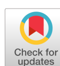

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ARTICLE

Republican Kinship in the Society of Princes: The Dutch States General as Corporate Godparent, 1578–1732

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Abstract
Throughout the early modern period, the Dutch States General, as if it were a natural person, frequently stood godfather over foreign children. Based on innovative archival research, this article investigates this unknown phenomenon as 'corporate godparenthood' and argues that it was an important tool of republican diplomacy in the Protestant society of princes, particularly in the Holy Roman Empire. Corporate godfatherhood allowed the Dutch Republic to partake, and assert its presence, in familial princely spheres to which it did not otherwise have access. The cultural practices of baptism, including the right of the godparents to name a child and baptismal gift-giving, allowed the States to form lasting kinship relations of mutual obligation in an economy of affection. Corporate godfatherhood had important and long-lasting effects: many of the dynasties with whom the States entered into a kinship relation remained allies for several generations, and supplied the States' army with troops and officers, while the States assumed the role of benefactor, protector, educator, executor, or legal guardian of various of its princely godchildren.

What is the commonality between Henry Stuart, prince of Wales (1594–1612), Frederick the Great of Prussia (1712–86), and the unknown Amalia van Euskercken? The answer is that all three of them were godchildren of the Dutch Republic. And they were not alone: this article will show that, between 1578 and 1732, the Dutch States General stood godfather to at least eighty-seven children, born in places as far apart as Paris, Copenhagen, and St Petersburg.[1] At each one's baptism, one or more representatives of the States would assist with the ceremony and would present parents, child, and those in their household with (frequently very lavish) baptism gifts. Thus began the kinship relation between the child and the Dutch state, which, in its ideal form, entailed a lifelong commitment for mutual care and loyalty, as if

[1]Appendix 1 (see https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X25000019) offers a complete list of documented godchildren to the Dutch States General with references to the archival material related to the sponsorship. Henry Stuart, Frederick the Great, and Amalia van Euskercken are nos. 3, 82, and 36 on the list respectively.

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the state were a natural person. This article analyses this unknown and remarkable phenomenon, which I will call 'corporate godparenthood', and argues that it was a highly meaningful aspect of the States General's management of foreign relations, impacting the States' honour, reputation, and alliance-building capacities in the long term.

In noting and analysing the States General's corporate godparenthood, this article breaks new ground. Incidental instances of the States' godparenthood have been mentioned only anecdotally or as a curiosity in older biographical studies of individual coparents or godchildren.[2] Thus far, the art historian Marten Jan Bok has been the only scholar to take Dutch corporate godparenthood seriously as a political practice; his article on the names of the godchildren of the city and province of Utrecht was, indeed, the main source of inspiration for this research.[3] Yet, as we shall see, the municipal and provincial godparenthoods studied by Bok were in fact premised on the diplomatic practice that preceded it. Similarly, the corporate godparent relationships between three German imperial towns and princely families to manage relations within the empire, recently analysed by André Krischer, postdate the States' participation in German baptism ceremonies by many decades, and were in all likelihood inspired by Dutch precedents.[4] It was in the realm of international politics, I will argue, that the practice of Republican corporate godparenthood and spiritual kinship originated and attained its most meaningful shape.

That the States General's godparenthoods have not been analysed before is at least partly because, until recently, it would have required a lifetime of study to even recognize the pattern. Invitations to stand godfather and the deliberations and decisions on these invitations are buried under many thousands of pages of correspondence and resolutions about other issues. It is only the current digitization of the entire archive of the States General by the REPUBLIC project at the Huygens Institute in Amsterdam that has facilitated the systematic study of the practice by enabling full-text searches on key terms in the States' resolutions.[5] Digitization has

[2]See e.g. Onno Schutte, *Repertorium der buitenlandse vertegenwoordigers residerende in Nederland 1584–1810* (*Repertory of foreign representatives residing in the Netherlands, 1584–1810*) (The Hague, 1985); Johanna Naber, *Prinsessen van Oranje en hare dochters in Frankrijk* (*Princesses of Orange and their daughters in France*) (Haarlem, 1901).

[3]Marten Jan Bok, 'De voornamen Utrecia en Trajectinus: peetkinderen van Stad en Staten van Utrecht' ('The first names Utrecia and Trajectinus: godchildren of the city and States of Utrecht'), *De Nederlandsche Leeuw* (*The Dutch Lion*), 118 (2001), pp. 92–110.

[4]André Krischer, 'Gevatter Stadt: Patenschaften als politische Praxis in den reichsstädtischen Außenbeziehungen', in Thomas Lau and Helge Wittmann, eds., *Kaiser, Reich und Reichsstadt in der Interaktion* (Petersberg, Germany, 2016), pp. 235–52.

[5]To identify the States General's godchildren and coparents, I have searched for the terms 'doop' (baptism), 'gevaders' (godfathers), 'gevaderschap' (godparenthood), 'peet[vaders]' (godfathers), 'peters' (godparents), 'pillegift' (baptism gift), 'pillegave' (baptism gift), and alternative spellings in the resolutions of the States General. For the years 1576–1630, I have used Nico Japikse, Ida Nijenhuis et al., eds., *Resolutiën der Staten-Generaal 1576–1630* (*Resolutions of the States General, 1576–1630*) (The Hague, 1914–2011), https://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/besluitenstatengeneraal1576-1630 (hereafter RSG). For the years 1631–1795, I have used the HTR transcriptions of the resolutions in the National Archives in The Hague by the REPUBLIC project: see https://app.goetgevonden.nl (hereafter NA 1.01.02). I have performed the same searches in the digitized, OCRed printed resolutions of the States of Holland for the years 1524–1795 (available on Google Books) (hereafter RSH). Given that neither the provisional REPUBLIC transcriptions nor the OCRed resolutions of Holland are absolutely accurate, it is possible that I have missed instances in the

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also been vital to contextualize the findings: I have carried out a prosopography of the coparents and godchildren of the States General, which, given the fact that many of them are German princes of fractured houses that have faded into obscurity, would have been much harder before the digital age.[6]

This article shows that corporate godfatherhood enabled the Dutch Republic to continue to participate in the familial sphere of the society of princes, even after they had renounced being ruled by a prince themselves. That the Republic, in the course of 150 years, expended much time, energy, and at least four million guilders in baptism gifts on its godchildren can only be understood when we appreciate what the States gained from the kinship relation. Importantly, corporate godparenthood functioned in what the Africanist Göran Hydén has called an economy of affection: a moral system of interactions and dependencies common in premodern societies.[7] As such, like other forms of patronage, it offered both long-term and more direct political gains, although these were never guaranteed. In the long term, corporate godparenthood offered the prospect of fostering and strengthening stable relationships, and allowed the transfer of mutual loyalty and care from one generation to the other. Since accepting godparenthood and assisting at the baptism were very much public acts, there were also major, short-term, communicative benefits to the practice. Baptism ceremonies took place in a princely arena of symbolic communication that is increasingly recognized as having been a constitutive part of making and managing international relations in the early modern period.[8] By participating in that arena, the Republic could assert its identity, power, and position within the society of princes to both elite audiences and the wider public.

