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Registration and Recognition

Documenting the Person in World History

Establishing and Registering Identity in the Dutch Republic¹

HENK LOUIJESTEIJN AND MARCO H. D. VAN LEEUWEN

Introduction

IN 1764 A STRANGER CHOSE TO SETTLE in the small Dutch town of Brouwershaven in the province of Zeeland. Upon his arrival on 24 February 1764, he sought out, without making himself known, the eldest minister of the local Dutch Reformed church, claiming to represent a godly physician who wished to settle in a 'quiet place, such as this' and desired some information. The minister asked him where the mysterious physician had obtained his diploma, whether he was of the Reformed faith, and whether he was a confirmed member of that church. The stranger replied that the physician had studied in Duisburg, where he had obtained his diploma, and was indeed a member of the Reformed church. The minister referred him to the town secretary. There, the stranger had to undergo much the same procedure. He told the secretary that the physician lived in Rheinberg and wished to settle in Brouwershaven. The secretary first enquired whether the physician was of the Reformed faith. Having been satisfied in this regard, he enquired as to why a physician would want to settle in Brouwershaven, which had little opportunity for a medical practice. The stranger replied that the physician was looking for a place to worship freely, which, as a Protestant, he could not do in Catholic Rheinberg. The secretary then mentioned a further obstacle, emphasizing that Brouwershaven was already well served by two excellent surgeons. The stranger replied that the physician would establish a pharmacy, and that, anyway, he was already well endowed with material goods and not in need of a large practice.

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The secretary then referred him to the burgomaster, while inviting him to return to his house in the evening.

That evening, the stranger was subjected to yet another round of questioning, this time by the secretary and the minister jointly. Only then did the stranger reveal that he himself was the physician, going by the name of Johannes Cato Kamerling. The secretary then took closer note of his appearance: on the face of it, Kamerling did indeed seem to be both religious and wealthy. The two town dignitaries enquired further about the doctor's personal background, and every question was met with a convincing response.

Well satisfied with their evening conversation, the secretary set in motion the next step in the process of admitting Kamerling as a burgher of Brouwershaven: he was accepted, provided he submitted his diploma and attestation of good conduct and bought citizenship. Accordingly, Kamerling travelled back to Rheinberg to obtain an attestation from the Reformed church, which he submitted on his return to the minister, complete with the seal of the consistory of Rheinberg. According to Kamerling, it also served as an attestation from Rheinberg's civic authorities, and the Brouwershaven council accepted his claim without requiring a separate civic attestation. Much to its satisfaction, Kamerling also submitted to the town council his university diploma, with two barely recognizable seals attached to it from the university and the city of Duisburg. Accordingly, Johannes Cato Kamerling was admitted in Brouwershaven as burgher and physician (Viergever 1766, 1: 8–24, 28–29, 40–49).

Within a few months, Kamerling proposed to the burgomaster's daughter. Her father was pleased with the prospective match, but required more evidence that Kamerling was who he claimed to be. Given that engagements in the Dutch Republic often lasted several years, the burgomaster might well be excused for imposing this delay. Kamerling obtained further proof of his identity in the form of a declaration from the secretary of Rheinberg concerning his family, and a copy of the will of his wealthy cousin, from whom he stood to inherit a considerable sum. The secretary, the minister, and the burgomaster were suitably impressed, and Kamerling and his bride were duly wed on 31 July 1764 – less than six months after he had arrived in Brouwershaven (Viergever 1766, 1: 78, 103–118, 154; Haks 1982, 111).

This case illustrates the ways in which an early modern Dutchman could establish whether a stranger whom he encountered was indeed the person whom he claimed to be. It shows that in the initial contact, the appearance and behaviour of the stranger were considered important, and he would be expected to provide certain documents – an attestation of good conduct from the church council and magistrate of his place of origin, and, in this case, also a university degree. For good measure, the newcomer was questioned also by the town's senior minister and secretary during an ostensibly social occasion whose purpose was to allow them to become better acquainted with him. On presentation of the required documents the newcomer was

accepted as a new burgher, though being accepted as a member, by marriage, of the town's elite required additional evidence. From this particular case involving a small town, it also emerges that church officials and the magistrate cooperated in obtaining the required evidence, which was supplied by their counterparts from the applicant's place of origin. This 'system' of establishing identity was operational throughout the Dutch Republic. It was especially important as the Republic was a country of immigration for much of its existence.

Hundreds of thousands of migrants settled permanently in the Netherlands, while more or less equal numbers sojourned in the Republic on their way to other destinations, and still other migrants worked as seasonal labourers in the herring fishery, shipping, peat digging, infrastructural projects such as land reclamation, canal construction, urban expansion, haymaking, harvesting, and the processing of commercial crops. In terms of numbers, the proportion of migrants in the coastal areas of the Netherlands was around half the entire male working population (J. Lucassen 1994, 181). Not all migrants stayed and worked throughout the year, but in terms of the number of years worked the proportion of migrants in the economy was just 10 per cent of the Republic's population as a whole, while in the province of Holland it was twice that (de Vries and van der Woude 1997, 72–73). Though the Republic was a country of immigration, internal migration was also an important feature. The economic development of the Netherlands had created a significant urban proletariat early on, and, as a consequence of developments in the agrarian sector, a growing number of impoverished smallholders emerged determined to seek their fortunes in the cities (Prak 1998).

In an era in which the difference between migrants and vagrants was often difficult to discern, and even smart dress on a stranger often proved to be a ruse – especially in the Dutch Republic where there were no sumptuary laws – universal distrust was the common fate of all who happened to come to a community where they were unknown and unconnected. In the Dutch Republic there existed a whole set of ways to establish an individual's identity, and a rudimentary 'system' of identity registration, essentially established at the local levels of town and parish. In this chapter, this rudimentary 'system' will be discussed, chiefly on the basis of secondary sources.

Identity registration has not been a prime concern of Dutch historians,² so this chapter may be regarded as providing a first description of the ways in which the Dutch established an individual's identity. Given the exploratory nature of our contribution, we abstain from placing the Dutch case in an international context, trusting that the other contributions to this volume will supply some of that context. The ways in which the early modern Dutch established and registered identity were many and diverse, as we will see, and one can confidently assume that some less

² Studies such as those by Groebner (2004) and Higgs (2004) do not exist for the Netherlands.

familiar ways of identification have been missed here, while others can be mentioned only in passing. Furthermore, partly by accident and partly by design, it is the methods used to establish identity in Amsterdam that will feature prominently in this chapter. That city has been better studied than other cities in the Dutch Republic, and it is blessed with an interesting source for the history of identity registration, the *Amsterdamsche Secretary*, a register and 'example book' containing all sorts of types of certificate drawn up by the secretaries of the city and its magistrates.³

Because of its size and importance it may safely be assumed that no other town in the Dutch Republic had a bureaucracy that was so well developed. Taking Amsterdam as the primary focus of this chapter, but not ignoring the rest of the Republic, we hope to be able to review the most important ways in which ordinary Dutch citizens would most likely be required to identify themselves at some stage of their life.

Identity registration by the church: baptisms, burials and marriages

At the Council of Trent, which ended in 1563, the Catholic church resolved that henceforth parish priests were to keep records of baptisms and marriages. The parish priest was required to perform every marriage ceremony in the presence of two or more witnesses, in order to end the practice of clandestine marriages. Baptisms also had to be registered, with the date of the baptism, the names of the parents, and the names of the godparents being recorded. The Council of Trent remained silent about burials, but in any case its reforms came too late to be implemented in the northern Netherlands, which was by then being ripped apart by the wars of religion which eventually led to the emergence of the Dutch Republic. Only in royalist and Catholic Amsterdam were baptisms registered from as early as 1564, and marriages from 1565 – before the city grudgingly joined the Revolt in 1578 (Hagoort 2010, 2).⁴ In general, however, baptism registers were not introduced until the 1570s and 1580s, with the Reformation. Baptism registration was usually introduced by the Dutch Reformed church, which in 1574 made it a rule that every congregation should keep registers of baptisms, confirmations, marriages, and burials (Hagoort 2010, 1).⁵ Accordingly, the Dutch Reformed church took over the duty of registering baptisms,

³ It can occasionally be found in public collections such as the Amsterdam City Archives (SAA), and the Special Collections of the Netherlands Economic History Archives (NEHA), housed at the International Institute of Social History. We have consulted the latter copy.

⁴ Gouda's parish church of Sint Jan might have registered baptisms and marriages prior to the Reformation, but none of those records have survived (Abels *et al.* 2002, 43).

⁵ Baptism was not actually an indispensable sacrament in the eyes of the Dutch Reformed Church.

marriages and burials from the Catholic church after the Reformation and regarded it as a general Christian service provided not just to the Dutch Reformed but to all Christians. Not surprisingly, then, a great number of baptized children were not actually of Dutch Reformed parentage. Gradually, however, other denominations started to baptize their children themselves, and to keep separate registers of those baptisms. This development can be traced in Amsterdam, Dordrecht and The Hague for example (Frijhoff *et al.* 1998, 277; 2004, 396; Wijzenbeek 2005, 208).⁶

Baptismal registers usually contained the names of the child, the parents, and the witnesses, and the date of the baptism. The date of birth was rarely noted, as baptisms usually followed soon after birth. The sextons, who kept the register, did not always follow the prescriptions laid down by the church: sometimes they omitted the names of the mother and the witnesses. In Amsterdam it was not until 1611 that the church council decided to check the registers to see whether they were being kept properly, an exercise repeated in 1622, and later on as well. In 1695 Amsterdam's Walloon church started registering dates of birth also. As a rule, Catholics always baptized their children the day they were born, making a note in the register when that was not the case (Hagoort 2010, 2).

The magistrate encouraged non-Reformed churches to keep registers of births or baptisms. In the case of the Amsterdam Mennonites, the absence of a register of newborns led to problems because the magistrates required a baptism certificate from those who wanted to become burghers, as those certificates could be used to prove the identity of the father. From 1714 onwards the Mennonites were required to keep registers of births; the Sephardic Jews and the Ashkenazi Jews followed later, in 1735 and 1739 respectively.⁷

A development similar to that in Amsterdam and Dordrecht took place elsewhere in the Dutch Republic. In Nijmegen too, from 1591 onwards everyone was in principle obliged to have their children baptized in the Dutch Reformed church. The church baptism registers have been preserved from 1608 onwards. Eventually there, too, dissenters resolved to draw up their own registers: the Walloon baptism register first came into effect in 1644, and the Lutheran in 1674; the Catholic baptism registers must be regarded as being complete from 1672 onwards. In Utrecht Mennonites kept registers from 1653, and Lutherans from 1670 (Bots and Kuys 2005, 305; Rommes 1998, 57).

It seems that the magistracy increasingly grew to appreciate the importance of well-kept baptism registers. In Amsterdam it required churches not only to keep registers, but, from 1785 onwards, also to submit a copy to the town hall every six months. From then on until the Napoleonic registration law of 1811, every six months

⁶ For a complete overview of surviving baptism, marriage, and burial registers in the Netherlands see Wijnaendts van Resandt and Booma (1998).

