

Cultural History as
Political Thought:
Johan Huizinga's
Engagement with the
Dutch Townscape

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Abstract: This paper defends a single and simple thesis. This is the claim that the connection between cultural history as a discipline and political thought as another one is more significant than is usually recognized. If it is true that politics is embedded in a certain culture, then by reconstructing a certain culture, it should be possible to draw conclusions about the politics which is possible within this framework.

This thesis will be illustrated with the example of the life and work of Johan Huizinga. Huizinga's whole oeuvre can be read as an attempt to show that the major force behind much of Dutch civilisation from the period of the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance up until at least the 17th century, the so-called Golden Age of Dutch culture (the historical epochs of his first and last great masterwork, respectively), was its middle-class culture. If that is true, it shows that through his engagement with cultural history, Huizinga was in fact representing a variety of conservative political thought. Through his research into the cultural history of his homeland, and in particular into the urban artifacts of that past, he proved that he was committed to preserving the essential elements of that particular culture—his understanding of cultural history in this sense had a conservative overtone. This second thesis is linked to the first: through Huizinga's work in cultural history he championed a type of liberal conservatism, proving that through cultural history it is possible to articulate one's own political thought. This way Huizinga, the cultural historian is interpreted here as an implicit political philosopher.

INTRODUCTION

This paper will present and argue for a single and simple thesis. This is the claim that the connection between cultural history as a discipline and political thought is more significant than is usually recognized. To put it more precisely: through one's work in cultural history one can actually present one's views on politics, in a refined way. This is not so much a statement about cultural history, a discipline which has often irritated the methodologically meticulous. Rather, it concerns the relationship between politics and cultural history. If it is true that politics is embedded in a certain culture, then by reconstructing a certain culture, it should be possible to draw conclusions about the politics which is possible within its framework.

I will attempt to prove this thesis with the help of a single example: certain parts of the oeuvre of the well-known and still popular Dutch historian of culture, Johan Huizinga. Alongside Jacob Burckhardt, Huizinga is perhaps the most widely read and most beloved authors among the classics of cultural history.

Huizinga was quite conscious of his contribution to the development of the discipline. This is obvious from a programmatic lecture he delivered on *The Task of Cultural History* in 1926 as well as an independent publication he authored, entitled *Cultuurhistorische verkenningen* (Cultural Historical Knowledge 1929; Huizinga 1984, 1929). Both of these works were, of course, preceded by his opus magnum, the work which is primarily associated with his name, *Herfsttij der Middeleeuwen* (Autumntide of the Middle Ages), published in 1919, one year after the end of WWI, and first translated into English in 1924. (Hereafter, I will refer to it as *Autumntide*).¹ Considering this work, together with his late classic, *Dutch Civilisation in the Seventeenth Century*, I would further argue that through his engagement with cultural history, Huizinga was in fact defending a variety of conservative political thought (Huizinga 1972). This second thesis is linked to the first: through Huizinga's work in cultural history he championed a type of liberal conservatism, proving that through cultural history it is possible to articulate one's own political thought.

In what follows I will first present a short summary of the emergence of cultural history, highlighting some of the protagonists who played a crucial role in the part of that process which concerns us here. This short narrative will help to position Huizinga in this development, while supporting my thesis about the link between cultural history and political thought. A telling clue about this connection can be found in the subtitle of his magnum opus, which refers to "forms of life, thought and art" as its basic topic, in the fourteenth and fifteenth century, in Burgundy.

Huizinga's oeuvre contains recurring references to Dutch cities and their citizens, and to the way of life of the Dutch burghers and the different communities, which flourished within the city walls. Therefore, it is no exaggeration to say that this was an all-important theme for Huizinga throughout his career. In fact, he seems to have embarked on a project to establish an entire political ideology, based on the historical reconstruction of the role of the middle classes in Dutch culture. Huizinga's whole oeuvre can be read as an attempt to show that the major force behind much of Dutch civilisation from the period of the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance up until at least the 17th century, the so-called Golden Age of Dutch culture, was its middle-class culture. This invites the question of what role *Autumntide* could play in this respect, dealing as it does with medieval courtly and Christian-chivalric matters. Some of Huizinga's critics have claimed that this historical reconstruction contradicts many of his other writings, in that it pays relatively little attention to the rising urban culture. (Dumolyn and Lecuppre-Desjardin 2019) Instead, the book concentrates on the Burgundy court and its outdated medieval values and feudal forms of life. In fact, it can be argued that there is no contradiction between Huizinga's late writing about the middle-class dimension of Dutch culture and this early masterpiece, which consists chiefly of a patchwork of medieval historical episodes. As I interpret them, both Huizinga's first and last great works serve to trace back the historical roots of his own personal, early 20th century Dutch middle-class culture, and of his own aristocratic Christian self-understanding. The earlier work, *Autumntide*, reaches back as far as the Middle Ages, and recalls a declining culture of the chivalric ethic, which, as I see it, would also be crucial for the modern bourgeois ethos in a similar fashion to the English notion of the gentleman, as developed by John Henry Newman, among others (Begley 1993).

The second one of Huizinga's master works, *Dutch Civilisation in the Seventeenth Century*, deals with post-Reformation Holland, presenting a historical account of the culture of the first successful bourgeois society in Europe (Huizinga 1969). Huizinga argues that both of these periods are relevant for making sense of the Netherlands of the first half of the 20th century. In fact, both of these reconstructions form parts of Huizinga's aristocratic and bourgeois conservative heritage. His ancestors were Baptist ministers, while his father was a university professor of physiology; in short, he belonged to the cultural elite of Dutch society. As such, he was committed to preserving the essential elements of that particular culture—his understanding of cultural history in this sense had a conservative overtone. He sought to propagate a return to the heyday of European culture after World War I, and even more so, before and during World War II, based on the

urban tradition of this part of Europe. Both the late medieval and the early modern episodes in Huizinga's narratives are important parts of his conservative criticism of his own age, dominated as it was by the militant forces of the totalitarian ideologies of Communism and Nazism. As we shall see, his emphatically European-style, moderate and liberal conservatism was a position which allowed him to sharply criticize both the right- and the left-wing totalitarian regimes of his age.

Arguing that throughout his career, Huizinga was “defending”—i.e. offering as a model for the present—the historical Dutch urban culture, we shall concentrate on some of the instances when he deals with cityscapes. There are two reasons for this focus: first, because for him the visual element was crucial in the reconstruction of the past, and second, because the *urbs*, the urban architectural ensemble, is crucial if we are to understand a “burgerlijk” (burgher-like) way of life and thought, including urban politics. In other words, his references to the value of the architectural remnants of the past can be understood as a visual metaphor of his concentration on the middle classes in his historical narrative.

