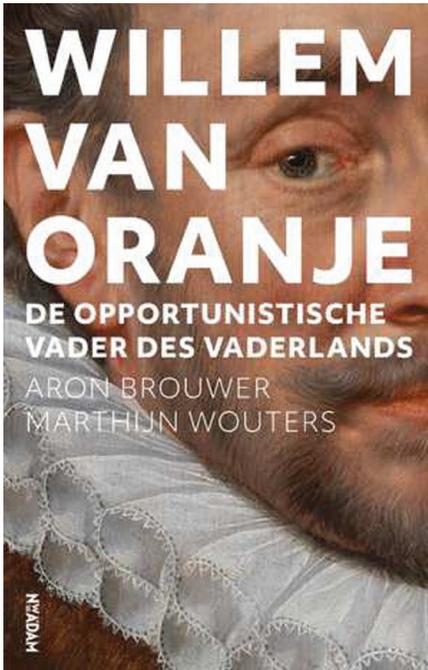


Note

Aron Brouwer and Marthijn Wouters. *Willem van Oranje. De opportunistische Vader des Vaderlands*, Amsterdam, Nieuw Amsterdam, 2017. 240 pp. ISBN 978-9-046-82118-3.



This book popularizes the history of the political opportunism of William of Orange (1533-1584). The main argument of Brouwer and Wouters is that unlike William of Orange's reputation as a liberator, advocate of religious freedom, and a *Pater Patriae* of the Netherlands, he was in fact a cynical political pragmatist who prioritized self-interest over the public good. The authors pay welcome attention to William of Orange's career before the Revolt of the Netherlands broke out, a stage of his life that other popularizers – mostly interested in the prince's role in the Revolt of the Netherlands – often neglect. Divided into four parts, each with three chapters, the book gives a chronological account of Prince William's life, from his youth until his death, and focuses on the signs that he was not always as driven by selfless ideology as people think.

Unfortunately, however, many things go wrong in the book. The narrative is, admittedly, enlivened by sometimes very

interesting citations from William of Orange's correspondence, but these remain without any significant analysis. The body of the text is often a rather tedious enumeration of events. The authors seek to demonstrate emphatically that Orange does not deserve his heroic reputation, but in doing so they pay remarkably little attention to the origin and development of this reputation and they fail to seriously engage with the extensive work that has already been done to challenge centuries of Orange glorification.

The many mistakes in this book do little to increase its persuasiveness. For purposes of brevity I can only give a few examples. Philip of Hesse is apparently the 'elector of

Hesse' (15, 22) but Hesse only became an electorate in 1803. Mary of Hungary married the 'prince' of Hungary, even though he was actually a king (20). These 'details' may not interest a modern popular audience or the authors of the book under review, but they mattered very much to people in sixteenth-century Europe. Similarly, Charles V did not simply *turn* William of Orange into a Habsburg grandee (38); service to the dynastic overlord was a Nassau tradition. And Philip II addressing William as 'My cousin' was not so much a kindness (45) as it was a conventional salutation. It also seems strange to me that, according to the authors, Hendrik van Brederode for a time intended to bequeath Culemborg to Prince William (106), when in fact Culemborg was a property of Floris van Pallandt, count of Culemborg. The authors did not add a footnote to clarify their assertion.

About the footnotes: it is good that the authors have provided a general audience with references to literature, but the haphazard, irregular and sometimes seemingly random placement of footnotes will likely annoy readers of *EMLC*. The annotation is especially problematic as the authors claim an innovative approach to the letters of William of Orange, but their references are difficult to verify and, very often, fascinating quotes lack footnotes.

In sum, while it is commendable that Brouwer and Wouters seek to popularize a historical interpretation of William of Orange that challenges his status as 'Father of the Fatherland', in my view their efforts produce neither new insights nor sufficiently sound scholarship.

Jasper van der Steen, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin