
Citizenship for Sale in Pre-modern Europe

MAARTEN PRAK

1 Introduction

In the spring of 1710, Allard de la Court from Leyden, in Holland, travelled to England. De la Court was twenty-one years old, the son of a wealthy textile entrepreneur and the grandson of a well-known political-theorist whose radical republicanism had made the family slightly suspect, in spite of its huge fortune.¹ De la Court's trip combined pleasure and education and could be seen as a miniature version of the Grand Tour that was a popular part of elite education at the time. He visited the various sights in and around London, but also travelled to Oxford, which he did not like ('a large and bad town'). There was, however, also a business element to his travels. He established contacts with the banking firm that would handle the substantial investments that Allard's father made in English government bonds during those years. Allard obtained an act of naturalization, on 30 June. This document was acquired at Custom House, and he paid 5.75 guilders, or just over a pound sterling for it, and a similar sum for a certified copy.²

The naturalization made Allard de la Court into a denizen, or adopted subject of the British Crown. It allowed him to reside in England and open a business there, even if he could only employ four alien workers. He could purchase land, but not inherit real estate. His formal status could not be inherited by his descendants, unless special provisions were made. His children could take up an apprenticeship in England. Allard de la Court had thus acquired citizen status, but on limiting conditions. The more encompassing form of citizenship, known as 'freedom of the City', was not available to him, unless he either went through a seven-year

¹ Arthur Weststeijn, *Commercial Republicanism in the Dutch Golden Age: The Political Thought of Johan and Pieter de la Court* (Brill 2011).

² The diary of the trip has been published in F Driesen (ed), *De reizen der De la Courts, 1641–1700–1710* (Ydo 1928) 77–121; the expenses for this naturalization process are provided in p 118.

apprenticeship or was prepared to fork out a very substantial amount of money to acquire citizenship ‘by redemption’. This would, for instance, also have given him the right to participate in local and national elections, to do business as he saw fit, without other restrictions than those imposed by the local guilds, or ‘livery companies’ as they were known in London.³

This little story alerts us to two aspects of pre-modern citizenship. In the first place, citizenship was mostly a local institution at the time. And second, it was for sale, just like today. At first sight, moreover, buying citizenship was something for the rich, again like today. But first impressions can be misleading, as we will see. In the following pages, I will outline the practices of buying local citizenship in pre-modern Europe. I will do so primarily by analyzing in some detail how this worked in Amsterdam during the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Next, I will sketch in more general terms the situation in other towns and countries. We will be looking at financial obstacles and the resulting social profile of who bought citizen status, and why. A third section will pay special attention to the community aspects of buying citizenship. This exercise is set against the implicit backdrop of modern investment citizenship practices, as discussed in other contributions to this volume. In the Conclusion, I will make that comparison explicitly.

2 Buying Citizenship in Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam

In the second half of sixteenth century, Amsterdam had a population of around 30,000, putting it among the upper end of the medium-sized towns of Europe, but making it the largest town in the Netherlands.⁴ In those days, between 50 and 100 people bought Amsterdam citizenship

³ Lien Bich Luu, *Immigrants and the Industries of London, 1500–1700* (Ashgate 2005) 143–44; see also Steve Rappaport, *Worlds within Worlds: Structures of Life in Sixteenth-Century London* (Cambridge University Press 1989), Chapter 2; Matthew Davies, ‘Aliens, crafts and guilds in late medieval London’ in Elizabeth A New and Christian Steer (eds), *Medieval Londoners: Essays to Mark the Eightieth Birthday of Caroline M. Barron* (London University Press 2019) 119–47.