I

The social practices surrounding baptism and godparenthood in early modern Europe, long disregarded, have recently received renewed attention.[9] In line with cultural anthropologists such as Janet Carsten and Marshall Sahlins, social historians have started to study kinship as a form of 'negotiated experience' resulting

years after 1630. It is unlikely that I missed many, because individual godparenthoods mostly required more than one resolution, all of which used several, if not all, of the search terms indicated.

[6]Miloslav Marek's website for royal and noble genealogies, https://genealogy.euweb.cz/, for instance, has been a great help. I thank Peter Wilson for directing me towards this website.

[7]Göran Hydén, 'The economy of affection', in *African politics in comparative perspective* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 72–93.

[8]See e.g. Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, 'Symbolische Kommunikation in der Vormoderne: Begriffe–Thesen–Forschungsperspektiven', *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung*, 31 (2004), pp. 489–527. As a recent volume has stressed, symbolic representation was especially urgent for the new Dutch Republic, which did not conform to dominant monarchical models: Joris Oddens, Alessandro Metlica, and Gloria Moorman, eds., *Contending representations I: the Dutch Republic and the lure of monarchy* (Turnhout, 2023).

[9]Guido Alfani and Vincent Gourdon, 'Spiritual kinship and godparenthood: an introduction', in Guido Alfani and Vincent Gourdon, eds., *Spiritual kinship in Europe, 1500–1900* (London, 2012), pp. 1–43; Joaquim de Carvalho and Ana Ribeiro, 'Using network analysis on parish registers: how spiritual kinship uncovers social structure', in Joaquim de Carvalho, ed., *Bridging the gap: sources, methodology and approaches to religion in history* (Pisa, 2008), pp. 171–86; Guido Alfani and Vincent Gourdon, 'Entrepreneurs, formalization of social ties, and trustbuilding in Europe (fourteenth to twentieth centuries)', *Economic History Review*, 65 (2012), pp. 1005–28; Will Coster, *Baptism and spiritual kinship in early modern England* (London, 2017).

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from cultural practices and symbolic notions and exchanges rather than blood relations.[10] Godparenthood was exactly such an enacted form of kinship. The choice of godparents was a tool employed by natural parents to expand, strengthen, and reshape their social networks, to heighten their social profile, and to build trust between families by creating what is often termed a 'spiritual' or 'baptismal' kinship between them.[11] This alternative kinship relation had very real implications, affecting the life of both godchildren and godparents alike. In Catholic countries, godparenthood was regarded as proper kinship, which prohibited, for instance, marriages between the natural children and the godchildren of a married couple as 'spiritual incest'. Luther strongly opposed the concept of spiritual incest in *The Babylonian captivity of the church*, and for Protestants spiritual kinship consequently did not form an impediment to marry.[12] Yet that was as far as the Reformation went. Calvin's subsequent efforts to abolish godparenthood and baptism feasts in Geneva were in vain. While Protestants followed Luther in emphasizing the godparents' duty to educate their godchildren religiously, the institution retained the social status of spiritual kinship and continued to imply the moral obligation for lifelong mutual care, which was visible, for instance, in the custom throughout Europe to include godchildren in testaments.

Vital to a family's standing and social capital, godparenthood was also a profoundly political institution. Among ruling elites, the selection of godparents (or 'witnesses' as Protestants also came to call them) was a sensitive task which had a prominent role in the dynastic management of international relations.[13] Baptism and godparenthood had been central to dynastic politics since the early middle ages, when Christian rulers started to use baptismal sponsorship and *compaternitas* as a diplomatic tool.[14] In the early modern period, this practice was still very much alive in the society of princes, where alliance-making continued to be deeply affected by family relations and the natural person of the prince, and godparenting functioned to strengthen, extend, and express familial relations between princely dynasties and thus between the states they ruled.[15]

[10]Marshall Sahlins, *What kinship is – and is not* (Chicago, IL, 2013); Janet Carsten, *Cultures of relatedness: new approaches to the study of kinship* (Cambridge, 2000).

[11]Like Janet Carsten I reject the term 'fictive kinship', which is sometimes also used for godparenthood. Since kinship relations are produced in social and cultural practices, the strong distinction between 'real' biological and 'fictive' cultural kinship is untenable.

[12]Michael James Halvorson, 'Theology, ritual, and confessionalization: the making and meaning of Lutheran baptism in Reformation Germany, 1520–1618' (Ph.D. thesis, Washington, 2001), p. 280; Guido Alfani, 'The Reformation, the Council of Trent and the divergence of spiritual kinship and godparenthood across Europe: a long-run analysis', in Silvia Sovic, Pat Thane, and Pierpaolo Viazzo, eds., *The history of families and households: comparative European dimensions* (Leiden, 2016), pp. 143–66, at pp. 150–1.

[13]The States used the terms 'getuyge' (witness) and 'gevader' (godfather) interchangeably and only rarely used the term 'peet(vaders)'.

[14]E.g. Joseph Lynch, *Christianizing kinship: ritual sponsorship in Anglo-Saxon England* (Ithaca, NY, 1998).

[15]Katarzyna Kosior, *Becoming a queen in early modern Europe: east and west* (Cham, 2019), pp. 153ff; Crawford Matthews, 'The baptism of Princess Wilhelmine of Prussia (1709–1758) in the presence of three kings: dynastic birth, gender, and the assertion of royal rank', in Jasper van der Steen and Irena Kosmanová, eds., *Dynastischer Nachwuchs als Hoffnungsträger und Argument in der frühen Neuzeit* (Berlin, 2023), pp. 67–97.

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Republics (governed by collective governmental bodies) were to all appearances largely excluded from this vital aspect of early modern relation-building. While individual members of republican governments could, of course, seek to raise their own family's status by striking up relations with foreign families, this did not impact their state's international relations in similar ways as in a monarchy. Indeed, godparenthood's ability to strengthen interfamilial relations beyond state borders and national communities was regarded as particularly problematic by some early modern republican polities. Venice, for instance, regulated the godparenthood of political authorities in relations with their subjects in the empire; aiming to prevent patronage networks between its governors and local communities, the Venetian Senate explicitly forbade representatives of the republic to become godparents in 1545. In republican Florence, too, using spiritual kinhood to strengthen political relations across political boundaries was regarded with suspicion.[16] These examples show the political weight accorded to the kin relationship forged by godparenthood, and the challenge it posed to systems of government that were apparently less compatible with the dynastic, familial organization of politics.

