

**‘Charity seems to be very National among them’. Motives for Founding of Almshouses
in the Netherlands c.1350-c.1800**

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Introduction

When discussing charity in the Dutch Golden Age, it has become something of a commonplace amongst historians, whether Dutch or foreign, to quote Sir William Temple’s observation that ‘Charity seems to be very National among them’. Visitors to the Dutch Republic seldom failed to remark – though often in passing – the ‘many and various Hospitals that are in every man’s curiosity and talk that travels their Countrey’, as Temple himself had occasion to observe. Temple, British ambassador to the Dutch Republic in the 1660s, seems to have visited many of them, but he was ‘affected by none more than that of the aged Sea-men at Enchuysen’.¹ There Temple met an old sailor whom he regarded as ‘the only rich man that I ever saw in my life’, as that sailor refused a tip from the ambassador asking him ‘what he should do with Money? For all that ever they wanted was provided for them at their House’.²

Whether Temple related an actual anecdote of his stay in the Republic, or embellished it for the delectation and instruction of his British readers, it is a fact that in the seventeenth century, the Golden Age of Dutch history, the Dutch were often praised for their charity by many visitors to the Netherlands. That charity literally petrified in the shape of a great number of buildings with a charitable purpose, such as hospitals, orphanages, old people’s homes and, last but not least, almshouses. It was also occasionally recorded for posterity by painters and draughtsmen, such as Rembrandt’s famous drawing of a man dispensing alms to a beggar family and Jan Steen’s equally famous, if ambiguous, painting of the burgher of

¹ In fact Temple meant the Enkhuizen old people’s home; there was no separate home for elderly sailors.

² Sir William Temple, *Observations upon the United Provinces of the Netherlands* (second edition, London 1673), p. 170-171; consulted on Early English Books Online.

Delft. Countless regent portraits were commissioned by the administrators of these charitable institutions, and the Dutch equivalent of Shakespeare, Joost van den Vondel (1587-1679), wrote the poem urging passers-by to give liberally for the benefit of the orphans, which is still on display over the entrance to the former Burgerweeshuis of Amsterdam.

This general image of a most charitable nation has been confirmed by modern historians who have calculated that during its Golden Age the Dutch Republic constituted Europe's most charitable nation in terms of per capita giving, 1.7 percent of national income in 1790 but probably much higher before, only to be exceeded by England in the late-eighteenth century.³ An unknown part of that came from private sources.⁴ Dutch charity thus was certainly something to comment on for contemporary foreign visitors – and later (Dutch) historians, who have been studying aspects of Dutch charity from the late nineteenth century onwards. It has also given rise to the current project 'Giving in the Golden Age', which studies the charitable behaviour of early modern Dutchmen – among them the almshouse founders who are the main focus of one of the subprojects of 'Giving in the Golden Age'.

In this paper, I will first introduce to some length the Giving in the Golden Age-project, before discussing my particular subproject on the foundation of almshouses, its preliminary research results with regard to the spread of almshouses and the characteristics of the founders, before concluding with a discussion of the various motives that might lie at the basis of the foundation of almshouses.

Giving in the Golden Age⁵

Since the 1960s Dutch charity has been studied quite extensively from the perspective of the recipients of charity, the poor, and these studies have greatly expanded our knowledge of the circumstances in which the poor lived, their strategies to cope with poverty and the objectives of the social policy of church and state. With the cultural turn however scholars in the humanities began to concentrate less on the more traditional social, demographic, and economic history and more on cultural history. A similar shift took place within the social sciences. There the interest in government regulations concerning poverty, such as social insurance and social welfare, declined much in favour of research on philanthropy. In the Netherlands most of this research is carried out by the Working Group Philanthropic Studies

³ See for this Peter H. Lindert, *Growing Public. Social Spending and Economic Growth since the Eighteenth Century. Volume I. The Story* (Cambridge 2004), 7-8, 43 and 46-47. In most countries until the 1930s public expenditure on poor relief never exceeded three percent; Lindert, *Growing Public*, 8.

⁴ Lindert, *Growing Public*, 43.

⁵ See for this paragraph also the research proposal which can be found at <http://www.iisg.nl/research/giga.pdf>.

at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam, where such questions are studied such as: what are individuals willing to give voluntarily, without the tax authorities having to compel them? Why do they give, and under what conditions? Social scientists concentrate mostly on the present, and go back at most to the post-war era, but these questions are now also taken up by historians, inspired by their colleagues of the social sciences, and applied to charity in a more remote past. Indeed, the question why so many early modern Dutchmen, from all social strata, gave so much to charity is the focus of the current research project ‘Giving in the Golden Age’ (hereafter abbreviated as GIGA).⁶ GIGA aims to answer this intriguing question about the charitable behaviour of Dutchmen by investigating, over a long period of time (1550-1820), how many and which people gave to charity; what, where, and when they gave, and, very importantly, what their motivations were for giving to poor relief. Three complementary research projects on large gifts, medium-sized gifts and small gifts will contribute to this wide-ranging, long-term approach of charitable giving.

The GIGA project aims to give a comprehensive answer to the question why people chose to be charitable, for although there is much historical debate on the reasons why people gave to charity, usually the focus is on one social group, or on one main motivation for giving (such as religious conviction, or the acquisition of social status). GIGA instead analyzes charitable giving on several levels at the same time, by focusing on respectively large, medium sized and small charitable gifts respectively. Large gifts, in the shape of almshouse foundations, are the subject of GIGA1, about which more below. The other two projects focus respectively on medium sized gifts (GIGA2) and small gifts (GIGA3). GIGA2 investigates a sample of wills from four Dutch cities (Bois-le-Duc, Leiden, Utrecht and Zwolle) to establish whether and how many gave (or not) and how much. In the Netherlands, wills were drawn up as early as the late Middle Ages and have survived relatively intact because of their legal importance to subsequent generations. They are thus a rich source for establishing the charitableness of Dutch will-makers. GIGA3 deals with anonymous and semi-anonymous, small-scale charitable giving through public collections and church offertories, in the same cities. It appears that regular collections played an important role in the charitable economy, and there is much archival material preserved which records the reasons and yield of collections. By focusing on several cities spread over the Netherlands the project hopes to avoid a too Hollandocentric perspective – though the supremacy of the Province of Holland in wealth and

⁶ The project is supervised by professors Lex Heerma van Voss and Marco van Leeuwen of Utrecht University, is funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), and is hosted at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam.

size of population implies also its great charitable ‘weight’. The threefold division in large, medium and small gifts will hopefully also shed light on the charitable behaviour and motivation of different social groups in the Republic, from the wealthy elite through the middle classes to the lower classes.

GIGA1: founding almshouses, ca. 1350-ca. 1800

The project on large gifts, ‘GIGA1’, aims to answer the question why so many early modern Dutchmen founded almshouses for the elderly. Dutch benefactors have contributed, funded and founded numerous institutions for among others the care of orphans, the sick and the mentally disturbed, but mostly however, they founded almshouses for the elderly, whose numbers surpass those of other large private foundations. A great number of almshouses were founded in the Netherlands over time, and few charitable institutions offered more opportunity to shape, direct and perpetuate one’s charitable ends. Therefore this peculiar group of benefactors has been selected for the of study large gifts. Often the benefactors left, in one way or another, evidence of what motivated them to spend so much money on charity, and the purpose of this study of almshouse founders is therefore to establish and analyze what their motives were – as far as is possible of course.

In order to create a sample sizable enough to come to more or less firm conclusions, it has been decided not to restrict this project to a few cities, but to take the whole of the Netherlands into account. Almshouses could be quite numerous in some Dutch cities, but they were also founded in smaller towns and even in the countryside. For the purposes of GIGA1, a database has been set up which aims at constructing a complete survey of Dutch almshouses, tentatively baptised the Dutch Almshouse Database (hereafter DAD). Originally, when first set up by Marco van Leeuwen, one of the GIGA-project leaders, the purpose of the database was to establish the frequency and geographical spread of private almshouse foundations in the Netherlands in order to assess the importance of this particular aspect of care for the elderly, as opposed to the larger institutions of care for the elderly established by civic and religious authorities and other provisions for the consequences of old age.⁷ DAD is now being modified and added to by myself, and aims at charting the almshouses established on the territory of the present Kingdom of the Netherlands from the earliest almshouse on record until the present day. Completeness is probably illusory, but nevertheless an attempt

⁷ See for this Marco H.D. van Leeuwen, *De Rijke Republiek. Gilden, assuradeurs en armenzorg 1500-1800* (Amsterdam/Den Haag 2000), Volume I of: Jacques van Gerwen & Marco H.D. van Leeuwen, *Zoeken naar zekerheid. Risico’s, preventie, verzekeringen en andere zekerheidsregelingen in Nederland 1500-2000*.

will be made to be as comprehensive as possible, so that the database may afterwards serve other purposes as well.