⁴ I have reported on the issues discussed in this section in two earlier publications: Maarten Prak, ‘Cittadini, abitanti e forestieri: Una classificazione della popolazione di Amsterdam nella prima età moderna’ (1995) 30(89) *Quaderni Storici* 331; and Erika Kuijpers and Maarten Prak, ‘Burger, ingezetene, vreemdeling: Burgerschap in Amsterdam in de 17e en 18e eeuw’ in Joost Kloek and Karin Tilmans (eds), *Burger: Een geschiedenis van het begrip ‘burger’ in de Nederlanden van de Middeleeuwen tot de 21ste eeuw* (Amsterdam University Press 2001) 113–32.

annually. They did so at a price of fifteen guilders when they came from another town in the County of Holland and twenty-one guilders for everybody else. In 1578, during the Dutch Revolt and after Amsterdam had isolated itself by siding stubbornly with the King of Spain while the rest of the County had joined the rebels, the price was reduced to a mere eight guilders. Shortly afterwards Amsterdam, now also on the rebel side, became the focus of a substantial flow of refugees from the Southern (Habsburg) Low Countries, when Antwerp was overrun by Spanish troops in August 1585. Antwerp had been the commercial hub of Northwestern Europe, but its population of around 100,000 was halved as a result of this change of military fortune. Applications for Amsterdam citizenship quickly rose to 150–200 annually and to 300–400 in the first decade of the seventeenth century. By that time, Amsterdam's economy was booming. In 1613, a so-far unheard of 1,063 individuals paid their eight guilders citizenship dues. Amsterdam's population had reached 100,000 according to a tax register compiled in 1622. From the mid-1620s, annual citizenship applications stabilized around 400 per annum and continued at that level until mid-century.⁵

This rise in citizen numbers was accompanied by a rise in citizenship dues. In 1624, the city's governors added six guilders to support local welfare schemes, in 1630 and 1634 new rises were announced, to thirty and forty guilders, respectively. In 1650, finally, citizenship dues were increased to fifty guilders, or 4.5 pounds sterling. That was around forty daily wages for a master artisan and fifty daily wages for an unskilled worker. This fifty guilders fee was divided between four institutions. The largest share, of twenty-two guilders, went to the municipal poor relief agency. A quarter, or thirteen guilders, was for the Civic Orphanage, an institution that only accepted children whose parents had been full citizens. Twenty per cent, or ten guilders, was for the civic militia. Finally, the city itself got a 10 per cent cut, or five guilders.⁶

This subdivision provides a hint of the reason why citizenship dues had been raised. It has been suggested that this was an attempt to stem

⁵ Numbers can be found in Erika Kuijpers, *Migrantenstad: Immigratie en sociale verhoudingen in zeventiende-eeuws Amsterdam* (Verloren 2005) 129, Figure 4.

⁶ These data come from an eighteenth-century manuscript on citizenship in Amsterdam, written by Hermanus Noordkerk, and available in the Amsterdam Municipal Archive, library H1004, art. xvi. The wage data have been taken from Jan de Vries and Ad van der Woude, *The First Modern Economy: Success, Failure, and Perseverance of the Dutch Economy, 1500–1815* (Cambridge University Press 1997) 610–11 (Table 12.1).

the tide of immigrants.⁷ However, if anything, the Amsterdam municipal authorities encouraged rather than discouraged immigration during the seventeenth century. At the same time, they were aware of the potential social costs of large numbers of arrivals in their community. Indeed, various social institutions had asked for financial assistance, and this is precisely what they got. The 1634 raise was a direct response to such a request by the civic orphanage, whose institution was filling up as a result of the increased number of children entitled to a placement.⁸ The relative unimportance of population control in determining the price of citizenship is confirmed by another episode in the citizenship saga of Amsterdam in this century.

In 1657, the city launched an ambitious extension of the city's perimeter to accommodate even more new inhabitants. The local authorities were deeply implicated, financially and otherwise.⁹ Unfortunately, this extension came at a time when immigrant numbers were no longer rising. It therefore became more difficult to sell off the new plots. In 1668, the radical decision was taken to create a formal status for 'inhabitants'. Obviously, there had always been people in Amsterdam who were not citizens and known as 'inhabitants', and there would be those also after 1668. However, for a very modest fee, one could get an official registration as 'inhabitant' and with that document gain access to the guilds without being a full citizen. This move made citizen status a lot less interesting. Annual uptakes of citizenship immediately fell to well below 200 annually, their lowest level during the seventeenth century. Although the numbers picked up again, they would not reach the levels of 1610–60 again until the final decades of the eighteenth century.¹⁰

