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VICISSITUDES OF A MAIDEN¹

Some 40 years ago Van de Waal made the following statement concerning the female figure personifying the Republic of the United Netherlands, the *Nederlandse Maagd*²:

Finally, the origin of the allegorical figure of the Dutch Maid can be determined accurately; she was initially a Pallas Athene and was first depicted on a coin of the province of Holland designed in 1680.

A glance through numismatic literature, however, reveals that long before 1680, as early as the end of the sixteenth century, this maiden was represented on Dutch coins and medals in a form which indicates a different origin. This article will attempt to show how she came to be identified in the course of the seventeenth century with Pallas Athene.

The medal came into being as a separate art form in the fifteenth century, a period when people were familiar with the allegorical way of thinking. At that time the allegories on the reverse of most medals had the purpose of illustrating the character or the activities of the persons portrayed on the obverse. Later, from the sixteenth century till the end of the eighteenth, the function of medals became almost exclusively a commemorative one, but the subjects immortalized were still mostly represented symbolically by figures derived from classical mythology or emblem books. In most cases these subjects were of a military or political nature: battles, peace treaties, royal marriages or deaths, were the most frequent occasions for striking medals. Although the form of expression remained largely the same throughout the nineteenth century, new subjects were added, such as exhibitions, anniversaries of societies, musical and sporting events. But by then personifications had become stereotyped, without any originality. Twentieth-century medallic artists, too, when inspiration is weak, sometimes revert to this old artistic idiom which has long since died out in other forms of art. Here we are witnessing, as it were, the last convulsions of an old tradition which was very much alive a few centuries ago.

1 Reprint, with some adaptations, of: Vicissitudes of a Maiden, in: *Festoën, opgedragen aan A.N. Zadoks-Josephus Jitta bij haar 70e verjaardag* (Studies presented to A.N. Zadoks-Josephus Jitta on the occasion of her 70th birthday), Scripta Archaeologica Groningana 6, Groningen-Bussum 1975, 409-417. De redactie dankt Uitgeverij Unieboek te Houten voor haar toestemming om het artikel hier te herpubliceren.

2 Translated from the Dutch text of Van de Waal 1952, 209 (cf. list of publications referred to below on pp. 61-62).

Then personifications were used in all forms of art, but medallists in particular liked to avail themselves of this possibility of reducing the mixture of concrete and abstract elements of the subject they had to depict to a simple allegory. This symbolical language was understood and appreciated by all educated persons, even if it was sometimes open to different interpretations. But the messages carried by medals from the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries are no longer easily accessible to the modern mind. On some medals the significance of the personifications is explained by the Latin legends. In most cases, however, we have to rely on the explanations given by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century authors.

The earliest handbook dealing exclusively with medals is that by Luckius³, published in 1620 at Strasbourg. He described and illustrated medals from various European countries, and among them some medals struck in the Netherlands. During the Eighty Years' War the progress of the struggle against Spain occasioned the striking of a large number of medals, which attracted attention outside the Low Countries also. Luckius' interpretations may be considered more or less contemporaneous with the medals themselves.

In 1657 the Haarlem magistrate Beukel van Zanten listed, and in many cases described, all Dutch medals known to him. His manuscript was never printed and is now lost, but an early eighteenth-century written copy is preserved in the Royal Collection of Coins at The Hague⁴. His explanations of symbolical figures are often different from those of later authors.

At the end of the seventeenth century interest in medals increased markedly. At that time the publication of handbooks for medal collectors started in earnest. The first author who devoted a book exclusively to Dutch medals was Abbé Bizot, a Frenchman. It appeared in Paris in 1687 and deals with the period from 1566 to 1680. In 1688 a new edition appeared in Amsterdam, also in French, and two years later a supplement written by Joachim Oudaen. This contains a number of medals unknown to Bizot, as well as medals which had been issued in the mean time between 1680 and 1687. A Dutch translation incorporating these additions was published in that same year (1690). It cannot be assumed with certainty that Bizot and Oudaen interpreted the personifications on sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century medals in the same way as people did at the time of issue, but they may be considered reliable as far as medals of the second half of the seventeenth century are concerned. All the same, every now and then there are discrepancies between Bizot's commentary and that of Oudaen in the Dutch translation.

