

## HAARLEM AND AMSTERDAM

...If the situation of Amsterdam is duly considered, it may be said to be one of the wonders of the world. It stands so low that it would be continually in danger of being drowned, were not the water kept out by dykes as high as the waves. The river Amstel, so gentle that one can hardly perceive which way it runs, passes across the whole city and forms the great canal, over which there are two bridges. That at the mouth of the sea, called the New Bridge, is one of the finest of its kind, not only for its sluices, but for the magnificent spectacle thence of the harbour, where ships are continually going out or coming in from all parts of the world. Besides the great canal, there are others worthy of mention: the Emperor's Canal, the Lords' Canal and the Prince's Canal. All these canals are broad and deep and quays run alongside. The banks are faced with stone and brick and adorned with lime-trees and elms. Very fine houses are built on most of these quays, especially on the quay of the Lords' Canal.

...After I had been to the Town Hall, I went to see the square where the merchants assemble about the affairs of their trade from noon till half past one o'clock. This square, which is longer than it is broad, is surrounded by a large open gallery or corridor, supported by stone pillars, which serves as shelter in case of rain. This place is called the Exchange, and here are to be seen merchants of all nations, the diversity of whose clothes and language is no less pleasing than the beauty of the place. Above all, nothing is more interesting than to witness the hurrying of those who are called brokers, who are the men employed by the great merchants to traffic for the bills of exchange, or to transact their other affairs. To see them scurrying from one part to another all over this square, anyone would think that they were mad.

...After having admired everything that witnesses to the wealth of its inhabitants, I have arrived in Amsterdam, this modern Tyre, the mistress of commerce, the warehouse of the world, and one of the finest, greatest and most wealthy cities in Europe. It contains both sacred and profane edifices which are magnificent, but at the same time (for I speak freely), they retain something bourgeois about them which one does not feel in the buildings of Venice and Genoa, where the architecture is of sublimer taste because there the nobility govern. The things that are truly great and noble in Amsterdam are its ramparts, faced with brick, and the broad and deep ditches with which it is encompassed. Amsterdam is the only city in the world which may be compared in any measure with Venice, for although it is not built as Venice is, in the midst of the sea, it stands as that does upon piles. Like Venice, it consists of a vast number of islands, and its principal streets are the canals, which have also the advantage of spacious quays along their banks, planted with trees, whereas at Venice the water is enclosed by the houses themselves. That I take to be all the resemblance there is between these two rivals in commerce, for as to the beauty of the buildings there is no comparison; one Canal Grande and one Cannaregio being worth more in this respect than the whole of Amsterdam. There are palaces, here are houses, which are neat, genteel and pleasant but lack any architectural style and are built in brick. Formerly the manner of building of the inhabitants of Amsterdam was very extraordinary. Most of the old houses that are still in existence stand upon stilts, which I will explain: the front of the first floor, on the level of the ground, is commonly all of windows separated by wooden pillars, which support all the masonry of the other floors, which fortunately for them are very light; for there is seldom a wall more than two bricks in thickness, and the ceilings are nothing but boards, so that the people on the first floor cannot speak without being heard on the second... I cannot imagine how houses so light can stand, and some of them are so slanting that they suggest dancers rather than houses. A number of these houses have recently been set upright. The principal adornment of these houses is their windows; no other country has such fine glazing, and many of the houses have polished plate-glass.



The Senate meets in the Stadthouse. This edifice, so much celebrated for its magnificence and because it contains the richest bank in the world, is indeed a stately building, and though it has defects it may be ranked among the finest structures in Europe. It fronts a square called the Dam, in the centre of the city. The building is almost a complete square, with pavilions at each angle. In the middle of the main façade there is a projecting building which occupies one third of the front and is decorated with seven porticoes so small that they disfigure the whole of this great mass of architecture. Notwithstanding this defect, it is certain that a foreigner, if he is not intent upon comparing this Town Hall with the Palace of Versailles or the Escorial or the Procuratie Nuove, and when he looks at it thinks that he beholds a municipal building and not the palace of a king or the seat of government of a powerful state, will gaze on it with admiration, especially if he considers that all the materials used in this building had to be brought from other countries.