HUIZINGA AND CULTURAL HISTORY – A CRASH COURSE

The most frequent way of defining what one means by the term cultural history is to give a shorthand historical overview of its growth. While the story usually starts in the 18th century, either with French or German authors, I would prefer to start with the figure of Giambattista Vico (1668-1744). Vico's importance was stressed by 20th century thinkers like Croce and Gadamer, yet for some reason he does not appear in the mainstream reconstructions of the birth of cultural history. On the other hand, if we accept Peter Burke's working definition of cultural history, as “a concern with the symbolic and its interpretation”, then Vico is, no doubt, part of that canon, himself establishing “an approach to the past in terms of symbolism” (Burke 2004/2008, p. 3). Moreover, Vico's criticism of the Cartesian method of scientific enquiry is a prefiguration of the *Methodenstreit* of German philosophy in the late 19th and early 20th century, a debate which was also crucial for Huizinga. Yet it is important to note that cultural history as a scientific methodology, was not born but only perfected in the era of late German Enlightenment and of classical idealism. The narrative usually starts with Herder's ideas of historicism, and with his pronounced anti-Kantian position. Kant's anti-historical frame of mind found its counterbalance in Herder's sense of history. These two opposite directions were to meet in the colossal philosophical system of Hegel, which has both an analytical and a historical pillar.

I do not, however, propose to make sense of the birth of cultural history as a simple denial of Enlightened rationality, even if Vico played a part in Berlin's intellectual history of anti-Enlightenment thought, as set out in his book *Against the Current* (Berlin 1981). It is important to note that Vico, while being embedded in Neapolitan culture, was also part of the more general late humanist rhetorical discourse. His interest in art and poetry can also be seen as a political stance, just as it had been for Cicero, probably the most important forefather of cultural history for our present purposes. After all, it is to Cicero's work that we can trace back the concept of culture as the cultivation of the mind, and the concept of *decorum*, the behaviour expected from people of good taste and propriety. Also, it was Cicero who demonstrated the political relevance of a veneration for the great achievements of the past and of our predecessors, as expressed by the notion of *mos maiorum*. This term is a reference not only to the unwritten code to which people had to accommodate themselves, but also to the honour of one's family and wider circle of ancestry. Most fundamentally, however, it was counted among the pillars, which sustained the Roman state: it

must be guarded by its leaders and defended even at the risk of death: religious rites, the auspices, the powers of the magistrates, the authority of the senate, the laws, *mos maiorum*, the courts, legal authority, good faith, the provinces, the allies, the good reputation of our empire, military affairs, the treasury (Cicero 2006, p. 99).

Cicero's interest in the Roman past was, however, not simply an antiquarian's interest: he also attributed political significance to this traditional honour of ancestral authority. Frequently referring to the cultural achievements of Roman history (including Roman law), he presents a repertoire of the normative standards and demands required from both present and future generations alike. In other words, in the Ciceronian paradigm both law and politics became embedded in ancient Roman culture.

It is telling that Herder does the same thing with the German past that Cicero did with the Roman past—in this sense he is not an innovator; he simply transplants the Roman paradigm and Vico's Neapolitan appropriation of it into the German historical soil. Vico himself theorized the notion of the nation, inspired in part by the meaning of the term *patria* in Cicero and partly by the ideology of Roman greatness. Cicero's cultural historical ideas about Roman culture directly informed his political ideas. Interestingly, however, neither Vico nor Herder stressed the political consequences of their cultural history. It was Lord Shaftesbury and the British tradition, which would explicitly connect the ancient Roman cultural-historical idiom and what came to be called the Republican political tradition.² The German way, as Gadamer points out, once again turns this discussion into an apolitical one: "in Germany the followers of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson did not, even in the eighteenth century, take over the political and social element contained in *sensus communis*" (Gadamer 1975; 1989, p. 24)

After Herder, the next major thinker to mention in connection with the birth of cultural history is, of course, Jacob Burckhardt. It was he who, in his work *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860) provided the first general account of the culture of a particular period at a particular geographic location. The road from Herder to Burckhardt leads through Romanticism and historicism. While both Herder and Burckhardt worked to elaborate a general (i.e. universal) philosophy of history, providing a metanarrative which helps to explain particular historical events, ideas and forms of life, both of them also emphasized the importance of the particularities of a historical situation. The influence of classical German idealism also undermines the primacy of political history in their vision of the historian's task. Burckhardt was, in fact, directly challenging Ranke's understanding of history being driven by political history scholarship based simply on empirical data mining and data hunting. Yet Burckhardt's vision of the birth of the modern individual was also perfectly compatible with the view of human nature provided by classical liberalism. Both Burckhardt and the paradigm of classical liberalism suggest that the primary unit of both politics and art is the individual, who has a rational capacity, a strong will in politics, and an originality and imagination approaching that of the genius in a number of other spheres of life.

It was not only to counter the exaggerated belief in the individual's talent of innovation which Burckhardt claimed to have uncovered in the Italian Renaissance that Huizinga developed his own version of cultural history. It was also as a riposte to the progressivist, Whiggish teleology discernible in Burckhardt's philosophy of history that Huizinga wrote his great work about the final phase of the Middle Ages in the context of the declining medieval Burgundy court. Burckhardt, the child of the 19th century, chose to concentrate on the future-oriented, constructive aspect of cultural heritage. (The original German title of his work was, of course, *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien*, 1860). Huizinga, during and after WWI was able to show that almost the same period could be presented in a different light, concentrating instead on the survival and decline of earlier paradigms in the late medieval cultural matrix.

Huizinga shared Burckhardt's approach to history: the Swiss historian of art tried to understand the period of the Renaissance in both the South and the North of Europe respectively, by painting an "aesthetic" picture of the whole culture of a population. As his theoretical writings make clear, for Burckhardt, a search for the "forms of life and thought" of a period of the past was the result of an inspiration directly rooted in German idealism, with the Hegelian notion of *Geist* (spirit) at its centre. As a historian, he was also able to paint the full panorama of the selected period, with all the minute historical details necessary to make the picture both vivid and easily comprehensible.