⁷ Jews also kept circumcision registers; those were not of interest to magistrates, however, and were kept by the mohels themselves (Hagoort 2010, 2, 6).

the sextons and other church dignitaries collected the registers from the town hall to have them updated, returning them afterwards. From 1792 onwards the States of Holland required the exact date and place of birth to be recorded as well. The council of Amsterdam's Dutch Reformed church decided in 1807 to add the gender of the newborn. Gradually, the registers thus gave more and more information, and the magistrate imposed increasingly detailed requirements in relation to the registration of births and baptisms. That might have reflected the fact that extracts from the registers were regularly required, as evidence, for example, of the place where one was born, or where one's parents were born (Hagoort 2010, 2).⁸

A similar form of registration, but one originally characteristic only of the Dutch Reformed church, concerned confirmed members of the church. For Calvinists, only those who had been confirmed could take part in the Lord's Supper or apply for church poor relief. All congregations had to keep these confirmation registers. Those for Utrecht, for example, have been preserved from as early as 1579. All newcomers who had been a member of a Dutch Reformed church elsewhere were required to supply an attestation from their home congregation, irrespective of whether they were settling in Utrecht permanently or living there temporarily. The same applied to other Protestant churches, though sometimes not until much later. Utrecht's Lutheran church, for example, did not adopt the habit of requesting attestations from immigrants until the eighteenth century (Rommes 1998, 56). Ordinarily those attestations would be accepted only from trusted and known congregations, but there were exceptions: from 1615 onwards the council of Nijmegen's Dutch Reformed church accepted new members who had fled from the wars in Germany on the basis of attestations of doubtful origin, often wondering about the 'Christian zeal' of those refugees (Schimmel 1966, 23). The confirmation registers served to inform church officials about whether someone was a member, and entitled to receive an attestation if he or she were to move elsewhere. The attestation itself usually named the migrant in question, certified that he or she was a church member, and of good conduct, and was signed by a minister of the elders of the original congregation. Without an attestation, one could not expect to partake fully in the religious life of one's new congregation.

Registration of burials was another form of church registration which the magistracy concerned itself with, but only to a limited extent. Few regulations were drawn up. Sextons of every church, or, in Amsterdam at least, gravediggers appointed by the magistrate, maintained registers of those who were buried in their churches or graveyards, and they kept separate registers of those who owned a grave in the church. Those records served primarily a financial purpose: burials were a source of income for church and magistrate (Frijhoff *et al.* 2004, 396).⁹

⁸ Unfortunately, because of the lack of research we know little about the issuing of these extracts, and the purposes they served.

⁹ Later on, the sexton and gravedigger were often the same person (Hagoort 2010, 5).

The magistracy seems to have taken an interest in the registration of burials only when it was of direct concern, such as when a tax on burials was imposed in the province of Holland on 26 October 1695. In Amsterdam, this tax was supposed to be collected by the gravediggers, but already by 3 December 1695 it was decided that the town secretary would collect the tax; from then on he kept a tax register which in fact served as a burial register (Hagoort 2010, 5). Other cities seem to have followed Amsterdam's innovation: in Gouda, for example, from 1697 onwards all burials were registered in the burial tax register. Also in Gouda, from 1730 onwards deaths of children at birth had to be reported by the midwives to the burgomasters as part of an effort to exercise greater control over the midwives (Abels *et al.* 2002, 298, 301). Apart for taxation purposes, registering deaths was important in other ways, as will be seen below. On remarrying, for example, widows and widowers were required to provide evidence of the death of their previous spouse, and the sextons of Amsterdam were required to report to the orphan masters the deaths of the parents of any underage children.

The only form of population registration the magistrate supervised closely was marriage registration. Marriage was important to the magistrate given its implications for property transfer: it was essential that marriages be universally recognized, so that no one could doubt the legitimacy of the couple's offspring and their entitlement to inherit property held by their parents. Registration of marriages was necessary to prevent clandestine marriages, bigamous marriages, and marriages between individuals who were too closely related – all events which were likely to lead to conflict and disputed inheritances. The province of Holland introduced a uniform marriage law on 1 April 1580 which gave the option to marry before a magistrate or before a minister of the Dutch Reformed church. For three consecutive weeks banns were read out at the town hall or in church, allowing an opportunity for any impediment to the marriage to be made known. This measure was intended to end the practice of clandestine marriage. Minors wishing to marry had to show written proof of consent from their parents. If, in the case of sailors or soldiers, parental consent could not be obtained due to distance, the consent of the captain or an officer would suffice.

A number of cities had their own marriage regulations. For example, in Amsterdam until 1604 it was also possible to marry before a notary (Haks 1982, 114–115; van der Heijden 1998, 45–46, 50–53, 68). As a direct consequence of the Reformation, in 1578 Amsterdam's magistracy appointed a committee for matrimonial affairs to register non-Dutch Reformed marriages. Every couple had to appear with their parents or guardians to answer questions about their age, whether their parents had consented to the marriage, whether they were related in any way, and at what address they lived. After their wedding date had been announced on three consecutive Sundays, Dutch Reformed couples married in church, while dissenters could marry before a notary or, from 1604 onwards, in the presence of two aldermen. Ordinarily their names, places of birth, and those of

their witnesses were noted. Exceptionally, it was customary in Amsterdam to note the age, as well as, until about 1715, the occupation of the bridegroom, and after 1755 the religion of the betrothed (Frijhoff *et al.* 2004, 292, 396). After the wedding, the secretaries could issue a testimony confirming that a couple had indeed been married in the jurisdiction of Amsterdam (N.N. 1726, 314–316). From 1581 onwards, the committee for matrimonial affairs kept two betrothal registers, one for the church, and one for the marriages at the town hall before the aldermen (if one of the partners was Dutch Reformed, the intended marriage would be listed in both registers).¹⁰

In Amsterdam, church sextons were also clerks serving the committee for matrimonial affairs, and they kept both church and town hall registers. Prospective marriage partners were obliged to marry within a month of the banns having been read out for the third and final time. Committee members checked whether the couple actually did so. In Rotterdam the Dutch Reformed church kept a marriage register from 1573 onwards. Three years later the magistracy resolved that all couples wishing to marry should appear first before a magistrate. It thus also became possible to marry before the aldermen instead of in church. In Gouda, it was possible to marry before a magistrate from as early as 1581, when the civil marriage register took effect (Abels *et al.* 2002, 298–299; Hagoort 2010, 4).

Though the magistracy had great influence in determining how marriages were concluded and registered, the Dutch Reformed church occasionally exercised additional control. Thus, from 1574 onwards, it required widows and widowers to prove that their first spouse had died (van der Heijden 1998, 72, 75).¹¹ The church also tried to influence the marriage policy of the magistracy. In Nijmegen in 1592 magistrates made it possible for couples to opt to be married before them. Hitherto, some of the city's Catholic inhabitants had left the city rather than be married before a minister of the Dutch Reformed church. The Calvinist church council urged magistrates not to marry couples whose banns had not been announced on three consecutive weekends, and also urged that those from outside the city be required to submit attestations certifying they were not engaged to someone else. It also requested magistrates to ensure that those whose banns had been announced did actually marry; apparently, many couples did not (Schimmel 1966, 10–11).

It was only at the end of the seventeenth century that the magistracy, at least in the province of Holland, started systematically to register all marriages for tax purposes. From then on a tax register at the Amsterdam town hall served as a duplicate marriage register. This development also took place in other cities

¹⁰ From 1578 to 1636 a separate register was kept in which the betrothals of couples where one of the couple lived outside Amsterdam were recorded. The oldest register also noted how long the couple had lived in Amsterdam. If one of the prospective spouses had been living in Amsterdam for less than three years, the banns also had to be announced in their place of origin (Hagoort 2010, 3).

¹¹ Unfortunately, nothing is said of the sort of evidence they had to present.

(Hagoort 2010, 5).¹² The magistrate also registered cases when marriages broke up. In Gouda, separations – forty-two in the seventeenth century and 243 in the eighteenth century – were registered in the *publicatieboeken* ('publication books'). In Amsterdam, separations were listed in the *huwelijkskrakeelregisters* (or 'matrimonial disputes registers') (Abels *et al.* 2002, 300).¹³

It appears that usually magistrates intervened in the registration of births, marriages and deaths only for the purpose of safeguarding property (marriage) or the payment of taxation (marriage, burial). It also seems that during the course of the eighteenth century their interest increased. The magistracy gradually intervened more and more in the actual registration, and either persuaded or ordered all churches to follow the example of the Dutch Reformed church. It thus began to encroach on terrain it had originally been content to leave to the churches. This development seemed to foreshadow the events of 1811, when the registration of births, marriages and deaths became a matter for the state alone.¹⁴

Identity registration by the magistrate: citizenship registers

In the early years of the Dutch Republic, local magistrates had generally not been particularly interested in keeping records of changes in population, one reason being that the system of taxation largely comprised levies on goods rather than on the income or wealth of individuals. Magistrates therefore seldom expressed an interest in the number of inhabitants. Population censuses were extremely rare and almost always for taxation purposes; therefore, they often extended only to those who had something to contribute and ignored those who did not. Moreover, such censuses were never national: usually local, occasionally provincial, and typically a one-time occurrence only.¹⁵ The only major census the province of Holland undertook dates from 1622, when every inhabitant of Holland had to pay one guilder towards the war effort, and it was never repeated. This reluctance may have emanated from a political concern and a religious one. Politically, the census of

¹² In Gouda, for example, after 1696 all marriages were additionally registered in the marriage tax register (Abels *et al.* 2002, 298–299), while in Dordrecht marriage registration had been transferred from the church to the city government as early as 1691 (Frijhoff *et al.* 1998, 69).

¹³ The Amsterdam registers have been preserved for the period 1592 to 1810 (Hagoort 2010, 14).

¹⁴ For some time after 1811 the new administration did not function fully, and did not cover all births, as is shown from comparisons between the new civil registers and the church registers – which of course are still kept even today (Kok 1991, 34–36).

¹⁵ They could also be very specific in nature: thus in 1749 the sheriff of Wanneperveen drew up a register of the migrant peat-cutters working temporarily in his jurisdiction, listing, among other things, their names, the names of their employers, and their place and province of origin. This register too was related to several taxation-related surveys in that year. Such registers of migrant labourers were very rare however. (Personal communication from Piet Lourens and Jan Lucassen.)

1622 served as a highly evident statement of the relative importance of the individual cities of Holland, and subsequent generations of Holland's regents preferred to maintain the division of influence manifested in that census – with cities such as Dordrecht and Haarlem retaining a considerable influence even though Rotterdam became larger and Leiden wealthier. The Republic's local magistrates were thus reluctant to conduct population censuses, so that no one would know how many people actually lived in their jurisdictions (Frijhoff *et al.* 1998, 76). Some voices within the Dutch Reformed church were opposed to censuses. Had not the Lord punished King David for holding a census among the Israelites by inflicting a devastating epidemic on them? In an era in which plague regularly ravaged the Dutch Republic, church ministers were unlikely to forget David's punishment. The first nationwide census was not in fact held until 1795, after the fall of the Dutch Republic.

The magistrates of Dutch cities, towns and villages did register their poorer, middling and upper classes. Indeed, the registration of those in need of poor relief was of great concern to all magistrates, as virtually all local authorities strove to minimize the number of people dependent on poor relief in their jurisdictions. Throughout the early modern age, magistrates devoted considerable energy, as we will see, to limiting the number of dependent poor. Much less in need of regulation, partly because it had been established for much longer, was the registration of burghers, that is inhabitants of urban communities who enjoyed full citizenship rights in their community as well as certain other rights – such as freedom from tolls and eligibility for guild membership.