From the start the database included such basic information as the locality where the almshouse was based, the years of foundation and – if that was the case – termination of the almshouse, the capacity of the almshouse and the conditions which the candidates for a place in the almshouse were to meet. It also included information on the names, gender, family relations, religion and social status of the founders, and information on whether and how the founders were commemorated in their foundations. For the purposes of the GIGA-project DAD has been expanded and complemented over the past months – among others more than doubling the entries – whilst also information has been added about for example rites of commemoration. The database is still very much a work in progress, and so far information has been gathered mainly from secondary literature.

As within the context of the GIGA-project the emphasis is on charitable giving in the Netherlands in the early modern age, the use of DAD will be restricted to those almshouses which have been founded by private benefactors over the period until 1800. As the scope of the project embraces most of the early-modern era, and by far the largest part of Dutch almshouses were founded between 1500 and 1800, whereas only about sixty can be found to be older than that, these earlier privately founded almshouses will be taken into consideration too in order to create a substantial investigative corpus. At this point DAD contains 425 almshouses founded before 1800, of which at least 342 were founded by individual benefactors, rather than public or semi-public authorities. It is these private benefactors, and their motives, who are the main focus of the project and this paper. Before discussing the most common characteristics of these founders, something should be said here about Dutch almshouses in general: what an almshouse actually was, and how wide spread the phenomenon actually was in the Netherlands.

Almshouses in the Netherlands: differences and similarities

One of the most poignant problems in creating DAD was how actually to define an almshouse. Medieval and early-modern charitable institutions were often fluid in their aims and uses, so it is sometimes difficult to class a particular institution, whilst there was also a bewildering array of names and appellations which might change from region or region, or even from locality to locality. To name only one example, the English term ‘hospital’ and its Dutch equivalent ‘gasthuis’ – literally, guest-house – are now commonly used only to denote

institutions of physical health care, whereas the etymology of both words clearly denotes its original and much more wider aim of dispensing hospitality in all its forms.

Unfortunately, Dutch holds no clear equivalent to the English generic term almshouse. The literal translation, 'aalmoeshuis', fell quickly out of use in the 16th-century Netherlands and has only been preserved in the name of one Dutch almshouse, the St. Anna Aalmoeshuishofje in Leiden, founded around 1500. The term aalmoeshuis occasionally was also applied to other almshouses in 15th and 16th-century Leiden sources,⁸ only to be replaced later on by the word 'hofje', literally 'small court', as generic term. The term 'hofje' has become common in the western Dutch province of Holland, but elsewhere in the Netherlands other terms for almshouse have persisted, sometimes until the present day. In fact many of these terms were used interchangeably in the sources.⁹

Over the past century however, the term 'hofje' – perhaps by virtue of the fact Holland to a large extent has dominated, as it indeed still does, the Netherlands – has become the generic equivalent in the Netherlands of the English word almshouse.¹⁰ This however has led to considerable confusion, for the archetypical hofje is an almshouse-in-court: a more or less quadrangular central common courtyard, usually consisting of a bleaching field with the common well, on all sides surrounded by small apartments, with a gate opening to the outside world. Ideally, these almshouses-in-court also have an apartment called a regentenkamer or regent chamber, where the almshouse administrators – called regents or 'regenten' in Dutch – would meet for dealing with the almshouse's affairs, the archive would be housed and often portraits and other memorabilia of the founder(s) were preserved.

⁸ Ine Leermakers & W. Donkersloot, *Leidse hofjes. Wonen om Gods wille* (2007), 70

⁹ Leermakers & Donkersloot, *Wonen om godswille*, 8-9. Almshouses are often called gasthuis in the provinces of Brabant, Friesland and Groningen, and 'kameren' or 'godskameren' – literally 'chambers' and 'God's chambers' in Utrecht. Both were originally medieval terms also occasionally encountered in Holland. More local variants were current in the city of Arnhem in the province of Gelderland, where the common term was 'weduwenhuis' or 'widow's house', and in the North-Holland city of Alkmaar where most almshouses were called 'provenhuis' – a term which is translated best as 'almshouse' as the 'proven' were literally the alms, in the shape of money and goods, the foundation provided its dependents with. Yet another older term, encountered still in the name of some almshouses in the Holland city of Leiden, was 'convent', a term which points to the religious nature of early, medieval almshouse foundations. Another term which was more common in the southern provinces and in Flanders was 'godshuis', best equated with and translated with the English term *maison dieu*. In Flanders the term is still in use for almshouses: thus in Bruges almshouses are routinely referred to as 'godshuizen'. But it was not known in the north either: thus the founders of the Hofje Meermansburg in Leiden referred to their foundation as 'Gods-huys'; R.E.O. Ekkart, 'De portretten in Meermansburg', *Meermansburg. Leidens grootste hofje 1683-1983/De Leidse Hofjes* 13 (1983), 13-39, there 13.

¹⁰ This development can be traced to the first overview ever of Dutch almshouses, written by D.P.M. Graswinckel, an archivist from the Dutch province of South-Holland and one of the regents of the Hofje van Gratie or Graswinckel in Delft. His concise overview *Nederlandsche Hofjes* (Amsterdam 1943) is still the basis on which later authors have built their own overviews of Dutch almshouses, most notably R. Lopes Cardozo, *Hofjes in Nederland* (hilversum 1977) and I. Dorren, *Langs hofjes: routes in Nederland en België* (Utrecht 1994).

But almshouses came also in other architectural forms.¹¹ Some almshouses were housed in one building, where the inhabitants would not have their own entry door but would live in one-room apartments in the building; others consisted of a row of small houses along a street with a common backyard. Almshouses-in-court were moreover not the only institutions of social care with a central inner court, but shared this feature with various other institutions. The courtyards of the Amsterdam Burgerweeshuis and the Amsterdam Begijnhof for example were originally also bleaching-fields, as still can be seen best in the Begijnhof.

The proliferation of different terms and architectural forms has led to an understandable confusion amongst Dutch scholars of what can be called an almshouse. Although this might also be the consequence of a consistent failure to ask that question in the first place, for scholarly study of almshouses in the Netherlands has been very limited,¹² confined mainly to scholars of architecture and protectors of monuments, and has focused specifically on those almshouses which can be called hofje or almshouse-in-court.

There were other differences among Dutch almshouses. Many, if not most of them, were founded by private persons but others were founded by private organizations, usually of a religious nature, such as the deaconries of Mennonite congregations in Amsterdam, Haarlem and Leiden, which all built one or more almshouses.¹³ Much rarer was the foundation of an almshouse by an urban government. The only unequivocal case was that of the Groningen St. Anthonygasthuis, which was founded in 1517 by the city on the ruins of a stronghold built by a local count who was temporarily ruler of the city. It was a special case as such, as it did not only house elderly. In general however urban governments preferred building larger complexes of old men's and old women's homes, and left the building of – typically smaller – almshouses to private persons and organizations.¹⁴

¹¹ Though perhaps not so much as in England, where there was even a, uniquely, circular almshouse, the Beamsley Hospital near Skipton, founded in 1593; Anna Hallett, *Almshouses* (Princes Risborough 2004), p. 34-35, 50 and front cover.

¹² This is also true of almshouses in other countries, for example Belgium, where only the situation in Bruges has been studied in some detail; Hilde de Bruyne, *De Godshuizen in Brugge* (Roeselaere 1994). Only in Britain has there been more interest in the phenomenon of the almshouse. An introduction provides Hallett, *Almshouses*; somewhat more substantial is Brian Howson, *Houses of Noble Poverty* (1993). Currently Nigel Goose is leading the construction of a historical gazetteer of English almshouses at the University of Hertfordshire.

¹³ It still has to be defined how and why these organizations chose to found these almshouses – it is quite possible that they did so only after their deaconries had received a substantial legacy of a private individual.

