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Maurice as the Nimrod of his Age

Political Propaganda Prints by Jan Saenredam

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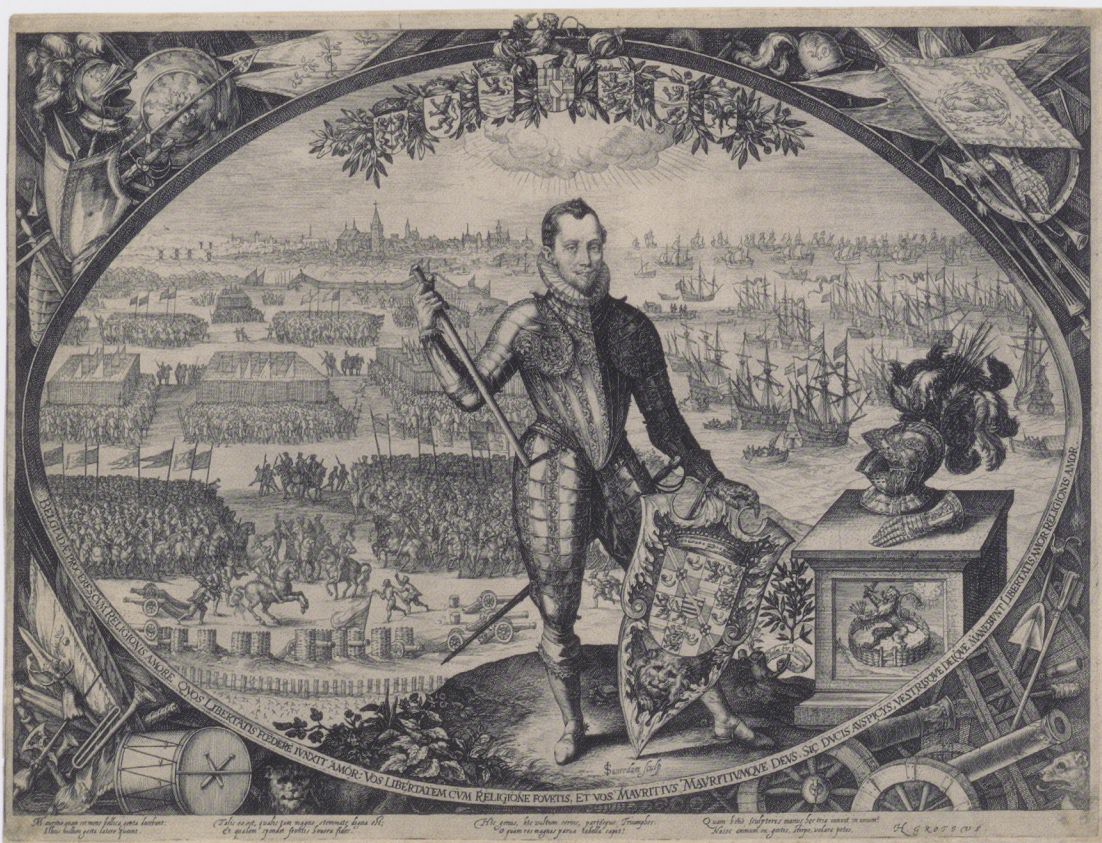
The Battle of Nieuwpoort (1600) is one of the most familiar points of reference in the history of the Netherlands – not just now, but in its own time. The battle was the culmination of a series of highly successful military campaigns with which Maurice of Nassau endeavoured to enforce the sovereignty of the infant Republic of the United Provinces. In 1600, Johan van Oldenbarneveld sent Maurice to Dunkirk to tackle the problem of privateers. There he engaged with the army of Archduke Albert of Austria, who was wounded in the arm; the archduke's magnificent horse was seized by Louis Gunther of Nassau and presented to Maurice. This time, Maurice's success was not a question of taking new territory, it was primarily a psychological victory, both for him personally and for the Republic. The Battle of Nieuwpoort unleashed a flood of broadsheets and pamphlets which explained the course of the hostilities in detail – chiefly through maps and bird's eye views.¹ The victory also prompted several artists to commemorate Maurice's triumph in the rather more elevated form of a genuine art print or a complicated allegory.