The Dutch case, by contrast, shows that the power of spiritual kinship could also be mustered to strengthen and assert the international position of the Republic. A republican government collectively standing godfather over a foreign child was not completely unheard of. Republican Florence, in the fourteenth century, at least once acted as godfather to a Visconti baby as a prelude to an alliance.[17] Yet, according to the current state of research, the States General seems to have been extraordinary among republican states and free cities in developing baptismal politics as a structural element in their management of foreign relations for more than 150 years, from the first instance in 1578 to their resolution to stop accepting foreign godfatherhoods in 1732. In that period, a complex practice emerged that, through familial language and ceremonies, helped to negotiate and express issues of affection, honour, rank, trust, and obligation in the international sphere.

II

While modern godparenthood privileges the relationship between godparent and godchild, early modern godparenthood was much more focused on the relationship between godparent and natural parent. It was the bond between the *compaters* or coparents that was affirmed by the voluntary kinship, and it was this relation that they pledged to perpetuate through the newborn child. Before discussing the religious and political practices and meanings of corporate godparenthood in the next sections, it is vital to understand who the States' coparents were, what their relation to the Dutch Republic was, and what they expected of it.

[16] Andrew Vidali, 'Political and social aspects of godparenthood in early modern Venice: spiritual kinship and patrician society', *Journal of Early Modern History*, 26 (2022), pp. 429–55.

[17] Louis Haas, 'Il mio buono compare: choosing godparents and the uses of baptismal kinship in Renaissance Florence', *Journal of Social History*, 29 (1995), pp. 341–56, at p. 346.

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While corporate godparenthood may have been practised at a local level before, the first documented cases occurred only during the Dutch Revolt, in the late sixteenth century.[18] They involved the family of William of Orange and Protestant government bodies. Orange and his third wife, Charlotte de Bourbon, were skilled baptism diplomats, carefully choosing the godparents of their six daughters to strengthen their political relations. In 1577, they invited both Elizabeth I of England (a crucial ally in the battle against the king of Spain) and the States of Holland and Zeeland as godparents of their second daughter, and no less a figure than Sir Philip Sidney held the child when she was christened Elisabeth Flandrica in their honour in Dordrecht.[19] Probably inspired by this event, one year later and for the first time in their history, the States General offered to stand godfather over the pair's third daughter.[20]

All other cases in the Low Countries and the Holy Roman Empire postdate the kinship relation that Orange and the States General struck up in 1578. It was at this moment that corporate baptism politics became, and could start to be conceived of as, an instrument of diplomacy both by the States themselves and by the society of princes with whom they interacted. While the States did not specify the reasons for their offer, these were probably related to their heightened self-awareness. The recent Pacification of Ghent (November 1576) had made the assembly permanent, and they were looking for ways to assert their new status and to strengthen their bond with the Nassau dynasty. Orange, for his part, had a similar interest. 'I cannot conclude otherwise', Orange's brother John of Nassau-Dillenburg wrote on hearing of the invitation, 'than that his excellency's authority and reputation [in the Low Countries] waxes and increases more and more.'[21] In the circumstances, a kinship alliance was opportune for both sides: the pair accepted, and the child was christened Catharina Belgica in their name. The arrangement set the pattern for the succeeding children: the baptisms of the pair's fourth and fifth daughters, Charlotte Flandrina (1579) and Charlotte Brabantina (1580), were witnessed by the Provincial States of Flanders and Brabant respectively, while in 1581 the Calvinist Republic of Antwerp became godparent of daughter number six, who was baptized Emilia Secunda Antwerpiana.[22]

The spiritual kinship between the Nassau family and the Protestant authorities was evidently meant both to deepen and to signal their steadfast alliance in the

[18]For the roots of political godparenthood in the Low Countries, see G. D. J. Schotel, *Het oud-Hollands huisgezin der zeventiende eeuw* (*The Dutch household of the seventeenth century*) (Haarlem, 1867).

[19]Charlotte de Bourbon to Elizabeth I, 2 June 1577, The National Archives, Kew (TNA), State Papers (SP) 70/145, fo. 79; RSH, 28 May 1577; Matty Klatter, 'Elisabeth van Oranje', in *Digitaal Vrouwenlexicon van Nederland* (*Digital women's lexicon of the Netherlands*), https://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/vrouwenlexicon/ (hereafter *DVLN*).

[20]Appendix 1, no. 1. The provinces of Artois, Hainaut, Lille, and Tournois declined to participate in the offer, citing reasons of religion.

[21]Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Archives ou correspondance inédite de la maison d'Orange-Nassau* (Leiden, 1835–1915), series 1, VI, p. 458.

[22]P. C. Molhuysen and P. J. Blok, eds., *Nieuw Nederlands biografisch woordenboek* (*New biographical dictionary of the Netherlands*) (11 vols., Leiden, 1911–37), I, pp. 593–4. *DVLN*, Marjolein Jorna, 'Emilia Secunda Antwerpiana van Oranje'.

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struggle against the king of Spain. The ceremonies for Emilia in Antwerp were particularly meaningful, as they came during an extremely tense phase of the revolt, only months after the publication of the Act of Abjuration. In such a context, the message of the familial concord between local authorities and the most prominent noble family in the revolt was unmissable for political observers both in the Low Countries and abroad.[23] From the very beginning of the practice, then, corporate godfatherhood had overriding political purposes, creating and communicating the alliance between the most powerful domestic dynasty and the corporate bodies spearheading the revolt against the king of Spain, and projecting that relationship into the future by transferring it to the next generation. In the case of the Nassau family, this transgenerational project turned out to be extremely robust. As appendix 1 shows, the States' kinship relation with the family extended through all generations of the Nassau stadholders of all provinces.

The custom initiated by William of Orange and Charlotte de Bourbon set the example for all later corporate godparenthoods of the Republic: whether it came to naming the godchildren, to gift-giving, or to assessing which invitations to accept and which to reject, the choices made in the late sixteenth century cast long shadows. Most importantly, Orange and Bourbon set the example for foreign princes to invite the States General as coparents. For, while the States, as we shall see below, may have developed policies and customs in the process of developing and shaping the godparent relationship, the initiative to enter into it usually, but not always, rested with the natural parents, who, by letter or envoy, invited the States into their familial sphere.