Beside Burckhardt, Huizinga was familiar with the later developments in historiography, and more particularly by Ranke's influence on the discipline. He was fascinated by the so-called *Methodenstreit* (debate about method) initiated by Karl Lamprecht's "cultural history-based" approach to history. Behind that

debate, we should be aware of the epistemological consequences of Dilthey's hermeneutic account of the humanities, including history. Dilthey famously developed the working methods of the humanities, with a sense of history and a specific, historically informed form of understanding and interpreting human thought and action. He is responsible for the distinction between the humanities and the natural sciences, as far as their research methods are concerned—a key development for Huizinga, who was also interested in the methodological issues of his discipline.

Most importantly for our present purposes, however, was Huizinga's effort to make use of painting, drawings, buildings and sculptures in historical investigations. For him art did not simply mean paintings and drawings: he was just as interested in the objects of daily life, in its commodities and utensils, as well as in the built environment, houses, streets and even towns as a whole. As he saw it, if we are interested in the life and thought of an age, we should draw on any historical resources available to us as historians. His approach was hermeneutic, but his interest in the past was not limited to texts: images in the most general sense of the word were just as important for him. In a certain sense, the world of objects was perhaps even more important than that of words. The advantage of objects, when compared to texts, is that we can directly contact them: we can experience them through our sensitive apparatus, without the need to rely on the rational faculty to decode them, as is the case in the interpretation of the signs of natural language. If Huizinga's history writing is close to poetry, it is not simply because he used a refined style and an evocative language: rather, it is the result of his interest in the "objective correlatives" of the thought and feelings of the people of his selected period.³ His historical reconstruction reminds us of the way art works, because it provides an enjoyable replica, or re-presentation of the world of the objects of an age.

In fact, his historical description can easily become a virtual theatrical performance. Like the planned scenery and props in the theatre, the flags and reliefs, masks and costumes, the trumpets and other musical instruments together with the toys of the children, the jewellery of the ladies or the tombs of the dead, all help him to enliven in a very vivid way vanished forms of life. He refers to a childhood memory from 1879 of the masquerade of the Groningen student fraternity celebrating its anniversary, recreating the entry of Count Edzard of East Friesland into the city of Groningen in 1506. His recollections of his childish impressions of these events, against the backdrop of the streets of Groningen are portrayed in the most colourful language in Huizinga's late autobiographical piece:

The pageant was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. I could still recount plenty of details about it: that the procession set out from Marktstraat, hence very close to our house on the corner of Ossenmarkt and Lopende Diep, that the wind was blowing hard, and a flagpole broke near our house, so that the flag wound itself around a horseman—but I'll restrain myself... I'd been gripped by my first contact with the historical past, and it was deep and unwavering.⁴

His general historiographical claim is that humans have a specific sense for approaching the past—which he calls "historical sensation" in his theoretical account of cultural history (Huizinga 2014, pp. 51-55). In a review of a recent book by Otterspeer, Ankersmit highlights the meaning of Huizinga's idea of historical sensation with the help of a threefold classification of the human ability to experience the world by the "sensitivist" literary critic, Lodewijk van Deyssel (1864-1952), one of Huizinga's favourite writers. According to Ankersmit, "observation" gives one quite a distant view of the world, while "impression" gets closer to it, but it is a "sensation" which actually provides a vivid experience. Just as van Deyssel wanted literature to reach this third level, so Huizinga had the same aim with his own history writing. He strove to make it possible for us, the readers, that "we may actually 'lose ourselves', so to speak, in the world" which the historian reawakens (Ankersmit 2007, pp. 252-253).

Regarding this visually sensual element in historical reconstruction, one more concept in Huizinga is also crucial: visibility (*aanschouwelijkheid*), which is close to "perceivability" in English, or simply paraphrases vividness and clarity (Dumolyn and Lecuppre-Desjardin 2019, p. 79). In another work he quotes Windelband, to explain the term: "vividness (*Anschaulichkeit*), i.e. the individual liveliness of the ideal

presence (*individuelle Lebendigkeit der ideellen Gegenwart*), is just as important for the eye of the spirit as it is for that of the body” (Windelband 1894).⁵ In other words, it is possible to have a similar sensual experience in intellectual cognition as in the visual perception of a real physical object. As we shall see, through this aesthetic apprehension, advocated by Huizinga, as the central element of the work of the historian, he succeeds in connecting the past once again with the present. This is true not only in a temporal sense (i.e. making present what has passed away), but also in a normative sense: the reconstruction of the past, which is the telos of the work of the historian, can become an argument in present debates. At this point, it is worth examining how Huizinga himself actually practices this sort of argumentation through a reconstruction of the past.

CROSSING DISCIPLINARY BOUNDARIES: FROM CULTURAL HISTORY TO POLITICAL THOUGHT

Historians often criticize Huizinga, yet readers keep on reading and enjoying him. Everyone can feel that his perspective on the past is wider than that of a positivist historian. While he shares the professional historians’ engagement with true empirical data, his narrative aims to achieve more. Most of the time in his works he seems to be in search of an elusive spirit of the age. It is perhaps for this very reason that the view is common that “Huizinga could certainly be regarded more as a ‘thinker’ than as a historian” (Dumolyn and Lecuppre-Desjardin 2019, p. 74). On the one hand this is, of course, a criticism of his self-reflective manner of practising history writing. Yet a theoretical reflection on one’s profession is not necessarily a fallacy. Ankersmit, who is among the most theoretically refined of the present generation of historians, claims that “Huizinga was not a philosopher”, but adds immediately that he was “an amazingly profound thinker” (Ankersmit 2007, p. 248). This debate between philosophy and history is not only somewhat scholastic, but also misguided: after all, can one not be a thoughtful historian or a historically sensitive philosopher at the same time?

Attempting to understand Huizinga’s actual disciplinary engagement is also important for another reason: it is helpful for revealing more about the way his cultural history was able to work as an implicit political philosophy. According to Ankersmit, Huizinga is both a thinker and a historian. On the other hand, in his theoretical reflections he defends the sensual character of his own historical prose, which indeed resembles an artistic use of language, characteristic of literature, far removed from the conceptual language of philosophy. In order to reconstruct the past lives and thoughts of a historical period, his prose needs to have an evocative power: his history is not simply a dry list of political events, including battles, coronations and revolutions, nor is it a collection of historiographic terms and artificial categories. Instead, it is a colourful mosaic of sensual delights and real shocks, describing church buildings, local festivals and communal mourning.

