. The contribution from Ido de Haan addresses this field of tension and the course of events there.

Under the Constitution of 1798, the supreme authority rested with the community of all citizens. Citizenship thus acquired a political definition: burghers [or citizens] had political rights that residents did not. This political connotation, however, was watered down in the subsequent constitutions. The term '*Burger Repraesentanten*' disappeared, and burghers became more or less synonymous with subjects. One fundamental change was that these burghers were burghers of the *state* and were expected above all to be imbued with love for their homeland. Citizenship became less locally based, although it continued to figure prominently in many fields, including politics.

The new, national base changed the traditional connotations of the burgher concept. The relationship between the state and bourgeois society became far more abstract and diffuse than the one between the city and the bourgeoisie had been. The previous social, economic and cultural connotations turned into the essence of the burgher concept, which became far more distinctive than ever before as a result. Precisely because the borders were undefined, the fear of crossing them – especially downward – became virtually an obsession. This unprecedented class consciousness also led to concern about the languishing state of the industrious middle class; after all, this group was the buffer between the upper bourgeoisie and the fellow citizens not regarded as burghers.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, this divergence between the political and the social-economic interpretations of the burgher

gave rise to the class state. Around the middle of the century, when political life awakened, the concept once again became politicised. The economic significance attributed to the middle class was an important factor. Largely responsible for the vigour of the nation, the middle class – in a national recurrence of the age-old metaphor from the urban context – formed the core or backbone of the nation. This idea was also the foundation for the constitution of 1848, where social-economic and cultural citizenship legitimised fully enfranchised citizenship with suffrage, although the census remained a permanently controversial criterion. The equalization backfired when growing appreciation of the social importance of the working class carried over into politics around 1870. By contrast, the virtues previously ascribed to the burgher fell out of favour. At the same time, the confessional groups explained that their allegiance to a purely social conception of citizenship could only be conditional. Thus, the burgher concept progressively acquired negative social-economic and cultural connotations, while the labour movement countered with its dissident label of ‘proletariat’, and the confessional groups became known as ‘small fry’. In the debates at the end of the nineteenth century, moreover, the nation or the people was depicted as the symbol of the political will, rather than the community of burghers.

The issue of which members of the nation might be considered sufficiently competent, responsible and loyal was resolved only in 1913 for the men and in 1920 for all adult Dutch citizens: paradoxically, this issue was too complex to accommodate anything but the simplest settlement. This permanently eliminated the political-judicial legitimacy of the social and cultural criteria for citizenship.

Citizens of the State and Cultural Burghers

The emphasis on the social and cultural connotations of the burgher concept in the nineteenth century has led this era to be characterized as the bourgeois century *par excellence*, as the works of art and especially the paintings produced during that period have been as well. One popular historical-materialist explanation directly

associated the one with the other: the upper cultural echelons represented the rise of the bourgeoisie manifested by the lower echelons during this period. Van Uiterter demonstrates that the course of events was less programmed (Van Uiterter 2002). Various questions arise: since when and on what grounds were paintings labelled as bourgeois, and how was this art appreciated? Can the creators on the one hand and the buyers on the other hand be regarded as bourgeois according to the social meaning of the term? And how did they relate to one another?

The bourgeois label became associated with paintings early on, and its meaning conformed entirely to the historical-national perceptions of the bourgeoisie that prevailed in the eighteenth century. The designation was used for paintings that represented the tradition of the internationally respected seventeenth-century past and was thus considered indicative of the unique national Dutch style. In practice, this tradition was reduced to what has always been known as Dutch realism: portraits, genre items and non-idealized landscape paintings. Throughout much of the nineteenth century, this bourgeois art was greatly appreciated both within and outside the Netherlands. Market demand for such art improved relations between artists and the public. Around 1830, artists in other countries started to resist the smooth, polished style of bourgeois art; they also placed themselves outside the social order. In the Netherlands artists could afford neither artistic nor social estrangement from their public. Only around 1860 the first internal resistance was heard to the appealing painting style featuring realistic depictions, and it would take two more decades before overt disapproval of them as bourgeois was shown. At that point artists in the Netherlands started to overtly embrace an anti-bourgeois lifestyle. Previously an indicator of quality and infused with positive national sentiments, 'bourgeois' became an intensely negative designation associated with inanimate stylistic perfection and a risk-free routine in choice of subject. This reversal of meaning was possible only once a self-designated vanguard of the public adopted this view. Around 1880 a rift emerged in the originally homogeneous public taste. An art-loving vanguard then invoked a self-proclaimed artistic sense and discredited those with more traditional tastes as bourgeois. Citizens of the state and cultural

burghers may be regarded as twin sons of the Enlightenment. The moment the first one came of age, however, the second was harshly discarded.