Citizenship registers were already in use in the Middle Ages, providing information on the new burghers of a city. Some from that era have survived: Gouda, for example, kept registers of new burghers from at least 1390, when the first surviving register begins, but the registers are complete only from 1501 onwards (Abels *et al.* 2002, 45, 305, graph). Not all citizenship registers are alike. Amsterdam's registers contain information on the name of the applicant, their sponsors – often a father, father-in-law, or employer – their occupation, their sponsor's occupation, the name of the applicant's wife if she herself was a burgher, the date on which the applicant had sworn the requisite oath of obedience, and whether the appropriate fee had been paid. Amsterdam's citizenship registers have survived intact from 1655.¹⁶ In some cities the registers have not survived at all, but no city would have gone without them.¹⁷

Becoming a burgher did not simply mean being registered as a burgher; it also entailed the possibility of identifying oneself as such. Prospective burghers had

¹⁶ For the period prior to 1655, only one register of burghers who had obtained citizenship through marriage (from 1647 to 1655) and two registers of burghers who had purchased citizenship (1584–1605 and 1636–1652) have survived.

¹⁷ Other cities where these registers have been preserved include 's-Hertogenbosch, Zwolle, and Rotterdam (Vos and Bosmans 1997, 56; Hove 2005, 364; Schoor 1999, 329).

to swear an oath of obedience and pay a fee, after which they would be given a *burgerceel* ('certificate of citizenship'), on which their name, the text of the oath, and confirmation that the fee had been paid were written, thus enabling them to prove that they were a burgher. In Amsterdam the document was also available in French and English, no doubt for the benefit of the large English and Walloon communities. Indigenous burghers could also request a written statement confirming their status, as could burghers who had become citizens by marriage to an Amsterdam burgher (N.N. 1726, 297–299). Prospective burghers born in Amsterdam might have had to supply evidence that they had indeed been born in Amsterdam. Nijmegen had a similar requirement: from 30 July 1641 it required new burghers to provide evidence that their ancestors had been burghers by supplying the letters of citizenship those ancestors had obtained. Prior to that the magistrate had relied on applicants to speak the truth; henceforth, written evidence was required. Failure to supply that evidence meant one had to pay the full fee (Schimmel 1966, 40). This particular form of identity registration does seem to have been revenue-based.

In Amsterdam, aside from the standard documents of citizenship, there were also separate citizenship documents for Mennonites, who gave a promise instead of swearing an oath, and Jews. Inhabitants could also swear their loyalty and be recognized as residents (*inwoonders* or *ingezetenen*) if they wished merely to set up a shop or trade in a sector not subject to guild regulations; they would then obtain a similar document. If one lost one's *burgerceel*, one could request a replacement extract from the citizenship registers (N.N. 1726, 301–303).

For those who could afford the fee, it was fairly easy to become a burgher of Amsterdam and other towns in the west of the Republic. Towns in the east often required more evidence of one's identity.¹⁸ In Utrecht, for example, applicants for citizenship had to present an attestation of good conduct from their place of origin. From 1654 this attestation had to specify the religion of the applicant: this seems to have been a prelude to the decision in subsequent years no longer to accept Catholics as burghers.¹⁹ In Nijmegen too, from 1593 onwards new burghers had to submit a sealed written attestation of their good conduct.²⁰ Amsterdam, more accommodating when it came to newcomers, did not require such statements.

Only a minority of Amsterdam's inhabitants had acquired citizenship. This implied that most Amsterdammers had no means of identifying themselves as such. Amsterdam had thousands of visitors, temporary immigrants, and many others who

¹⁸ See Lourens and Lucassen (2000), 11, 43, for the distinction between the more liberal cities in the west and the stricter cities in the east.

¹⁹ In fact magistrates reserved the right to make exceptions, and they frequently did (Rommes 1998, 41).

²⁰ In the case of religious refugees who desired to become citizens of Nijmegen, the magistrate sometimes accepted an attestation of good conduct from other parties, such as, in one case in 1615, an attestation from the deposed Protestant magistrate of Aix-la-Chapelle (Schimmel 1966, 22).

lived there permanently without being registered (Kuijpers 2005, 123, 127–128). This was part of a more or less conscious policy by Amsterdam, which as late as 1668 was greatly concerned with expanding its urban population and tried to make the city as attractive as possible to migrants.

Occasionally, registers of non-burghers were kept: between 1670 and 1747, for example, Amsterdam kept registers of *ingezetenen*, or residents. *Ingezetenen* were non-burghers registered as residents, which allowed them certain minor privileges, such as eligibility for membership of some – though not all – guilds; indeed, guilds gradually restricted the recruitment of new members to burghers, so that the *ingezetenschap* eventually disappeared (Schimmel 1966, 134–135; Kuijpers 2005, 122–123).²¹ With its register of residents, Amsterdam was an exception. The magistrate did sometimes, as a temporary measure, register non-burghers resident in its jurisdiction during wartime. Similarly, in times of trouble, in 1505 and 1565 for example, Utrecht ordered its innkeepers to register their guests, and to show the registers to the magistrate, but these rules were apparently temporary. Utrecht sometimes required strangers who had not become burghers to swear an oath of loyalty to the city.²² In Nijmegen, in 1592, just after the city had been seized by the Dutch, the magistrates concluded that there were many new inhabitants whose names and origins were unknown to the city authorities. They ordered those who had entered the city within the past seven years to present themselves at the town hall, though it is uncertain whether they actually did so. As a rule, throughout the early modern period the magistrates registered only burghers. Occasionally, other groups were registered in response to exceptional circumstances; once those circumstances had abated, the magistracy lost any interest in keeping records of these other groups (Schimmel 1966, 13, 15). There were exceptions to this rule, some of which will be discussed below. First, however, we will discuss the types of personal identification that urban magistrates could offer their citizens, before going on to discuss the widespread practice of ‘outsourcing’ identity registration by urban magistrates.

Other forms of identity registration by the magistrate: passports, letters of recommendation, *attestaties de vita*

The diversity of certificates that citizens could request from the magistrate can be demonstrated using a rare Amsterdam source, the *Amsterdamsche Secretary*. An Amsterdam magistrate could supply burghers having to leave their jurisdiction

²¹ These registers can be found in SAA 5033: Archief van Burgemeesters; Poorterboeken.

²² In 1542, 1552 and 1565, for example. Name, place of origin, and often occupation and age, and sometimes other details were registered. In 1565 the same measure was taken in Nijmegen (Rommes 1998, 50, 63–64).

with passports and letters of recommendation to be shown to foreign rulers or other magistrates within the Dutch Republic. We give an extensive overview here to show the considerable array of means of identification available to a Dutch burgher.

Passports did not, in fact, have entirely the same function as they do today; they were temporary identity documents issued for specific purposes. In the seventeenth century, passports were issued within the Dutch Republic in times of war, notably if a burgher wished to trade in a frontier area where war was being waged (N.N. 1726, 282). In 1593, for example, Nijmegen’s magistracy decreed that those who had left Nijmegen to live in other places controlled by the king of Spain must obtain a passport from a magistrate if they wished to return to the city.²³ Likewise, the magistrate could issue a passport for a sutler – a merchant selling provisions to the army in the field – wishing to travel to Dutch positions, requesting any magistrate in the territories *en route* to allow free passage. Travellers abroad could also be granted a passport, which specified their city of origin, and where they wished to travel to, and requested foreign jurisdictions to allow the traveller to pass without let or hindrance (N.N. 1726, 283–288).

Letters of recommendation served to facilitate access to foreign rulers and other Dutch magistrates, and were written in the name of the burgomasters and addressed to named sovereigns. Burghers could request such letters from the burgomasters, for example if they wished to travel to the Court of Holland in The Hague, or wished to trade somewhere. The magistrate could also issue a testimonial vouching for the person requesting it: for example, an *acte van legaliteit* (‘act of legality’) could be given to a notary, so that the latter could prove he was *bona fide* (N.N. 1726, 310–311). He could produce this to show to his clients. Similar testimonials existed for messengers of merchants, appointed by the city, ‘so that everywhere he may be recognized as such, assisted, and trusted’.²⁴ These testimonials needed the consent of the burgomasters or secretaries before they could be issued. Though not identity papers as such, they could be used as a means of identification, as the magistrate would issue them only to burghers or inhabitants of the city.

The same applies to a number of other documents issued by the magistrate, those documents predominantly serving the economic interests of the inhabitants of the city. Amsterdam’s burghers were exempt from tolls while travelling within the County of Holland, provided they carried a *tolbrief* (‘letter of toll’) issued by the magistrate, which confirmed they had lived for at least a year and a day in Amsterdam. The letter would also include the specific mark the burgher used to brand his merchandise, so that the toll collectors could recognize his goods. Skippers travelling outside the Netherlands could request a *zeebrief* (‘certificate of registry’),

²³ The city could demand that these passports – which could also be issued to its inhabitants – be returned (Schimmel 1966, 14).

²⁴ ‘Op dat hy over al voor zodanig zoude warden erkent, geholpen en vertrouwt’ (N.N. 1726, 311–312).

in which Amsterdam declared that the skipper had sworn that his ship was a Dutch ship, asking all magistrates to assist him if necessary. Those skippers sailing for Italian harbours could request a *gezondbrief* ('bill of health'), in which the magistrate declared their ship and crew to be free from the plague and other contagious diseases. Otherwise, Italian port authorities could detain them and submit them to quarantine (N.N. 1726, 289–295). A skipper could also obtain a declaration, or 'affirmation', from the burgomasters that his ship was based in Amsterdam; even though 'according to the general rule no one may testify on his own behalf, this rule is not so rigid and sometimes exceptions are made to it', meaning that it was sufficient for skippers to swear an oath and that they did not require witnesses.²⁵ Similarly, merchants could request a declaration to the effect that certain goods belonged to them; such a declaration could subsequently be presented to foreign authorities (N.N. 1726, 320–321).

Equally important were the documents necessary in civil court cases, though they were different in that their purpose was to establish not the identity of the burgher who requested them, but that of witnesses who could not be present in person before Amsterdam's aldermen. Such a document was termed a *lettere requisitoriaal*, a generic name for any written request from one magistrate to another. It could, for example, be a request to supply witness testimony in a civil lawsuit: 'to obtain testimony of the truth from a stranger'.²⁶ If one of the parties needed testimony from a witness living in a distant jurisdiction, a request would be sent to the appropriate magistrate, who would normally comply by sending copies of the testimony given in his presence (N.N. 1726, 208–210).

The magistrate could also establish the reliability of documents drawn up by citizens. Amsterdammers could draw up attestations and declarations on behalf of one another before burgomasters, aldermen, secretaries, or notaries and witnesses. The declarations made before burgomasters were called *certificaties*, or certifications. They certified attestations made by Amsterdam's inhabitants, drawn up before notaries and now verified by means of an oath sworn before the magistrate (N.N. 1726, 326–327). This procedure was necessary because Dutch notaries were not permitted to administer oaths.

Especially important in establishing identity were *attestaties de vita* (or life certificates), which could be issued by the secretaries, but also, if they required an oath, by the burgomasters. In the *attestaties de vita* two witnesses were required to appear before the burgomasters to certify that a third person, A, X years old and born in C, was still alive and residing in D, and that this person was, for example, entitled to the income from a certain annuity. Such declarations, confirmed on oath, were required for instance by the States of Friesland if anyone wanted to collect

²⁵ 'Volgens den gemeenen Regel, niemand in zyn eigen zaak getuigen mag, zo is echter deze Regel zo vast niet, of ze lyd somtyds wel eenige exceptie' (N.N. 1726, 318–319).