By embarking on a project to reconstruct the whole pattern of life in a given period, in other words to recreate its entire culture of it, Huizinga is also offering us a particular political philosophy—an attitude to the past in which the past is also important for present concerns. What does this entail? For Huizinga, history does not equate to an antiquarian interest in the past for the sake of the past. His vivid re-enactment of the past is a refined form of the criticism of the devaluation of the present—and in this way it provides all the major requisites for a cultural conservative’s way of thought. By being able and ready to awaken the past in the present, one enlists it as a partner in the present debates, too. Also, by making historical choices, one is able to allude to one’s potential present choices. Finally, in claiming that the past is of interest for the present, this is clearly a tradition-based view of politics.

Let me summarize in an abstract form the chain of argument I presented above, connecting cultural history with political thought, in Huizinga’s oeuvre:

- to recover the overall culture of a given period it is necessary to encounter the life and thought of the people concerned—this is the task of the cultural historian;

- by reviving the whole mentality of an age, one undergoes a vivid, sensory experience of the way people were thinking, feeling and acting in that age—including their political thought, feelings and action;
- surely, if that is such a vivid experience, it will have an impact on the way we think of the past;
- in this way the cultural historian is, in fact, joining in the debates of his own age, using the material he has excavated, and drawing on his archives.

In what follows, I will argue that Huizinga’s interest both in the cultural life of the 15th century Burgundy court, and in the mentality of 17th century Dutch burghers, were expressions of his discomfort with his own age. Huizinga’s cultural history offers more than a history of ideas alone, going beyond simply recreating an age which has passed. Through helping us to have an aesthetic perception of the past, it has a major impact on our way of thinking, and thus serves as an implicit political philosophy—one which is critical of recent political phenomena.

THE CONCEPT OF HOMESICKNESS—HUIZINGA AND THE URBAN PAST

An interesting thesis has been put forward recently by Thor Rydin (2021). Starting out from the notion of homesickness (*heimwee*), he argues that his experience of urban demolition in his own time may have inspired Huizinga’s impressive description of the culture of the 15th century Burgundy court as a culture in decay. As Rydin (2021, p. 737) points out, “between 1903 and 1905, Huizinga witnessed a large-scale destruction of early-seventeenth-century architecture in Amsterdam so as to make way” for a modernization of the urban space as well as to allow the building of new housing areas.

From an early age, Huizinga had an interest in the past forms of life in Dutch towns. From 1905 onwards he wrote works of local history about Haarlem and Groningen, cities where he lived and which he loved.⁶ (Huizinga 1948b, 1948c) While these works were not so much part of his project of cultural history, and were instead local history writing, his interest in the topic of urban renewal was more than a passing interest. He felt an experience of personal loss when encountering these changes. “The developments had instilled in him a feeling of ‘heimwee’, Huizinga wrote in a letter to his friend and author Willem Bijvanck” (Rydin 2021). Huizinga agreed with his old friend and co-author at the Christian-socialist journal, *De Kroniek*, the artist and art critic Jan Veth, that both art and architecture depend on the past. Their creative intentions should always take into account the prehistory of their activity, and avoid what he calls “the tyranny of the present”, with its “ruthless sledgehammers” (Veth 1916, pp. 524, 512). Quite in tune with his friends’ published laments about the loss of the common heritage of the past, Huizinga also voiced his own worries, going so far as to admit that the whole transformation of the face of the city caused him stomach aches.⁷ As Rydin explains, “The similarity of their conservative conception of cultural creativity—that is, of a creativity relying on a continued dialogue with the past—is apparent in ‘Autumntide’, which Huizinga had been working on since 1906...”⁸

One should be careful to draw hasty conclusions from Rydin’s use of the adjective “conservative”. In this context, it is merely a reference to Huizinga’s conception of the relevance of the past. As he saw it, human creativity is never a brand-new creation from ground zero. Instead, it is much more of a dialogue with the ancestors, based on reflection on one’s position, embedded as it is within a continuous line of transformations. This idea of the dialectic of transformation and continuity was to be a theme, which ran through *Autumntide*.

Take for example the traditional cityscape described in the very first chapter of the book:

A medieval town did not lose itself in extensive suburbs of factories and villas; girded by its walls, it stood forth as a compact whole, bristling with innumerable turrets. However tall and threaten-

ing the houses of nobleman or merchants might be, in the aspect of the town the lofty mass of the churches always remained dominant (Huizinga 2010, p. 2).

Huizinga's critics claim that he disregarded here the rising bourgeois element, and focused simply on the surviving feudal elements, including the power of the church. There is "No mention of belfries, guild-halls or marketplaces in this depiction. The town is dominated by churches, their height, their verticality, and their conquest of space by the peeling of their bells" (Dumolyn and Lecuppre-Desjardin 2019, p. 77). Obviously, Huizinga is aware of the rising spending power of not only the urban aristocracy, but also of the merchant class, yet he prefers to emphasize the traditional elements of this culture, represented by the still dominant position of the church within the cityscape, as opposed to the novelties of the medieval city in this age. It is tempting to read into this description a criticism of his own era, which was moving in the opposite direction in urban architectural development. What Huizinga sought was the ideal of the medieval town, and that ideal was built to a large extent on the supposition that the focal point in a town is the tower(s) of the church(es).

It should also be borne in mind that Huizinga was less interested in the transitory, ephemeral face of the town, and more in its ideal one. In fact, Dumolyn and Lecuppre-Desjardin also claim that this was Huizinga's main concern, when a few lines earlier they give the following *ekphrasis* of the painting Madonna with the Chancellor Rolin:

the city situated at the bottom of the hill near the river, where people cross the bridge to visit a market, a church, their home, where they moor boats, keep watch at the gate, etc., is not an identifiable town. It is, instead, the idea of the town, or more precisely the idea of the town in the fifteenth century, the crystallization of daily urban life and a spiritual ideal (Dumolyn and Lecuppre-Desjardin 2019, p. 77).

What the two critics are doing here is, in fact, a rather Huizinga-like effort to evoke the city as a vivid, thriving whole, including both its architectural elements and the citizens in the midst of their ordinary activity. One can find the original of this simulacrum in the *Hersttij*, quoted by Huizinga from Durand-Gréville:

the surprised eye discovers, between the head of the divine child and the Virgin, a city replete with gables and beautiful church steeples, a large church with numerous buttresses, a spacious square cut into two parts in its whole width by a staircase, and on the square come, walk, run, innumerable brush strokes that signify an equal number of living figures; our eye is attracted to a bridge formed like the back of a donkey (dropping off on both ends) that is crowded with groups of people thronging and crossing each other's paths; our eye follows the bends of a river where microscopically small barks travel...⁹

This description, however, points in the other direction: it is meant to show that van Eyck's insistence on providing a detailed, and therefore vivid overview of the life of a city, was a mistaken concept. The painter was unable to unify the motives, so they disintegrate and fall apart, as the centre does not hold. This is, therefore, a negative proof of Huizinga's main theme: that in fact you need something in the centre, like the tower of the local church, which can help to hold together the myriad of details, which build up a city. Disintegration is crucial in Huizinga's project, anyhow: the main—political—question of his book is how to hold a community together in the time of a crisis. No doubt, it was for a long time the court, but later it turned out to be the town, providing within its walls a unifying force for a whole community.

