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King William I

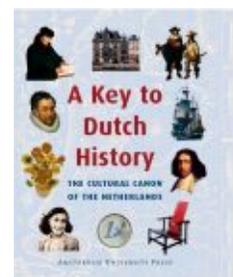
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Slings, Hubert and Frits van Oostrom.

A Key to Dutch History: The Cultural Canon of the Netherlands.

Amsterdam University Press, 2007.

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1772 - 1843

King William I

The kingdom of the Netherlands and Belgium

In 1813, after the end of French rule, the son of Stadholder William V returned to the Netherlands to accept the crown. This was a clear break with tradition. Unlike his father, William I did not become Stadholder (governor) of all the provinces but rather king of a unified state in which he played the main political role.

In 1815, the so-called Austrian Low Countries (modern-day Belgium) were united with the territory of the former Republic to serve as a buffer against the defeated French. And so, the United Kingdom of the Netherlands was created. In European terms it was a medium-sized country controlling large colonial territories. The energetic William (whose nickname was “king-merchant”) tried to restore the previously thriving economy by stimulating its strengths in the three

parts of the country (the north, south and the Indies). The south, where an Industrial Revolution had taken place early, had to concentrate on producing consumer goods. The traders in the north subsequently had to transport these goods across the world. And finally, the inhabitants of the colonies were to supply valuable tropical goods. The King had canals dug and roads laid between the north and south to make transport more easy. He himself acted as an investor. In 1824, William set up the Netherlands Trading Company for trade with the Dutch East Indies. The “cultivation system” or “culture system” was introduced in the East Indies, under which the indigenous population was obliged to work for the colonial authorities on the land for a period of each year. The products were sold by the Netherlands Trading Company.

Despite his economic endeavours, the King was not popular among the Belgians. Belgian liberals saw him as a ruler who desired absolute power and who was not prepared to tolerate any increased participation on the part of the educated elite. Belgian Catholics objected to the interference of the Protestant king in the training of novice priests. In 1830, the citizens of Brussels rebelled. They were inspired by the aria “*Amour sacrée*

de la patrie” that had been sung in their theatre. William I sent an army against them but to no avail. Belgium was granted independence. Nevertheless, William I kept the army called up for nine years – incurring extremely high costs – something that damaged his reputation in the Netherlands very badly. In 1839 he finally recognised Belgium’s independence. In the following year, a disillusioned William I abdicated from the throne.



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Sub-topics

Primary education sector

Symbols and rituals surrounding the monarchy
 William I, king-merchant
 The Belgian rebellion (theatre, Jan van Speyck:
 “then I’d rather blow up”)

Secondary education sector

The development of the position of the monarch in
 Dutch constitutional law
 The colonial politics of the Netherlands
 Potgieter and loss of direction (*Jan Saliegeest*)
 International relations in Europe in 1830:
 Congress of Vienna
 The borders of 1839

Past and Present

The monarchy: its significance, pros and cons
 Relations between Netherlands-Belgium and Flanders

In the Treasure Chest

Family tree of the House of Orange

References

Places to Go

Amsterdam: Palace on the Dam
 Frederiksoord

Books for young people

Martine Letterie, *Ver van huis* (10+)

Background literature

Frits Rovers, ‘*Dan liever de lucht in*’: *Jan van Speijk en de Belgische Opstand*. (Verloren Verleden 12), Hilversum 2000
 Maartje Janse, *De geest van Jan Salie: Nederland in verval?* (Verloren Verleden 17), Hilversum 2002
 Thomas von der Dunk, “Amsterdam: het Paleis op de Dam” in Jan Bank and Marita Mathijssen, *Plaatsen van herinnering: Nederland in de negentiende eeuw*, Amsterdam 2006

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