Interestingly, the council also decided, in 1652, to create a new form of citizenship, a so-called Great Citizenship. It would be available for a whopping 500 guilders and provide immigrants with exclusive access to the city council.¹¹ Of course, citizens who had inherited their status, or married a citizen's daughter, were exempt from this fee. It was clearly an attempt to create even more revenue for the city coffers, but it failed

⁷ Hubert Nusteling, *Welvaart en werkgelegenheid in Amsterdam, 1540–1860* (Bataafsche Leeuw 1985) 145.

⁸ Kuijpers (n 5), Chapter 7.

⁹ Jaap Evert Abrahamse, *Metropolis in the Making: A Planning History of Amsterdam in the Dutch Golden Age* (Turnhout 2020), Chapter 3.

¹⁰ Amsterdam Municipal Archives, archive 5025, no. 26, Resolutions of the city council (*vroedschap*), 21 May 1668, fol. 55r-v.

¹¹ PDJ van Ieterson, 'Ingezetenen van Amsterdam' (1987) 74 *Maandblad Amstelodamum* 52.

dismally. Only one individual ever bothered to actually buy this special status. Potential buyers were probably well aware that outsiders stood little chance of accessing the council without family ties to the ruling elite, whatever their legal title.

Buying citizen status was not necessarily the most common way of entering citizenship. In Amsterdam, children born into a family of citizens would automatically inherit this status from their parents. An exception was made, however, for Jewish citizens. The possibility for Jews to acquire full citizen status – available to them from 1632 – was in itself remarkable; few other towns in early modern Europe allowed this. Amsterdam Jews had to buy their citizenship in every new generation.¹² Christians born in Amsterdam to a citizen family were technically required to register their citizenship at the town hall, but it looks as if only a minority bothered to do so. Others relied on testimony from neighbours or relatives to confirm they were citizens when the need arose to invoke their rights. As a result, we have no reliable numbers of the people who were citizens by inheritance. Another group of people became citizens by marrying a boy or girl, woman or man, who already had that status, which was automatically conferred on the spouse. Once again: no numbers. Finally, some people were gifted citizen status by the local authorities. This happened automatically to all Reformed ministers who accepted a position in Amsterdam. Famous admiral Michiel de Ruyter was also made a citizen for free when he relocated to Amsterdam. But these were exceptions.

What was it that one would buy into as a citizen? As always in pre-modern Europe, citizenship in Amsterdam was a bundle of rights that had been cobbled together over many centuries. Only in the eighteenth century did a clerk from town hall, by the name of Hermanus Noordkerk, bother to trace all the various regulations and compile them into a single document, presumably for administrative purposes. Probably one of the oldest privileges of a citizen of Amsterdam was trial by one's peers, that is, other Amsterdam citizens. In practice, this meant the nine aldermen, who were by definition citizens. During the Middle Ages, another potentially important privilege was freedom from certain tolls. By the seventeenth century, most of these had, however, been cleared. Much more significant,

¹² Noordkerk manuscript, art xxvii. On the Jews of Amsterdam, see RG Fuks-Mansfeld, *De Sefardim in Amsterdam tot 1795: Aspecten van een joodse minderheid in een Hollandse stad* Hollandse Studiën vol. 23 (Verloren 1989); and Miriam Bodian, *Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation: Conversos and Community in Early Modern Amsterdam* (Indiana University Press 1997).

and possibly the single most attractive economic aspect of citizenship, was the access it provided to the local guilds.¹³

In seventeenth-century Amsterdam, around fifty guilds were active. Together, these guilds organized around 12,250 masters. A handful accepted also journeymen as members but apart from the shipwrights, these were all so-called service guilds, where mastership was hardly a distinct category.¹⁴ We can safely assume that all those masters were either citizens when they joined or became citizens shortly afterwards. Master craftsmen must have constituted around a quarter of the heads of households in Amsterdam. Among those who paid to acquire their citizenship during the years 1636–51, 60 per cent, or three in five, were registered with an incorporated occupation (see Table 7.1).