¹⁴ It is possible that almshouses housed people with a somewhat higher status than the public institutions, but the early-modern characteristic of fluidity of function also applies to these institutions: some of them indeed housed the elderly poor of lower classes, but others in fact functioned as institutions where the elderly could buy a place which would assure them of complete care. Typically, those who could afford it were of middle class stature. This phenomenon, apparently called *corrodian* in English (Sheila Sweetinburgh, *The Role of the hospital in medieval England. Gift-giving and the spiritual economy* (Portland, OR 2004), p. 27) and *provenier* in Dutch,

There was also a variety of possible manners of funding an almshouse, either by providing lump-sums, by providing long-term financial assets such as annual rents, or, quite often, both. Some almshouses possessed extensive land-holdings. Perhaps the most exotic form of funding was that of the Heilige Geesthofje in Leiden, founded by the Catholic rentier Cornelis Sprongh (1642-1706), who stipulated that the income from his lordship of Hoogmade would in future be used to fund his almshouse, and that the senior executor of his will would not only double as senior regent of the administrative board but also as lord of Hoogmade on behalf of the almshouse, an arrangement which continues to the present day.¹⁵

There were also differences in how almshouses were run. How an almshouse was organized and governed depended on the will of the founder, and there was thus quite a variety in that aspect. Many privately founded almshouses were governed by boards of regents selected by cooptation, but some ended up being supervised or even governed by religious or civic organizations. Yet others were supervised by other organizations but the assignment of apartments was still in the hands of the board of regents. Other almshouses effectively again continued to function as family affairs, without a proper board of regents, although this implied a certain danger as families could lose their interest or ability to look properly after their ancestor's foundation. Some of these almshouses were transferred from family control to other private organizations, as happened with the St. Andrieshofje in Amsterdam, founded in 1617 by the Oly-family and run by the family until their extinction in 1699, when the administration transferred to the Catholic deaconry.¹⁶ There were also almshouses where the descendants would regard membership of the board as a right, and did not hesitate to enforce their rights if other lines kept them out of the board.¹⁷

Finally there were also differences in who was to be given shelter. Some almshouses were reserved strictly for men, some for married couples, and others extended charity also to younger unmarried women or poor families. The majority of almshouses was however, either by design or by accident, reserved for women; either women who had never married, or

was different from the almshouses that the inhabitants of almshouses were expected to be able to take care of themselves, unlike the proveniers.

¹⁵ Although the lordship as such does not exist anymore: E.B.F.F. Wittert van Hoogland en Emiclaer, *De heeren van Hoogmade en de regenten van het Cornelis Sprongh van Hoogmade-hofje te Leiden* (z.p. 1944).

¹⁶ H.W. Alings, *De Amsterdamse hofjes* (Amsterdam 1965).

¹⁷ As happened in the Provenhuis Paling en Van Foreest in Alkmaar; where all regents had to descend from the founders. By 1686 only two lines of descendants were represented in the board, the Catholic family Ramp and the Dutch Reformed magisterial family Van Foreest, which incidentally did nothing to change the largely Catholic signature of this almshouse. That changed with the fleeing from France of a third line of more hard-line Calvinists, the Van Oudshoorn van Sonnevelt, who successfully claimed a position in the board despite opposition of the other lines. Their attempt to change the Catholic character of the almshouse failed however; Th.P.H. Wortel, *Inventaris van het Provenhuis Paling en Van Foreest* (Alkmaar 1961), pp. 9-13, 17, 21, 51-53.

women who had been widowed and for a variety of reasons did not, or could not, live with their offspring. This meant in practice that most almshouses focused on providing housing for elderly women – although the other categories never wholly disappeared. They focused moreover on a particular class of people. Aside from the odd elite inhabitant who had hit on hard times, most inhabitants of almshouses seem to have come from the respectable middle and lower middle classes, for whom a place in an almshouse meant an honourable way of avoiding the combination of elderly physical decline and sinking into dishonourable public poverty.

Despite all these differences however, in outward form and inward organization, in general all Dutch almshouses shared a fundamental core of characteristics, which can be regarded as the proper, unifying, definition of the differing forms of almshouses: an almshouse in the Netherlands usually consisted of a building complex, normally containing a number of small apartments, devoted to offering elderly members of the lower middle and middle class and – often – the family of the founders, free, or very cheap, housing accommodation. This usually, but not always, was combined with some additional benefits such as allotments of extra clothing, food, fuel and money – the actual alms – in order to prevent the dependents from descending into shameful poverty at an age when they were no longer able to work for a decent living.

It is this definition, which rests on the main function all almshouses had in common rather than the forms and varieties in which an almshouse was given shape, which is the guiding principle for determining whether a particular institution can be included in the Dutch Almshouse Database. Thus the number of almshouses is far bigger than has often been assumed: the 230 almshouses entered in DAD on the basis of the previously-mentioned surveys have currently been augmented with 300 others. Though it is unlikely that the numbers will continue to rise in such a spectacular way, not all almshouses retrieved through the study of secondary literature have already been entered, while especially local-historical secondary literature will undoubtedly yield more almshouses, especially from the smaller towns. It is not wholly flawless – some of the larger almshouses could offer more capacity than some old men's and old women's home – but a too strict application of definitions would do injustice to the fluidity of medieval and early-modern arrangements. It offers however a more concrete definition of a Dutch almshouse than has been attempted so far.

Almshouses in the Netherlands - spread in place and over time

There is, as might be expected given the dominance of Holland and the bias of the existing secondary literature, a strong emphasis in DAD on the western part of the country, notably Holland, which accounts for just over half of the foundations currently entered in DAD: in the period until 1800 219 almshouses were founded in what are now the provinces of North- and South-Holland,¹⁸ against 206 in the rest of the Netherlands. Other provinces had much less almshouse foundations, and the, very poor, province of Drenthe even none. Overijssel ranks currently second with 57 foundations and North-Brabant third with 39. Even though it is certain that more almshouses existed in these provinces which have not been adequately covered by the secondary literature, the overwhelming dominance of Holland – the richest, most populous and most powerful province throughout most of the early-modern age – in the number of almshouses is unlikely to be surpassed or even approached by the other provinces.

Almshouse Foundations per century until 1800, divided per modern province

Province	14th C.	15th C.	16th C.	17th C.	18th C.	C. unknown	Total
North-Holland	2	2	13	46	30	30	123
South-Holland	2	12	16	45	16	5	96
Utrecht	2		6	4	1	22	35
Gelderland	1		3	2	1	3	10
Overijssel	3	7	10	2	1	34	57
Friesland		1	4	10	5	1	21
Groningen	1	5	4	14	2	1	27
Zeeland		1	2	3	1	4	11
North-Brabant	7	15	7	5	1	4	39
Limburg		1	1	2	2		6
Total	18	44	66	133	60	104	425

From the table it is also clear that almshouse-founding occurred at a different pace, along the particular economic heyday of the region or locality in question. Thus in North-Brabant – or rather the city of Den Bosch, third capital of the Duchy of Brabant – foundations of almshouses reached a zenith in the fifteenth century, reaching a nadir in the eighteenth. Overall, the tempo of almshouse foundation seem to have kept pace with the growth of early-modern Dutch economy as a whole, as the table has shown: of the total of 425 almshouses

¹⁸ During the early modern age Holland was one province – because of its overwhelming dominance the King decided in 1841 to split the province in a northern and southern part.

currently entered in DAD 18 were founded in the fourteenth century, 44 in the fifteenth, 66 in the sixteenth, 133 in the seventeenth and 60 in the eighteenth. Of 104 others no foundation date is known, although they were clearly from far before 1800, and perhaps even from before 1600. Often lack of relevant secondary literature is responsible for this lack of precision: thus in Utrecht a majority of 22 out of 35 almshouses is still lacking a proper date of foundation, although this will certainly change: a number of these foundations are to be ascribed to various sixteenth-century canons of the Utrecht chapterhouses.¹⁹ The same lack of literature applies to Overijssel, which may be more difficult to redress: unlike many founders in Overijssel the Utrecht canons were very prominent men in their day, and as a group have been better studied.²⁰ But there too the number of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century foundations will still rise. Nevertheless it is unlikely that the picture will radically change and that the seventeenth century will be surpassed as the century in which most almshouses were founded. This would accord with the phenomenal economic success of the Dutch Republic precisely in that century. That most foundations are in Holland in that era is no accident, but also in Groningen and Friesland most almshouses were founded in the seventeenth century, which perhaps reflects the greater share of the booming Dutch economy the maritime provinces enjoyed. The only maritime province which is an exception to this rule is Zeeland. In the land provinces almshouse foundations seem to have declined. Not recognizable in the table is that almshouse foundations in the Brabant capital Den Bosch ground to a halt after the fall of that city to the Dutch Republic. Where Den Bosch had quite a few almshouses, after 1629 only one new almshouse foundation took place. The situation in Limburg is still imperfectly known, but it may be significant that of the two almshouses founded in the seventeenth century in the small town of Weert one was the work of the prosperous linen merchant Willem van Heythuysen († 1650) who had exchanged the place of his birth long ago for the booming textile industry in Haarlem.