Jan Saenredam (1565-1607) was one of them, although political allegorical prints scarcely figure in his oeuvre.²

Detail of fig 1.

Saenredam began by making a large, quite conventional print featuring a full-length portrait of an armour-clad Maurice with his army landing at Philippine and the preparations for the battle in the background (fig. 1).³ Maurice leans on his shield with his coat of arms; beside him is his heraldic device, an orange branch sprouting from a trunk with a scroll bearing his motto *Tandem fit surculus arbor* (At length the shoot becomes a tree). Above the oval are the arms of the seven provinces of the Netherlands, united by the foliage of an orange tree. Hugo Grotius wrote the Latin verse below. Two other prints to Saenredam's design, *The Triumphal Chariot with the Dutch Lion* (1600, fig. 2) and *Allegory on the Present State of the Netherlands* (1602, fig. 3), are even larger and present Maurice's victory as an allegory. Both prints bear a very prominent reference to the publisher, Herman Allartsz (Coster) (1572-1652) in Amsterdam, whose list leaned heavily towards 'national' political prints and maps.⁴ In view of the inscription on the *Triumphal Chariot*, the initiative for the publication must have come from Allartsz.

It seems likely that both Allartsz and Saenredam felt the need to establish their presence in the visual propaganda war between North and South. The



Southern Netherlands, which had always made a big spectacle of processions and triumphal entries, had an enormous lead when it came to visual rhetoric. In the years leading up to the Battle of Nieuwpoort, this had been made painfully clear to the Republic by the publication in Antwerp of a number of expensive books of plates in which the allegorical triumphal arches and *tableaux vivants* set up by chambers of rhetoric, guilds and town councils were described and illustrated in loving detail. The entry of Archduke Ernest of Austria into Brussels and Antwerp in 1594, for instance, was recorded in a book by Johannes Bochius, in folio, with thirty-three etchings by Pieter van der Borch, the *Descriptio publicae gratulationis ... in adventu sereniss. Principis Ernesti Archiducis*, published by the Weduwe

Plantijn and Joh. Moretus.⁵ Ernest died the following year, so the entry of the new archduke, Albert of Austria, was staged very soon afterwards, in 1596. This event, too, was recorded by Van der Borch and Bochius, as was the ceremonial installation of Albert and Isabella in 1599 on the occasion of their marriage, when Philip II gave them the whole of the Netherlands as a wedding present, thus saddling them with a decidedly unpleasant political inheritance.⁶ The twelve prints in which Jacob Savery commemorated the entry of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, into The Hague in 1586, the *Delineatio pompae triumphalis qua Robertus Dudlaeus Comes Leicestrensis Hagae Comitatus fuit exceptus*,⁷ really look rather pathetic alongside those costly books of plates, while William of Orange's entries in 1580 and that of

Fig. 1

JAN SAENREDAM,
Maurice of Nassau
and his Victory at
Nieuwpoort.
c. 1600. Engraving,
340 x 509 mm.
Rijksmuseum,
Amsterdam (inv. no.
RP-P-OB-77354).

Maurice in 1594 after the capture of Groningen were described but never illustrated.⁸ It therefore seems only common sense that a publisher should seize the opportunity to immortalize Maurice's glorious defeat of Archduke Albert at Nieuwpoort by commissioning a couple of large and prestigious prints from a renowned engraver.

Triumphal Chariot with the Dutch Lion (1600)

For the first print Saenredam chose the motif of an allegorical triumphal chariot (fig. 2).⁹ The Dutch Lion stands triumphant on the chariot holding lance, liberty hat and sword; on the seat before him rests the symbol of the unity of the Northern provinces, a bundle of seven arrows held by two clasped hands. Behind the lion is a large orange tree springing from a trunk with Maurice's coat of arms, in

front of him the personification of Prudence. The chariot is driven by Victory, holding aloft a lance with the arms of the towns (from Groningen to Zutphen) captured by Maurice in the preceding years. It is drawn by Concord and a group of Spanish prisoners (behind them can be seen their captured banners and other spoils of war) and surrounded by figures symbolizing Vigilance and the Happy Fatherland. From heaven, putti support the symbolic elements and Fame blows her trumpet. The print is titled *Elenchus rerum, deo auspice a confederatis belgis praeclare gestarum* (Critical exposition of the things magnificently achieved by the United Republic with the guidance of the Lord). This title refers chiefly to the very lengthy Latin verse proclaiming Maurice's heroic feats of arms. The cartouche in the centre contains the