THE ROLE OF THE CITYSCAPE IN THE BIRTH OF THE IDEA OF THE *AUTUMNTIDE*

It is worth recalling yet another significant example of the description of a whole city in Huizinga's oeuvre. In his 1943 autobiography, he recalls the birth of the idea of the *Autumntide* as follows:

Strangely enough, I do not have an exact time frame for this spiritual event, which I could best describe as a spark. It must have been between 1906 and 1909, probably 1907. In the afternoons, when my wife's time was taken up by the care of the small children, I often went for a walk alone outside the city, which at that time still led on all sides straight into the wide countryside around Groningen. On such a walk, along or around the Damsterdiep, on a Sunday, I think, an insight came to me: the late Middle Ages not as the announcement of what is to come, but as the dying away of what is to go. This thought, if one may speak of thought, circled above all around the art of the Van Eyck's and their contemporaries, which at the time uncommonly occulted my mind.¹⁰

Huizinga's narrative does not share with us the particular details of the view of the town which the walker-by actually enjoys on his route. Yet we can have no doubt that the view opening up in front of the *flâneur* of the city and its countryside must have played a major role in the birth of the idea. Evidently, we can imaginatively draw the picture with the help of his references to the cityscapes of the van Eyck brothers. This recollection comes from an overview he wrote late in his professional career, when he himself was a victim of the war. In this memoir, Groningen is a recurring theme. His other writings mention that he took habitual afternoon walks out of the city. In connection with these walks, he emphasizes the rather exceptional mood or feeling he had during these walks, approaching a kind of inspiration.

In the afternoons, when the medical friends had their practical sessions, I used to wander out of the city on my own, until we gathered again around cocktail hour. During these walks I usually fell into a sort of light trance, which I cannot quite name when I think about it, let alone describe the state of mind. It was not really thinking that I was doing, at least not about certain things, my mind just sort of floated outside the boundaries of daily existence in a kind of aetheric enjoyment, which was most akin to nature, and which quickly faded away and succumbed to the sober day.¹¹

Nonetheless, the fine description of the birth of the idea of the book itself—in a certain way recalling Rousseau's epiphany about the theme of his first great work, *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts*, when walking to Vincennes—is memorable, as it succeeds in collecting all the details of the book into the view of a single moment. Just as all the significant details of the city are collected into a cityscape when viewed from a distance, so he collects with the help of the city scape all the major motives of his book into this symbolic birth history of the book. Similarly, the old buildings of the city disappear after some time, the same way a period declines, and a new one is born. Yet the city survives, ensuring the survival of the basic traditions, the urban constitution and the local customs. Even if the late medieval period was a period of decline, it represents an important part of the past of the Dutch political community, as was the new golden age of the 17th century. The two episodes are seemingly so different, yet they are parts of the same story, embodying two of its major historical threads.

THE HOUSE, THE STREET AND THE CITY

Another author, Judit Gera, also argues, in her introduction to a selection of Huizinga's work in Hungarian, that for Huizinga, the Dutch town has a special relevance. (Gera 1999). She refers to a short essay entitled *Nederlands geestesmerk* (1934) which starts with a short recollection of the historian's personal relationship

to Haarlem, a typical town in the North of Holland. The way he presents this memory is in the form of a focusing sequence: he starts with the city, then zooms into the street, and finally identifies a particular house.

This “zooming in” is even more interesting, because the house chosen is not exceptional in any obvious sense. On the contrary. The word used by Huizinga to characterise it is: “*bescheiden*”, which means something like modest or simple. The term has, of course, a specific meaning in architecture, too: as opposed to the cathedrals of Dutch towns, or the often ostentatious town halls, the private, family homes seem particularly modest. Simplicity thus becomes a key feature of the burgher, the member of the middle class. He has a property, a family house, but one which does not strive to excel, does not seek to outshine the other buildings. One’s house provides a good overview both of one’s personal character and that of one’s family. In this sense, it has a symbolic value. When describing a person’s character, the adjective *bescheiden* means a character in balance, keeping the right proportions and avoiding the extremes (Gera 1999, pp. 31-32). Such an individual possesses the values of propriety, moderation and restraint. Balance and proportion are, of course, mathematical terms, but they occur in the architectural discourse as well.

The cityscape of a Dutch city shows the geometrical equivalents of such personal balance and proportion, in the relationships between buildings, streets and squares. The same is true if we look at the inhabitants of a city: they too have well-defined relationships to each other. An examination of genre paintings reveals that the Dutch middle classes were able to keep balance in possessing earthly values, while still keeping the Calvinist version of Christianity as their creed. This is true even if the moral critics of the age often criticised the growing tendencies towards materialism, and arguably, Huizinga, too, was critical of certain fashionable luxuries.

The house in Zijlstraat street, in the beloved city of Haarlem, was, however, simple and modest. Even so, it bore inscriptions. They claim: “Int soet Nederlant” (In the dear Netherlands) “Ick blyf getrou” (I will remain faithful), “Ick wyck nyet af” (I will not swerve). Huizinga recalls in his essay the days when every time he passed (once again, like a *flâneur*) by the house, he looked at the inscriptions and tried to find out their history. The owner of the house chose to display this message in the early 17th century, according to a guess by a historian, as an expression of love of the *patria*. The Dutch historian interprets the inscription as the direct message of the past to us. He takes it as a convincing proof that our forefathers were ready to initiate a conversation with us.

This example of Huizinga as cultural historian is also revealing about his working method. In his narrative, he presents himself as an engaged observer reading the signs of the town in order to make sense of its past. In other words, he claims that in the towns of his *patria* he lives among the tangible remnants of the past, the signs of which he is able to read. His acquaintance with the language of the built environment, the architectural semantics of the familiar streets, squares and houses helps the reading of the signs of the city for him.

When he describes the way of thought and life of his political community, Huizinga again refers to houses, streets and cities, because they bring us in direct contact with the mentality of our ancestors. Their houses offer us a visual and tactile experience of a certain way of life—that of the modest city dweller, who kept his commercial success in balance with the expectations of his community and—at least theoretically—the demands of Christian moral teaching.