...One of the finest walks in the city is the bridge which joins the ramparts from one side of the Amstel to the other. It is six hundred and seventy feet in length, and here one enjoys an admirable prospect which is perhaps the only one that can be compared with the view from the Pont Royal in Paris.

*Lettres et mémoires*, London, 1747.

CHARLES LOUIS POLLNITZ  
December 1732

...Amsterdam appears to no great advantage to a stranger on his first coming into it, unless he makes his way through the Heerengracht or the Keizersgracht streets: that of Haarlem is very long, but the sluices in the canal hurt the effect of it; the two former have also canals in the middle of them, and are very noble streets, but, like most in Holland, are planted with trees. I observed that some of the canals are very broad, and made a fine appearance, but the houses in general are not erected in a grand stile; on the contrary, very many of them disgrace the areas before them; this, though an evil, is in all the cities of Europe, and especially in London. In squares this great city appears to be very deficient; they are few in number, and have nothing in them striking: that called the Dam is the principal, but it is very irregular. It would be graced by the Stadthouse, were it not for a vile old building that disfigures its noble front, and which it is a scandal to the government to leave in its present situation.

But although Amsterdam cannot boast of many fine squares, like several other capital cities, yet it contains some fine public buildings that strike the spectator with astonishment at the magnificence to which trade has here attained... The building which is incomparably beyond all others is the Stadthouse; the front, as given by several authors, for I did not measure it, is 282, the depth is 232 and the height is 116 feet, besides a small cupola; it was begun to be raised in 1648; the front of the building has nothing of taste or elegance in it; it is a heavy pile which strikes the spectator with that idea which is raised by the grandeur of its magnitude... The inside of the building is finished in a very noble stile, considering the purpose to which it is applied, such as a prison, a bank, the seat of the Courts of Justice, the sessions rooms, guard rooms etc. The floors, walls and pillars are in general of marble, and many of the apartments are adorned with very fine paintings by the best of the Flemish masters.

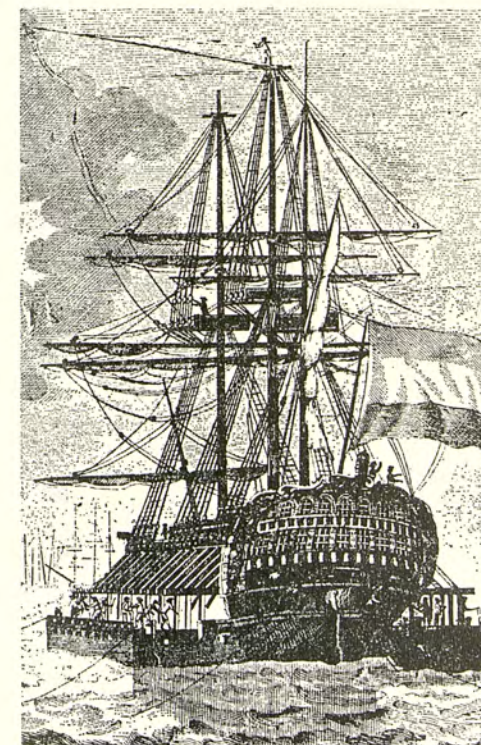
I went to the top of the cupola for a view of the city and neighbouring country, which it gives in great perfection, commanding the whole space built, with the canals and the immense number of ships in the harbour, altogether forming a very noble prospect.

*Travels through Holland, Flanders, Germany... in the years 1768, 1769, 1770*, London 1772-6.