²⁶ 'Om Getuygenis der waarheit te hebben van een Vreemdeling' (N.N. 1726, 69).

the interest on the annuities issued by that province. These attestations were pre-printed forms. They were available in Dutch but also in French, for the benefit of foreign powers, such as the king of Denmark or the city of Paris, both of which issued annuities to Dutch citizens (N.N. 1726, 327–328, 330–333). Since Dutch notaries were not allowed to administer oaths, *attestaties de vita* needed to be validated by the client, who would request a copy of the certificate from the notary and have it validated first by presenting it to the city's secretaries and then to the burgomasters, and lastly by confirming it on oath. The witnesses were required to be present when the secretary read the *attestatie de vita* and they also had to swear an oath before the burgomasters.²⁷

The validity of passports, letters of recommendation, *attestaties de vita*, and suchlike was time-bound, though it might be possible to renew them annually. Moreover, they were often limited in effect. They could thus be used to establish one's identity only for a limited time, in a certain specified area – for example for one journey back and forth only. Once their validity had expired, they were of no value to the individual.²⁸

'Outsourcing' middle-class registration: guilds and the Orphan Chamber (*weeskamer*)

The preceding paragraphs illustrate how important citizenship was in an urban environment, and that cities spent a great deal of effort to register burghers and supply them with means of identification outside the city walls. The modest bureaucracy of Dutch cities was unable, however, to provide burghers with all the forms of identity registration required. The solution was to 'outsource' many of these. Apart from entrusting the registration of baptisms, marriages and burials to the churches, the magistrate entrusted semi-public bodies with other forms of identity registration.

Guilds needed to keep track of their members. In 1617 in the city of Nijmegen, for example, the magistrate decreed that before settling as an artisan, a newcomer had to either provide evidence he had made a 'masterpiece' or do so under the auspices of the Nijmegen guilds. This measure purported to preserve the quality of artisanal production, while, at the same time, serving to regulate entry to the labour market. From 1642 onwards, all newcomers to a Nijmegen guild also had to present to the guild authorities a written attestation from the city's secretary that they had paid the fee for citizenship and sworn the required oath. This measure

²⁷ Mennonites and Jews were not required to swear an oath (N.N. 1726, 334–338).

²⁸ It is not clear how one could be sure if a document had ceased to be valid: presumably there were indication marks on the document itself, such as the date of issue; that might also explain why no registers were kept.

was introduced after several new burghers had obtained citizenship and then attempted to join the guilds without actually paying the citizenship fee.

Registration of the middle classes by the guilds was not a marginal phenomenon in the Dutch Republic. In small cities the various trades were often exercised by a relatively small group of individuals, and formal registration was not always necessary. In a city such as Amsterdam, however, the number of guild members was much higher, and it was necessary to register them. Of Amsterdam's male labour force, a quarter consisted of guild masters and 60 per cent of journeymen, leaving a mere 15 per cent beyond the control of the guilds (Lourens and Lucassen 1998, 123, 127–128).

Guilds kept registers of their prime active members, the masters,²⁹ and some registered the names of apprentices and journeymen too. They might also keep records of whether bakers or silversmiths had produced a masterpiece, for instance, or of the marks used by their members. Occasionally, a register of deceased guild members was kept. Guilds sometimes even registered non-members: between 1684 and 1694 the surgeons' guild, for example, registered cases of barber-surgeon activities by non-members. This was one way to control a closely related part of the labour market, and often those non-members had to pay for, as it were, not being incorporated by the guild.

From as early as the mid-sixteenth century, rather formal arrangements existed in the form of insurance provided by the Dutch guilds. Artisans and journeymen paid a small amount per week for this insurance, which they themselves administered. In 1811 the proportion of the male labour force with some type of formal mutual insurance may have been as high as 42 per cent in Utrecht, 55 per cent in Leiden, and at least 22 per cent in Amsterdam. Guild insurance primarily meant assistance in the event of burial, followed in importance by insurance compensating for lost income in the event of illness, and insurance to cover the costs of medication and the physician's or surgeon's fee. A few guilds offered members old age or widow's pensions. Insurance necessarily involves establishing the claims of individuals, and this in turn led to rules and regulations and to the registration of the commencement of the insurance and of certain characteristics of the insured, such as name, age, gender, place of residence, and health status (Bos 1998; van Leeuwen 2011).

Another example of a semi-public organization entrusted with middle-class identity registration was the Orphan Chamber. Often founded to care for burgher orphans and half-orphans, orphan chambers were run by unsalaried members –

²⁹ In Amsterdam, registers have survived for the guilds of the carpenters; painters; tinsmiths; booksellers, printers, and bookbinders; surgeons; compass makers and sail makers; goldsmiths and silversmiths; skippers; saw-millers; leatherworkers; tailors; pastry-bakers; corn carriers; corn skippers; corn measurers; corn millers; brokers; basket-makers; bricklayers; shipwrights; blacksmiths; peat-carriers; weighing-house carriers; and wine-merchants (van Eeghen 1951, *passim*).

often magistrates or their relatives – on a fairly independent basis. If a married burgher with children died in Amsterdam, the remaining parent had to provide proof, by means of documents drawn up and registered by the orphan masters, of the property their children stood to inherit on attaining the age of majority. If the surviving parent wished to remarry, he or she had to obtain a letter of consent from the orphan masters to be presented to the secretary of the city and the committee for matrimonial affairs before the banns could be announced (N.N. 1726, 350–353). In Amsterdam, the sextons of every church and churchyard were obliged to report to the Orphan Chamber each week the names of those buried who had left minors as heirs. The orphan masters recorded their names in death registers, a different one for each church and cemetery. Surviving pauper parents, who were unable to give their half-orphaned children anything, were listed as such in the death registers.³⁰ The registers for Amsterdam have been preserved. They contain less information than the burial registers, as they record only those leaving minors as heirs. In some cases they predate the burial registers, the earliest register dating from 1563 (Kretzschmar 2010, 1–2). The orphan masters could also designate a guardian, if none had been appointed in the deceased's will, and issue a certificate of guardianship to that guardian, whose name was then registered in the *Voogdyboek* (the 'Book of Guardianship'). Further, the guardians had to request approval from the orphan masters for all other acts of administration (N.N. 1726, 356–359, 362–363).

'Outsourcing' lower-class registration: registering and identifying the poor

While the orphans of burghers were registered by the Orphan Chamber, other semi-public organs took care of those receiving assistance lower down the social scale. During the Reformation a multiplicity of religious denominations had emerged, each of which established its own charity.³¹ Each religious denomination of any significance wanted its own patronage and protection, while municipal poor relief existed for those whom the churches failed to help. In Amsterdam, for example, almost all religious denominations maintained an ecclesiastical poor relief agency to provide for the 'ordinary' poor, while many also ran almshouses for elderly parishioners and orphanages for the boys and girls of their co-religionists. There

³⁰ However, if the deceased died outside the city or at sea, they were registered in the so-called *Kalisboek* (literally the 'Book of Poor Fellows'). In both cases the surviving parent, supported by a witness from the deceased's side of the family, had to declare their inability to give their children anything from the deceased's estate (N.N. 1726, 354–355).

³¹ The precise development over time and the degree of success in centralizing poor relief varied from city to city (van Nederveen Meerkerk and Vermeesch 2010, 135–154).

existed two municipal poor relief agencies, each covering one half of the town, and a burgher as well as an ordinary orphanage. Finally, like many other cities, Amsterdam had a number of almshouses. The poor relief system was thus fragmented across religious and secular lines, with a further distinction according to social status and religious denomination (Prak 1998; van Leeuwen 2000b; van Nederveen Meerkerk and Vermeesch 2010).³²

At any one time, a sizeable proportion of the Dutch population was being assisted by a poor relief organization. In times of hardship, this figure could rise substantially, and during the period of extreme poverty experienced in Amsterdam at the end of the eighteenth century about half the city's population were in receipt of a modest, *ad hoc* allowance. Given that assistance could be provided during most stages of the life cycle – to a child in a pauper family, to single mothers and underemployed families with many children, and to the elderly – it is conceivable that, even disregarding one-off donations, a large proportion, and perhaps even the majority, of the urban population were assisted during at least part of their life.

This largesse was a result of several factors, including the modernity of the Dutch economy, with many migrants – either from villages in the Dutch Republic or from abroad – moving to the cities of this heavily urbanized country. This footloose population contributed to the welfare of the Republic, but it also needed assistance during times of hardship. It was not just kindness that dictated they should be helped. It was also wise to do so, since the wealthy and the middle classes in the cities were surrounded, literally, by those who might be tempted to take in desperation that which was not given to them in benevolence.

A myriad of relief agencies existed, dispensing relief from their endowments, from the coins given by churchgoers, from the liberal bequests made in wills, and from grants from the city authorities. Having funds to dispense was one thing; having appropriate registration systems was another. The fact that relief was broken down by place and church helped the authorities keep track of recipients, but the many poor relief administrators still needed to keep documentary records of who received what. They used pauper books for the purpose. Many of these have been lost, but some have survived. Just as they form a valuable window on a substantial proportion of the Dutch urban population for social historians of the early modern era, they also formed a valuable registration resource for early modern poor relief administrators.

What did the pauper books register? Those for Amsterdam's Catholic Charity in the late eighteenth century noted the first name and the surname of the applicant – usually a woman – their marital status and the name of their spouse (or former spouse), if any, age, address, number of minor children, the name of their confessor, and, of course, the amounts given in winter and in summer (Faber and van Leeuwen

³² The following is described in more detail in van Leeuwen (2012).

1987, 15, 1991). This was more than sufficient information to enable the Catholic administrators to keep track of the poor. Other relief agencies in Amsterdam and in cities such as Zwolle, Delft and Groningen had similar registration systems.³³

Measures of control were in place, such as those at the Amsterdam Municipal Charity, where an application for support began with a visit to the district warden. From the seventeenth century onwards Amsterdam was divided into districts, each headed by a warden, who issued the certificates of poverty which applicants for relief had to submit to the Municipal Charity, and who distributed vouchers for free education in charity schools. Before issuing the requisite certificate the warden was expected to visit the pauper applicants, who were then required to report to the offices of the Municipal Charity, armed with their declarations from the warden and one or more extracts from the baptismal or birth registers, or from the marriage banns or marriage registers. The regents would then decide whether or not to register them for assistance. Applicants who were sick were also required to produce a certificate from a municipal doctor, surgeon, or midwife. Witnesses would sometimes be brought along to add force to an application.

Registration took place at the beginning of summer and the beginning of winter, when the regents, sitting at their desks, would hear applications. If all the conditions had been satisfied, district welfare officers would register an applicant and enter the following personal details in the registration book: first name and surname, age, marital status, place of birth, any illnesses or disabilities, and names and ages of spouses and of any surviving children. These particulars were passed on to the district welfare officers or the *consentvrouwen* ('licence women'). The licence women were concerned only with the 'licence holders' – applicants registered as holding an official licence to be paid their relief money at home. These applicants tended to be the sick, the elderly, and families with a large number of children, who found it difficult to attend the relief office each week, and so the licence women visited them at home to hand over relief money in person.

³³ In Zwolle in the second half of the seventeenth century, the Municipal Charity also registered occupation and other information it found of interest, such as the earnings of the children (and whether they should work more), place of birth in the case of immigrants, religion, health, value and nature of their possessions, such as clothing, and whether items had been pawned (Wijngaarden 2000, ch. 4). Similar information was registered for Delft in the seventeenth century. See van der Vliet (2001, ch. 4), and for the city of Groningen in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries see Buursma (2009, 95–98, *et passim*). From at least the end of the seventeenth century the Leeuwarden municipal agency collected similar information (Spaans 1997, 258–262). A small family reconstitution study of Amsterdam Catholic paupers has systematically linked data from the pauper books to data in the registers of baptism, marriage, and burials. This gives us a clue as to the completeness and reliability of both types of registration source. Both types of source were found generally to accord with one another in terms of the number and age of the children and the parents. It is clear, however, that the spelling of surnames had not yet taken on a fixed form, as the following examples illustrate. One surname was spelled variously as Celi(e), Se(e)li(e), and Ze(e)lie; another as Bre(e)mon(d) and Brymon(t); and a third as Spighthold, Spegtholt, Spighoff(f), and Spegthoff (Faber and Van Leeuwen 1991).