3 Cf. F. Wielandt 1951, 24-25.

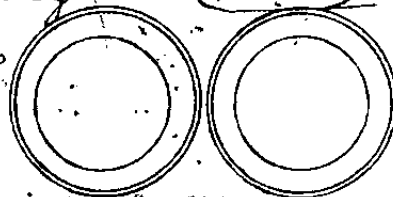
4 Now at Leiden.

1591 Von nobis domine non nobis. 1591. — Sed nomini tuo da gloriam (Vide 1589).

Psalm 135. 1.

Deene Penning is te de Zeelanders gaffelen, met hun wapen aan de een zijde
te fcheppen aan de andere.

De geesten aan god de eer der opwinningen van de bovengemelde vreden, ver-



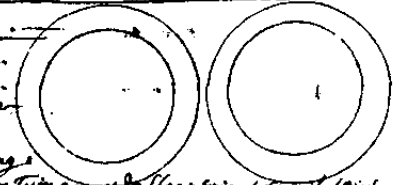
1591 Pax patet insidiis. 1591. — Tutus salus bello.

Luc. 327. — Morant. 303. 6. — Worden. 321. — Perit. 14.

Seneca in Hercule Fur. Tus arm in armis, Opprimis leges timor.

Omnia prorsus consilio quam armis expariri sapientem docet.

Thucydides lib. 2. Na colloquutione de pace prorsus proditionis urbium ten-
tentur fiant inter colloquutione, maxima cavenda est.



W De Stadsen deden in die tijd daer Penning muntten tot een waarfchoning.
Op de een zijde zat de Hollandsche Maagd, op de andere zijde een vrouwe in haar tuin gaande, tusschen de vi-
anden haar in de tuin belagardde, besprongen de aanvallen, met dit omschrift, De Vrede is alle lijk bedrog onderworpen.
Op de andere zijde zat de Hollandsche Maagd in haar tuin wakker wel gemood te gewapend, met haare kledde, tusschen
daer, die haar niet beschermden haare besprogers vroomlijk afweeren; met dit omschrift, in de oorlogs tijd heeft men
zekerder behoudenis: Dat is, men heeft het zeker te zijn te zien aan, als men een oerbaare oorlog heeft te goede waagt
hand houd de op alle toevallen goede agting neemt.

Part of a page from the copy of Beukel van Zanten's manuscript

In the sixteen eighties the Frenchman Nicolas Chevalier had settled in Amsterdam as a dealer in curiosities and medals. He was an admirer of kingstadholder William III and collected all the medals struck in William's honour from 1654 onwards. Chevalier published this collection in 1692; the book contained a number of specimens unknown to Bizot and Oudaen. As it deals with medals struck up to and including 1691, it is a continuation of their work. The most comprehensive work on Dutch sixteenth- and seventeenth-century medals was written by Gerard van Loon from 1710 to 1716, and published in four volumes between 1723 and 1731. It is still the standard work on Dutch medals of the period 1555-1716. Van Loon's explanations of personifications are generally accepted without question⁵.

For completeness' sake, another publication dealing with Dutch medals should be mentioned, one written in French by Jean Le Clerc and issued in Amsterdam in 1723. His illustrations deviate in a most extraordinary way from those of the other authors and also from the medals themselves. He often combines non-existing reverses (invented by himself) with existing obverses, or obverses and reverses derived from different medals. We need not attach too much weight to his interpretations of the symbolism, which differ quite often from those of the other authors.