The virtue of a house in a Dutch city reminds Huizinga of the virtues of a Dutch burgher in his political and denominational circle. In the very same essay he identifies the spirit of Holland with that of the burgher. “We Dutch are all bourgeois, from the notary to the poet and from the baron to the proletarian. Our national culture is bourgeois in every sense that one wants to attach to the word” (Huizinga 1935, Chapter 3, *Burgerlijk karakter van het nederlandsche volk*, p. 11). This is presages his last book about 17th century Dutch civilisation. He identifies the Dutch spirit as that of the city dweller, the burgher.

Importantly, this acclaimed bourgeois nature of the whole community excludes tendencies towards both tyrannical and totalitarian power, where:

“Bourgeois” (and the corresponding “*burgerlijk*”) became the worst defamation of all. For both the socialists and the artists, the “bourgeois” became the scapegoat, and has remained so until now. Fascism too has incorporated the concept in the garland of its execrations (Huizinga 1935, Chapter 3, *Burgerlijk karakter van het nederlandsche volk*, p. 9).

Here, Huizinga makes it clear that his reconstruction of 17th century Dutch national character is not politically innocent: it is a moderate, liberal-conservative position, which is in direct confrontation with both the Socialist and the Fascist extremes.

Van der Lem recalls Huizinga’s note from 1907, which underlines that “first of all and still up until today, old houses talk” (Lem 1997). This is because the town as a built environment (*urbs*), the product of architecture, is always necessarily connected to the city (*civitas*) as a political community of the citizens, once again the product of history. In this essay he makes it explicit that there is no political cohesion without a sense of a common past. “The life of a nation is history, as the particular human being’s life is that as well” (Huizinga 1935, Chapter 1, *De wording van onze nationaliteit*, p. 3). This approach to the political community, as understood from the perspective of its history, renders Huizinga’s political thought as paradigmatically conservative. Judit Gera refers to Huizinga’s political stance as “the platform of a kind of enlightened, European conservatism” (Gera 1999, p. 91).

THE MIDDLE-CLASS, THE CITY AND THE DUTCH NATIONAL CHARACTER

In the 1930s, Huizinga continued to lecture on 17th century Dutch culture. Finally, however, he felt compelled by the cruel reality of the war to write his thoughts down in a more detailed and concrete form. The resulting book, *Dutch Civilisation in the Seventeenth Century (Nederland’s beschaving in de zeventiende eeuw*, 1968) appeared in 1941. It is not comparable to the *Autumntide* in its breadth and panorama. Yet it serves as Huizinga’s silent rebellion against the Nazis’ invasion of Holland. Even so, it is certainly not a political pamphlet or an open attempt at political agitation. Instead, it is an indirect protest and an encouragement for the Dutch to preserve the best traditions of their political culture. The term civilisation (*beschaving*) can be translated either as culture or as civilisation, but it is close to the English term of being polished or accomplished. This concept connects the book to the great debate about civilisation and culture in the interbellum period, as they were distinguished in the influential works by Norbert Elias (1939). While Elias’s starting point in his historical sociological reconstruction is courtly society, in Huizinga’s book he discusses what he labels as the middle-class culture of the Netherlands. Reading it, we should not forget about his account of the culture of the Burgundy court in the background.

Huizinga agreed with the common claim that shipping and commerce dominated 17th century Dutch culture. “Land of shipping and trade now means land of city life. There had been important trading centres here even before the cities of the Middle Ages had appeared” (Huizinga 1948d, p. 420). In other words, he confronts here, in addition, the question posed in *Autumntide*, of whether cities were relevant already in the late Middle Ages, and answers it with a definite yes. His main point is not a historical one this time, however—it is only an argument in defence of his claim that by the 17th century cities had already established a major role in the life of the Dutch national and regional communities. Or to put it more precisely: Huizinga shows in this late work that the role of the cities was not something new and innovative, as claimed by those who—misunderstanding Weber—connected the rise of capitalism with the Reformation, or who accepted Burckhardt’s account of the individualist ethic of the Renaissance. Huizinga demonstrates that early modern urban liberty was founded on the medieval liberties and privileges these communities had enjoyed. The medieval notion was not about independence or autonomy or rights—the communities of medieval townspeople enjoyed only privileges granted by the king or the bishop, but they were free to act together, and together they felt much stronger than alone. As Huizinga saw it, public administration

remained stuck in those extremely limited forms which in the Middle Ages were called freedom, i.e. each small unit acting independently, strict prohibitions within its own circle, obstruction of outsiders as much as possible, but no restrictions imposed by a central authority (Huizinga 1948d, pp. 426-427).

This old-fashioned, but still valuable way of self-governance went hand-in-hand with some ancient practices of commerce, including the idea of the freedom of trade. “Amsterdam was rightly in favour of free trade, not because of any theory, as this did not yet exist, but because its most tangible interest here corresponded to the medieval-conservative heritage” (Huizinga 1948d, p. 427).

This traditionalist mentality was also present in the sphere of politics. There, too, there was not yet anything corresponding to Locke’s progressive ideas of individual rights and social contract. Instead, there was again a survival of medieval ways of proceeding:

The state, too, was thoroughly conservative, built on old traditions, clinging to old rights. The sense of freedom was alive and well, but the idea of freedom was that of the Middle Ages: freedom conceived as a set of freedoms, and freedoms equated with a number of rules, each valid within a limited area (Huizinga 1948d, p. 429).

At this point Huizinga approaches the idea of civic association, so characteristic of Otto von Gierke’s account of what he calls “medieval civic freedom” in the German context. This is how Gierke describes this form of medieval urban liberty in the Holy Roman Empire: “its basis was the old Germanic free fellowship; this became a civic community by assimilating the notion of free union and amalgamating it with the principle of the community of the mark...” (Gierke 1990, p. 32). While clearly the Dutch experience was not exactly the same as the German one, the remnants of the spirit of medieval urban freedom was crucial for Huizinga, too.

