



Bert Koene, *Oranjeman Suideras (1743-1811). Een leven zonder toegeeflijkheid* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2016, 173 pp., ISBN 978 90 8704 566 1).

The Orangist August Robbert van Heeckeren tot Suideras is a fantastic subject for a biography. This hot-tempered adherent of the House of Orange-Nassau lived a turbulent life, both politically and personally. According to author Bert Koene, whom I paraphrase here, Suideras was one of the most enthusiastic defenders of the stadholderly system and of the prince himself in the province of Gelderland.

At the start of his political career in 1767, when Suideras was appointed counsellor in the Court of Gelderland, he operated quietly in the background. This changed completely in 1780 when he became alderman of Zutphen. It seems that the ‘lightly inflammable’ Suideras felt much at ease in these turbulent years of struggle between opponents and defenders of Stadholder William V which intensified in the following years. In June 1787 he even prevented a civil war in Zutphen, thanks to his resolute performance. In the wake of the Batavian Revolution in 1795, however, Suideras became obsessed with the restoration of the old regime of the House of Orange-Nassau. After being forced into exile to Prussia, he kept in contact with Orangists in the Batavian Republic to discuss the possibilities of a new revolution. Despite his persistence to restore the old regime his attempts failed. Not only the actions of the so-called *Rassemblement* of Osnabrück in 1796, but also his own endeavours to start a revolution in the Achterhoek in 1799 ended in great disillusionment. Suideras tended to lose sight of reality. Even several of his political associates considered him to be a troublemaker. Moreover, Suideras was suspected of corruption because of his continuing precarious financial situation. Only years later and shortly before he died in 1811 Suideras would succeed – for the first time since his banishment after the Batavian Revolution – in acquiring a position as a justice of the peace in Warnsveld.

Bert Koene seems to be the right man for writing Suideras’ biography. Koene, who is a very prolific author, has written about the aristocratic politician Gerard Brantsen (1735-1809) and the eighteenth-century noble family De Westerholts van Hackfort, to name but a few topics. Koene is clearly fascinated by local politics and politicians in the second half of the eighteenth century: a period characterized by revolution, counterrevolution and regime changes. His biography about Suideras appeared at the same time as a couple of other publications, such as *De herinneringen van Jan Willem Kumpel (1757-1826)*

[...], by Hanneke Ronnes, and *Alexander Philip van der Capellen (1745-1787)* [...] by Jacques Baartmans. Although Ronnes' book consists for the largest part of the autobiography of Jan Willem Kumpel, both publications show that the life and work of Orangists in the revolutionary second half of the eighteenth century have increasingly been subject to scholarly research. Because of that, one gets a better view of Orangists that lived in these fascinating years and that sometimes had to find their way outside the established order.

At the same time, the focus on individual Orangists contributes to a rather one-sided view of what Orangism actually entailed. Suideras was an exceptional case in the sense that despite his privileged social position, even some of his political associates did not take him seriously. Although Koene provides an elaborate description of Suideras' attempts to restore the old regime, based on archival sources, it does not become clear what his ideas about the stadholderly system were. Nor does Koene explain why Suideras showed such devotion to the House of Orange-Nassau. Was Suideras driven by the pursuit of personal gain or were his revolutionary actions motivated by a sense of duty because of his social status? What were his motives to support the Orange family, even if he himself was convicted to lifelong banishment? Furthermore, the lack of historical background makes it hard to place Suideras' Orangism in a broader context. More information about, for instance, the Batavian Revolution and the consequences it had for political opponents, would have made clear that Suideras' story was not that exceptional. It is a missed opportunity that Koene did not use the large amount of historical research that has been conducted recently, to create a view of the world Suideras lived in and to compare him with other Orangists that had to deal with the same issues.

In short, the book would have benefitted from more analytical depth, which is perhaps caused by the absence of a clear point of departure. Other than the assumption that Suideras was a 'vessel of contradictions', Koene does not mention an approach or method in his preface. The reader could assume that Suideras' biography is based on his determined political life on the one hand and his problematic personal life on the other. This indeed makes Suideras an interesting subject of study. The persistence Suideras showed in his attempts to restore the old regime did not correspond with his personal life at all, which was completely dominated by marital problems and debt issues. Finally, the fact that Koene has a very pleasant style of writing, makes the book highly readable.

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