Burghers as the Core of Society

The rising ambivalence regarding the burgher concept in the nineteenth century is explored in detail by Remieg Aerts, whose research extends into the 1960s, when the qualification ‘burgher’ or ‘bourgeois’ was stripped of its last shred of positive self-recognition. Like the political discourse reviewed by Ido de Haan (De Haan 2002), the moral-cultural discourse considered by Aerts does not follow a clear linear progression (Aerts 2002). Early in the nineteenth century, art labelled as bourgeois was sometimes met with dissatisfaction, although it was championed in *De Gids*; at the time of the Tachtigers, artists were depicted as antipodes to burghers, although they were later rehabilitated by the supporters of community art. In the nineteenth century the bourgeois lifestyle acquired unprecedented negative overtones, notwithstanding the ongoing appreciation for its attributes such as thrift, self-restraint and sense of responsibility. After all these values made for social cohesion. In the nineteenth century the burgher concept elicited greater tension than ever, while remaining indispensable nonetheless.

This tension had in fact been rooted in the concept for centuries. We have observed how even in the Middle Ages the term burgher signified two different (but in practice rarely distinct) groups as the equivalent of a city resident. On the one hand, it could concern the political and social upper crust, while on the other hand it referred to the class of manual craftsmen and tradesmen. In the expanding cities of the Republic this ambivalence also surfaced in the practice of legal citizenship. The upper crust enjoyed civil rights *qualitate qua*, but many people from the lower social echelons acquired them as well. Thus, burghers were not a homogeneous group but did not comprise two clearly distinct categories either.

One other practice rendered the burgher concept diffuse at an early stage. When the proliferation of humanism led the political-

philosophical observations about the *civis* to be revisited, they were idealized by the upper crust as a freedom of spirit to be achieved through classical cultural education. This perception can hardly be construed as anything other than elitist. No mention was made of the cultural accoutrements of the lower bourgeois echelons, even though these humble burghers had been ascribed virtues such as diligence, sobriety, sincerity and loyalty since the Middle Ages. Very early on (and not only in the nineteenth century, as Aerts's spokesman Johannes Kneppelhout believed), these values led burghers to be viewed as the core of society. The admonition against succumbing to profligacy and wastefulness is a recurrent theme in observations about the patrician burghers. In the context of the burgher perceptions in the Netherlands, the humble, hardworking guildsman was considered to be the inevitable setoff: he did not repudiate his citizenship. The social and cultural ambivalence of the burgher concept was therefore deeply ingrained from the outset in both the practice of and the ideas about citizenship in the Netherlands. Only in the nineteenth century did the subject become truly controversial, for various reasons. In politics problems arose when complete fulfilment of citizenship became contingent upon social-cultural criteria. In social life the hierarchy was refined and defined more rigidly in an effort to stipulate the burgher and bourgeoisie concepts more specifically. In culture and art – as Van Uiter already noted with respect to painting – artists and art lovers started to view the Enlightenment ideal of a single cultural universe for the entire society as isolation in a stuffy cellar. Throughout this process, critics of bourgeois bigotry and cowardice did respect the cultural demeanour of these limited citizens under certain conditions. Moreover, the bourgeois national heritage elicited general admiration.

The chameleonic burgher concept of the nineteenth century reveals overwhelmingly what has in fact applied throughout its history: there was no single burgher concept, at least not one that assigned a specific meaning to the word. The 'burgher' concept has remained indispensable in political, legal, sociological and historical reflections about society and its individual members and in ideas about the lifestyle and the artistic tastes of a middle class that defies precise circumscription as well. The value of the concept depends on the subject it concerns, as well as on the position of the observer, his

self-image and his impression of his public. The vagueness of the term does not appear to have inhibited its usage. The contrary seems to be the case. Perhaps flexibility would be more accurate than vagueness. Over an extended period of time and in vastly differing communication settings, people appear to have used the term without fear of being misunderstood. Only in the second half of the nineteenth century did the additional stipulations suggest that the term had lost its versatility. In the 1960s the negative connotations became dominant, not coincidentally together with a levelling of the class society.