Even so, these conventional ways of handling public affairs, including commerce, public administration or governance, which had to do with the rule of the patricians, were to some degree in decline—just as the culture of the Burgundy court showed signs of decay in *Autumntide*. Yet the achievements of the Golden Age were to be long lasting, and its manifestations only began to disappear in Huizinga’s childhood years. Here we arrive back at what Thorin called “*heimwee*”: with Huizinga’s concern about the urban devastation he saw in the Dutch cities of the early decades of the 20th century. Unlike Paris, for a long time Amsterdam was able to preserve its built heritage. What is more, the whole Dutch network of flourishing cities survived for a long time. As Huizinga recalls it, there were

flourishing cities all the way up to Hoorn and Enkhuizen, each with its own type and atmosphere. It would be a melancholic task to enumerate which Dutch cities have retained the charm of their seventeenth-century past the longest. Up until fifty or sixty years ago, actually all of them. Only the tram lines, the concrete, the asphalt and the motor traffic have violated them (Huizinga 1948d, pp. 441-442).

Clearly, Huizinga was writing as a cultural critic in this passage. His criticism concerns the modern principles and practices of urban planning and construction, expressions of the technological bias of our modern civilisation, which, he claimed, may even cast a long shadow on our civility itself. There can be little doubt from this that the unheroic heroes of the seventeenth century serve as the control group for Huizinga, when he criticizes the culture, or the lack of it of the alienated 20th century. In his narrative, the traditional Dutch cityscape serves as a balance to counterpoise modernist demolitions and the geometrical mind-set of the urban planners and the spiritless nature of the new products of factory-built housing.

Beside such references to the urban milieu, Huizinga also directly addresses the issue of Golden Age Dutch Art. He makes the sociological claim that it is because of the bourgeois and urban nature of this cul-

ture that painting occupies such a disproportionately large place in it. This was not exactly a demand and thirst for the contemplation of beauty, as expected by the church fathers. Instead, he identifies “a zest for life and an interest in things” (Huizinga 1948d, p. 480) among the urban folks, which sounds—somewhat surprisingly—like a repetition of much of what Burckhardt had to say about the attitude to life in the Italian Renaissance. In both the Italian Renaissance and the Dutch 17th century Golden Age, there was a growing market for painting and other forms of artistic production, as a sign of a rise in capitalist consumerism. Huizinga also mentions “a hunger and thirst for the image”, which included the “direct representation of landscape, building, household goods, people or animals” (Huizinga 1948d, p. 481). By his time the opposition between the Baroque style of the schools in the Southern, Catholic parts of the Netherlands and the modest and simple style of the Northern parts was well established. Apparently, the 19th century movements of Biedermeier and realist tastes also inspired Huizinga, when he characterized the works of the Golden age Dutch masters: “All power of expression was absorbed by the intimate suggestion of humble reality and the dreamlike view (*aanblik*) of silent distances” (Huizinga 1948d, p. 483). His descriptions, as usual, are full of sympathy with the mentality he investigates: the art of description, so characteristic of the Dutch painters, fits very well into Huizinga’s own style of history writing. In both, the effect of visualisation is crucial.

In order to give a realistic account of the realism of Dutch painting, Huizinga also had to consider the role of Protestantism in Dutch culture. As the Church was no longer among the main supporters and sponsors of art, painters had to adjust their subject matter accordingly. The new sponsors, the patrician and middle-class clients turned towards new themes, and that is why the new genres rose in popularity. Generally speaking, the focus of interest turned towards the simple things of ordinary life. Corporations, guilds, clubs and associations ordered paintings to decorate the walls of the headquarters of corporations, such as guildhalls or the barracks of the militia companies, while court rooms or the halls of the council-houses also competed with each other in the way they were artistically furnished. Therefore, either mythological themes, ancient or Biblical, or sometimes even national symbolism were mobilized, to communicate religiously or culturally recognized abstract values or standards. Most of the time, however, Huizinga argues, Dutch burghers did not want to achieve more than simply representing what was actually visible. They were “firmly convinced of the absolute reality of all that exists and of every particular thing” (Huizinga 1948d, p. 485). This is true of Frans Hals just as much as it is of Vermeer, even if the latter adds to this realistic level of representation a certain poetic overtone, with the visionary colours of blue, green and yellow of his figures inhabiting an elegiac dream world. Huizinga’s judgement finds Rembrandt the best representative of the Dutch culture of the age. Even the painter’s main failure, an unsuccessful struggle for the grand style, monumentality and classical harmony, allows Rembrandt to embody the mentality of the age, and its “burgerlijk” (burgher-like) quality.

After evaluating the art of Rembrandt, Huizinga returns to urban architecture to explain the general spirit of the age. Once again, this is the architecture of the middle-classes. As the Church and the aristocracy were no longer placing the orders, the burghers took their place as the main builders of the urban context. The burgher’s house is a family home, providing accommodation for three generations. Although a building of this size does not allow for great extravagance, a simple and pure form of expression was in any case general in the Dutch urban context. What a shame it is, Huizinga complains, that so many of the best urban architectural ensembles were demolished in the 19th century—he gives the example of the earlier Grote Markt in Groningen. Just as with painting, so too with architecture: the main sponsors were private individuals or groups within civil society. Huizinga provides a list of the types of buildings characteristic in the age. “The new buildings required in addition to the bourgeois family houses were neither palaces nor cathedrals, but town halls, orphanages, headquarters for the militia, warehouses, in some prominent towns a merchant’s exchange, the warehouses for the large overseas companies, and finally the numerous country houses for the wealthy merchants” (Huizinga 1948d, p. 496). This social background to building made it obvious that Dutch architecture did not tend toward the monumental. Instead, it served public or private

interests and could correctly express the life and thought of the members of the family, in the case of private houses and of the citizens in their different associations, in the case of public buildings.

According to Huizinga, we can best understand the essence of the century through the architectural heritage we inherited from them. In the same way, the Dutchmen of the 17th century could best make sense of their environment through the beauty of the urban architecture which surrounded them. He mentions the examples of the cityscapes by Van der Heyden, Berckheyde, Beerstraten and Vermeer. Huizinga explains the miraculous effect of their vedutas on the viewer the following way: “Nowhere, perhaps, does the happy sun shine so brightly for us from that time as in the cityscape (*stadsgezicht*), which can sometimes fill us with nostalgia (*heimwee*) for this past of healthy-natural living with a simple thought system and a firm belief” (Huizinga 1948d, p. 498). As we can see, at this point in his analysis, Huizinga is trying to summarise his main message: that the spirit of Dutch simplicity is best preserved through the burgher’s houses in the historical districts of the cities of his age, although these were often demolished in the 19th century, or else through the cityscapes of contemporary painters. This loss of past value is crucial for deciding how far the past determines the present, but it also shows that a historian’s reconstruction of a by now disappeared past can cause serious changes in the present day—and Huizinga was writing this in the midst of WWII.¹²

Taken all together, the 17th century preserves its magic character in the eyes of Huizinga throughout his life. It is symbolic that he finishes his story with the burning down of the old, medieval town hall of Amsterdam, which makes necessary the building of a new one, according to the plans of Jacob van Campen—which would itself become one of the wonders of the world. Even so, the loss is obvious and unrepairable.