Fig. 2
JAN SAENREDAM,
Triumphal Chariot with the Dutch Lion after the Victory at Nieuwpoort, 1600.
Engraving,
340 x 616 mm.
Rijksmuseum,
Amsterdam (inv. no. RP-P-0B-70.090).



publisher's dedication: *Deo vindici Maurio ductori ordinibus copjas praebentibus S[acrat] D[edicat] Hermannus Alardus Anno 1600* (To the Lord our saviour, to commander Maurice and to all those who have provided funds, Herman Allartsz devotes [this print] in 1600 and dedicates it to them).

In Antiquity, the *currus triumphalis* was the most important part of the *pompa triumphalis* of a general entering the city after a victory.¹⁰ The chariot was preceded by a procession of bearers carrying captured objects and boards with the names of conquered cities and peoples. These elements also feature in Saenredam's print. The addition of allegorical personifications is typical of the sixteenth century, however, and derives from the highly popular illustrations of Petrarch's *Trionfi*.¹¹ When monarchs actually did enter a city in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, they were not usually seated in an allegorical triumphal chariot. Driving in a more prosaic coach or riding on horseback, they would pass ranks of temporary allegorical decorations in the form of triumphal arches, *tableaux vivants* and other displays. Sometimes an immobile triumphal chariot was set up as a decoration along the route with personifications portrayed by real people. On his entry into Antwerp in 1594, for instance, Archduke Ernest was met with the sight of an allegorical triumphal chariot in which was seated the Maid of Antwerp, with Religion, Obedience, Respect, Fidelity, Benevolence and Remembrance of Blessings at her feet.¹² These personifications, of course, were in keeping with the conceptual apparatus used when welcoming a new sovereign, and differed from those in Saenredam's print, which were part of the etiquette surrounding a victory.

Allegory on the Present State of the Netherlands or Maurice as the Nimrod of his Age (1602)

Two years later Saenredam and Allartsz produced a second allegory – an even larger and rather more complex composition (fig. 3).¹³ This one is titled 'Allegory on the Present State of the United Dutch Republic' (*Emblema hodierni rerum status in Belgica Foederata*), but it has been approached in such an original manner that its significance requires closer study. This time, moreover, there are no captions to the figures, save for the Maid of Holland (*Belgica Foederata*). It therefore comes as no surprise to learn that the lengthy Latin verse serves as an explanation and ends with the words 'this is the subject of the picture' (*haec tabulae summa est*). The scene has been conceived as a hunting party in the forest, for, so the verse tells us, the hunt is compared here with war (*bellum vero ipsum venatus comparatur*). In the foreground we see Maurice astride his horse, sceptre in hand; beside him is Pallas Athena. Maurice watches as a laurel-wreathed Victory presents the spoils of the hunt, in the form of the game that has been shot, carried on the backs of two horses, to the Maid of Holland, who watches the procession from a hillock beneath an oak tree. The arms of the Seven Provinces hang from the branches above her head. The Maid is surrounded by the seven Liberal Arts; Fame blows her trumpet from the heavens, while Mercury, the god of the arts and trade, appears from the undergrowth. On the right in the procession of horsemen, we can identify the young Frederick Henry among Maurice's generals.¹⁴ In the foreground are hunting dogs and two putti who hold up Maurice's coat of arms with the orange shoot sprouting from the crown, as Saenredam had also depicted it in his portrait of Maurice (fig. 1).