At the end of his article, Aerts observes that the overall depreciation of everything that is or is supposed to be bourgeois has bypassed the political burgher concept. This statement raises question as to whether the political-legal meaning of the term will survive. In conclusion, Tom Eijsbouts contemplates the future. He observes that also the political burgher concept has lost many of its connotations traditionally taken for granted. On the one hand, a massive influx of permanently settled 'strangers' has watered down the autochthonous connotation that national citizenship always had. On the other hand, European integration, both through political and legal regulations and through the discontinuation of typical national markers – border control, national currencies – especially with regard to legislation, waters down the sense of pertaining to the nation as a political-cultural unit. The burgher concept, the form, has lost most of its traditional substance.

This does not preclude, emphasizes Eijsbouts, the emergence of new forms of citizenship. In the second half of the twentieth century, for example, some types of rebellion against the established bourgeoisie (which were reminiscent of both the shrewd adventurers of the Middle Ages and of the nineteenth-century Bohemians) often coincided with claims to moral purity and a sense of social responsibility that might easily be labelled as modern versions of the eighteenth-century burgher ideal (Eijsbouts 2002). Another form of modern citizenship consists of the neo-republican burgher, who does not propagate civil disobedience but has no respect for the values of the established order either. He regards consensus and morality as dynamic units that arise from discussion and conflict. His role as a burgher consists of being a permanent political agitator.

Another revival of civic awareness is the demand for acculturation programmes for immigrants, which implicitly link citizenship with rights and obligations and suggest that an essential feature of the early-modern burgher concept is being resurrected. This trend does not offer prospective challenges at this time, unlike the third substantive innovation in the citizenship concept: that of European citizenship.

In the text of the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, the European Union has set forth a citizenship of its own. Following the transition from citizen of the city to citizen of the state, the next step is citizen of the federation. But the transition from city to state citizen was prepared by a civic ideology that justified a national sense of cohesion. In addition to its legal effectuation, it was enforced in public perception by the establishment of the unitary state. No 'Union-civic' ideology applies, however, and the transfer of political authority is a difficult course. The European citizen concept rings hollow at this time, and its proclamation is only symbolic at the moment. Moreover, the Union approach is cautious. The new European citizen is not defined autonomously, but has a status that is dependent on national citizenship. That is, in the words of the Maastricht Treaty (Article 17(1)), Union citizenship is conferred on "every person holding the nationality of a Member State." There is nothing here, then, that can compete with, or override, the status of citizen of the nation state (Vink 2003). Indeed, it may be argued that this European addition makes national citizenship even stronger and more attractive. But this symbolic value is impossible to ignore. A new, supranational 'homeland' is undeniably emerging in legislation and in tangible symbols (e.g. the introduction of the euro), while typical national regulations and symbols are disappearing. One of the consequences is that European citizens will increasingly become subject to rules and rights that differ from those applicable to 'outsiders'. This also means that, in the European Union area at least, there are now three categories of persons in any given member country. First, there are the country's own national citizens, who enjoy all of the rights normally conferred on citizenship, including the right to vote in national elections. Second, there are the citizens of other EU member states who are resident in that country, and who enjoy all the rights of EU citizens and who are therefore almost identical in citizenship

terms to the national citizens. They usually don't have the right to vote in national elections, however, and hence enjoy little or no control over the national government or its policies. That is a privilege reserved to national citizens only. Finally, there are the so-called 'third-country' citizens – citizens or nationals of countries outside the European area, and who enjoy only very limited rights. These are the real outsiders. One of the major effects of European citizenship has therefore been that it reduces the difference between national citizenship and European citizenship, while at the same time it creates a substantial difference between European citizenship and third-country citizenship. Europe has shifted the citizenship boundaries.

The burgher concept of the past millennium comprised a complex of geographic and topographical, political, legal, social and moral components. It remains to be seen whether and at what pace the current changes will lead to a remotely similar conception of European citizenship. However, the concept is unlikely to disappear altogether. The interpretations of all five stated components have changed drastically over the course of history, but the need for the concept has persisted. The burgher concept proved to be as flexible as it was indispensable as a frame of reference in a series of discourses about relations between individuals within a society and between an individual and that society as a whole. This flexibility does not appear to be on the verge of disappearing. Nor does such a frame of reference seem likely to become superfluous.

Notes

- 1 This article is based on the Introduction to the Dutch volume on the concept of citizenship which appeared in 2002: see Kloek and Tilmans (2002). In a shorter version it was presented at the Annual Conference of the History of Social and Political Concepts Group, held in Bilbao, July 2003. The author is grateful to copanellists Manuel Perez Ledesma, Pim den Boer, Raymonde Monnier and Henrik Stenius for their useful comments.
- 2 Such associations may of course be unrelated to the actual etymology. Burgher comes from *burch/borch*, meaning a fortified place or city, while *poorter* is derived from *portus*, meaning harbour.

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