Next to economic advantages, citizen status also offered social privileges. The most important of these was the access it provided to the Civic Orphanage, or *Burgerweeshuis*. Orphanages were important because high mortality rates made it quite likely that parents might die while their children were too young to look after themselves. The problem was exacerbated by epidemics like the plague. In Amsterdam, 10–15 per cent of the population died from the plague in 1602–04, and the city was struck by the same disease again in 1616–17, 1623–26, 1629, 1634–35 (this one killing around one in five Amsterdammers), 1652–57, and 1663–66.¹⁵ Amsterdam had two orphanages: one for children whose parents were citizens (*Burgerweeshuis*) and the other for children whose parents were mere inhabitants (*Aalmoezeniersweeshuis*). The well-to-do made private arrangements, but if that was out of the question, it made a huge difference which of these two institutions would be responsible for the well-being and education of one's children. The Civic Orphanage, which held on average around 750 children during the seventeenth century, was far superior on both counts. Judging from the rich and varied diet that was served to the children, these could expect a healthy start in life. In the *Aalmoezeniersweeshuis*, on the other hand, the diet was monotonous and distinctly less healthy. Likewise, children in the *Burgerweeshuis* could

¹³ The privileges of Amsterdam's citizens are outlined in the Noordkerk manuscript, Chapter II.

¹⁴ Piet Lourens and Jan Lucassen, 'Ambachtsgilden binnen een handelskapitalistische stad: Aanzetten voor een analyse van Amsterdam rond 1700' (1998) 61 *NEHA-Jaarboek voor economische, bedrijfs-en techniekgeschiedenis* 160.

¹⁵ Ronald Rommes, 'Plague in Northwestern Europe: The Dutch experience, 1350–1670' (2015) 16(2) *Popolazione e storia* 53; also Leo Noordegraaf and Gerrit Valk, *De gave Gods: De pest in Holland vanaf de late Middeleeuwen* (Bert Bakker 1988) 230.

Table 7.1 *Occupations and likely guild affiliations of individual citizenship 'by redemption' in Amsterdam, 1636–51*

	Incorporated occupations	Percentage	Outside guilds	Percentage	N total
Professions	11	10.5	94	89.5	105
Merchants	13	2.4	535	97.6	548
Crafts	2,776	87.1	411	12.9	3,187
Shops and services	960	76.2	300	23.8	1,260
Unskilled wage labour	136	9.8	1,250	90.2	1,386
Others	0	0	75	100.0	75
Total	3,896	59.4	2,665	40.6	6,561

Source: Amsterdam Municipal Archive, Poorterboek E (gekochte poorters); published before in Kuijpers and Prak (n 4), 128.

expect a good education, with the boys being taught a craft while the girls were prepared for the life of a middle-class housewife. The *Aalmoezeners* orphans could expect little education and were sent out at a very early age to work for wages. Many of them were shipped to the Dutch colonies in Asia and the Americas as cheap labour.¹⁶

Finally, there were political privileges attached to citizen status. These were, however, limited. The highest offices in Amsterdam were only open to citizens.¹⁷ This meant that one could not hope to get a seat on the thirty-six-strong council, or become one of Amsterdam's four mayors, or be appointed an alderman, without being a citizen. But these positions were only available to rich and well-connected elites anyway, for whom the citizenship fee was not a major obstacle. We must assume that the vast majority of those buying a citizen status had no hope of being considered for such offices. Most of the minor offices in Amsterdam, on the other hand, did not require citizen status.

¹⁶ Anne EC McCants, *Civic Charity in a Golden Age: Orphan Care in Early Modern Amsterdam* (University of Illinois Press 1997), Chapters 3–4; for the number of children in the Civic Orphanage, see *ibid.*, Appendix A.