We discover from the verse why Maurice's successful campaign is



compared with a hunting party, for it describes Maurice as the 'Nimrod of our age' (*nostrī aevi Nemrod Nassovius*). In Genesis (10: 8-9) King Nimrod is indeed called 'a mighty hunter before the Lord' (which is to say that Yahweh commended him for his hunting skills). He is also described there as 'a mighty one on earth'.¹⁵ This could be an allusion to Maurice as the first real power in the young Republic. The lavish spoils of the hunt represent the extremely successful outcome of Maurice's military campaigns of the previous ten years, which had made it possible – after all the misery of the early years of the war – for the arts and trade to flourish. This is emphasized by the prominent place occupied by the Liberal Arts and the presence of Pallas Athena and Mercury, and by the scene on the plain on the left which, accord-

ing to the Latin text, illustrates how concerted efforts are being made to revitalize farming, trade and shipping.

A similar theme had been pictured three years earlier in the South, during the entry of the newlywed Albert and Isabella in 1599. The revival of Antwerp as a consequence of the wise rule of Albert and Isabella was depicted through the figures of Justice, Minerva and Mercury on a temple façade.¹⁶ Elsewhere Saenredam's allegory resembles elements of the decorations seen during Leicester's entry into The Hague in 1586 and preserved for posterity in the frieze of prints by Savery. There, too, the Seven Liberal Arts were portrayed to show how they would recover after the violence of war (fig. 4), and there, too, the Seven Provinces represent the unity of the Republic (fig. 5).

Fig. 3

JAN SAENREDAM,
*Allegory on the
Present State of
the Netherlands or
Maurice of Nassau
as the Nimrod of
his Age, 1602.*
Engraving,
405 x 608 mm.
Rijksmuseum,
Amsterdam (inv. no.
RP-P-08-70.091).

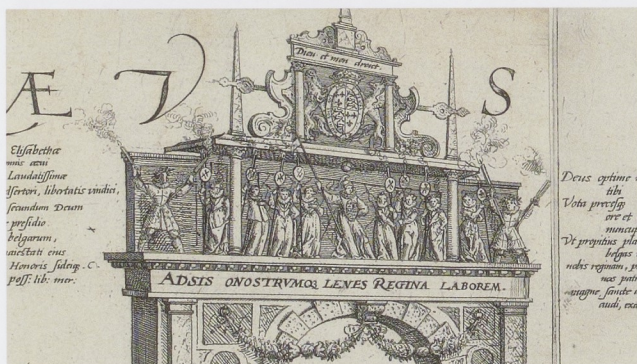


Fig. 4

JACOB SAVERY,
*Triumphal Progress
of the Earl of
Leicester in The
Hague*, (detail,
print 4), 1586.
Etching,
161 x 3874 mm.
Rijksmuseum,
Amsterdam (inv. no.
RP-P-OB-80.445).

Fig. 5

JACOB SAVERY,
*Triumphal Progress
of the Earl of
Leicester in The
Hague*, (detail,
print 5), 1586.
Etching,
161 x 3874 mm.
Rijksmuseum,
Amsterdam (inv. no.
RP-P-OB-80.445).

The Relative Permanence of Symbolism

Saenredam's *Triumphal Chariot* (fig. 2) was an immediate success. Not only are there a number of retouched reprints of it, there is also an extraordinary reworking of the print, whose traditional and unambiguous symbolism proved capable of functioning effectively on various occasions. In the sixteen-sixties or -seventies, for instance, Hugo Allardt transformed the composition in a fourth state into an allegory on the Dutch fleet's defeat of the English, titled *The Victorious Dutch Naval Heroes*, in which he replaced the figure of Victory with Michiel de Ruyter and Cornelis Tromp.¹⁷ It would seem that the print was also a source of inspiration for a real entry, for the ceremonial procession staged in Amsterdam in 1609 on the occasion of the signing of the Twelve Years Truce included an allegorical triumphal chariot carrying a triumphant Truce accompanied by Discipline and Prosperity.