Within the province of Holland, three cities account for the greater part of foundations: Haarlem ranks on top with 54 foundations, followed by Amsterdam with 45 and Leiden with 41. Fourth and fifth come Gouda with 24 foundations and Alkmaar with 20 foundations. Other cities have much less almshouses: the oldest city of Holland, Dordrecht, had only four; Delft seven, Schiedam four, Rotterdam three, Vlaardingen and Hoorn two and Leerdam, Edam and Naaldwijk one each. The semi-urban village of Wormerveer also boasted

¹⁹ As became clear from a superficial glance through A.J. van den Hoven van Genderen, *De heren van de kerk. De kanunniken van Oudmunster te Utrecht in de late middeleeuwen* (Zutphen 2003).

²⁰ Eventually it would be necessary to complement the use of secondary literature with archival research, but whether there will be occasion for that within the GIGA-project remains to be seen.

one almshouse, and finally the city-in-all-but-name The Hague had nine almshouses by 1800. The pattern is in a way surprising. Most almshouses were founded in the Southern Quarter, the urban heart of Holland which contained most of the above-mentioned localities, with the exception of Alkmaar, Edam, Hoorn and Wormerveer, but within this conglomerate of cities the majority of foundations took place in only three cities. In Haarlem and Leiden almshouses were founded from the late 14th century onwards; in Amsterdam by contrast most seem to have been founded in the 17th and 18th centuries, although in that period also in Haarlem and Leiden a number of new almshouses were built. From the point of view of Dutch almshouse 'historiography', the almshouses of Haarlem and Leiden are the best known and best researched, which is probably a consequence of the survival of a considerable number of the almshouses until the present day and consequently the touristic advantages of calling the city a 'hofjesstad', a 'city of almshouses'.²¹ It is odd however that a smaller city like Gouda counted 24 almshouse foundations until 1800, but that the much more important Dordrecht never seems to have had more than four. Delft, another thriving industrial town and old rival of Gouda, also counted a limited number of foundations, only seven. Why this should be so, is difficult to establish at present. It is possible that many almshouses in Dordrecht and Delft were much less long-lived than others elsewhere, and therefore less well represented in the historic consciousness of the local inhabitants and in secondary literature. The picture may also be somewhat distorted due to the efforts of archivists in Alkmaar, Gouda and Haarlem to chronicle many foundation of almshouses which eventually have disappeared.²² Indeed in Gouda only two out of the 24 almshouses have been preserved integrally, whereas the others have either disappeared completely, or survived only partly. A similar fate may have befallen almshouses elsewhere, with dire consequences for their historiography.

But perhaps there is also a relation between the number of almshouses in a locality and the wider charitable infrastructure within a particular geographical entity – some urban governments may have been less prone to endorse the foundation of private almshouses, or may have been unwilling to grant these almshouses tax exemptions, as was the case in other cities. It is noteworthy that the magistrate of Dordrecht was only willing to allow the foundation of the Arend Maartenshof in 1624 when the founder, Arend Maartens (c. 1550-

²¹ There are many publications on almshouses in Haarlem, though only one overview study by a Haarlem archivist: G.H. Kurtz, *Haarlemse Hofjes* (Haarlem 1972). Leiden is somewhat better covered from an academic perspective: noteworthy are Turck, *Die Leidener Wohnstiftungen*, Leermakers & Donkersloot, *Wonen om godswille*, and a number of articles in the journal *De Leidse Hofjes*, which appeared between 1969 and 1986.

²² See for Alkmaar W.A. Fasel, A. Feld, L.F.M. Landzaat, J.H. Rombach, *De Alkmaarse hofjes*, *Oud Alkmaar* 7 (1983), p. 511-543; G.N.M. Vis, *Oud en Arm. Hervormde bejaardenzorg in Alkmaar 1744-1994* (Hilversum 1994), 48-53. See for Gouda J.E.J. Geselschap, 'Hofjes van barmhartigheid' in: A. Scheygrond (eds.), *Gouda zeven eeuwen stad, 1272-1972* (Gouda 1972), 219-240.

1629), issued a non-refundable loan of nearly 13.500 guilders to the magistrate.²³ This is not known for other almshouse foundations elsewhere, and might imply a reluctance to allow private almshouses, which might account for the comparative lack of these institutions in Dordrecht. For Dordrecht in particular may also have played a role that the city was largely confined within its medieval walls, which doubled as dikes for much of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries after the surrounding countryside had been flooded in the early fifteenth century. There was perhaps simply not enough space for almshouses in Dordrecht. But such a unique circumstance does not explain the discrepancy between almshouse foundations in Delft and its neighbour Gouda. More research may clarify this difference.

Another striking feature is the great predominance of urban almshouses. Rural almshouses seem to have been relatively rare: currently there are only eleven villages in the database.²⁴ Most of these village-based almshouses can be found in Friesland, elsewhere they are more occasional, as on the Zeeland island of Schouwen, where two out of five almshouses were founded in the countryside rather than in the capital Zierikzee. Such rural almshouses are however unknown for other Zeeland islands. Quite frequently these rural almshouses were actually founded by urban-based benefactors.²⁵ A special case was the Hofje van Aerden in the small town of Leerdam, which was founded there, and not in The Hague where the benefactress, Maria Ponderus (1692-1764), widow of Pieter van Aerden, had spent her life, because she had stipulated it should be built there where poor relatives of hers might be found. As all of her relatives lived in Leerdam rather than in The Hague, the executors of her will determined it should be built there.²⁶

The temporal division of almshouse foundations corroborate the image of a boom in foundations when the economy was booming. In Alkmaar, Amsterdam, Delft, The Hague, Gouda, Groningen, Haarlem, Leeuwarden and Leiden most almshouse foundations took place

²³ The rent on this loan is still being paid today; Kees Zandvliet, *De 250 Rijksten van de Gouden Eeuw. Kapitaal, macht, familie en levensstijl* (Amsterdam 2006), 220.

²⁴ Dronrijp, Etten, Jutphaas, Marssum, Naaldwijk, Noordgouwe, Oosterland, Roosendaal, Swichum, Wergea and Wormerveer.

²⁵ As was the case with both the founders of the rural almshouses of Schouwen, Sir John Conyers and Susanna Maria Lonque, who would typically spend much time in Zierikzee. Conyers was buried there, but Lonque preferred burial in the lordship where she founded her almshouse; P.H. de Vos, *De Grafchriften der voormalige St. Lievensmonsterkerk te Zierikzee* (Zierikzee 1911), 47-51; J.H. Simmelink & H. Uil, 'Susanna Maria Lonque (1699-1752), ambachtsvrouw van Ooster- en Sirjansland' in: *Kroniek van het Land van de Zeemeermin (Schouwen-Duiveland)* 25 (2000), 36-64. In Friesland the same phenomenon is visible. To name just two examples, Leeuwarden-based jurist Henricus Popta (1635-1712) founded an almshouse in the village of Marssum; a century before the famous Brussels-based jurist Viglius van Aytta founded an almshouse in his native Swichum; Peter Karstkarel & Leo van der Laan, *Friese Hofjes. Gasthuizen, Diaconiehuizen en Armenhuizen* (Leeuwarden 2007), 92-96, 126-127.