The regents of the Amsterdam Municipal Charity would on occasion ask for supplementary evidence from applicants, should doubts arise during their registration or as a result of subsequent enquiries. They would try to discover whether the applicant was indeed out of work and, if so, why. Former employers would be approached, and if the applicant's willingness to seek work was in doubt he had to provide proof that he was looking for work. If there were doubts about whether the applicant had actually lived in Amsterdam for the requisite number of years, the police could be asked to investigate whether he was, in fact, a newcomer to the city. Poor relief institutions used elaborate registration procedures. An application for relief had to be supported with documents and declarations by witnesses. At irregular intervals, various officials would check on the accuracy of the information supplied. Every resident of Amsterdam applying for relief was visited by an inspector, and even after registration inspectors would visit the homes of applicants at least once a year to check on their current circumstances.³⁴

Delft's poor relief administrators strove to obtain as much information on their poor as possible in order 'to know them completely' ('volcomelijc te leeren kennen'; van der Vliis 2001, ch. 4, esp. 102).³⁵ A veritable network of informers existed in this town, as well as in other towns, who, often voluntarily, supplied the relief agency with information on paupers (see also Buursma 2009, 118–124). It is interesting to note that in the city of Leeuwarden, magistrates recruited wardens from the lower ranks of society, who were then required to provide information to the municipal relief agency on the paupers amongst whom they lived and about whom they were therefore well informed (Spaans 1997, 216).³⁶

For the migrant poor there was a special system of registration, at least in some Dutch cities.³⁷ Since the end of the seventeenth century some Dutch towns – though not Amsterdam – had used letters of surety (*acte van indemniteit*, *acte van cautie*) to stem the influx of the poor. A letter of surety was a promise by a person or an

³⁴ The administrators of the Catholic Charity in Amsterdam required written proof from the warden that the applicant had lived in Amsterdam for a number of years, as well as written proof from a priest that the applicant had attended Mass at Easter. Naturally, a copy of their baptism entry also had to be provided (Faber and van Leeuwen 1991, 21; Buursma 2009, 118–124). Lutherans who applied for charity had to present two witnesses to testify that the applicant had been attending Holy Communion for several years (Kuijpers 2005, 349). On registration, control, and fraud by Lutheran poor in Amsterdam in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Kuijpers (2005), 313–315.

³⁵ The city's procedures for registration and for monitoring fraud were similar to those described for Amsterdam; they included an investigation by the warden, an interview with the administrators, often in the presence of witnesses, and, if necessary, a further investigation by the deputy bailiff, who might make enquiries with the applicant's neighbours.

³⁶ This had the disadvantage, however, that the wardens were not always up to the task. Some were semi-illiterate and had to be replaced.

³⁷ This is described in more detail in van Leeuwen (2012). This article explains how Dutch poor relief agencies were able to continuously cope with the influx of migrants claiming relief, in part by means of the letters of surety.

organization to pay for the relief of named individuals if they required assistance within a specified number of years. Normally the letter took the form of a certificate, or surety, issued by a town council, or a poor relief organization run by the town, to a resident on leaving that town. From 1682 to 1785, for example, Leiden issued letters of surety for emigrants which were valid for periods of two to three years, and also required immigrants to present their own letters of surety (C. Davids 1978, esp. 174). Only Leiden's own citizens had the right of admission to, or the right to settle freely in, the city. Citizenship was obtained by birth as the child of a citizen, or through purchase. Migrants wishing to purchase citizenship had to present a letter of surety. Leiden was divided into 130 districts, and district wardens ensured that nobody offered accommodation to migrants without a letter of citizenship or surety. A similar system governing residence was in operation in other parts of the Netherlands, including the city of Rotterdam and the province of Drenthe (Gras 1989; van Voorst van Beest 1955).

Letters of surety issued to Leiden immigrants contained the name of the institution issuing the document, the name of the immigrant, the date of issue, the place of origin, and the date of burghership, if any. In two-thirds of cases the letter was actually drawn up before a Leiden notary. In that case, it usually also stated the occupation of the immigrant, and the names and occupations of those who stood surety and the duration of that surety. If issued outside Leiden, a letter of surety sometimes also contained details of the immigrant's family and their ages. Leiden's outgoing letters of surety included the name of the Leiden relief agency, the date of issue, the name of the emigrant, the place of destination, and the composition and ages of the emigrant's family.³⁸

Similarly, from the end of the seventeenth century, Rotterdam's wardens closely monitored those who lived in their district. They checked whether non-Rotterdamers had a certificate of admission (*acte van admissie*). The newcomers who did not were referred to the Admissions Commissioners, or their names were given to the constabulary, who would have illegal migrants evicted from the city. Admission was granted if applicants could provide for themselves and had the necessary papers, which included either a letter of surety to the value of 300 guilders from their place of origin or a letter of surety signed by family members, friends, fellow countrymen, or employers. Only those immigrants with the right of admission and who had lived in Rotterdam for more than two years without having had recourse to assistance were eligible for relief (Van Voorst van Beest 1955, 10–22).

From 1649 onwards Haarlem's magistrates used the wardens of the various neighbourhoods as controllers and registrars of population movements in their

³⁸ The letters of surety collected by Leiden's poor relief body that have been preserved cover a large proportion of the Republic's territory, including the towns and rural areas of South and North Holland, and parts of Gelderland, North Brabant, and Overijssel (C. Davids 1978, 151).

districts.³⁹ From then on, Haarlem residents were required to report to the warden if they were renting out accommodation to strangers. The warden kept a register of everyone living in his neighbourhood, registering co-residents and their occupation or trade. In that way he became more of a public servant than the neighbourhood representative he had been before (Dorren 2001, 65, 81). The magistrate was especially concerned to keep out poor strangers, in order not to further burden the city's system of poor relief. In Haarlem, only those who received a certificate of admission in four consecutive years became eligible for municipal poor relief. Despite these strict rules, the wardens often failed to observe them, and permitted strangers without certificates of admission to stay (Dorren 1998, 73–74; 2001, 86).

The letters of surety system developed at the end of the seventeenth century in response to local rules governing domicile. In 1682 the States of Holland declared that 'all such persons who have moved from any place to the towns or to the countryside shall, after a period of one year, be deemed no longer to belong to the place from which they have moved' (quoted in C. Davids 1978, 187, n.16). When an indigent individual migrated to a town in Holland, that town could recover the costs of support from his or her town of origin for a maximum of only one year. Other provinces followed this example and introduced similar rules.⁴⁰ At that time, towns were faced with a growing influx of poor migrants whom they had to support from the start. It appears that towns started to demand letters of surety to put a stop to this. Leiden, for instance, required the wardens to keep out 'poor people from outside the town, beggars, wheedlers, vagrants, vagabonds, idlers, and other undesirables' whom the town would otherwise have to support (quoted in C. Davids 1978, 147).

From the end of the seventeenth century the poor were thus increasingly subject to a system of identity registration to prevent them from becoming a burden on the poor relief agencies of the cities in which they were strangers. However, Amsterdam was in permanent need of new blood and absorbed large numbers of poor Dutchmen and – beyond the Republic – foreigners, whom the city could channel towards its colonial endeavours. The Dutch East India Company, or *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC), was especially desperate for men to fill its lower ranks and to serve as sailors or soldiers. It is to the registering of those occupational groups that we will now turn.

³⁹ There were 108 districts in the eighteenth century. These neighbourhoods played an important role in the years 1580–1650, due to the massive influx of immigrants, but their importance swiftly declined after 1700 (Dorren 1998, 77–78).

⁴⁰ The states of Utrecht in 1687, Zeeland in 1705, Overijssel in 1767, and the Estates General acting for Limburg and Brabant in 1792 (Luttenberg 1837, 13–15, 41–42, 49–53).

Registering sailors and soldiers

As we have seen, the Dutch city authorities 'outsourced' the registration of guild members, orphans, and the urban poor, preferring to concentrate on registering burghers. Occasionally magistrates did register the identity of non-burghers as part of a wider urban policy to promote the local economy and out of a concern for public order.

Maritime Dutch cities – and Amsterdam more than any other – often experienced public disturbances on the waterfront, where sailors met to enjoy the delights of life ashore after a long uncomfortable voyage. Carousing led to arguments and brawls. In the seventeenth century, Amsterdam – but also Rotterdam, then a fairly small but growing port – appointed a port sheriff, or *waterschout*, to deal with all forms of disturbance and crime on the waterfront.⁴¹ These included the tendency of sailors to abscond with an advance from the skipper who had hired them, or to show up too late for the work agreed, or else to take up a job on another ship, to the inconvenience of merchants and their skippers. One of the port sheriff's duties was to keep the muster-roll of departing ships' crews, which he was to read aloud after it had been completed. He was also present when the ship returned, when the crew would receive their salary. On the muster-roll the sheriff noted each sailor's surname, first name, place of residence, and the agreed pay. A skipper could use the muster-roll to force a contracted sailor to show up – and if he did not appear the port sheriff could prosecute the sailor for breach of contract. The sheriff would also check to see whether the sailor was still bound by any previous contracts and whether he was still formally engaged elsewhere (van Vooren 1916, 98, 100, 105–106; van Zijverden 1998, 140).

By the eighteenth century muster-rolls had become pre-printed forms on which the port sheriff filled in each sailor's name, rank, age, place of origin, monthly salary, and sometimes the name of the person who had recruited them. All sailors had to sign the muster-roll. On the roll, the port sheriff noted the name of the captain, the ship, its destination, and the date on which the roll had been drawn up.⁴² The muster-rolls were kept in the custody of the sheriff, with the skipper being provided a copy.⁴³

It was not easy to enforce sailors' compliance with their contracts. In Rotterdam in 1726 the port sheriff became obliged to keep a register of deserters, making it possible to trace recidivists, who were punished more severely than first-time offenders (van Vooren 1916, 106). His position was clearly an important one in

⁴¹ Amsterdam appointed its first port sheriff in 1641; Rotterdam appointed a similar functionary in 1645, who later also became known as the port sheriff (van Zijverden 1998, 137–155; van Vooren 1916, 98–117). The office of port sheriff continued to exist until it was abolished in 1989. By then, its responsibilities were largely restricted to monitoring merchant seamen (van Zijverden 1998, 139–140).

⁴² In the nineteenth century the sailors engaged had to produce some means of identification, sign with their names, and appoint a person to stand surety for them (van Zijverden 1998, 143–144).

⁴³ In Amsterdam muster-rolls have been preserved for the period 1747–1852 (van Zijverden 1998, 147).

the harbours of maritime cities, and illustrates the importance those ports attached to a well-ordered maritime labour market. Indeed, the port sheriff's muster-roll registration was deemed so important that it became an exception to the common pattern of urban magistrates devolving identity registration to third parties as much as possible.