The personification of War (which, temporarily, had come to an end) followed the chariot on foot, in chains held by Truce. The horses drawing the chariot were ridden by actors playing the archducal couple, Albert and Isabella, led by Integrity and Patriotism. The French king, Henry III, and his English counterpart, James I, walked beside the chariot, now and again giving it an extra push. Beneath the wheels lay a defeated Licence and Misery. At the end of the route the triumphal chariot was greeted by the Free Netherlands with Maurice and some members of the States General, as well as the archducal couple in the company of the Spanish king, Philip III, and General Ambrogio Spinola.¹⁸

To the best of my knowledge, there was no follow-up to the 1602 hunting scene comparing Maurice to Nimrod (fig. 3). Admittedly, it was customary in the Republic to compare contemporary (Reformed) leaders to 'leaders sent by God' in the Old Testament, equating its own struggle for independence with that of the Israelites.¹⁹ Nevertheless – despite the fact that to this very day the Dutch hunting association is known as Nimrod – an identification with Nimrod is unusual and even somewhat unfortunate. The Old Testament David would have been a more obvious choice. Six years earlier, during his entry into Amsterdam in 1594 after the spectacular capture of Groningen that safeguarded the eastern part of the Union, Maurice was hailed as a David who had defeated the giant Goliath.²⁰ A stage was set up on the Dam and David's triumphal procession was enacted. David was played on this occasion by Jacob de Gheyn, who was Jan Saenredam's teacher at the time. Saenredam was very probably in the audience for this performance. If he was there, he would also have been able to see Maurice's emblem painted above the stage – the orange tree with the motto *Tandem fit surculus arbor* –

that he included in his portrait of Maurice (fig. 1) six years later. On his entry into Brussels in 1577 William of Orange was welcomed with *tableaux vivants* in which not just David, but Moses and Joseph as well, were presented as the saviours of their people.²¹ Hercules, too, as a proverbial hero, was trotted out for virtually every triumphal entry of a monarch, as he was for the entry of Archduke Ernest in Antwerp in 1594.²²

Did the Calvinist Saenredam think up the comparison to Nimrod himself, or did that idea come from his publisher, Allartsz? At first glance, Nimrod as a metaphor for a mounted hunter with his trophy may have seemed an attractive figure to link to Maurice, particularly as the Bible refers to a truism ('wherefore it is said: Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the Lord', Gen. 10:9). A huntsman on horseback was also appropriate because, after the victory at Nieuwpoort, the stadholder preferred to be depicted astride his horse, as he is in a print by Crispijn de Passe I of 1600 (fig. 6) – an image that immediately evoked associations with the archduke's captured steed.²³ Whoever came up with the hunt allegory, however, was apparently unfamiliar with the fact that the Nimrod of Genesis also had some distinctly negative qualities, for he was traditionally identified with the ruler responsible for the building of the Tower of Babel. The builder's name is not mentioned in Genesis, where it simply says that he was a descendant of Noah. But in Flavius Josephus's widely-read *Antiquities of the Jews* (1, 4) he is identified as Nimrod. This means that it is also King Nimrod who oversees construction in various, mainly Southern Netherlandish sixteenth-century depictions of the Tower of Babel, so that he is, in fact, the personification of Hubris or pride. The best-known example is Pieter Bruegel's *Tower of Babel* (1567) in



Vienna.²⁴ In an illustration in Athanasius Kircher, *Turris Babel, sive archontologia* (Amsterdam 1679) (fig. 7), Nimrod is shown pointing to the tower, with his positive description from the Vulgate (*Nimrod ... ipse coepit esse potens in Terrae. Robustus Venator coram Domino*).

In any event, the comparison of Maurice to Nimrod did not endure. When Maurice made his entry into Amsterdam in 1618, he was compared to Menenius Agrippa, a Roman consul described by Livy but essentially unknown.²⁵ This was also too far-fetched, and at his entry into Breda, two years later, one of the triumphal arches carried a prefiguration that presented no risk whatsoever: Gideon,

Fig. 6
CRISPIJN DE PASSE
THE ELDER,
Maurice of Nassau
as the Victor of
Nieuwpoort, 1600.
Engraving,
440 x 292 mm.
Rijksmuseum,
Amsterdam (inv. no.
RP-P-0B-15.807).



the Old Testament warrior in the book of Judges, the successful leader of the Israelites appointed by God.²⁶

Later in the century, so it seems, Nimrod could suddenly also be used as a term of abuse. This emerges from a pamphlet directed at the political opponents of William III: 'Nimrod's mosquito swarm still in arms against Orange, besides a heavenly physic for the knowingly blind.'²⁷ In it, the anonymous author describes the Grand Pensionary Johan de Witt and his brother Cornelis, murdered by the Orangist mob in 1672, as 'Nimrod and his brother'. The illustration on the title page shows William III in a triumphal chariot driven by the Dutch lion. The accompanying quatrain begins: 'Let Nimrod's mosquito swarm slander my Prince's name, / Truth will very soon drive them into the candle's flame.'²⁸

The moral? Even Old Testament comparisons should be used with caution.