²⁶ Anna de Haas, *Ponderus, Maria*, in: *Digitaal Vrouwenlexicon van Nederland*. URL: <http://www.inghist.nl/Onderzoek/Projecten/DVN/lemmata/data/Ponderus> [07/04/2009].

in the seventeenth century. The situation is less clear in other cities: the example of Den Bosch has already been noted, and counted most almshouse foundations in its heyday of the fifteenth century. The situation in Deventer, which counted most foundations in the sixteenth century, is less clear cut, for this Hansa city was already past its prime in that century. As its fellow Hansa cities Kampen and Zwolle are still very imperfectly known – of the twenty known almshouses in Kampen the foundation date of just one is currently known, and in Zwolle fourteen almshouse foundations can't be placed in time yet either. The case of the city of Utrecht has already been mentioned. Further research will be necessary to hone and sharpen the image, but it is unlikely that it will be radically altered. The Dutch Golden Age was clearly also a Golden Age of almshouse foundations, and consequently most of them occurred in Holland, and within that province in its three most prosperous cities, Haarlem, Leiden and Amsterdam.²⁷

Characteristics of the 342 almshouse founders

Almshouses were thus omnipresent in the Netherlands, and foundations ranged from the high Middle Ages through the Golden Age into the eighteenth century, and beyond. Founding an almshouse obviously remained a popular, if expensive, charitable act. Establishing who these founders were, and what traits they had in common, is an important part of coming to a better understanding of what might have motivated them to engage in charity on such a lavish scale. As said above, in DAD information is gathered about the founders, first of all their names and dates, but also their social status and wealth, gender, family relations (i.e. whether they were married or single and had children or not) and religion. On the basis of these characteristics, it is possible to arrive at an 'average' almshouse founder.

To begin with wealth, unfortunately very little is known about the wealth of most benefactors. Only in a few cases does the secondary literature reflect on the sums involved to build an almshouse, let alone the wealth of the benefactors. Currently only of 25 out of 342 founders is known what they chose to expend on foundations, and amounts of money varied greatly in size. The most lavish endowment was that of Christoffel van Brants (1664-1732) who set aside 250.000 guilders for his almshouse, one of the monumental almshouses built in Amsterdam from the late 17th century onwards. Such large endowments were not uncommon in Amsterdam – the second and third largest are also from Amsterdam – but much more rare

²⁷ The Hague obviously also had a wealthy elite population, but it has been suggested that inhabitants of The Hague were often not native to that city and resorted to founding almshouses elsewhere. This is true of at least two almshouse founders, Maria Ponderus, founder of the above mentioned Hofje van Aerden in Leerdam, and of Cornelia Quack, founder of the Cornelia Quackhofje in Vlissingen.

outside it. Close comes only Johan de Bruyn van Buytenwech (c.1590-1657), lord of Nieuwkoop, Noorden en Achttienhoven, with 100.000 guilders for his The Hague almshouse. In general however lower amounts of money were involved – the fifth on the list, Cecilia Coninck († 1769) spent 50.000 guilders for her almshouse in Leiden. But much lower amounts were also possible. The lowest amount on record, 5000 guilders, was set aside by Willem van Heythuysen († 1650) for his almshouse in Weert. What almshouse founders chose, or could afford, to set aside for their foundation differed strongly, and may have had to do more with the size of their capital than with the minimal costs of an almshouse. Even with the more modest sums building an almshouse was after all possible, and although some of the larger endowments were used to build almshouses with an unusual capacity, this was not always the case. While the Van Brants-Rushofje could house 29 women, and the Hofje van Nieuwkoop counted no less than 60 apartments, the third largest endowment, 118.000 guilders supplied by Petronella Calkoen (1680-1753) for her Fontainehofje, was intended only for 12 persons. On the other hand, the size of endowments said little about the amount of money a founder could provide. Diederik baron van Leyden (1695-1764), one of the richest burghers of Leyden, spent ‘only’ 9000 guilders on the almshouse he founded in his lordship of Vlaardingen.

The available literature says also little on the subject of the total capital available to the founders. It will be difficult to reconstruct that on the basis of primary records, if these are available, since wills rarely provided information on how much one left behind in total. Only when a probate inventory was made – and that usually only happened when an inheritance needed to be divided – might it be possible to assess the total wealth of the founder and compare that with the sum spent on his or her almshouse. Meanwhile Zandvliet’s *250 Rijksten*²⁸ provides a glimpse with regard to the five founders who made it in his list. Thus De Bruyn van Buytenwech, number 174, on his death left 270.000 guilders, of which thus more than a third was destined for his almshouse. Arend Maartens (c.1550-1629), number 124, urban official of Dordrecht, was worth 325.000 guilders in 1627 and had spent by then at least 34.400 guilders on his almshouse, founded in 1624-1625 – just over a tenth of his capital. Emmerentia Benningh (1586-1667), number 134, the widow of the powerful Leiden burgomaster Jacob van Brouhoven (1577-1642), left at her death 306.500 guilders. Half of that inheritance may originally have belonged to her husband; she was his only heir after their three children had died young. She founded only a small almshouse, but her husband had

²⁸ See for what follows Zandvliet, *250 rijksten*, 49-50, 220-221, 238-240, 299, 404-405.

spent almost 20.000 guilders on his almshouse, had founded a fund of 6400 guilders for religious refugees like he himself had been and two theology scholarships of about 6000 guilders, so that she may have thought that they had been charitable enough.

The fourth on the list, Johan van der Veken (1549-1616), number 20, was at some time worth 904.000 guilders, and spent at least 6400 guilders on his almshouse.²⁹ Only of dr. Henricus Popta (1635-1712), number 255 who was worth 200.000 guilders in 1697, and founder of the Popta Gasthuis in Marssum, is it not yet known how much he spent on his almshouse.³⁰ How much almshouse founders thus spent on their foundations seems not so much to have depended on what they could afford – though this may have played a role with the less wealthy founders – but rather on what they chose to afford.

Closely related is the acquisition and preservation of social status. At this point it can be said that the occupations of about 100 founders – or founders' husbands or fathers – are known. Some founders were noblemen, but many more were urban regents, high clergy, high government officials, notaries and solicitors and merchants. Even a seemingly lowly occupation as that of Claes Claesz van Medenblick († 1654), who was 'master bricklayer' hides in fact a wealthy project developer in booming Amsterdam, who designed one of his projects to be an almshouse.³¹ It is likely that most founders enjoyed a rather high status, and the accompanying wealth which would allow them to fund the considerable expense of founding an almshouse.

As for religion, almshouse founders were most often Catholic or Dutch Reformed, but religious minorities also founded almshouses. Currently only 238 out of 342 founders are accounted for. The vast majority of those founders of whom we know the religious affiliation was Catholic: 159 in total. However, this is in part because all founders before the Reformation of the 1570s will have been at least officially Catholic, so that all foundations

²⁹ After his funeral 2000 loafs of bread were given to the population of Rotterdam. See also Noortje de Roy van Zuidewijn, *Van Koopman tot Icoon. Johan van der Veken en de Zuid-Nederlandse immigranten in Rotterdam rond 1600* (Amsterdam 2002).

³⁰ Five almshouse founders out of a total of 264 very wealthy persons is perhaps not much, but it is quite possible that charity was also conducted in other ways. There were some of these wealthy Dutchmen who were philanthropically active, but in a different way. Thus the childless merchant Simon de Rijck (1565-1652), number 104 with an inheritance of 380.000 guilders, used part of his capital for a fund out of which the orphan masters of Amsterdam could pay their annual dinner. The Utrecht regent Johan van Aelst († 1700), number 155 with an estimated capital of 300.000 guilders, bequeathed 315 guilders to the poor; Zandvliet, *250 rijksten*, 189, 270.

³¹ I.H. van Eeghen, 'Claes Claesz van Medenblick en zijn nakomelingen', in: *Maandblad Amstelodamum* 49 (1962), p. 176-184.

earlier than that must be ascribed to founders who were at least Catholic in name.³² This accounts for 111 out of the 159 Catholic founders. This still leaves Catholics at the top where almshouse foundations are concerned, for the remaining 48 were founded after the Reformation. By contrast, the second largest group, that of Dutch Reformed founders, currently counts only 37, although it may be expected that number will still rise, as many almshouses founded after the Reformation of the Netherlands in the 1570s and 1580s will have been founded by adherents of the public religion. It is likely that among the unclassified founders many more Dutch Reformed founders can be found. The third group consists of twelve Mennonites. Seven were Remonstrant, Six were Lutheran, three were Walloon Reformed, three are known to have been Protestant without a further clue as to what specific sect, and one founder was Jewish.