The muster-roll thus played an important role in the recruitment of sailors. It was similarly important when it came to registering soldiers and sailors recruited for the Dutch army and the Dutch East India and West India companies. Clearly, such registration did not take place at the city level, but instead at the level of 'national' organizations. It was also very important to the Dutch Republic as a whole: the Dutch East India Company and the Dutch West India Company (WIC) played a dominant role in establishing and continuing the pattern of Dutch colonial expansion, and given that the Dutch Republic was at war for 105 of the 207 years of its existence, the army was obviously a key feature of the Republic's state apparatus. The muster-rolls were central to registering those who were to fight in wars. Both the VOC and the WIC hired sailors on an impressive scale, but neither utilized the services of the port sheriff, using instead their own mustering administration (van Zijverden 1998, 147). Not much is known about the WIC's administration since most of the relevant records have disappeared, but one presumes it was similar to that of the VOC, on which the WIC was modelled. Much more is known about the VOC's administration and the records it kept.

Registration of sailors by the VOC started at the point of recruitment, when they were superficially examined by a committee of directors and maritime officers. No identification was required. Specialists were examined more strictly. In the case of an engineer, for example, a testimonial concerning his skills could be required. If the applicant was approved, the clerk noted his name, place of birth, rank, and salary. Clerks wrote these data, primarily for salary registration purposes, on muster-rolls, one for each ship. Each voyage thus resulted in a single muster-roll. That roll comprised the principal record relating to the sailors – who were hired for one voyage only.

Sailing with the VOC was a high-risk affair, and many sailors and soldiers failed to survive. Even so, the VOC did not register to whom the salary of a deceased employee should be paid. A sailor or soldier wishing to make sure that any wages owed to him would be paid to his next of kin in the event of his death had to supply them with information on which VOC ship he was sailing with, in what capacity, and under which skipper, and preferably also the date of departure and the expected date of arrival at the ship's destination (van Gelder 1997, 143–144, 147).

In the Dutch army, too, the muster-roll was the central document listing and registering soldiers. Whereas in other states war led to increasing central registration of the soldiers serving in those wars, in the Dutch Republic financial responsibility for the army was and remained divided among its provinces, with each paying a proportion of the costs. In theory, each province had its own *stadholder* responsible

for military affairs. In practice, there were at most only two stadholders at any one time. They cooperated closely in military matters, in collaboration with a number of central bodies such as the Council of State. The Republic's army did not centralize the mustering of armies. In fact, the army consisted of companies led by an officer who was responsible for hiring his own soldiers. Sometimes entire regiments and their officers were raised that way. The Estates General or the Council of State drew up contracts with company commanders and paid them a specified sum intended to cover their pay and the costs of recruiting soldiers (Nimwegen 2010, 30–33). The commanders listed the names of their men on muster-rolls. Once everyone had been accounted for, the commissary would seal the muster-rolls and send them to the Council of State, which was responsible for actually paying the soldiers (Nimwegen 2010, 47).⁴⁴

Apparently the central authorities did not see any reason to preserve these lists – more or less complete lists of soldiers have survived only for 1780–1781. By then, these lists had become printed documents on which the company commander noted a soldier's name, the date he was hired, for how long he had been hired, his height, age, place of birth, religion, previous occupation, whether and for how long he had served before, and whether he had a wife and children to look after. This level of information density was unusual, and it is unclear why the central commander wanted to know all this. One surmises that it was connected to attempts by the last two stadholders, William IV and his son William V, to obtain a clearer picture of the state of the military.⁴⁵

From 1749 onwards commanders formally had to report regularly on the conduct of their officers, though there is no trace in the records that they actually did so. It was not until 1772 that William V issued detailed ordinances setting out how officers and their conduct should be registered. These conduct lists were also pre-printed. It was possible to include first names and surnames, current age, place of birth, religion, whether the officer was married and had children, how long he had served in the regiment and in what rank, whether he had previously served in another Dutch or foreign regiment, and for how long, which languages he spoke, whether he was diligent, what skills he had, whether he was of good character, how accomplished he was in military drill, and whether he should be promoted. In the period 1773–1795 such lists were indeed compiled, though not for the entire army, and not for every year. Many of them have been preserved. Their primary purpose seems to have been to allow the stadholder to fill vacancies in such a way that he could advance the careers of diligent officers and pass over those of lesser ability (Zwitzer 1991, 107–108, 208).

⁴⁴ Those rolls also noted whether someone was sick, wounded, or on guard, and where they were, so that the muster commissary could inspect and count all the soldiers. He noted particulars for each soldier, such as weaponry, where he came from, and how long he had been with the company.

⁴⁵ Zwitzer gives no explanation of why all this information was included (Zwitzer 1991, 46, 179).

The conduct registers of the officers – and perhaps also the detailed lists of common soldiers compiled in the late eighteenth century – were thus late additions to early modern Dutch identity registration. Perhaps in practice they became effective only during the last stadholdership. For most of the Dutch Republic's existence there was only limited registration of army personnel owing to the devolved organizational structure of the army, a peculiarity which reflected that of the Republic as a whole.

Establishing the identities of the criminal underclass

Important as sailors and soldiers were to the Dutch Republic, they enjoyed a bad reputation. Dutch authorities were very distrustful of this vast reservoir of drifting men in the Republic's fleets and armies, and not entirely without reason. Especially in times of war, the difference between a soldier and a criminal was more one of degree than kind – at least in the eyes of the magistrates. This leads us back to the urban magistrates and the way they tried to keep a grip on the criminal underclass of the Dutch Republic.

As we have noted, local magistrates in the Dutch Republic, and, to some extent, the provincial authorities, spent considerable effort in monitoring the lower strata of society. The lowest stratum was regarded as exceptionally prone to criminal activity and could be controlled only with great difficulty, as its members were often itinerant and registered nowhere. A criminal career in the Dutch Republic often involved much travelling. This created problems of prevention and punishment in a society where the judiciary was primarily based locally. Magistrates had to cooperate, with varying degrees of success, to punish wrongdoers drifting from one jurisdiction to another, exacerbated by the age-old practice of punishment by exile. As part of their punishment, criminals were often declared dishonourable. This meant they lost all hope of being granted credit, and of a decent livelihood, in the jurisdiction in which they had been punished. They were usually exiled – imprisonment was rarer – and that more or less forced them to take up a criminal career elsewhere.

Up to, and during, the sixteenth century, punishment sometimes took the form of either corporeal mutilation or branding – depending on the seriousness of the crime. Amputating his ear made it possible for a man best avoided to be easily recognized. It became impossible for him to earn a decent living anywhere. Increasingly, during the sixteenth century, such punishments were thought undesirable, by humanists among others. Corporeal mutilation gradually fell out of use: the last case of a criminal having an ear amputated in Amsterdam was in 1650. A punishment which endured longer involved a cut to the cheek, but it too was not without its opponents: in 1668 some aldermen opposed it on the grounds that one should never deform the face of the culprit. Branding the face had fallen into disuse by the sixteenth century. Another visible mutilation, cutting off a thumb, was

recorded in Amsterdam for the last time in 1748, although eighteen years later the sheriff was still requesting its imposition (Spierenburg 1978, 114–115). After 1650, mutilation seems increasingly to have been confined to less visible parts of the body, making it more difficult to recognize a convicted criminal.

Flogging and branding did not fall into disuse, though. The purpose of flogging was not to identify a criminal as such, though the telltale scars on his back certainly required him to keep it covered in later life.⁴⁶ Branding was a means of visibly registering a convicted criminal. In the Middle Ages branding had usually been applied to part of the face, to the cheek, or the forehead. By the mid-sixteenth century, shoulder branding became more common. This change from more to less visible branding seems to attest to a growing revulsion against the practice: henceforth, convicts could conceal the brand mark under their clothing. For this reason, prisoners suspected of a certain crime were often physically examined to see if they had been marked earlier. The brand mark could easily be identified as each criminal court had its own branding iron for the purpose. Amsterdam's brand mark consisted of the three St Andrew's crosses that also appeared on the city's coat of arms. A special variant was formed by pressing both sides of a red-hot sword onto the back of the convict, creating an X-shaped scar. Flogging and branding were usually combined, with the flogging preceding the branding. Occasionally, convicts tried to have the brand mark erased: one had his mark 'skinned out' by a physician, another used quicklime. As a result, the judicial authorities distrusted all forms of shoulder scar (Thuijs 2008, 220; Spierenburg 1978, 76–77; Egmond 1993, 27).

The enduring practice of branding enabled magistrates to establish whether a prisoner had been engaged in criminal activities or not. As recidivism was regarded as aggravating the seriousness of an offence, increasing the likelihood of the death penalty being imposed – even for non-capital offences – branding remained important for purposes of identification.

The magistrate was often confronted with suspects from the margins of society, such as gypsies and other vagrants of whom little was known. Interrogation served to establish their name, place of birth, age, sex, place of domicile, marital status, occupation, and, sometimes, also whether they had family (Egmond 1993, 24). Magistrates often recorded the information obtained on the criminal underworld in their files for later use.⁴⁷ In the case of grave crimes, the magistrate might conduct a more extensive inquiry and contact other courts, sometimes discovering that this procedure only complicated matters, because several vagrants used the same nickname,⁴⁸ a common practice to create identity confusion (Egmond 1993, 26).⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Flogging was always done on the bare back (Spierenburg 1978, 75).

⁴⁷ See Thuijs (2008, 71), for one particular case.

⁴⁸ As was the case with a certain 'Glory of Holland', of which there were two or three around 1718 (Egmond 1993, 25–26).

⁴⁹ See also Thuijs (2008, 20–21). It was not uncommon to have a whole set of false names (Thuijs 2008, 22, 31–32, 91).

As a group, gypsies caused magistrates less difficulty when it came to ethnic identity – if only because Dutch early modern authorities routinely combined different groups of travelling people under the catch-all phrase ‘heathens’ or ‘Egyptians’ (L. Lucassen 1990, 13–14, 21). They were characterized by their dress, language, and names. Individually, however, they appear to have been more difficult to identify, due to their habit of adopting names that did not accord with Dutch practice, so creating confusion. Moreover, gypsies in detention seem to have adopted a tactic of identifying themselves and their place of birth, age, relatives, and occupations in different ways the longer they were detained, creating a ‘proliferation of identities’, much to the annoyance and exasperation of Dutch courts. Suspects often changed their names. Jewish naming practices also led to many difficulties, as Jewish vagrants usually had only a first name, using their father’s name as a patronymic – like many Dutch, but in practice they resorted to a much more restricted pool of names. As these were extremely common, it was often hard to distinguish between first names, surnames, nicknames, and aliases (Egmond 1993, 87–90, 112–113).⁵⁰

Having said that, magistrates seem not always to have been overly concerned about the precise identity of a prisoner. At least one historian has claimed that the average court was not interested in actually establishing the identity of the defendant as it was not particularly relevant for determining the sentence (Thuijs 2008, 19). Furthermore, during the Dutch Republic the authorities did in fact maintain a system of centrally registering convicts in the best way available to them: using the branded bodies of convicts as a register.⁵¹

Other ways to establish identity

Early modern Dutchmen could rely on the ecclesiastical and civil authorities to register and establish their identity. The most important means of doing so have already been discussed, but there were other ways of establishing identity too.

To prevent a single mother and her children falling into poverty, the magistrate, church, and family were keen to establish the identity of the father. Sometimes, the father would acknowledge his paternity in a written statement to that effect, but often this required testimony that the mother and father had had intercourse with one another. In one recorded case, the father was identified because the child had the same hereditary deformity, but such evidence was rare. In normal cases, judges could ask the contending parties to swear an oath. Oaths made by men were considered of greater value than those made by women, but women had another

⁵⁰ The problem of identifying gypsies more or less ceased because they had been driven out of the Republic by 1750 (L. Lucassen 1990, 27, 34).