But even more trustworthy authors do not always agree among themselves in their descriptions of one and the same medal⁶. The explanation for these discrepancies may be that the rendering of abstract concepts on medals was becoming rather mechanical in the course of the seventeenth century. The medallists had been trained as silversmiths and seal-cutters, but they had not had a classical education, and therefore probably had no very clear idea of the original meaning of the symbolical figures they found in various handbooks at their disposal which systematically explained the significance of mythological and emblematic figures and their attributes⁷. Many personifications on medals resemble each other and attributes are often interchanged. Small wonder, then, that the uncertainty increased about the way these figures should be explained.

5 Cf. the article on Gerard van Loon below, pp. 63-84. Another standard work on Dutch medals is that issued by Frans van Mieris. It covers the period preceding and slightly overlapping that treated by Van Loon, from the beginning of the fifteenth century till 1558. As it does not contain any medals relevant to this study, it has not been included in the survey of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century numismatic literature.

6 This proposition, that even authors living at the time when the medals were issued gave different interpretations of the same personification or attribute, was treated more elaborately a few years after the publication of this article by Liesbeth Kamerbeek in *JMP* 68 (1981), 59-106.

7 Van Loon, 1732/34, 285-286, lists a number of these handbooks.

To meet this difficulty, towards the end of the eighties Dutch medallists started to provide their customers with printed Explications (*Verklaringen*) of the symbolism⁸. This became a regular habit in the eighteenth century, so that we know in most cases what the medallists of that time intended to express. For the earlier period, however, we have to rely on Van Loon and his fellow-authors.

An illustration of different interpretations of the same personification by various authors is afforded by the personage who is the subject of this article, the *Nederlandse Maagd*. On one of the many medals struck in the Netherlands to commemorate the coronation of William and Mary as king and queen of



Coronation of William and Mary as King and Queen of England,
1689, medallist unknown

England in 1689, we see a helmeted female figure in classical garb, holding a staff surmounted by a cap in her right hand, the symbol of Liberty. With her left arm she leans on a book with two clasps, probably representing the Bible, placed on a pedestal decorated with a crowned rose and a bundle of arrows, well-known symbols of England and the United Provinces. The legend, interrupted



Guilder of the province of Holland, introduced in 1681

⁸ The Royal Collection of Coins and Medals at Leiden possesses a large number of these 'Explications'. The earliest one preserved is dated 1685.

by the woman's head, reads: *Hanc tuemur, hac nitimur* – this (liberty) we defend, on this (faith) we rest. In fact, apart from a few details, exactly the same design and legend as that on the guilders introduced by the province of Holland in 1681⁹. For obvious reasons this medal does not occur in Bizot's Paris edition (1687), but it does appear in the French Amsterdam edition of Oudaen's Supplement of 1690. Obviously, he describes the woman wrongly as "Une femme représentant la Grand' Bretagne"¹⁰. It seems probable that he was misled by the reverse legend which says that Britain's Liberty, Religion, Justice, and Laws have been vindicated (by the Prince of Orange, whose shield is shown within the legend). In Oudaen's Dutch edition, also of 1690, he has apparently changed his mind¹¹. Here he calls the woman "the *Nederlandse Maagd* dressed as a war heroine". Chevalier (1692) follows Oudaen's French interpretation by calling her "Une femme qui est la Grand' Bretagne"¹². Finally, Van Loon says: "La Hollande, sous l'emblème d'une Femme armée"¹³. Another interpretation is given by the Resolutions of the States of Holland of 3 December 1680, in which the discussions on the design for the new guilder mentioned above are reported¹⁴. The female figure to be shown on the coin, which, as we saw, is the same as that on the medal of 1689, is here called "a Pallas" and "the aforesaid Pallas". Clearly in the sixteen eighties the same symbolical figure could be styled alternatively Pallas and the *Nederlandse Maagd*. This passage in the Resolutions of the States of Holland induced Van de Waal to make the remark quoted at the beginning of this article. Let us examine more closely how the personification of the Dutch Republic on medals developed.