As for gender, of the 342 founders 155 were men and 83 women acting as single founders. Together they totalled 238 of all almshouse founders, so that by far the greatest part of almshouses had a single founder. There were also 62 man-woman combinations acting as founder. Usually these consisted of husband and wife, but there were also cases in which a father and daughter or mother and son joined forces in founding an almshouse. There were also less common combinations: four almshouses were founded by a pair of men – usually brothers – and three by a woman-woman combination – usually sisters. Three were founded by a man in combination with two women – also usually siblings – and only one was founded by two married couples. One almshouse, the Claes Stapelhofje in Hoorn, was founded by a combination of three apparently unrelated men under the inspiration of the eponymous chairman Claes Stapel († 1685).³³ The sex of the remaining almshouse founders is still unknown.

The largest group of founders thus consisted of male single founders, but the second largest consisted of the female single founders. Though single founders thus predominated, this is not to say that they had never been married, for some of them at least were widows and widowers. Unfortunately the secondary literature has so far yielded very little information considering the marital status of the 342 founders. Only of 169 founders is their marital status known: 86 founders were married, 43 founders were widowed, 40 had never married at all and one – an exceptional case – had separated from his wife. This was Gerard van de Rijp († 1735), separated from Debora Gelthouwer, who disinherited his wife in favour of his

³² Every city had a different moment of Reformation – and sometimes more than one Reformation – but I have settled on the year 1572 as the divide, as after that year an almshouse was no longer automatically Catholic.

³³ Willeke Jeeninga, *Het Claes Stapels Hofje te Hoorn* (Hoorn 2002).

nephews with the provision they use part of the inheritance to found an almshouse: this became the Amsterdam Rijpenhofje, founded in 1737.³⁴ At present the marital status of the other founders is not known. It may be confidently assumed that many of the founders who acted alone, and of whom non information on their marital status is at present available, were in fact single or widowed.

The same lack of knowledge exists with reference to the presence or absence of close relations, by which is meant whether almshouse founders had children or not. If they did, their first priority in life would have been to provide first of all for their children before thinking of extending charity to others. At this point, 33 founders were found never to have had any children, of 17 the secondary sources state it is not known if they ever had any, 29 had children, and four had children who died before their parents did. There were thus certainly almshouse founders who had children and either believed their children to be well-endowed, or even deliberately stepped out the role society expected of them. At least one almshouse founder was on sufficiently bad terms with her offspring that she preferred to channel as much of her inheritance as possible in the foundation of an almshouse. This was Agneta Deutz (1633-1692), member of a wealthy Amsterdam family who bereft her son of anything more than his legitimate portion, which she could not deny him, in founding the Deutzenhofje, one of the largest almshouses of Amsterdam. Such behaviour was not uncommon, though certainly exceptional.³⁵

To conclude this paragraph, at present the profile of the average almshouse founder is male, single, wealthy and of high or considerable social status, and, more likely than not, to belong to either the Catholic or the Dutch Reformed fold. The question which now remains to be addressed, is what might have motivated the founder of an almshouse.

Motives for founding almshouses

I will concentrate in this part of my paper not so much on the whole range of possible motives, but on those which, based on the secondary literature, I think may have had relevance for the foundation of almshouses. These motives will be ordered chronologically, and will start with the religious motive which, according to most secondary literature, lay at the basis of the foundation of the first almshouses, at the end of the 14th and beginning of the 15th centuries.

³⁴ They had been married in 1730 but soon separated, and Van der Rijp made in 1733 a will in which he appointed his nephews as universal heirs provided they built an almshouse; Alings, *Amsterdamse Hofjes*, 46.

³⁵ Cavallo, *Charity and Power*, 131, mentions a similar case in Turin in the 17th century.

The first purposely-built almshouses-in-court had in all probability not just a social purpose, but primarily a religious one, as Hans-Martin Turck has contended in his study of Leiden almshouses.³⁶ According to Turck, the founders of these almshouses specifically intended the inhabitants of their almshouses to act as a bedehouse would in England, a prayer community which should commemorate the founder in their prayers, so that the founders would sooner be able to leave Purgatory. For that reason these almshouses housed normally no more than twelve to thirteen men, with their wives if they had one, who were expected to regularly pray for the founder, either in the chapel of the almshouse itself, or in a nearby church. One such almshouse chapel survived the Reformation, in the earlier mentioned St. Anna Aalmoeshuifhofje.³⁷ Similar examples are known from other localities, such as Maastricht.

This emphasis may soon have shifted even within the Catholic context, for by far most of the later almshouse foundations were to the benefit of elderly women, but nevertheless throughout the early-modern age, and far beyond, this particular aspect of an almshouse community seems to have persisted in many almshouses founded by Catholics. Thus the inhabitants of the St. Paulushofje in the village of Etten prayed every evening for the soul of founder Justus de Nobelaer († 1685) until about 1965, when changes within the Catholic church brought many of these old traditions to an end.³⁸ It is likely that more post-Reformation examples of such Catholic commemorative almshouses will be found.

The religious incentive to found almshouses will not have disappeared after the Reformation, but may have differed along with the religious background of the particular founder. For Protestant founders it is far less easy to discern the precise religious motive, for, if they were well-groomed theologically, they all rejected the 'do ut des'-attitude of the Catholics, in which a direct connection was made between charity and salvation. For Calvinists building almshouses was not necessary from the prospect of salvation, as their theology taught them that salvation was a gift from God, not earned by humans. Founding an almshouse was for them more like a public assertion of their confidence in their salvation, and of thankfulness for God's mercy which had endowed the founder with so much material wealth. For the Mennonites on the other hand, who were theologically much more divided than the Calvinists, the founding of almshouses seems to have been more inspired by the

³⁶ Turck, *Leidener Wohnstiftungen*, passim.

³⁷ Although no longer in use since the Reformation it has even retained its relic of the holy Anna, still in its original reliquary; Leermakers & Donkersloot, *Wonen om godswille*, 158.

³⁸ H.G.J. Buijks, A.L. van Geertruy, C.J.M. Leijten, C.Th. Lohmann & L.E. van der Plas-Taal, '*Ten behoeve van dertien arme vrouwen*' (Etten-Leur 1981), 40. The ladies decided to stop this tradition arguing that Justus was already in heaven, and if he was not, than it would not be of help anymore anyway.

perceived necessity to balance material wealth, which was in principle soul-endangering, with Christian love to one's neighbour.

On the other hand, for many founders who were formally Mennonite or Calvinist, especially those that lived in the late 16th and the first half of the 17th centuries, traditional, 'Catholic' motives may have retained a strong hold on their personal beliefs. It thus remains to be seen whether changing theological opinions influenced the foundation of almshouses, or that perhaps certain 'Catholic' forms retained an attraction even though the religious aspects of founding an almshouse had receded in the background. One might think that almshouse foundations retained a certain popularity with especially the theologically less sophisticated members of society – indeed many elite Dutchmen of the early 17th century kept their distance from the hotter sort of Protestantism. This was however certainly not the case with all Calvinist founders, most notably with 'King Broeckhoven', the strict Calvinist burgomaster Jacob van Brouchoven mentioned above, who dominated Leiden politics after 1618, and became infamous with dissenter contemporaries for persecuting dissenters in Leiden.³⁹ More research will be necessary to determine what the religious stance was of almshouse founders, for which purpose the poems and biblical verses often inscribed on the facades of almshouses may serve.

It is possible that especially the dissenter founders had in mind to provide the elderly of their community with the possibility to stay out of the civic, government-controlled institutions for the elderly, which might be to the detriment of their salvation by inducing them to lapse from their faith in favour of the Dutch Reformed regime of the civic institutions. This will certainly have played a role with the Catholics, who created for example in Amsterdam a whole charitable infrastructure to prevent their orphans and elderly from falling prey to these institutions. It may also have been of consideration to Mennonites and Lutherans.