¹⁷ Amsterdam's governance structure is described in Sjoerd Faber, Jacobine Huisken and Friso Lammertse, *Of Lords, Who Seat nor Cushion Do Ashame: The Government of Amsterdam in the 17th and 18th Centuries* (Stichting Koninklijk Paleis 1987).

So, who were the people buying citizenship. As already explained, a majority worked in occupations that fell under guild rules, but we can be more specific, as is shown in the table 7.1 above.

The table demonstrates that around half of all individuals who paid for their citizen status during this period were artisans. Merchants and shopkeepers were also much in evidence, unsurprising for a commercial centre like Amsterdam. Remarkably, just over 20 per cent were unskilled wage workers at the time they became citizens. The fees, which amounted to around two months' worth of wages, were selective but not insurmountable, even for workers. Their presence among the citizens by redemption also suggests that access to the Civic Orphanage was seen as a genuine attraction for workers. This is confirmed by contemporary stories about sailors – definitely not a middle-class occupation – hoping to place their children in this orphanage. It goes on to show that even though citizenship was not equally distributed across all social classes, it was nonetheless accessed by all social classes.

3 Acquiring Citizenship in Early Modern Europe

The story outlined so far for Amsterdam would apply to every town across early modern Europe, even if all the details would be different.¹⁸ The reason for the similarity was the origin of citizenship arrangements. These went back to the feudal principle of the privileged community. During the Middle Ages, and especially from the twelfth to the fourteenth century, communities across Europe received charters from their sovereigns that established some form of self-rule and, implicitly or explicitly, created a community of individuals implied under that self-rule. Most of these communities were initiated by the people themselves, some of them were established by princes and lords with the hope of attracting people and creating prosperity and hence revenue. Some of the towns established at the time remained disappointingly small, others would eventually grow into substantial towns and cities.¹⁹

¹⁸ More on the topic of this section in Maarten Prak, *Citizens without Nations: Urban Citizenship in Europe and the World, 1000–1789* (Cambridge University Press 2018), Chapter 1; see also, Tamar Herzog, *Defining Nations: Immigrants and Citizens in Early Modern Spain and Spanish America* (Yale University Press 2003); and Phil Withington, *The Politics of Commonwealth: Citizens and Freemen in Early Modern England* (Cambridge University Press 2005).

¹⁹ For the earliest of these communes, see Chris Wickham, *Sleepwalking into a New World: The Emergence of Italian City Communes in the Twelfth Century* (Princeton University Press 2015).

Whatever their size, with the establishment of such an urban community questions emerged about not only who were its members but also about how the community might attract and incorporate new members. The reason for this was demographic necessity. The health conditions in the vast majority of medieval and early modern towns and cities were such that they were subject to a permanent population deficit. In other words, they depended on immigration to remain even at the same size, and even more so if they wanted to grow. Given the absolute and relative increase of urbanization, immigration was a structural feature of the period.²⁰ By implication, these towns and cities also needed policies to keep their citizen community viable, and inclusion mechanisms were an obvious route. Perhaps it was not a necessary route – infamously, the access to full citizen status in Venice was formally closed in 1297, but this was very exceptional. Even Venice had less comprehensive forms of citizenship that were accessible to outsiders.²¹ But selling citizen status was a very common policy, and almost all urban archives from the period still hold extensive registrations, listing the individuals who entered the community in this way.

All such immigrants found obstacles in their way. One obstacle was finance. Buying citizenship could be very expensive. The City of London charged £42, or almost 1,500 days of unskilled wages in the middle of the sixteenth century. That price came down to £22 even before 1600, and due to inflation this meant around 450 daily wages, but that still amounted to around 1.5 years of work.²² No wonder the great majority of immigrants in London chose a different route open to them. Quite exceptionally, completing an apprenticeship also provided access to citizen status in London. In many German towns, citizenship could also be very expensive. There is no obvious pattern in the distribution of fees. We might speculate that London, being so attractive, could afford to make its citizenship expensive and thus make new citizens pay towards

²⁰ Klaus Bade, Piet Emmer, Leo Lucassen, and Jochen Oltmer (eds), *The Encyclopedia of Migration and Minorities in Europe: From the 17th century to the Present* (Cambridge University Press 2011); Anne Winter, 'Population and migration: European and Chinese experiences compared' in Peter Clark (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of Cities in World History* (Oxford University Press 2013) 403–20.