The United Provinces came into being after the Union of Utrecht in 1579. Already before that date, however, some of the provinces rebelling against the King of Spain had been represented on medals by various symbols. One of these was the lion. According to Beukel van Zanten (1657) the reason was that most of the provinces bore a lion in their coats-of-arms¹⁵, but the suggestion of vigour and courage must have played a role as well. During the whole period of the Republic, till the end of the eighteenth century, the lion continues to

9 Van Gelder 1980, 143.

10 Bizot (French) 1690, 244.

11 Bizot (Dutch) 1690, 353.

12 Chevalier 1692, 106.

13 Van Loon 1723-1731, III, 418; French ed. 389. For quotations the French text has been used throughout. For other medals with a similar female figure, cf. Van Loon III, 380, 2 and IV, 415; French ed. III, 355, 2 and IV, 463.

14 Vermeulen 1865, 166-167.

15 The manuscript has no page indications. He makes this remark in his description of a reckoning counter of 1575 (Van Loon 1723-1731, I, 212; French ed. 209).

represent the United Provinces, with or without a sword or a bundle of arrows, later also with a spear surmounted by a cap of liberty. Sometimes a bundle of arrows alone is enough to indicate the Netherlands.

In most cases, however, the Netherlands is personified by a female figure, sometimes seated within an enclosure formed by a wattled fence, a so-called *tuin*. In an article on the Dutch *tuin*, Van Winter¹⁶ has discussed this type of Maiden depicted on coins and medals of the last decades of the sixteenth century. The earliest example is found on a reckoning counter issued by the rebellious province of Holland in 1573. A woman in a wide-brimmed hat



Reckoning counter, referring to the rebellion of the province of Holland against its Spanish overlord, 1573

holding a sword in her right hand is sitting in a *tuin*¹⁷. According to the legend she represents *Libertas Patriae*, not yet the province itself. On copper coins struck by the same province from 1574 onwards¹⁸ we see a woman also sitting in a *tuin*, her hand pointing upwards to indicate her trust in God. Van Winter makes the following comment¹⁹:

We do not know this seated woman's name. No decree, no resolution or note has been preserved to enlighten us. It seems probable that she was soon called the *Nederlandse Maagd*. That does not tell us anything about her origin. I believe we may assume that, as happens so often, old images lingered on and acquired new significance. But even if we are being driven towards sacred symbolism time and again, we should not limit ourselves to the view that this maiden is akin to Mary or the saints. We must remember also 'de maghet van Gendt' [the maiden of Ghent] and similar figures who were unrelated to them.

16 Van Winter 1957, 29-129.

17 Van Loon 1723-1731, I, 174; French ed. 172.

18 Van Gelder 1980, 78-79.

19 Translated from the Dutch text of Van Winter 1957, 100-101.

Van Winter is here referring to allegorical figures which he discussed earlier in his article, namely Mary or a saint sitting in a *hortus conclusus* as a symbol of virginity in the Middle Ages, and maidens as patronesses of towns. On the subject of the latter he remarks²⁰:

It should be borne in mind that many *τυχαί* symbolizing towns or regions, more allegorical than mythological figures, people the world of ideas in later antiquity. They emerged again as town patronesses in the sixteenth century.

In other words, the origin of the *Nederlandse Maagd* is not, as has been stated, Pallas Athene, but she descends partially from medieval symbols, partially from allegorical figures of classical antiquity. That the woman seated within an enclosure formed by a wattled fence was in fact soon referred to as the *Nederlandse Maagd* is shown by a reckoning counter struck to commemorate an offer of peace to the Netherlands by Spain in 1591. On both sides such a



Reckoning counter referring to an offer of peace to the Netherlands by Spain, 1591

female figure is depicted with a lion-shield at her side. On the obverse she is sitting at her ease, while the peace negotiators are approaching the open fence; on the reverse she is on the alert, with raised sword, surrounded by a body-guard, while soldiers are chasing the enemy away over the closed fence. Luckius (1620)²¹ calls her *Virgo Batava*, Beukel van Zanten slightly later “the Maiden of Holland”. Oudaen and Van Loon call her “the Maiden of Holland” and “une Femme qui représente les Provinces-Unies” respectively²². On a reckoning counter of 1596 she is sitting in a praying posture²³.