JOSEPH MARSHALL  
1768

...The building is a parallelogram, the internal courtyard with its arcades is convenient, but the architecture is bad: the Ionic columns above the arches of the porticoes are not properly based, the niches and the surfaces of brickwork and stone contrast horribly in colour, and everywhere there are the usual very Gothic windows. But I think there can be no stranger spectacle in all Europe than that presented by the Exchange of Amsterdam. David Teniers, Bamboccio, Leonardo da Vinci, Ostade, Hogarth, would never tire of drawing caricatures there. Every kind of face can be seen, and for the most part so distorted that such variety and such distortion of the features of the human race hardly seems possible. The Jews and the Portuguese are prototypes of ugliness as extreme in their line as the most famous examples of beauty in Greece. Noses large and small, menacing noses, hooked noses, mouths stretching from ear to ear, twisted, protuberant; eyes wide open, eyes half-closed, bloodshot, surly eyes, jutting chins with fat dewlaps, sharp chins, flat chins, double and triple chins; hunchbacks of all kinds, crooked, spindly, lean, swollen, fleshy, knock-kneed legs — in short, in all my long travels I have never seen before gathered together all the ill-composed forms that nature has let fall from her hand here. The strangeness of the apparel corresponds to that of the faces, and it is indeed a wonder to have such men, clad almost in rags, speak to you in terms of millions and of news from the whole globe of the world, and to handle a patrimony, the fortunes of many, in little pieces of paper...

...The architecture of the Stadthouse is noble but has something German about it in the roofs, whose angles are like the section of a solid triangle. The architects of the north will never be able to eliminate the deformity of the great slope which they are obliged to give their gables; they cannot crown them with balustrades nor spread airy terraces such as those on which flourished the hanging gardens of antiquity, and the cornice of the classical order is overwhelmed by the slope of the roof and loses all elegance of proportion. I noted another defect in the porch or vestibule, which has seven arches along the front and two at the sides, and does not provide a magnificent entrance; but I am appeased by the political reasons more than by the mysterious ones. This Pritanaeum is also a strong-point, with prisons and courts, and a roused populace could invade it without difficulty were it easy to enter... The outside is, as I said, full of dignity. The Composite Order provides a great variety of caulicoles to the capitals, which sometimes take the form of a two-headed eagle, or an apple encircled by a serpent, or sometimes a crab, which in ancient medals signified a maritime city. The tympanum of the principal façade contains a richly decorative bas-relief which is over-crowded with figures: tridents, shells, laurel wreaths, coral, gilded unicorns ruin it, and are indicative of rather poor taste in whoever wished for such barbarous sumptuousness. Amsterdam wearing an Imperial crown is drawn in triumph by marine deities trumpeting her renown. Neptune with his trident accompanies her to smooth the waves for the passage of her ships, on a shell drawn by two unicorns. In the tympanum of the front facing the canal is Commerce, wearing the petasus of Mercury, one foot resting on the globe; and in the distance is a ship with full sails, the ancient badge of the city. The Ij and the Amstel, river deities, stand at her feet, men of all nations hasten to bring their wares to offer her in tribute. This bas-relief is better than the other. The two gables are crowned majestically with bronze statues of Peace, Prudence, Justice, Vigilance, and Atlas carrying the globe. But why does there have to be a replica of this Atlas, this same Peace and the other virtues in the Great Hall? There are also festoons which are repeated so often both inside and out that it suggests a sterility of invention on the part of the architect: these could be replaced by panels of other patterns in bas-relief, to vary the decoration. Beauty in ornament consists of harmoniously combined variety. The truth of this philosophical definition is more apparent in architecture than in any other production of the hand or mind of man...





...The praises one reads accorded to the harbour and to the arsenal are exaggerated. The latter certainly is not to be compared with the Venetian arsenal, so well described by our Dante. The armoury is a very poor thing in comparison with those of other ports; the rope-walk, 1,800 feet long, is larger than any I have yet seen in France, in Italy or in England. The arsenal at Venice will always be the most magnificent of all because of the height of its roof and its forest of stout columns. I climbed upon the camels, as they call certain huge vessels which raise the warships and carry them beyond the sands of the 'Pampus'. This is said to be the invention of Cornelius de Witt, the unfortunate victim of popular fury in The Hague; some erroneously attribute it to Peter the Great.