²¹ Venetian citizenship is discussed in Anna Bellavitis, *Citoyennes et citoyens à Venise au XVI^e siècle: Identité, mariage, mobilité sociale* Collection de l'École de Rome vol. 282 (École française de Rome 2001); see also Bellavitis, 'Gender and Citizenship in Early Modern Venetian Guilds', Paper presented at the 17th World Economic History Congress in Kyoto, 2015.

²² Data kindly supplied by Patrick Wallis, London School of Economics.

the maintenance of the city's social infrastructure, just like Amsterdam did. But this argument cannot explain why Vechta in Saxony, with a population of just over 2,000 at the end of the nineteenth century, charged some 150 unskilled daily wages for the privilege of its citizenship in the seventeenth century.²³ Likewise, the different price levels for acquiring citizen status between London and Amsterdam in the seventeenth century, when both were among the five largest cities in Europe and growing rapidly, underline that there was no integrated European market for 'investment citizenship'.

Another obstacle was religion. In many towns and cities, it was necessary to profess the dominant religion. Even in the Netherlands, with its reputation of tolerance, rules were introduced in some towns to accept only reformed, that is Calvinists, individuals as citizens. Catholic citizens were allowed to retain their status and also to pass it on to their children, but new arrivals had to demonstrate their allegiance to the so-called public religion.²⁴ Calvinism was the only faith in the Dutch Republic that could perform its rituals openly. The Reformed had taken over all church buildings from the Catholics. The latter were forced into hiding, and even though the existence of their 'hidden churches' was known to the authorities and their priests were registered, Catholicism remained an outsider religion. In German towns and cities, it depended on the faith of the local ruler which faith would be acceptable, and when it came to citizenship, religious discrimination was the norm. The same applied in the Swiss Confederacy, where each of the cantons, and by implication their towns, had a distinct religious identity.²⁵

In some towns, most notably in German-speaking territories, moral conditions were also imposed on new citizens. Candidates would have to

²³ Piet Lourens and Jan Lucassen, "'Zunftlandschaften' in den Niederlanden und im benachbarten Deutschland", in W Reininghaus (ed), *Zunftlandschaften in Deutschland und Niederlanden im Vergleich Schriften der Historischen Kommission für Westfalen*, vol. 17 (Aschendorff 2000) 21.

²⁴ Maarten Prak, 'The politics of intolerance: Citizenship and religion in the Dutch Republic (17th–18th C.)' in Ronnie Po-chia Hsia and Henk van Nierop (eds), *Calvinism and Religious Toleration in the Dutch Golden Age* (Cambridge University Press 2002) 159–75.

²⁵ Francisca Loetz, 'Bridging the gap: Confessionalization in Switzerland', in André Holenstein, Thomas Maissen and Maarten Prak (eds), *The Republican Alternative: The Netherlands and Switzerland Compared* (Amsterdam University Press 2008), 75–97; Willem Frijhoff, 'Was the Dutch Republic a Calvinist community: the state, the confessions and culture in the early modern Netherlands', in André Holenstein, Thomas Maissen and Maarten Prak (eds), *The Republican Alternative: The Netherlands and Switzerland Compared* (Amsterdam University Press 2008) 99–122.

prove that they came from a proper family, with legally married parents.²⁶ Much more general, although seldom put down in writing, was the discrimination against women. The gender bias in the registration of new citizens makes it very clear that, for a range of reasons, women were much less inclined to buy citizen status than men. Among the 6,845 new citizens registered in Amsterdam between 1636 and 1651, only 203, or 3 per cent, were women.²⁷ An important reason was almost certainly that they could expect fewer benefits. Although there were exceptions, in general women were strongly under-represented among guild members, neither could they expect to be appointed to high office. Gender discrimination created the strongest bias far in the selection of citizens by redemption. Through marriage and inheritance, large numbers of women nonetheless acquired citizen status – and passed it on to husbands and children.