20 Van Winter 1957, 103.

21 Luckius 1620, 327-328.

22 Bizot (Dutch) 1690, 58; Van Loon 1723-1731, I, 423; French ed. 416.

23 Van Loon 1723-1731, I, 475; French ed. 465.

In the first half of the seventeenth century the *Nederlandse Maagd* does not occur on medals, but in the second half she is often portrayed in a warlike attitude, with helmet, cuirass and spear with cap, to indicate that she is defending the liberty of the United Provinces. She sometimes has additional attributes, such as a lion, bundle of arrows, or a shield bearing the arms of the States General, and in a few cases even a Medusa-shield. She begins more and more to resemble Pallas Athene, who is at this time found on medals as a personification of the wisdom of the public authorities, with helmet and spear, but without the cap of Liberty. A.N. Zadoks-Josephus Jitta has given several examples of medals with the goddess in this role²⁴.

One of these is the medal Johan Lutma made in 1648 by order of the town council of Amsterdam to commemorate the Peace of Westphalia. He took as his model the title page of a book published in 1626, designed by Rubens, but changed it according to the exigencies of his subject²⁵. The goddess Pallas is here, as Professor Zadoks has shown, accompanied, as often before, by Hercules. In the seventeenth century he was considered a Dutch national hero and personification of the country's bravery. No doubt when Rubens designed his title page and Lutma his medal they wanted to symbolize Valour and Wisdom, but at the time the medal was made others were already giving it a different interpretation. The poet Jan Vos, who was closely connected with members of the Amsterdam council, wrote:

De Spaansche Hercules en Staatsche Pallas koomen
Naa tachtigh jaaren krijg, elkander tegemoet

(The Spanish Hercules and Dutch Pallas meet each other after eighty years of war)²⁶. Vos, who had not had a classical education, is perhaps the first to see Pallas, with spear, bundle of arrows and Medusa-shield (this shield is lacking on another version of this medal) as a personification of the United Provinces. Beukel van Zanten did not know the medal. Oudaen, in his Dutch translation of Bizot, does not share Vos' opinion, but calls her "Pallas"²⁷. So does Van Loon, who says: "Hercule et Pallas, la Valeur & la Sagesse"²⁸.

In 1651 Sebastian Dadler made a medal by order of the States of Zeeland to commemorate the Great Assembly of the States General after the death of William II, who had threatened their liberty. Its obverse shows a helmeted woman seated on a rock, in one hand a spear with cap of Liberty, in the other

24 Zadoks-Josephus Jitta 1964, 32-34.

25 Van Luttervelt 1956, 76-79.

26 Vos 1662, 557.

27 Bizot (Dutch) 1690, 184.

28 Van Loon 1723-1731, II, 310; French ed. 299.



The Great Assembly of the States General, 1651, by Sebastian Dadler

a Medusashield and a ribbon to which the coats-of-arms of all seven provinces are attached. We do not know what Dadler or the States of Zeeland called her²⁹, but in 1687 Bizot describes her as “une Dame représentant la République”³⁰, and Van Loon twenty-five years later as “une Femme armée, emblème des Provinces Unies”³¹. In this case a woman with several attributes of Pallas Athene is accepted as the *Nederlandse Maagd* but in the case of another medal a woman who clearly stands for the United Provinces is called Pallas by Bizot. This is the medal Christoffel Adolphi made in 1667 on the occasion of the Peace of Breda. On the obverse a helmeted woman, holding a sceptre terminating in an open eye, a symbol for a vigilant government, and in her other hand a spear with a bundle of arrows attached to it, tramples upon a monster in human form representing Discord. At her feet lie a lion and a lamb, in combination a symbol of peace. Oudaen, in his translation of Bizot, also calls her “Pallas”³², but Van Loon describes her as “une Femme qui

29 After the present article had been printed in 1976, an article by Van der Meer appeared in JMP 60/61 (1973/1974, published 1977), 128-140. On pp. 130-133 the genesis of this medal and its symbolism are discussed. However, no further light could be thrown on the interpretation Dadler and the States of Zeeland gave to the female figure.

