



The Ptolemaic (above) and the 'true' Copernican (below) systems of the world as depicted by Nicolaas Visscher on his 1669 edi-

tion of the world map by Jodocus Hondius. Photo from *The Calvinist Copernicans* (Rienk Vermij, 2002).

clude the humanities and the social sciences. Every field of scholarship would be admissible, but only in a historical context. And so it was that Edita (the name of the Academy's publishing division) initiated the series 'History of Science and Scholarship in the Netherlands'. Rienk Vermij's *The Calvinist Copernicans. The Reception of the New Astronomy in the Dutch Republic, 1575-1750* was the first volume in the series and appeared in the bookshops in mid-2002.

And Edita has not been idle since then, for three more volumes have already been published. The second volume is Gerhard Wiesenfeldt's *Leerer Raum in Minervas Haus. Experimentelle Naturlehre an der Universität Leiden, 1675-1715*, a study of the experimental philosophy that spread from Leiden and conquered continental Europe at the start of the eighteenth century. The experimental tradition has frequently been associated with the Dutch Newtonians's Gravesande and Musschenbroek. But Wiesenfeldt deliberately focuses on older influences and lesser-known fig-

ures too, and thus avoids the presumption that even here in the Netherlands scientific activity merely reflected the spread of Newtonianism, which would only have strengthened the aforementioned Anglo-Saxon bias. The third volume in the series, which quite coincidentally covers more or less the same historical period, is Rina Knoeff's *Herman Boerhaave (1668-1738). Calvinist Chemist and Physician*. This work too pursues the line that Dutch science had no reason to hide its light under a bushel. Knoeff departs from the standard interpretation of the great physician Boerhaave in taking his Calvinist convictions seriously, not just in his private life but also as a formative influence on his scientific work. The fourth and, for the time being, last volume in the series is Johanna Levelt Stengers' fairly technical study, *How Fluids Unmix. Discoveries by the School of Van der Waals and Kamerlingh Onnes*. Though this work takes us outside the Golden Age, there is a tenuous link with the other volumes in that both the Amsterdam professor Van der Waals and his younger Leiden colleague Kamerlingh Onnes figured prominently in the so-called *Second Golden Age* of Dutch history.

Like the first three volumes, Levelt Stengers' study also happens to deal with the history of science. However, there is no intention of limiting this series to 'science' in the English use of the word. To abandon the original guidelines of *scientia* (or in Dutch, 'wetenschappen') in its wider continental sense would be to deny its very *raison d'être*. So we may look forward in the future to studies that cover the whole spectrum of scholarship in the arts and sciences. A start has been made.

K. VAN BERKEL

Translated by Chris Emery.

Rienk Vermij, *The Calvinist Copernicans. The Reception of the New Astronomy in the Dutch Republic, 1575-1750*. KNAW / Edita, 2002; 433 pp. ISBN 90-6984-340-3.

Gerhard Wiesenfeldt, *Leerer Raum in Minervas Haus. Experimentelle Naturlehre an der Universität Leiden, 1675-1715*. KNAW / Edita, 2002; 464 pp. ISBN 90-6984-339-0.

Rina Knoeff, *Herman Boerhaave (1668-1738). Calvinist Chemist and Physician*. KNAW / Edita, 2002; 237 pp. ISBN 90-6894-342-0.

Johanna Levelt Sengers, *How Fluids Unmix. Discoveries by the School of Van der Waals and Kamerlingh Onnes*. KNAW / Edita, 2002; 302 pp. ISBN 90-6984-357-9.

Society

The Netherlands and the Tragedy of Srebrenica

Some events should never be forgotten. Among them are those that took place on 11 July 1995. On that day, the Bosnian Serb army overran the 'safe haven' of Srebrenica, a Muslim enclave in Bosnia that was under

the protection of the United Nations. In the days that followed, 7,500 Muslim men and boys were brutally murdered. Dutchbat, the Dutch UN peacekeeping force, was powerless to intervene. The troops were not equipped to fight off an attack and, worse still, their rules of engagement made no provision for such action. Even their requests for air strikes to deter the Serbian forces were repeatedly turned down. The Dutch peacekeepers withdrew from the area a few days later.

