



Yme Kuiper and Ben Olde Meierink (eds.), *Buitenplaatsen in de Gouden Eeuw. De rijkdom van het buitenleven in de Republiek* (Adelsgeschiedenis 14; Hilversum: Verloren, 2015, 336 pp., ISBN 978 90 8704 538 8).

The seventeenth-century Dutch Republic witnessed a proliferation of *buitenplaatsen* or country seats as members of the upper strata of Dutch society, having profited from the burgeoning economy, either started to upgrade already existing houses or castles on the countryside, or construct new houses altogether. Often these country seats were adorned with meticulously constructed gardens, betraying the leisurely function of these houses. Yet these country seats did not merely serve as a place to which the well-to-do could retreat from their busy lives in the city: some of them were mainly used to generate profit from the agricultural activities that took place on the land that was part of these estates.

Country seats existed in various forms and guises, which makes them hard to capture by a single definition. Contributing to the formulation of a definition is definitely not the goal of this volume, explains Yme Kuiper, one of the editors, since ‘we already have enough of them’ (38). Instead, this volume aims to show that the proliferation of countryseats during the seventeenth century was a complex development which did not only involve wealthy merchant and regent families, but the landed and high nobility as well. Through a systematic comparison of country seats in the different provinces of the Dutch Republic, new information about this development should be unearthed.

Each chapter in the volume focuses on a specific province of the Dutch Republic, although two articles are devoted to Holland, its most powerful province. One of the central themes which is analysed throughout the various chapters is the periodisation of the construction of country seats, while some aspects of country seats, such as their geographical location, owners, and architectural style, are usually addressed as well. Gerdy Verschuure-Stuip and Hans Renes, for example, explain the relationship between the country seats and the surrounding landscape in Holland and highlight the ‘rational reasons’ which underpin the locations of the countryseats; Fred Vogelzang studies the locations and the owners of the countryseats in Utrecht and explains their increasing number over the course of the seventeenth century; Ben Olde Meierink and Elyze Storms-Smeets chart the construction of country seats in Guelders while answering the question whether these country seats were transformations of existing estates or newly-built mansions. In this way, even though some chapters are quite exploratory in nature, the volume provides an

overview of the different trends in the various provinces, as the construction of country seats often was related to internal factors (e.g. the development of infrastructure) as well as external ones (e.g. the wars with Spain and other European powers).

The chapters, even though addressing a number of overlapping themes, are nevertheless diverse in the application of a specific perspective through or method by which country seats are studied. Yme Kuiper and Annemarie Zijlstra use seventeenth-century maps to study country seats and their gardens in Friesland, while Johan de Haan focuses on the interior of country seats in Groningen and Drenthe. Because of this diversity in approaches and perspectives, the chapters, which at times can be a bit descriptive and enumerative, remain interesting. The least descriptive and most interpretative chapter is the contribution by Rob van der Laarse, who focuses on the 'political and cultural meaning of country seats' and situates country seats within the framework of the competition between the Dutch patriciate and nobility, most notably the stadholders. Van der Laarse shows that country seats were used, by nobles and members of the patriciate alike, to represent their dynasty and to highlight dynastic continuity. This function of country seats could be appropriated by opponents who, through the acquisition of a family's country seats, could highlight their supremacy over that family.

The volume derives its main strength from the decision to discuss country seats in all the provinces of the Dutch Republic, and in particular from the inclusion of the provinces Noord-Brabant and Limburg, large swaths of which were conquered by the Republic's armies in the seventeenth century and were part of the so-called generality lands. The inclusion of these provinces further emphasises the different histories and characteristics of the Dutch provinces; by bearing this in mind the authors are able to explain the differences as well as the similarities between the country houses in each of the provinces. Bas Aarts, for example, raises the question about the extent to which architecture of country estates in Brabant can be related to the religious affiliation of their owners while he, just like Evelyn Ligtenberg does in her contribution on Limburg, takes into account the architectural influence from the Southern Netherlands and the Holy Roman Empire. Indeed, Ligtenberg concludes that the estates in the northern parts of Limburg were more influenced by architectural trends from Guelders and the Northern Netherlands in general, whereas this was less the case for the country seats in the southern parts of this province. On the other hand, similarities were caused by the spread of architectural styles, such as classicism, across the various provinces, or because certain architects were commissioned throughout the Republic.

Although the authors have tried to take into account transregional or even transnational developments (albeit to a varying degree), one is left with the feeling that in some case a thematic analysis would have been more suited

to address developments which transcend provincial and national boundaries. Was the religious affiliation of the owners of country seats in one way or another visible in the exterior or interior of their estates? If so, was the way in which the faith of the owners materialized uniform across the provinces? Some of these questions are addressed, but mainly within provincial boundaries. A thematic analysis could shed more light on the differences and similarities between the country seats and their owners in the various provinces of the Republic. Another aspect of the volume which could have been developed more fully is the integral or holistic study of country seats which Yme Kuiper advocates in the introduction. Such an approach aims to analyse the various aspects of country houses, such as their exterior, interior, relation to the landscape, political and cultural meanings, in conjunction with each other. Admittedly, this might be a bit too much to include in relatively short chapters, and most chapters do address several aspects of country houses. Yet a fuller integration of various aspects of country seats could have been undertaken.

Aside from these minor criticisms, this is an interesting volume which not only provides a good overview of country seats in the Republic's provinces, but also studies country seats in relation to wider transregional trends and the particular politico-economic context in each of the provinces. In doing so, this stimulating and, it has to be emphasised, wonderfully illustrated volume raises new questions and opens up new avenues for research. As such, the volume may well serve as a template for future research on country seats in the Dutch Republic.

Jaap Geraerts, University College London