I climbed to the Tackt of the Admiralty, but saw nothing of interest, save for the extreme cleanliness for which the Dutch are famous; and I visited the warehouses of the East India Company... The harbour of the Company is close to the other and the same wall serves both rope-walks. The construction of Dutch ships differs from that of others on account of the sands which obstruct the Zuiderzee, and they have an enormous belly and a certain air of gravity which is in keeping with the phlegmatic character of the nation which steers and controls them.

#### DELFT

...The town of Delft is not large, but it is beautiful and discreetly enlivened with colour, canals and trees. The Old Palace in which William I, Prince of Orange, was murdered by the infamous Balthasar Gherard, an agent of Philip II, has been converted into a cloth factory and into a school, and the room in one of whose walls were the holes of three bullets which pierced the temple of the unfortunate prince, is no longer shown to visitors. I went to venerate his memory in the church of St. Martin. The monument erected to this great father of his country is indeed magnificent. His effigy lies, in princely attire, beneath a vault upheld by twenty-two pillars of black marble, and at his feet lies the faithful dog which died of sorrow after the assassination of his master. The hero is also depicted in bronze, in full armour except for the helmet with a large crest which lies at his feet. This statue lies above the other one, of marble, which portrays his corpse, so that the illusion of reality which one receives at first glance is to a large extent lost. A statue of Fame, balanced upon one foot, an ambitious conception which approaches that of Giambologna's Mercury, holds a crown of laurel above the warrior's head, and with the other hand holds a trumpet to her lips. The folds of the garments of the goddess are blown by the winds, whose wings, like those of seraphs, form the base upon which the figure is borne, as her foot presses upon them. Other statues representing various virtues adorn the front of the mausoleum, and many ingenious devices and inscriptions in praise of the dead prince are carved upon it. A long epitaph in good Latin recalls the glorious deeds and the unfortunate death of the great William, whom Philip II, the terror of Europe, feared, and failed to conquer or alarm, but by the hand of a hired assassin, with wicked deceit, removed from the world. The mausoleum is worthy of so great a man: the marble and bronze figures could not be better worked — there are some *putti* bearing torches, who are truly weeping; and the principal figure of William has an air of constancy and tranquillity amid the awful tempest.