But simply recalling these events will not tell us who was responsible for them. It has taken several years to establish who was to blame, because the Dutch government was reluctant to face up to what happened. That is why the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation (NIOD), an independent body, was commissioned to investigate the fall of Srebrenica. NIOD took its time reporting its findings, which were finally published on 10 April 2002. The NIOD report and appendices, published under the title *Srebrenica, a Safe Haven* (Srebrenica, een veilig gebied), run to several thousand pages; 3,400, to be precise. Once the report had been published it was no longer possible to avoid the question of who was to blame – a question that was raised repeatedly during the ensuing months. It was raised following the resignation of the entire Dutch cabinet, in Dutch parliamentary debates, in yet another Dutch parliamentary enquiry, and in a public enquiry broadcast on Dutch television.

To understand how this process unfolded we first need to consider the main conclusions of the NIOD report:

- The government must carry the largest share of blame. In 1993, the Lubbers cabinet dispatched troops on a mission with a 'very unclear mandate' to a UN Muslim enclave that was virtually impossible to defend. The government's decision was based on 'a combination of humanitarian concern and political ambitions' and it involved 'enormous risks'. The Lubbers cabinet was succeeded by that of Wim Kok, which was equally responsible. By the end of 1994 the United Nations as well as the Dutch Minister of Defence Joris Voorhoeve had reached the conclusion that defending Srebrenica was an impossible task. The Dutchbat troops and the Muslim population they were assigned to protect were sitting targets. But the international community would not take action, and Minister Voorhoeve resigned himself to the fact that the situation was 'untenable'.

- The report was lenient towards the members of Dutchbat, who have often been criticised for not fighting back. According to NIOD, 'armed resistance was not an option'. The Dutch troops were heavily outnumbered. Their requests for air support were turned down. Moreover, their rules of engagement allowed them to fire only in self-defence. Nor is it true that the Muslim men were slaughtered 'in full view' of the 'Blue Helmets'. No-one could have predicted this atrocity, which took place out of sight of the Dutch

troops. Although they did, reluctantly, co-operate in an evacuation in which the men were separated from the women and children, the Dutchbat peacekeepers had been forced to choose the lesser of two evils and could not be held responsible for the separation.

- In the aftermath of the fall of Srebrenica, senior military figures made serious errors. Army generals attempted to disguise the truth about the tragedy. NIOD describes their secrecy as 'a cover-up that rebounded on the army like a boomerang'.

In the days immediately following the publication of the report it was not clear how the Dutch cabinet – and Prime Minister Wim Kok in particular – would react. Kok was, after all, the only member of the government apart from Defence Minister Pronk who had been involved in every stage of the Srebrenica drama. As such he could be held accountable for dispatching the Dutchbat troops and for the course of events during the fall of Srebrenica, and also for the way in which the aftermath was dealt with. Kok's response was also influenced by the report of the Netherlands Interchurch Peace Council (IKV), which had been published prior to the NIOD report. In contrast to NIOD's findings, the IKV concluded that given more decisive action by the Dutch cabinet Dutchbat could have prevented the massacre. Minister Pronk took this conclusion very much to heart.

Thus far the government had defended itself by claiming that it had had to do *something*; doing nothing had not been an option. In other words, the Netherlands and the international community had tried to make the best of a bad job. That was all they could do. Would it have been better if we had stayed at home? It was the Bosnian Serbs – and General Mladic in particular – who were to blame for the tragic culmination of events. But such justifications cannot conceal the fact that the international community and the Netherlands had failed miserably. The United Nations acknowledged this in a critical report and an enquiry by the French government drew similar conclusions.

Prime Minister Kok too accepted that disastrous mistakes had been made. He differed from the United Nations, however, in that rather than taking refuge in the anonymity of 'the international community', he took upon himself the successive cabinets' responsibility for the debacle. Given the report's conclusions, the Prime Minister felt he had no alternative but to resign. The other ministers also took this as a signal to step down, and Kok's second cabinet fell shortly before the general election scheduled for 15 May 2002 (see p. 299). Kok's dramatic gesture won him respect not only in the Netherlands, but also worldwide: he had personally acknowledged the failure of the international community.

But the poisoned chalice had not yet been drained. Kok had settled his own account, but Parliament wanted to take the matter further. It wanted the whole matter sorted out, and so a public enquiry was launched – a step that should have been taken much earlier. After

NIOD's thorough investigation this move was seen as rather pointless, but that was not how it turned out. Although few new facts emerged, the public hearings held in November 2002 created a deep impression. For the first time commanding officers, generals on the home front and government ministers had the opportunity to give their version of events in full – in front of the cameras and the people of the Netherlands. The whole country was drawn into the many dilemmas confronting the decision-makers and the issues they had to wrestle with.