Fig. 7
King Nimrod,
illustration in:
Athanasius Kircher,
Turris Babel sive

archontologia, 1679.
Collection Inter-
national Institute
of Social History,
Amsterdam.

NOTES

- 1 For broadsheets on Maurice's military successes of 1590-1600 see Frederik Muller and De Atlas Van Stolk, and esp. C.M. Klinkert, *Nassau in het nieuws. Nieuwsprenten van Maurits van Nassaus militaire ondernemingen uit de periode 1590-1600*, Zutphen 2005, pp. 170-246.
- 2 For biographical details see G. Schwartz & M.J. Bok, *Pieter Saenredam. De schilder in zijn tijd*, Maarssen & The Hague 1989, pp. 16-26 and 293 (based on the biography in Cornelis de Bie, *Het gulden cabinet* (1662), probably written by Jan's famous son, Pieter Saenredam).
- 3 F. Muller, *Beredeneerde beschrijving van Nederlandsche historieplaten, zinneprenten en historische kaarten*, 4 vols., Amsterdam 1863-82, 1, no. 1153, G. van Rijn, *Atlas van Stolk. Katalogus der historie-, spot- en zinneprenten*

betrekkelijk de geschiedenis van Nederland, 10 vols., Amsterdam 1895-1931, II, no. 1101, F.W.H. Hollstein, *Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts, ca. 1450-1700*, xxIII (Amsterdam 1980), p. 101, no. 128.

- 4 For Herman Allertsz (Allertsz) see E.W. Moes & C.P. Burger, *De Amsterdamsche boek-drukkers en uitgevers in de xvii eeuw*, 4 vols., Amsterdam & The Hague 1900-15, vol. 4, pp. 324-42 (work) and pp. 342-49 (biography). He added 'Coster' to his name from 1603 onwards, because in that year he became sexton ('koster') of the Nieuwe Kerk in Amsterdam.
- 5 *New Hollstein* (Pieter van der Borcht), Part v, Ouderkerk aan den IJssel 2007, nos. 2178-212.
- 6 *Ibid.*, nos. 2213-30 (*Historia narratio perfectionis et inaugurationis Serenissimorum ...*