Besides the stadholderly families, all coparents I have found fall into three categories: foreign princes (predominantly in the Holy Roman Empire), military officers, and ambassadors. The common denominator of these groups is foreignness: the States' godparenthood functioned to strengthen relations in the international sphere, where subjecthood was absent or tenuous. The first category of coparents consisted of foreign princes. Only three royal families figure on the list: the house of Stuart of Scotland (1594), the house of Oldenburg of Denmark (1649), and the Hohenzollerns of Brandenburg-Prussia (several times after Prussia became a kingdom). All other foreign rulers were evangelical princes in the Holy Roman Empire. Even when excluding the Danish-German dukes of Holstein, no fewer than 56 per cent of the States' godchildren were German princesses and princes of electoral, ducal, or lower-ranking houses. After 1650, when Huguenots and ambassadors no longer became coparents, that percentage was even higher. Many of these German coparents were, of course, related to the sprawling Nassau family, and various godfatherhoods, through either the male or the female line, honoured this family relationship. Yet, as the continuing acceptances of godfatherhoods during the stadholderless periods show, other considerations than the link to the stadholders' families played a part. Quite a few of the States' princely coparents, such as the counts of East Frisia, the counts of Bentheim, and the electors of Brandenburg (who ruled Cleves and Berg), were neighbours, whose good affection was valuable if only because their states acted as the Republic's

[23] William Melvill to William Davison, 19 June 1577, TNA, SP 70/145, fo. 138; Pietro Bizzari to Sir Francis Walsingham, 5 Mar. 1582, TNA, SP 83/18, fo. 44.

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proxies or buffers in the Holy Roman Empire. Besides pragmatic reasons, good-neighbourliness was certainly part of the ethos and language of the States' corporate godparenthood.[24]

The value and desirability of familial relations with German princes should also be seen in the context of their critical role as suppliers of officers and soldiers to the States army. Importantly, all Generality pensions given to foreign, princely godchildren were paid from the so-called 'states of war', in other words, the military budgets of the provinces.[25] This alone signals the purpose they were thought to serve: the payments were meant to aid the Republic's war effort and increase its international security by consolidating or strengthening existing alliances by direct military advantages. When William III of Orange invaded England in 1688, the broad alliance of German princes guarding the Republic's back in the Lower Rhine region consisted wholly of coparents of the States (Brandenburg, Braunschweig-Lüneburg, Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel, and Hesse-Kassel). Coparenthood and military co-operation were clearly correlated, and were exponents of an economy of affection and trust that was seen, talked about, and organized in familial ways. Especially in the later period, the princes of the empire became not only vital allies but also regular suppliers of troops and commanders to the States army.

Military relations were also crucial for a second group of coparents, which consisted of high-ranking foreign officers in the States army, such as Charles de Liévin and Horace de Vere. While the States decided in 1618 that they would no longer accept coparenthood of military officers of the rank of colonel or below (in order 'not to burden the country with such unnecessary costs'), generals such as the Frondeur Henri Charles de la Trémoille were evidently deemed worthy enough.[26] Foreignness was essential to this group because the States' godparenthood here served to strengthen the bond between the state and officers who were not their subjects. Only in one case did the States accept the coparenthood of a Dutch-born officer: Field Marshal Joan Wolfert van Brederode. Brederode's lordship over Vianen, however, rendered him technically sovereign and even a prince of the Holy Roman Empire. As a member of the high nobility, Brederode was an invaluable ally of Grand Pensionary John de Witt, moreover, meaning that his loyalty to De Witt's stadholderless regime had to be cemented and communicated at all costs.[27]

The final category of coparents of the States General consisted of diplomats. Eight times in the first half of the seventeenth century, the States General stood godfather over the children of either foreign diplomats in The Hague or Dutch representatives abroad. The first foreign envoy to be honoured with the States General's coparenthood was Sir Ralph Winwood, who, as the representative of the Republic's protector-king and coparent James VI/I, was a pivotal figure in Dutch international relations in the early seventeenth century. Benjamin du Maurier, the representative of that other vital relation, France, invited the States to stand godfather over

[24]See e.g. RSG, I.xii, pp. 129–31; and appendix 3 (https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X25000019).

[25]Most pensions mentioned in the appendix can be found in the digitized 'states of war' published by the Brabant Historisch Informatie Centrum, https://www.bhic.nl/onderzoeken/staten-van-oorlog.

[26]RSG, II.iii, 546 (5 Nov. 1618).

[27]Herbert Rowen, *John de Witt: grand pensionary of Holland* (Princeton, NJ, 1978), pp. 350–5.

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his daughter in 1614, along with Louise de Coligny, in whose honour the States named the child. When the French representative Nicolas de Baugy 'discretely' invited the States for the baptism of his son in 1634, they explicitly noted that it was impossible to reject ('condescend') the offer, given the ambassador's 'good qualities' and his 'notable service' to the 'common cause'.[28] The motivation to accept Baugy's invitation might be an indication of why, after the mid-seventeenth century, the States ceased to accept ambassadorial godparenthoods; in the era of John de Witt, with its flexible and interest-based system of alliances, the 'common cause' with foreign ambassadors was perhaps more difficult to define.

An important aspect of coparent relationships was the power asymmetry that almost always existed between the natural parents and the godparents. When they were the solicited party, the States General could often be regarded as the patrons or protectors of the natural parents, as was the case with most German princes. With royal coparents or, from the mid-seventeenth century onwards, the electoral house of Brandenburg, the situation was reversed. The pregnancy of the most important Protestant princesses and queens produced much diplomatic gossip and lobbying to procure the invitation to stand godfather over the expected child.[29] On such occasions, the States General or their ambassadors abroad also actively solicited godfatherhood, as they always did with the princes of Orange. Such offers were clearly meant as a mark of great esteem, which was reserved for the most important relations. The reputational risk inherent to such offers (as they might be declined) seems to have been mitigated: at least in Brandenburg in 1688, the States only made the formal offer once they knew that it would be accepted.

While they were keen to patronize 'illustrious persons', the States would not accept all invitations to stand godfather. Although the reasons for rejections were not spelled out in the resolutions, two may be inferred. First, they clearly regarded godfatherhood as a mark of friendship and nothing else. When, in 1602, the count of East Frisia invited them as a conciliatory gesture in an ongoing conflict, he was sternly rebuked: affectionate relations were a precondition, not a result of, baptismal sponsorship.[30] The status of the coparents was also a factor in the decision whether or not to accept an invitation. Although power asymmetries were never an issue, the States clearly expected the prospect of a reciprocal relationship. During the Thirty Years' War, various destitute Protestant princes in the empire begging for the States' kinship and support were snubbed. Thus the prince of Anhalt had to repeat his invitation various times in 1648 and 1649 before the States 'courteously excused' themselves; when the prince of Landsberg issued a similar invitation, the States did not even deign to answer him (negatively) before the child in question was already 'several years old'. Arguing that the baptism gift was necessary to rebuild countries 'devastated by war' in these cases did not persuade the States: godfatherhood was an indication of partnership, not of pity.[31]

[28]NA 1.01.02, inv. 3193 (11 Sept. 1634).

[29]E.g. NA 1.01.02, inv. 4588 (1 Oct. 1680).

[30]RSG, I.xii, pp. 129–31 (1, 13, 27 Aug. 1602).

[31]RSH, 29 Apr. 1649; 21 July 1649; 26 Nov. 1649. See also Landgravine of Hesse to States General, 28 Feb. 1629 (attached to RSG (1626–30), 24 Apr. 1629).