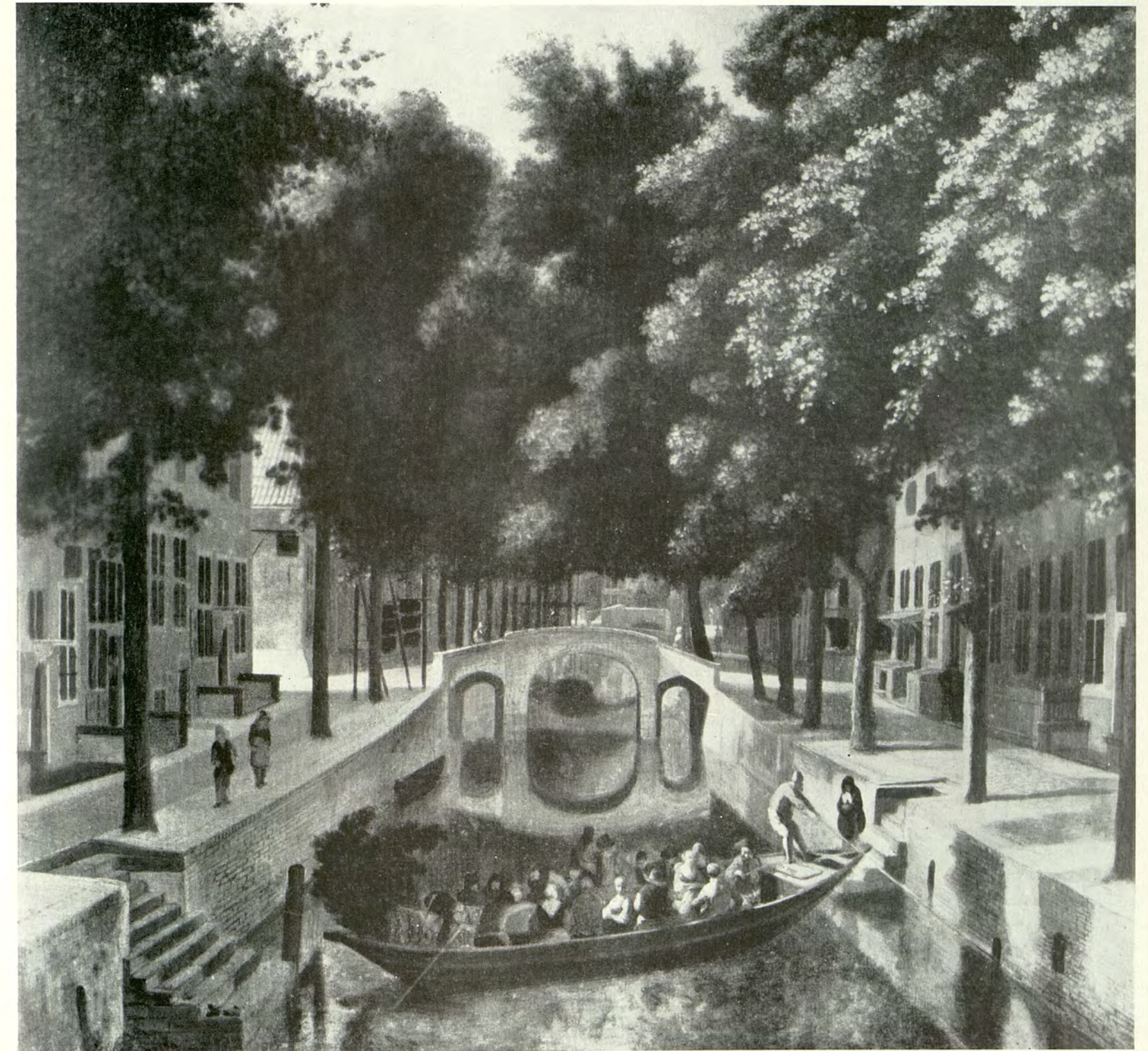
*Ragionamento sulla filosofia del secolo XVIII e frammenti di viaggi*, Como, 1830.

CARLO GASTONE DELLA TORRE DI REZZONICO

1788

172. JOB ADRIAENSZ BERCKHEYDE: *An old Canal in Haarlem*. The Hague, Mauritshuis.

Signed and dated 1666, this shows the Oude Gracht, the old canal of Haarlem. Job Berckheyde, with his younger brother Gerrit and Jan van der Heyden, was one of the first artists in Europe to paint views which are accurate, objective and analytical but which catch the subject in a given moment of its history.





173. JOB ADRIAENSZ BERCKHEYDE: *The Old Exchange, Amsterdam* (detail). Frankfurt, Städelsches Kunstinstitut.  
In this view of the old Exchange, as in the other works of the brothers Berckheyde, the city is depicted from an intimate experience of its daily life, sights familiar to those who live there and pass daily through its streets, an approach which clearly heralds that of the eighteenth-century view painters.



174. GERRIT BERCKHEYDE: *A Square in Haarlem*. Brussels, Musée Royal des Beaux-Arts.  
This view of the square in front of the Church of St. Bavo (the Groote Kerk) in Haarlem is among Gerrit Berckheyde's best works. Painted from a viewpoint in the street, it conveys an impression of the city as it might appear to a passer-by rather than a presentation of a famous building.







175. GERRIT BERCKHEYDE:  
*The Market Place at Haarlem* (de-  
tail). London, National Gallery.

Signed and dated 1674, the view  
of the Groote Markt and the  
Groote Kerk is shown from a  
point rather more distant than that  
of the preceding painting.



176. GERRIT BERCKHEYDE:  
*View of Haarlem with the Groote  
Kerk* (detail). Cambridge, Fitzwil-  
liam Museum.

This detail from a second painting  
is from a viewpoint close to that  
of the preceding illustration.