4 Citizenship and Community

A standard objection against the modern ‘citizenship investors’ is that they are really rent-seeking, footloose cosmopolitans. Their rent-seeking is implied in the protection (financial or otherwise) they hope to find in the country whose passport they acquire. They are foot-loose because they seldom reside permanently in their new country. This was much more difficult in pre-modern Europe. In the Middle Ages, towns forbade their citizens to stay away from home for more than three or six months, unless they had obtained special permission. This requirement was no longer enforced in the early modern period. However, other mechanisms also tied citizens to the community.

Migrants buying Amsterdam citizenship were at the same time becoming members of an ‘imagined community’, to quote Benedict Anderson’s famous expression.²⁸ The Dutch word for ‘citizen’, which is *burger*, was deliberately ambiguous. It referred to a social class as much as to a legal status.²⁹ But even in that second meaning of legal status, there was an ambiguity. In towns like Amsterdam, the civic community was routinely

²⁶ Mack Walker, *German Home Towns: Community, State and 1648–1871* (Cornell University Press 1971).

²⁷ Kuijpers (n 5), 127.

²⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983)

²⁹ Kloek and Tilmans (n 4); Harald Hendrix and Marijke Meijer Drees (eds), *Beschaafde burgers: Burgerlijkheid in de vroegmoderne tijd* Utrechtse Renaissance Studies, vol. vi (Amsterdam University Press 2001).

referred to as *burgerij*. No doubt, the core of this *burgerij* consisted of people with full citizenship rights, but it included others – mere inhabitants – as well. Amsterdam’s civic militias, which since became world famous thanks to Rembrandt’s portrayal of some militiamen in his *Night Watch*, had originally recruited men with citizen status. But in 1580, when the Dutch Revolt hung in the balance, it was transformed into an organization that recruited among all local males, regardless of their legal status.³⁰ Nonetheless, the militias were nicknamed *burgerij* throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and made claims on that basis about the governance of the town.³¹ With more justification – because they had citizens status by definition – guilds made similar claims, supported by arguments about why their concerns deserved a hearing because the petitioners were ‘honest *burgers*’.

We already saw how guild membership was an important incentive to become a citizen. Guilds were primarily organizations of people – usually men – who shared the same occupations.³² At the same time, they were deeply involved in broader community issues. In London, for example, the City’s most important office holders as well as its representatives in Parliament were elected by the members of the Livery Companies.³³ The City’s headquarters was called ‘Guildhall’ for a reason. This direct involvement of the guilds, or at least their leadership, was a feature of the governing structures in many European towns at the time.³⁴ They were sometimes directly represented on the local council. But guilds also provided other services to the community, such as manpower for the civic militias, the maintenance of the town’s defense works, assistance when fires broke out, or cutting ice in winter. Some of them offered their members insurance against the cost of burial, or in case of illnesses, relieving other charities from the costs

³⁰ Paul Knevel, *Burgers in het geweer: De schutterijen in Holland, 1550–1700 Hollandse Studiën* vol. 32 (Verloren 1994); Maarten Prak, ‘Het oude recht der burgeren: De betekenis van burgerschap in het Amsterdam van de zestiende en zeventiende eeuw’ in Hendrix and Meijer Drees (n 29), 31–41.

³¹ See also Maarten Prak, ‘Citizens, soldiers and civic militias in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe’ (2015) 288 *Past & Present* 93.

³² There is a substantial and growing literature on guilds; for a first introduction in connection with the topic of citizenship, see Prak, *Citizens without Nations* (n 18), Chapter 3.

³³ Rappaport (n 3), 188.