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The death of a child normally ended the familial bond between the natural parents and the coparents. As long as a godchild lived, the States would not become coparents with the same natural parents twice (in 1655, Amsterdam could stand godfather over a Brandenburg prince, because the States General were already godparents of his elder brother). The premature death of a child, however, did occasion several 'repeats': the natural parents sought to restore the broken coparent relationship by inviting the States to witness the baptism of another child. The prince and princess of Prussia in the eighteenth century even invited the States for a third time after their first two children had died in infancy. The States accepted all invitations, and presented every child with exactly the same, hugely valuable gifts that signalled the importance of the Brandenburg relation.[32] Their persistence was rewarded: the third child would grow into Frederick II ('the Great') of Prussia, no doubt the most prominent and powerful godchild the States ever had.

III

Having established the origin of the practice of the States' corporate godparenthood and who their coparents were, it is time to address the practices that gave shape and meaning to corporate godparenthood. Functioning in an economy of honour, affection, and obligation, godparenthood is best understood as a specific form of patronage: it entailed a system of mutual allegiance, dependencies, and benefits that was not contractual or spelled out, but which was nevertheless felt and understood by those involved. Like all softer aspects of international relations, its effects were seldom direct or measurable, but its forms and rituals allowed the expression and negotiation of moral relationships, which benefited both the States and their coparents in various ways. This section will address how the baptism ceremony proper was a site of political and religious meaning.

One very concrete reason for the States to be interested in standing godfather was the occasion to present and assert themselves ceremonially and socially in princely society. Baptism ceremonies were public occasions, often including lavish fireworks and ballets, in which local communities and a broad regional and international elite participated. Various princely baptisms, particularly those involving firstborn sons, were also widely published in printed pamphlets.[33] Especially in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, when the Republic was a newcomer on the European stage, this was valuable publicity. While the legitimacy and sovereignty of the Republic were never an explicit concern, both the resolutions and diplomatic correspondences on baptisms show that the ceremony and the attending feasts presented an occasion to assert the state's position in the European hierarchy, to enhance its reputation, and for its individual representatives to interact socially with the family of the child and the other princes and dignitaries alike.

Baptisms, importantly, also allowed the States General to insert their republican symbols into princely spaces. During ritual processions and receptions, the

[32] Appendix 1, nos. 76, 77, 82.

[33] Halvorson, 'Theology', pp. 330–78; Andrea I. I. Thomsett, 'Festival representation beyond words: the Stuttgart baptism of 1616' (Ph.D. thesis, Vancouver, 1990); Rick Bowers, 'James VI, Prince Henry, and "A true reportarie" of baptism at Stirling 1594', *Renaissance and Reformation*, 29, no. 4 (2005), pp. 3–22.

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Republic's coat of arms and its motto (*Parvae crescunt concordia res*) were prominently displayed on banners and shields. At the baptism of Henry Stuart, crown prince of Scotland, the novelty of the States' participation in the ceremony occasioned a mistake. The Scottish masters of ceremony had put up the arms of the province of Holland, rather than those of the Generality. The States' ambassadors had them removed and rushed in a painter and carpenter to make the proper shields of the six united provinces under which they sat during the public celebration.[34] Both the act and the fact that the ambassadors reported the incident extensively in their report indicate the sensitivity of the matter and the importance of acquainting the princely audience with the proper symbolic trappings of the new state.

The feasts that almost always attended princely baptisms were important for other reasons too. At grand dinners the States' representatives could mingle in a relatively convivial atmosphere with princely society, which early modern diplomats saw as an ideal opportunity to do diplomatic business.[35] A fixed feature of such feasts, and frequently reported by the States' representatives, was the toast. Especially in the Holy Roman Empire, such toasts could be elaborate affairs, involving not only the health of the baby and the mother but also the success and honour of the godparents. The Dutch representative at the baptism of Juliana von Hesse-Kassel was pleased to report that the toast for the States' health and prosperity had been drunk twice, and with 'more honour than any of the other godfathers', since all princes had been standing.[36]

In the early seventeenth century, the States and their representatives were clearly proud of being invited into the familial sphere of princes and of their prominent place in baptism ceremonies. The first Dutch representative in the Holy Roman Empire, Pieter Cornelisz Brederode, in particular sent extensive reports reflecting on how baptism ceremonies affected and reflected the States' reputation. In Hesse, in 1608, he wrote about the 'marvel' of the extraordinary honour the landgrave bestowed on the Dutch.[37] In Ansbach, some years later, he described being greeted outside the town by the prince himself, who had travelled towards him with a large following (in itself a mark of esteem) to tell him that he had given a place of honour to the States General at the ceremony for three reasons, which Brederode took care to repeat word for word to his masters. For Ansbach (and the agent could not but agree), the establishment of the Reformed religion (the 'well-reformed' state), military success (seen as evidence of God's support), and the necessity to collaborate and seek each other's protection in a time of danger were all powerful reasons to seek and celebrate the States' kinship.[38] For the Republic, at this moment, the fact that these high-born rulers would seek *their* protection and support was extremely gratifying, and boosted its reputation in Germany. Brederode was pleased to report that, as in Zweibrücken before, he had procured public precedence over the many princes present at the ceremony.

[34]RSH, 1593–4, pp. 684–5.

[35]In 1601 the States explicitly ordered their representatives to seize the occasion of the baptism ceremony 'to further this land's business'. RSG, I.xi, p. 515.

[36]Pieter Cornelisz Brederode to States General, 24 Nov. 1608, NA 1.01.02, inv. 6016.

[37]Ibid.

[38]Brederode to States General, 10 June 1616, NA 1.01.02, inv. 6017.

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The occasion to claim a prominent position in the princely hierarchy was an aspect of baptism ceremonies to which both the state and its individual representatives were acutely sensitive. Perhaps surprisingly, the issue of precedence does not seem to have caused major diplomatic incidents. Partly this was the case because the international hierarchy was highly formalized and, after the meteoric rise of the Republic in the early seventeenth century, fairly static: from the 1630s onwards, the States always claimed precedence over all others but royal representatives. An important exception, which undoubtedly prevented many potential clashes, was made to the next of kin of the child, since German custom dictated that parents and grandparents always came first in baptism rituals. Another mitigating factor in the international context was the fact that issues of rank were settled well before the actual ceremony: the States always made their godfatherhood conditional upon their rank. Finally, matters were doubtless simplified by the fact that most of the coparents were clients of the Republic and not in a position to refuse.