Closely connected to the religious incentive, at least from a Catholic point of view, was the survival of the Catholic memorial cult. While the religious incentive perhaps no longer applied to founder's descendants who had lapsed from their ancestor's Catholicism, the related memorial cult often did survive, though in a different guise. Many founders made henceforth provisions in their wills that the regents and inhabitants of their foundations would still on certain moments – such as the date of their death or birth – commemorate the founder through festivities of some kind. This was one way to ensure the persistence of the memory

³⁹ Zandvliet, *250 Rijksten*, 238.

of the founders, but at the same time their charitable foundations seem to have become more important for the founder's families than used to be the case before the Reformation. The emphasis seems to have shifted to the memory of the family as such: while masses and prayers for the founder's souls were often abolished, the administrators of almshouses, who were often from the same families, turned the almshouses into monuments of familial charity. An early almshouse such as the Dordrecht Armen Vrouwenhof founded by Pieter Hendriksz van Slingelandt and his wife in 1519 was fitted out with a memorial plaque only at the end of the century by their Protestantized descendants, complete with heraldic crests, and this trend became eventually more and more common. Almshouses seem to have been fitted out more than before with heraldic crests and commemorative texts chiselled in memorial tablets, and whereas older foundations were often difficult to see from the street, newer almshouses tended to be more conspicuous in the cityscape, with elaborately wrought gates. A new phase in the history of Dutch almshouses seems to be the building and foundation of so-called 'monumental' almshouses, which really took off in the second half of the 17th century. Founders were no longer content with reasonably modest buildings but built impressive gatehouses, regent chambers and lavish courtyards with monumental wells, and even provided the inhabitants with much more living space than the older almshouses could provide. Some of these were compared to palaces, such as the Hofje Meermansburg in Leiden, founded in 1683, which was described as more pleasant than many imperial palaces.⁴⁰ Oddly enough, such lavish charitable spending became prominent in an era in which the Dutch economy started to contract. Such foundations – some of which were endowed with capital far beyond the necessary minimum – seem to point to a certain element of conspicuous charitable consumption.

Such almshouses often became veritable family shrines, founders often specifying in their will that their portraits – and sometimes those of their predeceased offspring – should be placed in the regent chambers. Often almshouses had only a portrait of the founder(s), but others were donated also portraits of ancestors, or sponsors – Christoffel van Brants included amongst the portraits of his family a portrait of his great sponsor Tsar Peter the Great – and some who were the last of their line donated the entire collection of family portraits to their foundation, as was the case with Cornelia Elisabeth Occo.⁴¹ One founder, Maria Ponderus,

⁴⁰ 'Voorwoord', in *Meermansburg. Leidens grootste hofje 1683-1983/De Leidse Hoffes* 13 (1983), 1.

⁴¹ It has been conservatively estimated that there may have been once 500 paintings in Dutch almshouses, though in some places more than in others. Particularly well-endowed with paintings were the almshouses of Alkmaar and Amsterdam; no paintings at all are known for the almshouses in Gouda. Not all of these paintings

founder of the Hofje van Aerden in Leerdam, left the entire art collection of her husband to her foundation.⁴² Maintaining an almshouse founded by a relative also became a status symbol for especially urban patrician families, who often spent considerable sums of money on the maintenance of the almshouse, and left their portraits to decorate regent chambers.⁴³ Governing an almshouse became, more than before the Reformation when the administration was often delegated to urban secular and spiritual authorities, a matter of family pride, a way of bolstering and upholding one's family status. It would especially endow them with the image of being protectors of the just poor, one of the characteristics of good government.⁴⁴

The honour of the lineage and the duty of care for one's family members was also of concern to the founders from before the Reformation, and explicit provisions that almshouse administrators should give preference to family members if an apartment in their almshouse became vacant date from before the Reformation. There is little evidence that this happened often, as many founders were from families who managed to maintain their wealth and status throughout their existence, but this certainly occurred from time to time, and it was a stipulation adhered to even centuries afterwards – in the Leiden St. Stevenshofje, founded in 1487, the administrators in 1744 and 1783 on two occasions specifically stated they had admitted a person because he was of the founder's kin.⁴⁵

Evidently many founders felt concern for those who would come after them. Thus not only the memory of one's family was safeguarded, it also protected the status of one's family even if one's descendants had hit on hard times. To be publicly known as poor was absolutely detrimental not just to one's own honour, but could also reflect badly on the reputation of the family as a whole. This not only applied to those who wore the same family-name as the founder, but also to a much wider circle of kin, which makes it difficult to trace these relations in the many cases that almshouse administration was rather haphazard. But given the fact that many founders made this explicit proviso – currently 44 out of a total of 342⁴⁶ – in their wills it is likely that this may have been an additional motive of some importance. At

were portraits; some had the figure of Charity as subject; R.E.O. Ekkart, 'Schilderijen uit Nederlandse hofjes' in *De Leidse Hofjes* 10 (1981), 1-18, 39-55.

⁴² The collection is still exhibited in her almshouse, which is now more of a museum.

⁴³ Some regent families effectively used the almshouses they administrated to house their collection of family portraits, such as the Van Foreest family in the Provenhuis Paling & Van Foreest in Alkmaar and the Graswinckel family in the Hofje van Gratie in Delft; Ekkart, 'Schilderijen', 3-5, 41-42.

⁴⁴ See for this also Sheila Muller, *Charity in the Dutch Republic. Pictures of Rich and Poor for Charitable Institutions* (Ann Arbor 1985).

⁴⁵ Leermakers & Donkersloot, *Wonen om godswille*, 102; see p. 95, 138, 163 for other examples. The St. Anna Aalmoeshuushofje housed between 1606 and 1626 two women from the founder's kin; Leermakers & Donkersloot, *Wonen om godswille*, 163.

⁴⁶ In fact one of them, Margriet Spijkers of Den Bosch in 1443, only allowed preference for elderly women of her family if they were devout enough.

least one set of founders – Maarten Meerman and his wife Helena Verburg, founders of Meermansburg – specified not only that their family enjoyed precedence, but even assigned a specific apartment in their almshouse to that purpose, which was indeed used for that purpose, although on occasion it was uninhabited.⁴⁷

More often however the almshouse administrators seem to have used their position to provide for elderly personnel or clients. Dispensing places in almshouses could be regarded as a form of patronage, some administrators using it to dispense favours to fellow members of the elite who asked for a place for their own personnel or clients. This may not have been a motive high on the agenda of almshouse founders, but at least some founders made explicit provisions in their wills for their personnel, often reserving a place for them. Almshouse foundations could thus act as a form of provision for elderly personnel.⁴⁸ But it may be doubted that this was ever more than an additional motive of much lesser importance than either religious considerations or family status concerns.

It is likely that especially childless couples and those that were the last of a prominent lineage might be prone to found charitable institutions in order to keep their memory and the memory of their lineage intact. How important that was, may also be deduced from provisions that executors of founder's wills also were to make sure that the founder would be given a sumptuous memorial in the shape of a lavish funerary monument. In such a case, it may well be assumed that the foundation of an almshouse was intimately linked with the desire to perpetuate the memory of one's failing lineage. Sometimes almshouse founders anticipated that such a thing would be the case, for example when a founder made a will in which the foundation of an almshouse was dependent on the survival of an only child.⁴⁹

While religious and status considerations may have been the strongest motives, the list of possible motives is not exhausted by them. There is clear evidence that some almshouse founders at least did not act out of charitable motives alone. Depriving unwanted heirs of a substantial part of their legacy seems to have inspired a small number of almshouse founders.

⁴⁷ 'Bouwgeschiedenis van Meermansburg', *Meermansburg. Leidens grootste hofje 1683-1983/De Leidse Hofjes* 13 (1983), 4-9, there 6.

⁴⁸ Although there were alternatives, such as leaving them a bequest or allowing them to stay on in their house for a while.

⁴⁹ As was the case with Jean Pesijn and his wife Marie de Lannoy who in 1650 made a will in which they stipulated an almshouse should be built in case their daughter died, which apparently anticipated event took place in 1655; 'Verrezen uit het puin van een bouwvallig nest'; de stichting en de bouwgeschiedenis van het Jean Pesijnhof', *De Leidse Hofjes* 12 (1983), 5-23. Another such case was that of the Hoorn merchant Gerbrand Clomp (c.1606-1680), who reserved a part of his inheritance for an almshouse if his daughter would die before her 16th year. His daughter however survived him by 67 years, so that the almshouse was never founded; Henk Looijesteijn, 'T geslagt der vrome martelaar: Jan Jeroensz van der Laen en zijn nageslacht, ca. 1530-1747' (unpublished MA-thesis, University of Amsterdam 1998).