CONCLUSION

In this essay, I aimed to show that the cultural historian Johan Huizinga practised a kind of cultural history which also served as a medium for and embodiment of his political thought. As a Dutch historian, interested in the past of his political community, he was engaged in a project to understand the “meaning” of that history, in order to show the ideal embedded in that past. His first and most famous work, *The Autumntide of the Middle Ages*, still focused on the court life and high art of the 14th and 15th century France and Netherlands. His last greater work, *Dutch Civilisation in the Seventeenth Century*, presented the Golden Age of Dutch Art, as it flourished after the Reformation, in the context of regaining the liberty of the Netherlands. While a critical interpretation might miss in Huizinga’s *Autumntide* a substantial reference to the middle-class urban culture of the late medieval period, I have attempted to show that this is not an arrogance and blindness towards the middle classes on his part. Rather, it is a conscious choice on the part of the author to concentrate on the Christian religious, the chivalric, and the artistic elements in that particular period of European culture.

I also implied that there is no contradiction or shift in values between his first and last great work. Huizinga, whose major research field was and remained the Middle Ages, but who was just as interested in the most successful, early modern period of Dutch culture from very early on in his career, could point at two important pillars of the Dutch cultural heritage with the help of these major works. On the one hand, he identifies the medieval, Burgundian, Christian and chivalric ideal and on the other hand he cites the early modern, post-Reformation, patriotic, urban component. Pointing at these two different, but connected sources of value in modern Dutch culture and civilisation, he tried to paint a deeper, historically rooted account of the attributes of this culture. By referring to both the chivalric and the middle-class building blocks of this communal cultural package, he offered a criticism of his own century. In this, he was not simply a positivist historian of past culture—he harboured an ambition to offer cultural criticism as well. He had serious problems with the modernist intentions to “liberate” the contemporary world from the burden of the past and its legends. Beyond that dislike of modernist artistic and urbanist aspirations, he also proved to be a dedicated critic of the two sorts of totalitarian ideologies, characteristic of his own age in Europe.

Huizinga saw National Socialism and Communism as dangerous revolutionary movements, which were actually quite close to each other, and as such, he hated both of them. His younger relative, the well-known essayist Menno ter Braak, accused him of having retreated to the ivory tower of historical studies in an age of political crisis (Krul 1990). It was crucial for him to convince his younger and more rebellious colleague of the opposite. In a letter addressed to ter Braak in September 1936, Huizinga wrote: “today’s extremist nationalism, with its antagonistic twin, bolshevism, is the disaster of our age” (Huizinga 1936, p. 73). Such a direct formulation of his political stance was quite rare, and restricted most of the time to personal correspondence, but nonetheless it is unquestionable that he held principled, anti-totalitarian political views, and further on, that his political conviction can be labelled as a liberal conservative position. One can make an even stronger claim, in agreement with Wessel Krul: that Huizinga also thought that Dutch society needs to remain, what it had always been: conservative, moderate, “burgerlijk” (Krul 1990). All of this shows that his political persuasion was that of a principled conservative, which enabled him to recognise the conservative element in the Dutch tradition. He found the conservative element in the history of Dutch culture, and with the help of it, he came to argue for the relevance of the past for his own day. As a conservative cultural critic of his day, he identified himself in a way as a late representative of the supposed conservative inclinations in pre-modern Dutch culture.

One way to show the connection between these two, the conservative element of Dutch culture, and his own conservatism, is to consider his account of Dutch cityscapes, and his own experiences of the Dutch urban landscape. Huizinga showed that architecture provides the best direct, sensation-based access to the past, which is why the demolition of parts of Amsterdam awakened him to the fact that a culture was threatened with disappearance because of the hubris of modernity—a fact which must have strengthened the conservative inclination in him. The recognition of the relevance of the Dutch cityscape, both in its physical reality, and in its artistic reproduction, as it was painted or drawn in the Middle Ages or in the Golden Age, is a recurring element of Huizinga’s oeuvre. The typical Dutch urban milieu in which he was brought up helped him to research the specific way of life and thought of the Dutch urban environment, from explicit local histories, like the ones he wrote about Haarlem and Groningen, through the memorable *Autumntide*, to cultural historical pieces, perfected in his late piece about seventeenth century Dutch civilisation. The overall claim of this paper has been to show that an appreciation of the Dutch cityscape led Huizinga to an aesthetically geared re-creation of the “burgerlijk” Dutch past. This interest in the past reveals him as an implicit political philosopher, with an outlook which might be labelled in the context of the 20th century as a political stance of urban, liberal conservatism.

NOTES

- 1 The book’s most up-to-date and most detailed English translation: Huizinga 2020.
- 2 Here I follow Gadamer’s narrative, in his introductory chapter on the guiding concepts of humanism: Gadamer 1975, 1989, p. 18.
- 3 This is the term made famous by T. S. Eliot, first introduced in his essay on Hamlet and His Problems.
- 4 As Huizinga (1969) was not available to me, I used the following translation available online: J. Huizinga: My Path to History. On an Interest in History. Tr. Diane Webb, <http://docs.letterenfonds.nl/frag/Unedited-English-Huizinga-Mijn-weg-tot-de-historie.pdf>
- 5 Huizinga quotes Windelband in Dutch in: Huizinga: Verzamelde Werken, vol. 7. p. 21. available at: https://www.dbnl.org/arch/huiz003gesc03_01/pag/huiz003gesc03_01.pdf
- 6 According to Dumolyn and Lecuppre-Desjardin, “this early work was certainly not cultural history” (Dumolyn and Lecuppre-Desjardin 2019, p. 66).
- 7 Huizinga (1989); Veth (1916, p. 181).
- 8 Rydin refers to Huizinga’s autobiography, which claimed that the driving idea of the book was conceived “between 1906 and 1909, probably in 1907” (Huizinga 1947, p. 39).
- 9 I quote this *ekphrasis* of the city from the following English translation: Huizinga 1996, p. 334.

- 10 Mijn weg tot de historie, Verzamelde werken. Deel 1. Oud-Indië. Nederland, p. 39.
- 11 Mijn weg tot de historie, Verzamelde werken. Deel 1. Oud-Indië. Nederland, p. 19.
- 12 See also his essay: My Path to History, in: Huizinga (1969).

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