- Albert i et Isabellae* (Antwerp 1602). For the Southern Netherlandish 'triumphal entries' see I. von Roeder-Baumbach, *Versieringen bij Blijde Inkomsten*, Antwerp & Utrecht 1948, and P. Vandenbroeck, *Rondom plechtige intredes en feestelijke stadsversieringen. Antwerpen 1594-1599-1635* (documentary exhibition Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp) 1981.
- 7 D.P. Snoep, *Praal en propaganda. Triumfalia in de Noordelijke Nederlanden in de 16de en 17de eeuw*, Alphen aan de Rijn 1975, pp. 25-31, figs. 2-7; Hollstein, op. cit. (note 3), xxiii, p. 202, no. 5.
- 8 Snoep, op. cit. (note 7), pp. 24-25 and 31-34.
- 9 Muller, op. cit. (note 3), I, no. 1152. Van Rijn, op. cit. (note 3), II, no. 1096; Hollstein, op. cit. (note 3), xxiii, pp. 92-93, no. 120. For a discussion of a copy in reverse see B. Kempers in *Openbaring en bedrog. De afbeelding als historische bron in de Lage Landen*, Amsterdam 1995, pp. 92-94.
- 10 Cf. H.S. Versnel, *Triumphus. An Inquiry into the Origin, Development and Meaning of the Roman Triumph*, Leiden 1970.
- 11 Cf. for example the suite by Philips Galle after Maarten van Heemskerck, *New Hollstein (Maarten van Heemskerck)*, Part II, Roozendaal 1994, nos. 491-96, and I.M. Veldman, *Leerrijke reeksen van Maarten van Heemskerck*, Haarlem & The Hague 1986, pp. 58-66.
- 12 *New Hollstein (Pieter van der Borcht)*, part v, op. cit. (note 5), no. 2182, Vandenbroeck, op. cit. (note 6), pp. 38-39, no. 1.
- 13 Muller, op. cit. (note 3), I, no. 1174. Van Rijn & Van Ommeren, op. cit. (note 3), II, no. 1126, Hollstein, op. cit. (note 3), xxiii, p. 91, no. 119.
- 14 With thanks to Daniel Horst for this identification. Alongside Frederick Henry rides an allegorical woman with a winged heart, probably Hope (cf. Hope in a print after Van Heemskerck, *New Hollstein (Maarten van Heemskerck)*, Part II, op. cit. (note 11), p. 183, no. 502.
- 15 Cf. also 1 Chronicles 1:10 'And Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be mighty upon the earth.'
- 16 *New Hollstein (Pieter van der Borcht)*, part v, op. cit. (note 5), no. 2229, Vandenbroeck, op. cit. (note 6), pp. 50-51, no. 13.
- 17 See Hollstein, op. cit. (note 3), xxiii, p. 93, and note 9 above.
- 18 J.A. Worp, *Geschiedenis van het drama en van het toneel in Nederland*, 2 vols., Groningen 1904-08, vol. 2, p. 15 (based on a description by Hoof, see Gedichten van P.C. Hoof, ed. F.A. Stoett, Amsterdam 1899, I, p. 81).
- 19 See for example H. van de Waal, *Drie eeuwen vaderlandsche geschied-uitbeelding 1500-1800*, The Hague 1952, pp. 15-36. Jan Saenredam was an elder and deacon of the Reformed Church council of Assendelft, see Schwartz & Bok, op. cit. (note 2), p. 21.
- 20 As another fitting allegory, the victory of Claudius Civilis over the Romans was portrayed on a triumphal arch, see Snoep, op. cit. (note 7), pp. 31-34, with a reference to Samuel Coster, *Beschrijvinge van de blyde inkoopste...*, Amsterdam 1642, p. 7, and Isaak Pontantus, *Historische beschrijvinghe der seer wijt beroemde Coop-stadt Amsterdam*, Amsterdam 1614, pp. 148-49.
- 21 Every monarch laid claim to the comparison to King David. In The Hague in 1549, Philip II was welcomed as, among other things, a David who had defeated the Goliath of heresy, see Snoep, op. cit. (note 7), p. 19.
- 22 On the entry of Albert and Isabella in 1599 there was a representation of a terrifying Gallic Hercules (as the prototype of the governor, Albert), who held all the regions of the Netherlands, including the Seven Provinces of the Republic, in check with chains clamped in his teeth, see *New Hollstein (Pieter van der Borcht)*, Part v, op. cit. (note 5), no. 2228, Vandenbroeck, op. cit. (note 6), pp. 48-50.
- 23 I.M. Veldman, *Crispijn de Passe and his Progeny (1564-1670). A Century of Print Production*, Rotterdam 2001, pp. 98, fig. 48 (reused in 1631 as a portrait of van Gustav Adolf II on horseback, see Veldman fig.168). See Klinkert, op. cit. (note 1), pp. 290-91, for the translation of the Latin inscription listing military successes from 1590 onwards.
- 24 W.S. Gibson, *Bruegel*, Amsterdam 1977, pp. 93-97.
- 25 Snoep, op. cit. (note 7), pp. 36-38.
- 26 Worp, op. cit. (note 18), II, p. 15.
- 27 'Nimrods mugge-swarm noch in 't harnasch. Tegens Oranje. Neffens een hemelsche artzenye voor de willens-weete blinden.' W.P.C. Knuttel, *Catalogus van de pamfletten-verzameling berustende in de Koninklijke Bibliotheek*, 10 vols., The Hague 1890-1920, no. 10622. Nowadays 'Nemroet' is still a very negative name in Turkey, meaning a bogeyman or a bad and aggressive person (with thanks to Dr Xander van Eck in Izmir).
- 28 'Laet Nimrods mugge-swarm mijn Prins met last'ren liegen,/ De Waerheyt sal haer All'haest in de kaers doen vliegen.'