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The port of Rotterdam

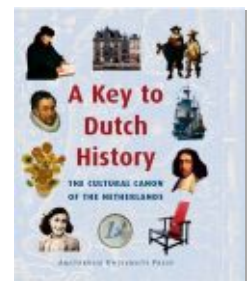
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Amsterdam University Press, 2007.

Project MUSE. <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/76693>.



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circa 1880 - the present

The port of Rotterdam

Gateway to the world

If there is one place that has made the Netherlands such an important trading nation in modern times, it is Rotterdam. The port lies at the delta of major European rivers, is accessible for sea-going ships and currently has access to a market of one hundred million people just a day's drive away. It is the natural location for Europe's major port. The rebuilding of the port was therefore a top priority during the post-war reconstruction of the Netherlands. The port was severely damaged in World War II – almost half of it was destroyed. Due in part to the re-emergence of Germany and successful European cooperation, trade with the German market was restored. Growth was so swift that by the 1950s expansion of the port was needed: the Eemshaven and Botlek were developed.

Rotterdam had only become the major port of the Netherlands in the nineteenth century. Although the city had existed for a long time, it had not been considered a

top priority port. In around 1250, a dam was built in the estuary of the small Rotte River to prevent inflowing seawater from making the river-water too salty. At the dam, goods were loaded by hand from riverboats onto coasters – this was the beginning of the port of Rotterdam. In the sixteenth century, Rotterdam developed into an important fishing port and later the city had some share of the colonial expeditions. However, Rotterdam never became the centre of colonial trade: the port at that time was too difficult to reach from the sea and moreover, the major financiers and entrepreneurs had their offices in Amsterdam.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the port changed dramatically. Mining and industry began to flourish in the German *Ruhrgebiet*. Furthermore, Rotterdam became much more easy to reach from the sea. Under the direction of hydraulic engineer Pieter Caland, the dunes at the Hook of Holland were cut

through and a new link was dug to the port: the *Nieuwe Waterweg* (New Waterway). In the port itself, new harbour basins were dug. Steam cranes and other machinery facilitated loading and unloading, and freight trains transported the products quickly.

The port of Rotterdam has grown continuously over the past forty years, for example, with the development of the *Europoort* and the *Maasvlakte*. It is important to the Netherlands government to keep the port of Rotterdam competitive.

Just like Schiphol Airport, Rotterdam is a main port, a hub for Dutch international trade relations. Today, globalisation means that goods are transported intensively from one end of the globe to the other. Competition is increasing – even between ports. For this reason the state is paying extra attention to the design and accessibility of the port of Rotterdam. The *Betuwelijn*, a new freight railway line between Rotterdam and Germany, is one of the projects that will lay the foundations for the future of the port.



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Sub-topics

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In the Treasure Chest

Recent map of the port of Rotterdam

Model of a container

References

Places to Go

Rotterdam: Havenmuseum

Educational tours of the port for school children

Books for young people

Joris Lutz, *Fred in de haven* (including a CD-ROM) (4+)

Background literature

Paul van de Laar, *Stad van formaat: Geschiedenis van Rotterdam in de negentiende en twintigste eeuw*, Zwolle 2000

Websites

www.gavehaven.nl

www.portofrotterdam.com

(includes a large educational section)

www.buitenmuseum.nl/publieksservice