⁵¹ For skin marks as a means of identification see also Groebner (2004, 68–84).

weapon (Haks 1982, 90). When an unmarried woman was in labour, the midwife – almost always appointed by the local authorities and oath-bound⁵² – was to ask her who the father was. If she refused to say, the midwife was not permitted to continue to help her. After naming the father, the woman had to swear an oath to the midwife with witnesses present. The declaration by the midwife, confirmed by a notary, carried great weight in the event of a trial. It was not uncommon for fathers to try to persuade the midwife not to ask for the name of the father, or to ‘forget’ it. More often, however, they tried to persuade the mother not to name, or even to misname, the father, lured by the promise of financial assistance. If the mother did name the father, she was often believed by the judges. In Leiden, for example, in 65 per cent of cases between 1671 and 1795 the mother was proven right, and the father ordered to pay for the upkeep of the child (Haks 1982, 85–86, 90–91; van der Heijden 1998, 123). This practice of swearing on oath the name of the father was abolished by the Code Civil of 1811, though it continued for a time.⁵³

The web of sworn midwives could not catch all single mothers. Throughout the early modern age, desperate mothers – or perhaps fathers – left their offspring at the door of the local orphanage. The notes they left with the foundlings may be regarded as a peculiar form of identity registration. Sometimes orphanages maintained books in which the notes found on the foundlings were kept. These notes – often giving names, age, and religion – were pasted onto a page. Sometimes a playing card cut in half had been tied to the note by the person leaving it, so that he or she could reclaim the child at some point using the other half. If they did not, the half playing card remained attached to the foundling register for ever (van Leeuwen 2000a, 64).⁵⁴

Factors shaping identity registration in the Dutch Republic

So far, we have discussed each method of identity registration, its origin and nature, in the early modern Dutch Republic separately. This has allowed us to present a variety of such methods in some detail. We do not want to argue that all these measures originated from a single common source. Nor do we want to claim that they were so closely connected as to have constituted a single system. At the same time, we feel it is fair to conclude that, taken together, the various registration methods discussed above covered almost the entire population of the Dutch Republic at some stage in their life, regardless of whether they were rich, middle-class, or poor; migrant or sedentary; and regardless of their religion. To a large extent,

⁵² If she was not, her declaration was taken less seriously (Haks 1982, 91).

⁵³ A form of ‘paternity act’ was reintroduced in 1909 (Kok 1991, 37).

⁵⁴ See also Wagenaar (2009, 56–59), for examples from the nineteenth century.

the methods of identity registration employed in the Golden Age predated the Reformation, or in some cases – citizenship registers, for example – originated as early as the late Middle Ages. This was the case for the registration of baptisms, marriages and burials, and for the way in which guilds registered the urban male labour force. These registration methods evolved in the early modern era in specific ways relating to the following general factors: the Reformation, the decentralized political structure of the Dutch Republic, growing literacy, and the flowering of a modern economy.

The Reformation had the enduring double effect in the Netherlands of both a separation of secular authority, as exercised by the magistrate, and ecclesiastical authority, as exercised by the church, and a proliferation of ecclesiastical authorities. Henceforth, there could not be a single poor relief agency; there would be many agencies caring for the poorer members of their particular congregation; and the magistrate would need to assume a measure of control and provide care for those poor who for some reason or other the church declined to help. There could no longer be one, Catholic, method of registering life-course changes; instead, we find various registers for Catholics, Calvinists, Lutherans, Jews, and Mennonites. Though this proliferation of registration created problems of uniformity, comprehensiveness, and coordination, that registration was also devolved to smaller units, which were able to monitor more easily what was happening and which usually had a strong interest in vigilance: after all, the well-being – if not the souls – of their fellow believers was at stake.

Lacking a strong central state apparatus, Dutch administration was decentralized in a corporatist fashion.⁵⁵ Corporatism is a political system in which government – in the case of the Dutch Republic, mostly urban government – devolves some of its powers to civic associations. Towns had transferred a number of key responsibilities to corporations, the most important of which were the guilds. Those corporations had a considerable degree of autonomy, with their own members, self-government, their own statutes, capital, and income. Their activities were monitored by local government. Guilds, too, were bodies governed by public law and ultimately subject to the authority of the town government, which sometimes also approved their annual accounts. In the event of a dispute with his guild, a guildsman could always appeal to the town government. If rumours of fraud or maladministration were serious enough, the town government would launch an inquiry. This decentralization created problems, notably with regard to migrants, but it also made registration easier in the sense that it took place within the corporation of stakeholders itself – thus saving on state bureaucracy – and with more legitimacy than if left to the state.

⁵⁵ Histories of the Dutch Republic include those by Israel (1995), Prak (2005), K. Davids and Lucassen (1995), and de Vries and van der Woude (1997). On corporatism see Prak (1999) and van Nierop (1997).

The modern Dutch economy of the Golden Age created problems with regard to identity registration. A sizeable proportion of the population were highly mobile: though not all came from outside the Dutch Republic, many were at least born in a place other than that in which they lived. To deal with the problems that migration gave rise to, churches requested documents proving confirmation, guilds would require proof of apprenticeship or mastership, and relief agencies and the city authorities would demand letters of surety. The fact that Amsterdam was a key centre in the global network of trade, financial services, and information meant further proof of identity would be required from merchants, skippers, buyers and sellers of bonds and annuities, and the like. The modern economy thus not only needed such documents, it also provided the urban infrastructure to produce them.

It seems a paradox that, equipped with a weak central state and a small bureaucracy, the Dutch Republic succeeded fairly well in supplying its inhabitants with the forms of identity registration they needed, and succeeded fairly well in knowing, when it needed to, who they were. One answer to this apparent paradox might be that in this densely populated, modern, urban economy it was both possible to devolve much of the responsibility for registration to local associations of citizens, and wise to do so.⁵⁶ It relieved some of the burden on the administration and the treasury, and it was effective, as citizens took an interest in registration control and were in many cases in the best position to monitor it and uncover fraud. Of course, the lack of a centralized state and a numerically powerful bureaucracy created a myriad of ways in which identity was locally registered and monitored.

Some problems went beyond the level of the community though, notably in the case of the travelling poor, absconding sojourning sailors, and migrating military men. These could have created havoc in key areas of the Dutch national and imperial economy. It is interesting to note that in these cases the usual practice of outsourcing registration to local groups of citizens was supplemented or replaced by supra-local measures and bodies. Perhaps one has to grant the rather diffuse political structure of the Dutch Republic a certain amount of credit for its flexibility.

Epilogue: limits to early modern identity registration

The fact that registration existed does not mean it was either comprehensive or effective, and it is to these points that we will now turn. Of course the mere existence of a register does not imply it was properly kept. Since the late fourteenth century, in the city of Utrecht, for example, those who became burghers had to be registered in the so-called *stedelijk publicatieboek* or *buurspraakboek* ('town publication

⁵⁶ There is a nice contrast to be pointed up here between the efficiency of the Dutch devolved system and the ineffectiveness of the German centralized system, according to Fahrmeir (2000).

book' or 'neighbour book'). From 1611 onwards, new burghers first had to pay a fee to the treasurer before being entered in the register. However, though they were registered in the treasury accounts, their names were not always subsequently inscribed in the burgher register, which increasingly became incomplete.⁵⁷

It was not just the magistracy registers that had lacunae; church registers suffered the same fate. In Dordrecht, for example, post-Reformation baptism registration was far from faultless due to the 'growing pains' experienced by the new church: it was not until 1578 that those problems had been adequately resolved. Even afterwards, lacunae remained, due for instance to ministers in some cases delaying and then forgetting to register – thus the baptism of arguably the most famous Dutch statesman, Johan de Witt (1625–1672), went unrecorded.⁵⁸

As registration systems were local, they often differed in content and presentation. In Amsterdam and Leiden, registers were kept of the publication of marriage banns, with names, birthplace, place of residence, and often occupation being recorded. Amsterdam recorded the couple's ages as well. In Utrecht, however, registration was haphazard, at least initially: the marriage registers of the Dutch Reformed church have been preserved only for the years 1590–1595 and again from 1600. Few details were registered: usually only the names of the couple, and sometimes their place of origin. Especially in the case of brides and bridegrooms from the elite, the register often mentions only their name – even the customary designation of whether the bride and bridegroom were widowed was often omitted. Nor was the place of origin usually noted for the many soldiers in Utrecht (Rommes 1998, 53–54).

Other forms of registration showed similar problems. Nijmegen often had problems with river skippers who bought citizenship in order to obtain letters of toll from the city granting them exemption from excises on the River Waal but who did not settle in Nijmegen. From 8 November 1592 those skippers were required to present a *wettelijcke attestatie*, a 'lawful attestation', confirming that they had renounced the citizenship of their place of origin; they were also required to rent and live in a house in Nijmegen. They were to renew their oath and letter of citizenship annually; nevertheless, despite further tightening of the rules,

⁵⁷ This may have caused occasional problems for the city's secretaries, but they were presumably aware of the necessity of consulting the treasury accounts. In 1700 a new register was introduced. It was more reliable than the previous one, but names that appeared in the treasury accounts were still sometimes omitted from the new register (Rommes 1998, 45).

⁵⁸ It was only from 1635 onwards that baptized children were properly registered. The same applies to Dordrecht's burial registers: they were kept regularly only from the end of the seventeenth century; before that date they were very incomplete. The earliest burial registers from Dordrecht churches date from 1632 and 1636, but in plague years for example only half of deaths were recorded in them (Frijhoff *et al.* 1998, 86–87, 96–98). Something similar happened in Leiden, where during the epidemic of 1669–1670 officials temporarily suspended recording burials due to the overwhelming number of people dying (van Maanen 2005, 45).

problems with skippers evading the requirements were to recur from time to time (Schimmel 1966, 13, 58–60). Another problem in Nijmegen concerned citizenship. Since 1623 one had to be a member of the Dutch Reformed church – or at least not a Catholic or a Jew – in order to obtain burghership rights. Some 'lapsed' Catholics returned to their original faith after acquiring citizenship. For a while, those burghers whose deceit became apparent were subsequently stripped of their citizenship. Eventually, however, the magistracy lost interest in the problem, although the practice seems to have continued (Schimmel 1966, 45–48).⁵⁹

Registration systems also had limits in other respects. Some individuals were economical with the truth. The early modern Dutch authorities relied much on personal oaths.⁶⁰ If people were brazen enough to commit perjury, there was often little early modern society could do immediately. For example, despite all the precautions inherent in the system of marriage banns, it proved possible for two Leiden women, Cornelia Gerritsdr van Breugel and Elisabeth Boleyn, who had already lived together for a time, to marry one another. Boleyn moved temporarily to Amsterdam, followed soon afterwards by van Breugel dressed in men's clothes. In 1685 they were married as man and wife in Amsterdam's New Church, where Cornelia used the name Cornelis. They returned to Leiden as husband and wife, but after two and a half years Cornelis decided to revert to being Cornelia and dressed in women's clothes. It was only then that the couple were found out. In 1688 they were exiled from Leiden and forbidden to live together again (Dekker and van de Pol 1989, 83).⁶¹ There were similar cases concerning transvestite women. In one celebrated case a couple lived together for three years without the wife discovering her husband's true sex. All that time, the husband had refused to have sex with his wife. The discovery of her husband's true sex apparently came as a great shock to her (Dekker and van de Pol 1989, 89–90).⁶²

In certain walks of life, during the early modern period, men – and women – had ample opportunity to disguise their gender, especially in the army and the fleet, where the Dutch tended not to be too particular about who enlisted. In the Dutch Republic, uneducated young men from the lower classes had few options; the same could be said of young women from those classes. Women sometimes managed to hide their identity – as a person and as a woman – for years on end.