The enquiry's findings were published in January 2003. This report – which is particularly critical of the attitude of ex-General Hans Couzy, then Commander-in-Chief of the Dutch ground forces – does not contain a great deal of new information, but it has at least brought the dilemmas of the Srebrenica tragedy out into the open and, via the television cameras, into the homes of the people of the Netherlands. That, after all, is where the drama began. The overwhelming majority of Dutch people did not want to stand idly by while ethnic cleansing was taking place in Bosnia. But neither they nor the politicians representing them had really grasped all the implications of intervening in the conflict. And we have learned to our consternation that half measures are not enough to prevent a tragedy.

WILLEM BREEDVELD

Translated by Yvette Mead.

Jan Willem Honig & Norbert Both, *Srebrenica: Record of a War Crime*. New York, 1997.

The Vlaams Blok

The electoral success in 2002 of Jean-Marie Le Pen in France and the Pim Fortuyn List (LPF) in the Netherlands has, in spite of the huge differences between them, again focused attention on Flanders and its extreme right-wing party, the Vlaams Blok or Flemish Bloc. In a display of total ignorance and disturbing over-simplification, Le Pen, Fortuyn and Vlaams Blok leader Filip Dewinter have all been tarred with the same brush. In some quarters Flanders has once again been portrayed as a region virtually synonymous with neo-Fascism and the extreme right. In Flanders itself, however, the events in France and the Netherlands caused some wry amusement when it became their neighbours' turn to be faced with unusual and extremist voting behaviour.

France, Austria, Denmark, Italy and now the Netherlands have all proved just as susceptible as Flanders to the virus of the extreme right. Dozens of Flemish politicians, journalists, political commentators and artists have been arguing for years that the rise of the Vlaams Blok should not be regarded as a typically Flemish phenomenon, but their analyses and warnings have not always been taken seriously. After all, there are quite a few people who have a vested interest in associating Flanders with the extreme right.

Because Wallonia has never had an extreme right-wing party worthy of the name, and also because Flanders has produced a number of Fascist supporters in the past, it has been all too easy for political opponents to pigeonhole Flanders as a hotbed of right-wing extremism. Only since Le Pen's spectacular breakthrough has it become obvious, especially among Belgium's French speakers, that the success of the extreme right is a Europe-wide phenomenon that cannot simply be linked to a single region.

The chief reason why Flanders is often associated with the Vlaams Blok is the fact that the Blok presents itself as the sole successor to the Flemish Movement and the only Flemish nationalist party. It spares neither money nor effort in projecting the image of being the only radical Flemish party that resolutely defends Flemish interests. It has adopted the Lion of Flanders – the emblem of 'official' Flanders – as the party's symbol and sings the official Flemish anthem at its meetings.

In order to distance itself from the democratic pro-Flemish parties and movements who support a federal Belgium with the greatest possible cultural autonomy for Flanders, the Vlaams Blok has from the start adopted the most radical political programme possible. Its aim is to destroy the Belgian state and achieve total independence for Flanders. However, the history of its birth and evolution provides ample evidence that at heart the Blok's motives are rooted more deeply in radical right-wing attitudes than in Flemish nationalism.

After the Second World War, during which many Flemish Nationalists had been tarnished by political and military collaboration with Nazi Germany, the founders of the newly-resurrected Flemish nationalist political organisations opted firmly for democracy. The ill-fated totalitarian principles and ultra-right assumptions were thrown overboard. In 1954 the Volksunie, the Flemish People's Union, was set up as the party of Flemish nationalism with a federal state as its principle objective. Its founder, Frans van der Elst, was later to emphasise that: *'We did not want any kind of neo-fascist, right-wing, anti-democratic party. We opted wholeheartedly for a democratic party, and accepted parliamentary democracy. We knew that the Flemish people are democratic at heart, with no inclination for revolution.'* But as the party grew and began to attract younger members, internal divisions started to appear. In the 1960s society was becoming increasingly vocal, traditional religious and socio-political structures were breaking down, and new concerns about such things as the environment and pacifism were moving to centre stage. Some of the older members began to feel alienated from the younger centre-left leadership which they felt had abandoned the party's conservative traditions, and in 1971 the party finally split. One of those who believed that the party had moved much too far to the left was Karel Dillen. The final straw came when the Volksunie joined the national government and was inevitably forced to accept compromises. In 1978 Dillen founded the Vlaams Blok.