Not all ceremonies, evidently, entailed an equal involvement on the part of the States. There were quite a few occasions of second-rank houses where the States routinely allowed themselves to be represented by a foreign courtier and did not show a particular interest in how the ceremony played out. In general, the closer to home, or the more prestigious the coparents, the stronger the States' engagement with the actual ceremony was. To the various baptisms of the neighbouring principality of East Frisia, the States usually sent two deputies from their own midst, from Friesland and Groningen, the provinces most affected by East Frisian affairs.[39] For prestigious royal and electoral ceremonies, the selection of representatives was a more delicate issue. When the States in 1614 accepted the godfatherhood of the first son of Elizabeth Stuart and Frederick V (who had, reportedly, been conceived on Dutch soil), they sent the boy's biological kin, the stadholder's brother Frederick Henry, to represent them.[40] Such high-profile ceremonies could also engender fierce rivalry. In 1648, Holland threatened not to pay its due if its representatives could not attend the ceremony for the newborn prince of Brandenburg instead of the States General's representatives.[41]

Baptism ceremonies were, of course, primarily religious events, initiating the child into the confessional community. The main Christian churches (Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed) were surprisingly lenient towards the baptism rites of other confessions (the Council of Trent even allowed baptism to be administered by Jews and heretics in case of an emergency), and evangelical German princes frequently used the liturgical freedom to accommodate a cross-confessional (Lutheran–Calvinist) audience.[42] Yet the attending choice of godparents did, of course, remain deeply affected by confessional concerns. It was unthinkable that

[39]E.g. NA 1.01.02, inv. 3192 (3 Jan. 1633).

[40]RSG, II.ii, p. 200 (9 Feb. 1614).

[41]Irena Kosmanová, 'Ideologische Intervention in der Frühen Neuzeit: Beispiel der Republik der Vereinigten Niederlande und der Landstände von Kleve-Mark in den 1640er und 1650er Jahren' (Ph.D. thesis, Charles University in Prague, 2015), pp. 75–89.

[42]Halvorson, 'Theology', p. 361.

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the States General, being the main Reformed power in Europe, would stand godfather over Catholic children, while the chance that they were invited to Reformed princely baptisms was substantial in the absence of much high-ranking competition. Throughout the period, however, they regularly accepted and even solicited invitations to stand godfather over Lutheran children. As long as the baptism was performed by a Reformed minister 'or to the order of the Augsburg confession', godparenthood was an option.[43] The reasons for this rather surprising flexibility were partly theological, but mainly political. Especially in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, baptism ceremonies functioned to communicate the familial unity of international Protestantism, which was a major reason for various coparents to invite the States.

This was most explicitly the case in one of the first and most prestigious ceremonies to which the States were ever invited: the baptism in 1594 of Prince Henry of Scotland, the firstborn son of King James VI of Scotland. Indeed, James unequivocally invited the States to stand godfather in order show the world 'his sincere mind' in the matter of religion, and to encourage 'the unity and community' of the Protestant states in Europe.[44] Other coparents in this event, besides the head of the Anglican Church, Queen Elizabeth I of England, were the Lutheran king of Denmark and the Lutheran dukes of Braunschweig and Mecklenburg.[45] Publicity was an essential element: princely baptisms not only consecrated the introduction of a child into the attending community of princes but also communicated the familial unity of that community to the outside world.[46] In the case of Prince Henry, who was to remain the paragon of the Calvinist prince throughout his short life, this was extremely valuable publicity to the States, as it legitimated their brand-new position in the society of princes, and labelled them as prominent Calvinist kin to the king of Scotland.

Communicating confessional unity remained a recurring and prominent theme in the States' godparenthoods. On the eve of the Thirty Years' War, in the 1610s, the States accepted a whole string of godfatherhoods that told the outside world of the familial bond that existed between the German princes of the Protestant Union (with whom the States negotiated an alliance in 1613) and the Dutch Republic.[47] As the confessional peace in Europe was extremely tense and fragile throughout the decade, and the Dutch truce with Spain was expected to end at the latest in 1621, it was more important than ever to celebrate and communicate Protestant familial unity. The prince of Ansbach, as we have seen above, emphasized this at the baptism ceremony for his son, in 1616, and the message was also central to the much-publicized Wurttemberg baptism in the same year.[48]

In one case, the States' godfatherhood functioned as a direct intervention and a message of solidarity in a brutal ongoing confessional conflict. In the 1660s, the audacious countess of Bentheim, Geertruida van Zelst, found herself involved in

[43]RSH, 1613–19, p. 78.

[44]RSH, 1593–4, p. 681.

[45]*A true reportarie of the … baptisme of the most excellent, right high, and mightie prince, Frederik Henry* ([Edinburgh], 1594).

[46]Bowers, 'James VI'.

[47]Appendix 1, nos. 10–13, 15–18, 21–3.

[48]Thomsett, 'Festival representation'.

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huge difficulties with the bishop of Münster, Christoph von Galen, whose protection she had sought in a family dispute with her in-laws, and who was the godfather of her first son. The bishop subsequently sought to convert her family to Catholicism; when they refused, Galen invaded Protestant Bentheim and abducted the count. Having already sent her first two sons to safety in the Dutch Republic, Geertruida and her third, newborn son managed to escape captivity and fled to the Republic, where she obtained John de Witt's ear and the States' support.[49] To shield her family, the countess invited the States to stand godfather and take on the education of all three sons. For the States, maintaining Protestantism in neighbouring Bentheim was of vital interest, and godparenthood was a way to support the countess and assert their intentions vis-à-vis the bishop. In vain the bishop demanded that they 'renounce the tutelage' of 'the count's underage son'.[50] When Geertruida died, the States appointed guardians over her sons, raised and educated them, and asserted their claim diplomatically.[51] Although Bentheim would remain contested territory for some time, the next generation was at least saved for their cause: the brothers remained of the Reformed religion, while one of them, Statius, grew up to become an officer in the States army, achieving the rank of cavalry general in the 1720s.[52] The States' support having secured Steinfurt for the Protestant branch, the new count of Bentheim-Steinfurt, Statius's elder brother Ernst, named his firstborn son Friedrich Belgicus in their honour. What may have seemed like an opportunistic alliance in a contest of political godfathers in 1668, then, turned out to be a long-lasting confessional bond between the house of Bentheim and the Dutch Republic.

IV

The section above focused on how the States' godparenthood and its public participation in baptism ceremonies allowed it to manifest itself in the society of princes and to communicate its relations to the outside world. This public, communicative, and ephemeral side of godparenthood was deeply intertwined with the practices that gave permanence and meaning to the more intimate familial bond that was formed with the coparents and the godchild. This section analyses the cultivation of this bond, the shaping of a shared identity, and an ethos of mutual care and obligation. Through naming and gift-giving practices, the political allies sought to give substance to their kin relationship by engaging in a system of moral reciprocities. Although results were not guaranteed, and some kin relations

[49]Gisbert Strotdrees, *Es gab nicht nur die Droste. Sechzig Lebensbilder westfälischer Frauen* (Münster, 1992), pp. 33–4; Dagmar Feist, *Glaube – Liebe – Zwietracht. Religiös-konfessionell gemischte Ehen in der frühen Neuzeit* (Berlin, 2017), pp. 400–3; Esther van Tol, 'De gravin van Bentheim' ('The countess of bentheim'), in Ineke Huysman and Roosje Peters, eds., *Johan de Witt en het Rampjaar. Een bloemlezing uit zijn correspondentie* (*Johan de Witt and the year of disaster: an anthology of his correspondence*) (Soest, 2022), pp. 67–72.