³⁴ Fabian Wahl, ‘Political participation and economic development: Evidence from the rise of participative political institutions in the late medieval German Lands’ (2019) 23 *European Review of Economic History* 195, 201.

of supporting these families.³⁵ As a result, guilds and their members – who, as stated before, were almost by definition citizens – tended to see themselves as the mainstay of the civic community. In eighteenth-century Amsterdam, the knifemakers asked for protection against foreign competition precisely because they were ‘citizens and inhabitants, and have their steady abode in this town’. The local Wine Merchants’ Guild objected to competitors who had obtained their citizenship and even guild membership, but still lived ‘elsewhere, yes even outside the country’.³⁶ A proper citizen lived locally.

Guilds in Catholic regions were also strongly involved in religious rituals and institutions. They maintained altars and funded masses in numerous churches, and they paid for stained glass windows and other adornments. Guilds celebrated the day of their patron saint on the Holy Calendar with elaborate meals, a custom that was continued in many protestant areas after the Reformation.³⁷ By severing the connection with Rome, the Reformation reinforced the importance of the local community as a spiritual unit. Its secular equivalent was a form of urban republicanism that we find in many regions of Europe but was especially strongly articulated in Germany. The foundational ideas of this republicanism were the fundamental rights and duties connected to citizen status and the basic equality of citizens within the community. From these claims came implications relating to the treatment of citizens by the authorities, but also about the right of citizens to participate in community affairs.³⁸ All

³⁵ Prak (n 18) 107–12; Phillip Hellwege (ed), *Professional Guilds and the History of Insurance: A Comparative Analysis* Studien zur vergleichenden Geschichte des Versicherungsrechts, vol. 7 (Duncker & Humblot 2020).

³⁶ Amsterdam Municipal Archive, archive 5061, no. 697: 1751/29 and no. 705: 1759/16; see also Maarten Prak, ‘Individual, corporation and society: The rhetoric of Dutch guilds (18th. C.)’ in Marc Boone and Maarten Prak (eds), *Statuts individuels, statuts corporatifs et statuts judiciaires dans les villes européennes (moyen âge et temps modernes)/Individual, Corporate, and Judicial Status in European Cities Late Middle Ages and Early Modern Period* (Garant 1996) 255–79.

³⁷ Wonderfully investigated in Gervase Rosser, *The Art of Solidarity in the Middle Ages: Guilds in England 1250–1550* (Oxford University Press 2015); see also the essays in Justin Colson and Arie van Steensel (eds), *Cities and Solidarities: Urban Communities in Pre-modern Europe* (Routledge 2017).

³⁸ Heinz Schilling, ‘Civic republicanism in late medieval and early modern German cities’ in Heinz Schilling (ed), *Religion, Political Culture and the Emergence of Early Modern Society* (Brill 1992) 3–59 (orig. ‘Gab es im späten Mittelalter und zu Beginn der Neuzeit in Deutschland einen städtischen “Republikanismus”? Zur politischen Kultur des alteuropäischen Stadtbürgertums’ in Helmut Koenigsberger (ed), *Republiken und Republikanismus im Europa der Frühen Neuzeit*, Oldenbourg 1988, 101–43).

this underlines the fact that buying citizenship in pre-modern Europe was much more than an economic transaction.

5 Conclusions

Citizenship has been for sale in Europe for the best part of a millennium. Modern practices of ‘investment citizenship’ therefore seem to have a long pedigree. I would, however, argue that those modern practices in actual fact have very little to do with older ways of buying citizenship. A first stark contrast seems to be the numbers. In early modern Europe, middle-sized towns could welcome dozens of new citizens every year, most of whom would have forked out the requisite registration fee. They did so because they expected economic benefits, but these ‘investors’ were usually middle class and surprisingly often even working-class people, not the rich that ‘citizenship investment’ programmes today are targeting, which constitutes a second contrast. A third contrast is the way such citizens ‘by redemption’, as they were called, were subsequently tied into the community. Although residence might not always be requisite, it was at least expected. As citizens, these immigrants would also be drawn into a network of civic institutions and required to participate in a range of community activities. These activities were underpinned by an ideology of local republicanism in which the citizen was the key figure.