⁵⁹ Between 1721 and 1743 this ban ceased to be enforced, and Jews too could henceforth become burghers of Nijmegen. By 1789, it had been effectively abolished (Schimmel 1966, 68, 74, 102). Other eastern Dutch cities too tried to close their gates to anyone who was not Dutch Reformed (Lourens and Lucassen 2000).

⁶⁰ Nijmegen is one example. In 1619 all citizens were ordered to personally renew their oath before the burgomasters (Schimmel 1966, 30).

⁶¹ It is not known how this couple managed to fool the authorities. Did they forge the necessary documents? Perhaps those documents were not always actually required.

⁶² One such woman, Barbara Adriaens, twice married another woman, once in Amsterdam in 1632 and subsequently in Groningen (Dekker and van de Pol 1989, 84–85).

How often this occurred is impossible to tell,⁶³ but that it was perhaps not infrequent is attested to by an offhand remark made by the Amsterdam burgomaster and national politician, Nicolaas Cornelisz Witsen, who wrote to a friend: 'but how many examples could I not give of women, who did manly service on our ships, and conducted themselves extraordinarily bravely',⁶⁴ he remarked how 'I myself have discovered women dressed as soldiers in our army, and made them change clothes'.⁶⁵ The occurrence of women posing as men was certainly common enough for notaries' manuals to treat the question of the validity of instruments drawn up before male witnesses who turned out to be women. Some offenders were so successful in hiding their sex that it was only on the scaffold or on their deathbed that their true sex was discovered. If a man was suspected of being a woman, an array of 'tricks' was available to the authorities to ascertain 'his' true sex: one involved placing a spinning-wheel close to the person: a woman would show an interest, a man would not; another was to throw a ball – in trying to catch it, a woman would spread her legs as if she were wearing a skirt; a third was to scatter peas on the floor – supposedly a man would keep his balance, a woman would not. That women could successfully pose as men may have been partly related to the lack of centralized bureaucracy in the early modern age. When, in the nineteenth century, the Dutch state became ever more bureaucratized, erecting barriers in the form of central registration of all births, marriages, and deaths, military conscription and medical examinations, the phenomenon of transvestite women successfully assuming a male identity disappeared completely (Dekker and van de Pol 1989, 36–37, 65, 127, 130).

When it came to enlisting in the fleet or the army, it was not just women who made use of proxies. Men did too. The rather superficial registration of the identity of sailors and soldiers offered ample opportunity for fraud: one could enlist under a false name, or claim a false place of birth. There were many cases of sailors, esteemed by recruiters for their considerable ability, enlisting under another name, after which a sailor of lesser ability actually showed up to do the work (van Gelder 1997, 49, 145–146; 2003, 177). This problem was apparently sometimes solved, or at least addressed, by the Dutch East India Company, which occasionally registered not just name, place of origin, age, and occupation, but also physical traits, such as the colour of eyes and hair, making it possible to check more closely those who showed up for work.⁶⁶ This might have gone some way to solving the

⁶³ Rudolf Dekker and Lotte van de Pol investigated the occurrence of women posing as men in the early modern Dutch Republic and identified 120 individual cases, almost all from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Dekker and van de Pol 1989, 13, 25).

⁶⁴ '[. . .] maar wat zoude ik al voorbeelden van vrouwen kunnen verhalen, die op onze schepen manndienst hebben gedaan, en zich bijzonder dapper gedroegen' (Dekker and van de Pol 1989, 12).

⁶⁵ '[. . .] ikzelve in onze legers vrouwen in soldatenklederen hebbe ontdekt, en van kleding doen veranderen' (Dekker and van de Pol 1989, 12).

⁶⁶ Personal communication from Matthias van Rossum.

problem of enlistment by proxy, but it certainly did not stop women dressed as men from enlisting. It appears, however, that throughout its existence the VOC never tried to turn this more detailed registration into permanent company policy; name and place of birth remained the only categories of personal information the muster clerks normally registered, though nationality and age were sometimes also asked.⁶⁷ The permanent need for VOC hands meant that the company placed as few obstacles as possible in the way of the many hopefuls who applied for the lowly jobs of company sailor and soldier. Having said that, once aboard ship it was often quickly discovered that a sailor was not as experienced as he had claimed to be, and the VOC officers usually punished them by making them work harder. Another danger was that of the proxy issuing at registration a *maandbrief*, a 'monthly letter' to a relative, who stayed in the Republic and collected his salary on his behalf. On his return, the VOC employee being proxied for might discover that his identity fraud had not paid off because the proxy himself had been fraudulent. One could expect little sympathy from the VOC in such cases. Perhaps this is why the problem, though widespread, was never adequately dealt with. A similar problem occurred with company soldiers – able-bodied men with a smattering of superficial military skills proxied for invalids and old men (van Gelder 1997, 145–146, 149; 2003, 177–178).

As with VOC sailors and soldiers, identity fraud was an option for soldiers in the Dutch army. Army contractors often lured away existing soldiers, providing companies with battle-ready soldiers and allowing them to swiftly raise a full-strength unit. The soldiers were then listed on the muster-roll under a false name. This was a problem, as the nominal strength of the army no longer corresponded to its actual strength, and the commanders of the companies from which the frauds had absconded incurred financial loss. To counter this, in 1588 the Estates General decreed that all mustering should take place in the same place on the same day and at the same hour, in order to prevent commanders 'borrowing' each other's soldiers in an attempt to make their companies complete. In 1599 they were also forbidden to mix 'any burghers, peasants, sutlers, freebooters, soldiers from other companies' among their soldiers during the inspection by the muster commissary. During campaigns, the muster commissary ensured that a tally of any losses was made by means of musters, in order to prevent having to pay out more than was necessary for the men actually surviving. In response, company commanders routinely included many more soldiers on the muster-roll than they actually employed, so that they minimized their financial losses. This fraud was extensive, and according to contemporaries the Dutch army was one-third weaker than the payrolls suggested. Though this was not all due to fraud, the stadholder and his staff usually took into account a difference between paper and effective strength of about 25 to 30 per

⁶⁷ The procedure c. 1669 also involved asking about nationality (van Gelder 1997, 144; Ketting 2002, 66); the procedure c. 1752 also involved asking about age (van Gelder 2003, 179). It appears, however, that these extra categories were not listed in the VOC salary records (van Gelder 2003, 491).

cent. The stadholder knew how to respond to the problem. Regardless of all the fraud, in the 1630s and 1640s the Dutch army was three-quarters the size of the French army (60,000 compared with 80,000 men). 'The war effort of the Dutch Republic was impressive indeed' (Nimwegen 2010, 30, 45–48).

Then there was the problem of forged documents. One way or another, documents could be falsified. During the first three decades of the eighteenth century a family gang travelled throughout the Dutch Republic on the pretext of collecting money for a worthy cause. Collectors were required to have a magistrate's permit in order to collect. The family fabricated such permits by turning passports, issued to them under some pretext or other, into fake permits, a strategy made easier by the fact that permits and passports were of similar size. The text, identifying the bearer and signed by an authority, was usually accompanied by some sad story about the misfortune that had befallen certain buildings and places, and a register, in which all those who gave and the amounts they had given could be listed.⁶⁸ In 1724, a member of the gang was caught. His passport, issued by a notary in the name of the States of Holland, stated his name and gave the name and signature of the notary. The falsifier had managed to remove the word 'passport' and replace it with the word 'permit'. A tragic story had been written on the back, and several seals attached. With such a false passport bearing the name of a trusted authority, it was easier to persuade victims to give to an apparently worthy cause. Brazenly, the gang went round The Hague and Rotterdam, using their false permits, collecting money at the homes of state dignitaries and local regents, some of whom made considerable donations. Their names, and the amounts given in the register of donors, induced others to give as liberally.⁶⁹

Despite the wide scope for falsifying documents, the registration systems in place in the Dutch Republic could have the desired effect. After all, we know about the collection racket because it repeatedly failed. And even if a person had successfully cleared the hurdles set up by the systems, he was not safe if his antecedents gave rise to suspicion, as will be illustrated, finally, by the case of Dr Kamerling, mentioned in the introduction.

For a while, Kamerling lived the life of a respected burgher, fathering a son with his wife, and taking part in his father-in-law's business. Gradually, however, suspicions emerged about his background. Despite, so he claimed, engaging in a lively correspondence with his 'Rheinberg sister', there was always a reason she could not visit. Furthermore, he became increasingly suspect owing to dubious

⁶⁸ See also Chapter 9.

⁶⁹ The pseudo-collectors were found out, however, and tried by the same councillors of the Court of Holland at whose door they had collected earlier. Earlier, in 1714, the gang had been caught because the minister of the church in Winschoten, having become mistrustful, had written to Hanau in Hessen to enquire whether the village for which the collection had been held had indeed burned down, and discovered it had not (Thuijs 2008, 89, 91, 185–186).

business dealings. Kamerling always knew how to allay the burgomaster's suspicions, but eventually only his father-in-law and wife still trusted him. Others in the Brouwershaven administration did not. Although they had previously relied on the documents he had submitted, they now secretly enquired about him in Rheinberg and Duisburg. The letters they received in response confirmed their suspicions: Johannes Cato Kamerling was known neither in Rheinberg nor in Duisburg, and the same counted for his sister. He had forged his credentials. Kamerling was subpoenaed and interrogated, but denied lying about his identity, even after the bailiff had shown him the letters from Germany. He was placed under arrest. A committee was sent to Rheinberg and Duisburg. Upon their return the committee confirmed that Kamerling was not known in those cities. It took a few further rounds of interrogation before Kamerling admitted not only to forging his identity but also to previously having tricked various other people out of money. Two surgeons then examined him and discovered he had once been branded. Kamerling then confessed to having been branded in Rotterdam for forging letters of exchange, and revealed his true identity: Abraham Maggaris, born in Middelburg. He was a recidivist, so the punishment was severe, although it could have been worse. On 15 November 1765 he was flogged, branded with the double sword, and condemned to life imprisonment in Middelburg (Viergever 1767, 2: 5–46, 53–54, 57–79, 83–138, 142–144).⁷⁰ Despite attempts to escape, Abraham Maggaris, alias Johannes Cato Kamerling, ended his days in prison in Middelburg in 1803. By then the Dutch Republic had predeceased him by eight years.⁷¹

Kamerling's case serves to illustrate the considerable potential effectiveness of the early modern Dutch 'system' of establishing and registering identity. If the Brouwershaven authorities had been more suspicious of the seals on Kamerling's identity documents, he might have been found out much earlier. The authorities in Rheinberg and Duisburg would have informed Brouwershaven that he was not the person he claimed to be. The Brouwershaven elite may well have realized this – why else would they have consented to the town secretary publishing their version of the whole affair? While their motives in agreeing to publication are not clear, the apologetic tone suggests they were the laughing stock of their peers elsewhere in the Republic.

⁷⁰ This recalls the celebrated case of Martin Guerre in sixteenth-century France (Davis 1983). Our story also illustrates Tamar Herzog's central point in Chapter 7 about 'performativity' and registration.

⁷¹ For an impression of the new regulations and the growing means available to register identity in the new era see Welten (2007). The French revolutionary predilection for registration makes it much easier for historians to follow individual lives. For the increasing bureaucratic paperwork required to marry, sometimes leading to people not marrying because they were unable to submit the required papers, see Kok (1991, 54). See also van Eijl and Lucassen (2007) and L. Lucassen (2001, 2002, 2003).

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