30 Bizot 1687, 221.

31 Van Loon 1723-1731, II, 362; French ed. 350.

32 Bizot (Dutch) 1690, 245.



Peace of Breda, 1667, by Christoffel Adolphi

représente les Provinces Unies”³³. In fact, the warlike attributes which the *Nederlandse Maagd* acquired in the course of the seventeenth century caused her to resemble the Goddess of Wisdom to such an extent that their names became interchangeable. ‘A Pallas’ became the indication of a warlike female figure in general (cf. also the Resolutions of the States of Holland referred to above). On Dutch medals her characteristic attribute is the spear with cap of Liberty.

This confusion in nomenclature is not unique to the Netherlands. In France, for instance, similar examples can be found. In 1663 Louis XIV founded an Academy for the express purpose of designing the medals of his *Histoire Métallique*. We are informed about the discussions of its members during a certain period through a publication by Josèphe Jacquot. In the case of several medals a woman who personifies France is called ‘Pallas’ at one stage of the discussions and ‘la France’ at another³⁴. Sometimes the same figure is called ‘Bellone’ as well³⁵. The original meaning of the gods of classical mythology had become so vague that it could even be said in the introduction to the first publication of the *Histoire Métallique*: “Il y a une très grande quantité

33 Van Loon 1723-1731, II, 556; French ed. 535.

34 Jacquot I, 72-74; II, 197-200; II, 413.

35 Jacquot I, 52-54.

d'autres figures qui ont des attributs. Mars, Pallas, Hercule, pour la Guerre; Minerve pour la Prudence, ou pour les Arts"³⁶.

Eighteenth-century medallists revert to the sixteenth-century motif of the maiden in a *tuin* surrounded by a wattled fence; she is usually unarmed, apart from her characteristic spear with cap. Only in war time does she wear a cuirass and a helmet as well. For instance, on the New Year's medal³⁷ which



New Year's medal, 1747, by Martinus Holtzhey

Martinus Holtzhey made in 1747, when the Republic was at war with France, she is thus portrayed, standing in a *tuin* holding a caduceus and an olive branch in her left hand. The caduceus symbolizes Dutch commerce, the olive branch the peace negotiations taking place at that time at Breda. A *Verklaring* written by Holtzhey explains what he meant by his symbolism. On his son Johan George's New Year's medal³⁸ for peaceful 1760 she is again seated in



New Year's medal, 1760, by Johan George Holtzhey

36 Jacquot I, CXXIV.

37 Vervolg van Loon 221.

38 Vervolg van Loon 356.

her *tuin*, this time without any warlike attributes, not even a spear. She is sitting on and surrounded by merchandise and leaning on an altar. To the left of this we see books, according to Holtzhey's *Verklaring* the Bible, charters, and treaties. In her lap lies a bundle of arrows, in her right hand she raises a cap of Liberty decorated with a sprig of orange with two fruits (Prince William V of Orange and his sister). On other eighteenth-century medals she is accompanied by various other attributes, such as scales, the tables of the law, cornucopia, which, like the olive branch and caduceus of the 1747 New Year's medal, properly belong to other personifications. All these symbols are used imaginatively, in ever varying compositions. They were still meaningful to the contemporary educated person, but their application is far removed in spirit from that of classical times. This unorthodox use of symbols is the logical outcome of a development which started in the seventeenth century and which was the cause of confusion between two allegorical figures, those of the *Nederlandse Maagd* and Pallas Athene.

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Abbreviations

JMP Jaarboek voor Munt- en Penningkunde