[50]NA 1.01.02, inv. 4827 (16 Oct. 1668) and inv. 3241 (1 May 1671).

[51]NA 1.01.02, inv. 3303 (19 Apr. 1681), inv. 4591 (17 Dec. 1686), and inv. 4594 (12 and 24 Oct. 1689). It was not unheard of for the States to act as legal guardian, with the explicit consent of the remaining living parent (in this case, the count). In East Frisia, the States assumed guardianship (*voormundschap*) over the two daughters of Justina Sophia von Ostfriesland in 1663, after her husband had died young: see NA 1.01.02, inv. 3290 (8 Oct. 1674).

[52]W. F. Visch, *Geschiedenis van het graafschap Bentheim* (*The history of the county of Bentheim*) (Zeehuisen, 1820), pp. 208–9.

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remained little more than ephemeral courtesies, I will show that, in many cases, their effort was remarkably successful.

The most visible sign of godparenthood, and a potentially enduring mark of political identity, was a child's name. Throughout early modern Europe, naming was traditionally the godparent's prerogative, and many of those who invited the States General to stand godfather also offered them the opportunity to choose their child's name.[53] To understand the States' godparenthood, it is instructive to closely investigate this practice. In a society that accorded deep meaning to the names of objects and people, naming practices were hugely significant, both in the power dimension that was clearly inherent to them, and in the meanings and associations of the names that were given.[54] Proper names marked the place of individuals in early modern society, 'allotting positions in a system admitting of several dimensions'.[55] In the context of dynastic politics, they were a highly politicized means to conflate the child's familial and political identities, and to imprint upon that child, almost literally, their commitment and loyalty to their godparents. Moreover, throughout their lives, children named after the Dutch Republic or the States General served to advertise the power of the Dutch state and to heighten its reputation abroad, especially when a princely bearer of the name came of age and used it on official documents.

Whether and how the States would name their godchildren involved delicate negotiation, which depended on both domestic and international power dynamics. Occasionally this was literally a diplomatic negotiation. In Scotland, for example, the name of the prince was determined in a special meeting of all foreign envoys and King James. After ruling out the name of Charles (in view of the fact that the French King Charles IX had presided over the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre in 1572), the assembly unanimously settled on the chiastic name of Henry Frederick, Frederick Henry, underscoring the concord of the coparents.[56] Mostly, however, the issue was whether the States General would attain or assert its prerogative to name a child, and what that name would be. On both scores, the rank of the coparents was clearly the determinant factor. Lower-ranking officials, such as ambassadors, would without exception offer the States the first choice of name. Foreign princes who were not employed by the state did not normally defer to the States in the naming of their child. When they did, it either signified their submission to the States' patronage or bestowed a particular honour upon the States. In the latter cases, the States occasionally waived their privilege.

By naming a child, the States sometimes signalled their submission or respect to a third party. Thus, in the early seventeenth century, they named the son of the English ambassador after his master, their coparent King James I/VI of England

[53]Christof Rolker, 'Patenschaft und Namengebung im späten Mittelalter', in Christof Rolker and Gabriela Signori, eds., *Konkurrierende Zugehörigkeit(en). Spätmittelalterliche Praktiken der Namengebung im europäischen Vergleich* (Konstanz, 2011), pp. 17–37.

[54]For a sociological reading of the cultural significance of given names, see Stanley Lieberson, *A matter of taste: how names, fashions, and culture change* (New Haven, CT, 2000). On early modern naming practices, see e.g. Marjorie Elizabeth Plummer and Joel F. Harrington, eds., *Names and naming in early modern Germany* (New York, NY, 2019); Coster, *Baptism*, pp. 167–93.

[55]Claude Levi-Strauss, *The savage mind* (London, 1966), p. 187, cited in Coster, *Baptism*, p. 167.

[56]RSH, 1594, p. 683.

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and Scotland.[57] In the 1630s, when relations between the States and the house of Orange were particularly good, the States twice seized the opportunity to honour the stadholder, Frederick Henry, and his wife, Amalia van Solms. The son of the French ambassador Nicolas de Baugy was named Frederick explicitly for this reason.[58] In the case of Frederick Jan van Euskercken, the short-lived son of the States' acting ambassador in Paris, the States decided to name the child after the president of their assembly on the day the decision was taken, the Frisian nobleman Frederick Schwartzenberg. Yet the reference to the stadholder was clearly not incidental, as Euskercken's daughter, mentioned in the introduction above, was named Amalia only a year later.[59]

In most cases, however, the States were not so kind, preferring to aggrandize themselves. As a result, various elite children in Europe had rather quaint first or second names, for how to name a child after a republic? Following the custom set by Orange and Bourbon, whose first daughter, as we have seen, was named Catharina Belgica in 1578, the States mostly settled on Belgica/Belgicus, and occasionally on Batavus (no female instances have been found). The most remarkable example occurred in the mid-seventeenth century. When the States suggested to the Danish extraordinary ambassador Corfitz Ulfeldt that he might call their godson Belgicus, Ulfeldt had a fortuitous idea that may seem whimsical to modern eyes, but was in fact a profoundly serious tribute: he named the boy Leo Belgicus, simultaneously referring to the Dutch Republic's ubiquitous symbol of the Belgic lion and to the boy's mother, Leonora.[60] Equally eccentric was the name the States conferred upon the second son of the countess of Bentheim: Statius, a name emphasizing the boy's relationship with them as an assembly, rather than with the Dutch state.[61] This may have seemed appropriate because, as we have seen, the States in this case became not only godparents but also legal guardians of the child. Subsequent generations of the Bentheim family, however, would revert to convention: at least two Protestant counts of Bentheim received the proper name of Belgicus.[62]

If a name bound a child and its family to its godparents, so did gifts. Throughout early modern Europe, birth gifts formed an important part of baptism ceremonies, playing an essential role in forging the bond between godparents and child. Functioning in what Sahlins called a 'spectrum of reciprocities', the godparents' birth gift represented a tangible and measurable 'mark of affect, the demonstration of fidelity, and the public expression of honour in a system which privileged personal relationships above all others'.[63] George Sanders, who has specifically researched the States General's diplomatic gifts, is less alert to the complex economy of affection and obligation inherent to early modern gift culture, perhaps because he excluded

[57] Appendix 1, no. 8.

[58] NA 1.01.02, inv. 3193 (11 Sept. 1634).