The case of Agneta Deutz has been noted, but also Gerard van de Rijp used his almshouse foundation to deny his estranged wife a substantial amount of his capital. Not always founders informed their heirs of their intention. That was the case with Johan de Bruyn van Buytenwech who apparently failed to inform his inheriting nephew and nieces that a large part of his inheritance had to be set aside for the building of the lavish Hofje van Nieuwkoop in The Hague. According to local gossip at the time it came quite as a shock, but they did faithfully comply with their uncle's wishes, building the almshouse and acting as its administrators.⁵⁰ There are also a few cases of founders who literally wrote in their wills that their heirs were well enough provided for and would not need to be put at disadvantage by their foundation.⁵¹ In the cases of most almshouses the heirs seemed to have complied with the founder's wishes, but there is a case known of a would-be founder whose projected almshouse never materialized, perhaps because of successful obstruction by his heirs.⁵²

There is also the possibility that gender played a role in founding almshouses. As has been seen, men predominated among the almshouse founders, but most almshouses seem in fact to have been founded for the benefit of women, which was in a sense logical since women who survived childbirth tended to live longer than men and often outlived husbands. Even almshouses originally founded for men or for couples, in practice often became confined to women. Some at least were explicitly founded to provide women with a refuge. Some founders explicitly decreed that their almshouse would have administrators of both sexes, which was quite rare given that most often administrators were men. The Hague patrician Cornelia van Wouw (1601-1681) for example stipulated that her foundation – which provided housing for elderly women – should never have more than one male regent and two female regents.⁵³ This seems to indicate a certain bias towards her own sex. Eva van Hoogeveen (1594-1652), who founded the eponymous almshouse in Leiden, was Lady of Hoogeveen and scion of a wealthy regent family. She remained a spinster all her life, though she must have been a desirable party, was explicitly described in the epithet over the almshouse-gate as 'most chaste and laudable virgin' and specified that her almshouse was meant for those 'who had no husband'. Perhaps she was moved to provide a home explicitly

⁵⁰ H.W. Mensonides, 'Johan de Bruijn van Buijtenwech en het Hofje van Nieuwkoop' in *Jaarboek Die Haghe* 1963, 1-112, there 1.

⁵¹ This might perhaps point to genuine altruism.

⁵² This was the case of the unmarried The Hague regent Mr Pieter Stalpert van der Wiele (1629-1680), who willed the foundation of an almshouse in Noordwijkerhout, but this never materialized: H.P. Fölting, *De Vroedschap van 's-Gravenhage 1572-1795* (Pijnacker 1985), p. 137.

⁵³ Hell Maarten, *Wouw, Cornelia van*, in: *Digitaal Vrouwenlexicon van Nederland*. URL: <http://www.inghist.nl/Onderzoek/Projecten/DVN/lemmata/data/Wouw> [16/06/2009].

for confirmed spinsters of less privileged backgrounds than hers.⁵⁴ It may be that some founders at least were specifically motivated by concern for the vulnerability of single women in society.⁵⁵

Other founders may have been inspired by copying behaviour of some sort. That was already the case in late 15th century Leiden, where Willem Aerntsz van Tetrode († 1487) and his wife Cristijn Arntsd'r Bruinen († c. 1508) partly modelled their St. Stevenshofje on the Jeruzalemshofje, founded twenty years before.⁵⁶ More than a century later, Arend Maartens was inspired by the recently built Heilige Geesthofje in The Hague (1619) when he founded the Arend Maartenshof in the years 1624-1625.⁵⁷ Johan de Bruyn van Buytenwech stipulated that his almshouse should be built after the example set by that of Cornelia van Wouw, though the Hofje van Buitenkoop became much grander than the Hofje van Wouw.⁵⁸ The Hofje van Wouw was also the explicit example for another almshouse founder, Justus de Nobelaer of the St. Paulushofje in his lordship of Etten.⁵⁹ And in Leiden the executors of both Jean Pesijn and Maerten Meerman referred to the recently built Tevelingshofje as example.⁶⁰ Another such, possible, example of conscious copying behaviour is from Amsterdam. Though nothing certain is known about it, the fact that the Dutch Reformed Pieter Adriaensz Raep (1581-1666) and the Mennonite Arend Dircksz Bosch (1583-after 1648), neighbours already, bought neighbouring plots in the Jordaan on the same day where they both built an almshouse suggest they may have acted in a concerted manner. The neighbours were different in that Raep was unmarried and a Dutch Reformed magistrate, whereas Bosch had children and was a Mennonite merchant.

It is also certain that some almshouse founders were related to each other, such as the founders of the Groot Sionshofje and the Hofje van Bethaniën in Leiden.⁶¹ De Bruyn however also had a good example in the family in his aunt Elisabeth Buytenwech († 1616) who founded the Gouda Hofje van Buitenwech in 1614.⁶² Founding almshouses thus ran in the family and in the neighbourhood. There are more instances of almshouse founders

⁵⁴ P.J.M. de Baar, 'Eva Aelbrechtsdr van Hoogeveen en haar familie', *De Leidse Hoffes* 13 (1984), 61-66; J.F. Dröge, 'De bouwgeschiedenis van het Eva van Hoogeveenshofje', *De Leidse Hoffes* 13 (1984), 67-81.

⁵⁵ Cavallo, *Charity and Power*, 5, and in general Chapter IV, notices a similar link between female charity and concern about female vulnerability in the late 17th century.

⁵⁶ Leermakers & Donkersloot, *Wonen om godswille*, 91.

⁵⁷ Zandvliet, 250 Rijksten, 220.

⁵⁸ Mensonides, 'Johan de Bruijn van Buijtenwech', 13-14.

⁵⁹ Buijks et al., *Ten behoeve van dertien arme vrouwen*, 5.

⁶⁰ 'Verrezen uit het puin van een bouwvallig nest'; de stichting en de bouwgeschiedenis van het Jean Pesijnhof', *De Leidse Hoffes* 12 (1983), 5-23; 'De bouwgeschiedenis van Meermansburg' in *Meermansburg. Leidens grootste hofje 1683-1983/De Leidse Hoffes* 13 (1983), 4-9.

⁶¹ Leermakers & Donkersloot, *Wonen om godswille*, 76; see for another example p. 127.

⁶² He was the administrator of this almshouse, which he also expanded.

specifically referring to preceding foundations, as a source of inspiration – and perhaps in a display of elite rivalry.⁶³

One motive which has not been considered yet, in part because it is very difficult to investigate, is the actual charitable altruism of founders. The public statement of altruistic intentions was after all intended for an audience passing by their foundations which was, like the founders themselves, bred and groomed in a society in which charity was universally considered to be a Christian virtue, and which would have understood this language of charity as the proper way to embed these foundations in society's structure. But perhaps something can be said about the level of altruism of founders by considering their almshouse foundation in the context of other charitable acts, either through an analysis of founder's wills or through other, external biographical information on charity conducted during their lifetimes. Some almshouse founders did not restrict themselves to founding an almshouse: the example of 'King Broeckhoven' has already been noted, but also Dr. Henricus Popta founded scholarships – six in his case – for poor university students.⁶⁴

To Conclude

In this paper I have presented the current state of research concerning the study of Dutch almshouse foundations, based on the Dutch Almshouse Database and a perusal of the available secondary literature. From the preliminary results it appears that the average almshouse founder was likely to be male, single, wealthy, of high or considerable social status and more likely than not to belong to either to the Catholic or the Dutch Reformed churches. Motives for the founding of an almshouse may have been largely religious in origin and nature, but there is strong evidence that with it came an equally strong desire to preserve one's memory, the status and honour of the lineage and the family, with perhaps the additional benefit of patronage and providing for elderly retainers. Other possible motives may have been a concern for the vulnerability of single women, the exclusion of unwanted heirs, copying or rivalling other almshouse founders, and finally – last but not least, but certainly with the least evidence – pure altruism.

The image of almshouse founding as presented in this paper must be honed and sharpened by further research. For that purpose the remaining unstudied secondary literature needs to be consulted. Afterwards, as it is highly likely that the available literature may not

⁶³ Comparable to the fashion in Turin to have one's bust as benefactor or benefactress in the Turin hospitals; Cavallo, *Charity and Power*, 134, 140.

⁶⁴ Zandvliet, *250 Rijksten*, 405.

solve all issues, it may well be necessary to study the wills and regulations designed and devised by the almshouse founders, if these are found to be still extant, for further investigation of what their motives might have been. This study should thus present an image of what could have prompted (a) wealthy Dutch individual(s) to channel a considerable part of his or her capital into the foundation of such a charitable institution, and thus contribute to a deeper understanding of what induced people to give to charity.

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