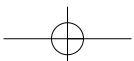
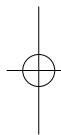
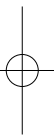


The Book of Rotterdam





THE BOOK OF *Rotterdam*

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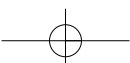
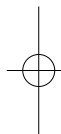
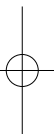
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Foreword

Can the rich history of Rotterdam be summed up in one small book? The answer is yes, it can, if the author possesses knowledge about the subject and can write in a concise, clear manner. The historian Arie van der Schoor, from the Rotterdam Municipal Archives, has proved that this is possible.

The format and chronological lay-out of *The Book of Rotterdam* makes it very easy to use. It is a useful reference book to quickly acquaint yourself with the history of Rotterdam, from the alleged attacks by the Normans to the commemoration of the fire boundary in May 2010.

This edition also provides the finest and most striking images from the enormous collection in the Rotterdam Municipal Archives, that is to say.....the author already had specific images in mind, but, of course, followed the advice of his colleagues in the Municipal Archives. How do you go about making a selection from the huge range consisting of over 18 linear kilometres of archives, and a few kilometres of books, periodicals and newspapers? And what about the hundreds of thousands of photos, drawings, cards, maps and posters? And then there is also the image and sound collection with thousands of films, gramophone re-

ords, tapes, CDs etc. Expert archivists have assisted the author in his search.

Anyone interested in these rich collections should definitely pay a visit to the Rotterdam Municipal Archives at Hofdijk 651, or go to www.gemeentearchief.rotterdam.nl

Ms. Jantje Steenhuis, *Director of the Rotterdam Municipal Archives*



Modest beginnings (up to 1570)

Around 800 AD, the site of modern-day Rotterdam in the Maas-Merwede region was already inhabited, but the dam of the Rotte river, from which the city's name is derived and which ensured its development, dates back to around 1270. At the time that it was granted a town charter in 1340, medieval Rotterdam was still a fairly rural settlement of a few thousand inhabitants. The town and municipal administration were still locally and regionally focused, although import, export and transit were increasing due to the fact that a shipping link was being established with the surrounding countryside in Holland. By around 1400, Rotterdam had become a port for transit and transshipping and was one of the smaller towns of Holland and Zeeland. It remained that way for a long time, but the town enjoyed modest growth during the fifteenth century. Monasteries and convents established themselves in the town, in which the *Heilige Geest and Gasthuis*, wealthy religious individuals and brotherhoods were already providing help and assistance to the poor and needy. The *Grote Kerk* (dedicated to St. Laurence), which was gaining higher standing thanks to its rebuilding, acted as a spiritual centre. Herring fishing was also on the increase, more cargo was being shipped to destinations both within the country and abroad and guilds were forming in industry. Urban life primarily revolved around the dam and the port, which had gained the status of economic centre of Rotterdam. The prosperity of the medieval town suffered somewhat due to the proximity of the powerful town of Dordrecht and competition from towns such as Delft, Leiden, Haarlem, Gouda and Amsterdam. By the close of the fifteenth century, the Hook and Cod wars (known in Dutch as *Hoekse en Kabeljauwse twisten*) had also caused a great deal of damage, from which the town only recovered after 1500. In addition, trade and the merchant navy made use of Rotterdam's favourable location. During the sixteenth century, the town on the Maas became a key location between Amsterdam in the northern Netherlands and Antwerp (which dominated the global economy at the time) in the southern Netherlands. The focal point of urban activity and life increasingly tended towards fishing and shipping and the accompanying industry and the town began to grow gradually as a result. The municipal administration expanded with new trade-related groups and gained more influence in all domains, even in that of the church. However, a climate of political and religious tolerance prevailed and no action was taken against the new unorthodox movements that were causing a great deal of turmoil elsewhere.

Under attack from the Norsemen

Conflicts among the successors of Charles the Great had weakened the once so powerful Carolingian Empire over the course of the ninth century. Norsemen, particularly the Danes saw their chance and began to plunder the coastal regions of the Netherlands. After the merchant settlements of Antwerp and Dorestad, as well as Witla on the Maas estuary had been destroyed in 836 AD, the Norsemen were said to have gone on to reduce the *Bulgersteyn* castle at Rotterdam to ashes shortly afterwards in 838 AD, at least according to the nineteenth-century historian Peypers, who based his accounts on fantasy and legends. In actual fact, *Bulger-*

steyn did not yet exist then and archaeological data suggest that in around 800 AD people had probably only been living in a modest settlement where the Rotte joins the Maas for a short time. It is not until over five hundred years later that we may speak of a medieval town called Rotterdam, where *Bulgersteyn* castle rose up on the site of the modern-day *Schielandshuis* Historical Museum.

The Norsemen ransack *Bulgersteyn* castle, lithograph in: W.N. Peypers, *Rotterdam in opkomst, ontwikkeling en bloei. Historische Tafereelen* [The Rise, Development and Prosperity of Rotterdam: Historical Scenes] (Rotterdam, 1863)



c. 1270

MODEST BEGINNINGS (UP TO 1570)

The damming of the Rotte: the beginnings of Rotterdam



A small settlement on the lower reaches of the Rotte is mentioned in documents from the eleventh century as *Rotta* and this predecessor of Rotterdam created new settlements by developing the land. The old settlement of Rotta was lost around 1150 as a result of severe storm surges and flooding that affected the entire region. As a response to these disasters, administrators and inhabitants constructed dikes before 1200 along the great rivers Maas and Hollandse IJssel in order to protect the region. Openings in the front of the dike that posed a danger, such as the Rotte, through which water from the countryside drained into the Maas, were dammed off in the thir-

teenth century and fitted with drainage sluices. While work was underway on the Willemsspoortunnel in 1991, evidence of this medieval Rotte-dam was found underneath the modern-day Hoogstraat, including an old wooden drainage sluice. The dam must have been constructed around the year 1270 and as a result a new settlement, Rotterdam, quickly developed and was first recorded between 1281 and 1284.

The remains of the medieval wooden drainage sluice in the dam of the Rotte, excavated by the *Bureau Oudkundigheid Onderzoek Rotterdam* [Rotterdam Office for Archaeological Research] in 1991

1299

Wolfert van Borselen favours Rotterdam

Many different parties attempted to take advantage of the political unrest that existed in Holland and Zeeland following the murder of the count Floris V in 1296. Floris' son Jan was too young to rule, which meant that Floris' nephew, Jan van Avesnes from Henegouwen, came over to put matters in order. The town of Dordrecht and a number of noblemen from Zeeland, including Wolfert van Borselen, Lord of Veere, as-

sisted him in this regard. After something of a struggle, Wolfert was able to take over actual power in Holland. On 17 March 1299, he granted town privileges and exemption from tolls to the small town of Rotterdam in order to help promote his position in the Western Netherlands against the enemy towns of Schiedam and Dordrecht, but this was short-lived: Wolfert van Borselen was murdered by his adversaries in Delft on 1 August 1299 and the newly-acquired town charter of Rotterdam was quickly revoked soon afterwards.



Engraving of Wolfert van Borselen ('Heer Wolfert Vander Vere') in *Oude Chronyck van Hollandt* (An Old History of Holland), an edition of the *Divisiiekroniek* (a collection of historical accounts and stories written by Cornelius Aurelius) from 1517

1340

MODEST BEGINNINGS (UP TO 1570)

A permanent town charter for Rotterdam

Following the short-lived town charter of 1299, Rotterdam gradually developed during the fourteenth century into a settlement that aspired to become a larger town. The counts of Holland had set their sights on the political and economic power of towns and they capitalised upon the wishes of their subjects. Count Willem III had already granted privileges of a town to part of Rotterdam in 1328, whilst his son and successor Count Willem IV granted a permanent town charter to the whole of Rotterdam in exchange for payment on 7 June 1340. For the estimated 2000 people who lived

there, this privilege allowed, among other things, freedom from tolls in the county of Holland and exemption from a number of taxes, permission to hold annual markets and, of course, great administrative and judicial powers. In contrast however, such privileges also came with obligations, such as the provision of soldiers to the Count in wartime, but the legal foundation for the further development of Rotterdam had been laid.

The town charter of Rotterdam of 7 June 1340, from the Old City Archive



1340

Reconstruction of Rotterdam at the time that its town charter was granted

There are no images or maps in existence that depict the town of Rotterdam at the time that it was granted a town charter and the oldest maps showing images of the town date back to the sixteenth century. We therefore do not know what the town looked like in the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries, although eighteenth-century town history enthusiasts in Rotterdam in particular did not hesitate to produce detailed prints of Rotterdam around 1300 or 1400 AD. However, historical and archaeological data have

made it possible to produce a reliable reconstruction of a map of the young medieval town around the mid-fourteenth century. Using the courses of old rivers and waterways in the ground, information about the distribution of plots of land, but also information about medieval manorial lease fees paid to counts that has survived as written records, a picture emerges of very modest buildings along the Rotte and around the dam in an otherwise rural area.



Reconstruction of the map of Rotterdam around 1340, drawing by D. Wijnand based on a design by C. Hoek

c. 1350

MODEST BEGINNINGS (UP TO 1570)

The 'Rotterdamse Schie' is completed

A town charter is no guarantee that a town will prosper. Although Rotterdam had a favourable location on the Maas and the Rotte, it did not possess a shipping link with towns in Holland such as Delft, Leiden and Haarlem. The little town could therefore not perform a transit role in the considerable amount of trade to and from England that existed at the time, as Schiedam could thanks to the river Schie that flowed to Delft. Two days after the town charter of 1340 was granted, Count Willem IV also commissioned the regional water board of Schieland to dig a useful shipping canal

of this kind from Rotterdam to the Schie at Overschie, for which Rotterdam would bear the costs. This canal, known as the Rotterdamse Schie, was completed ten years later. The addition of the Delfshavense Schie between the docks at Delfshaven on the Maas and the Schie, the construction of which in 1389 was commissioned for the same purpose by the town of Delft, fearful of competition, gave rise to 'the three Schies'.

The point at which the three Schies join at Overschie, detail from a map of the regional water board (*Hoogheemraadschap*) of Schieland (1684)



1358

The town is fortified

After Count Willem V had been declared insane in 1358, he was replaced by his brother Albrecht, who granted permission to Rotterdam on 8 May to build fortifications around the town. During these uncertain times when the Hook and Cod wars began, many towns aspired to protect and expand their territory for reasons of preserving their own existence and their desire to expand. In

order to dig a moat, Rotterdam was permitted to expand the town boundaries. To the West, the Coolsingel became the town moat and defences appeared. Evidence has shown that the first stone town gates and town walls had already been built before 1400. During excavation works in the 1930s, 1960s and 1980s, remains of medieval walls and towers were exposed for a brief period. The

most spectacular find, however, was in 1989 when fourteenth-century town defences were found several metres below ground level against the backdrop of the futuristic cubical houses next to Blaak NS rail station.



Remains of the fourteenth-century southern town wall at Blaak NS Station in 1989, photograph courtesy of the Municipal Archive