[59] NA 1.01.02, inv. 3194 (9 June 1635).

[60] Appendix 1, no. 40.

[61] Appendix 1, no. 55.

[62] Appendix 1, no. 74; appendix 2, no. 13.

[63] M. D. Sahlins, *On the sociology of primitive exchange*, ed. M. Banton (London, 1965), p. 145; Felicity Heal, *The power of gifts: gift exchange in early modern England* (Oxford, 2014), p. 88.

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birth gifts from his analysis.[64] Yet especially at the diplomatic level, birth gifts (*pil-legaven* in early modern Dutch) were part of a ritualized and very public series of political exchanges, and extremely important in shaping family relationships.[65]

Typically, the States' baptism gifts consisted of three parts. The first was a gift of gold, or gilded silverware, usually a basin and ewer, but in some cases also elaborate jewels for the mother, or simply gold coins. The second part consisted of gifts 'for the bedchamber'. These included gifts for those in the household involved in caring for the baby and the mother: ladies of the bedchamber, nurses, and cooks, but also musicians and other staff present during the public presentation of the child. This part would also contain a monetary gift to the poor in the church on the occasion of the actual baptism. The final part, and the most far-reaching financial commitment on the part of the States, was the pension letter that was bestowed on the children of the most deserving or high-ranking coparents, and which was frequently presented in a specially crafted golden box. This, obviously, was the part that was most coveted and treasured by aspiring spiritual kin.

The value of the gift depended on the rank of the coparents. The costs of gold and silverware typically ranged between 1,000 and 12,000 guilders; and pensions from 250 to 10,000 guilders per annum. These were significant sums, even for princely households. Since gift-giving constituted a prominent and public part of the baptism ceremony, it offered the opportunity to communicate to the outside world the *richesse* and magnanimity of the Dutch state and the value it attached to a given sponsorship relation. Especially the latter aspect rendered the choice of baptism gifts a highly sensitive procedure. Onlookers might deduce political messages from it, be impressed in the case of an exceptionally rich gift, underwhelmed by a mean one, or offended when the gift's value exceeded what they themselves had been given previously. When, in 1594, the States' representatives presented three golden cups with the dazzling value of 12,000 guilders as their baptism gift to Prince Henry of Scotland, they were publicly snubbed by the envoys of German princes, who assumed that the cups were merely gilded. It must have given tremendous satisfaction to the ambassadors to be able first to riposte that the cups were in fact 'pure gold' (*aurum purum*), and then to produce the pension letter bestowing a staggering 5,000 guilders per annum on the young prince.[66]

Although detailed descriptions are rare, and I have been unable to find surviving gifts in modern collections, the available sources suggest that they normally contained symbolic decorations emphasizing the grandeur of the Dutch state and its friendly relations with the coparental dynasty.[67] Thus instructions issued to the agent in Germany specify that the golden cups to be given to Prince Henry of the Palatinate, in 1614, should contain the coat of arms of the States General on the

[64]George Sanders, *Het present van staat. De gouden ketens, kettingen en medailles verleend door de Staten-Generaal, 1588–1795* (*The gift of state: the golden chains, necklaces and medals given by the States General, 1588–1795*) (Hilversum, 2013).

[65]Maija Jansson, 'Measured reciprocity: English ambassadorial gift exchange in the 17th and 18th centuries', *Journal of Early Modern History*, 9 (2005), pp. 348–70.

[66]Pieter Bor, *Oorsprongk, begin ende vervolgh der Nederlandsche oorloghen* (*The origin, beginning and continuation of the Dutch wars*) (4 vols., Amsterdam, 1681), III, p. 837.

[67]I thank Dr Martina Minning (Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum) and Dr Verena Wasmuth (Stiftung Preußische Schlösser) for their help in seeking to locate remaining gifts.

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inside and that of the Palatinate on the outside, suggesting that the Palatinate contained a Dutch spirit, which the prince could drink in.[68] Pension boxes, too, were richly decorated with symbols; at least one example contained the coat of arms of the States on the outside, while being lined with orange satin referring to the stadholderly dynasty on the inside.[69] When Amsterdam bestowed the remarkable pension of a cannon per year to the newborn prince of Brandenburg at his baptism in 1655, the martial gift itself symbolized the military alliance which the godparent relation prepared. Moreover, the first of the cannons was decorated with a silver portrait of the prince and the city arms.[70] Similarly, the rare surviving golden cup given by the States General to its military commander Frederick van Grovestins in 1709 prominently displayed the coat of arms of the Generality (Figure 1). Pension letters, too, carried the most important republican symbol of state, the Leo Belgicus carrying a bundle of arrows, as they were sealed with the States General's great seal (Figure 2).

Because of the sensitive nature of gifts, and the danger of insulting those in the princely audience, the States in the seventeenth century developed a remarkably constant protocol that would remain in place throughout the period. The decision on the gift was always taken after consulting the archive to find what had been given in 'similar cases', meaning those of equal rank. The richest gifts were given to royal and electoral godchildren and the Nassau family; a second tier was formed by the dukes and counts of the empire; the lowest-value gifts went to officers and ambassadors. Of course, exceptions were occasionally made. The son of the Danish ambassador Ulfeldt, for example, received a pension that was much higher than customary for ambassadors, which probably indicates that the gift was at least partly rewarding Ulfeldt for his role in the successful negotiations on the Sound tolls he was conducting at the moment of the baptism of his son.[71]

The granting of pensions, particularly, was a delicate issue, which could easily lead to jealousies and conflicts, as German princes kept a close eye on who received them. Emilia Antwerpiana, countess of Landsberg, complained in 1629 that her son Friedrich Ludwig had not been given a pension, which had been given to other princes.[72] She claimed that the States' agent Brederode had promised her as much when he had attended the ceremony. The States investigated the matter, but found that Brederode had only expressed the hope that the omission of a pension might in 'some or another way, with God's help, be remedied'.[73] This was not enough to sway them. Betting on the States' short memory, the countess tried again following the death of Heinrich Ludwig von Hanau-Münzenberg in 1632, requesting the transfer of the pension from Hanau to Landsberg, but to no avail. It was only on the third try, in 1639, that her son did finally obtain the desired pension.[74]

[68]RSG, II.ii, 200 (9 Feb. 1614). For similar instructions, see e.g. Appendix 1, nos. 31 and 33.

[69]Brederode to States General, 5 Feb. 1619, NA 1.01.02, inv. 6019.

[70]J. F. L. de Balbian Verster, 'Amsterdam en de groote keurvorst' ('Amsterdam and the great elector'), *Jaarboek Amstelodamum*, 16 (1918), pp. 115–68, at p. 149.

[71]Appendix 1, no. 40.

[72]RSG, 1626–30, 27 Apr. 1629.

[73]Brederode to States General, 20 Dec. 1619, NA 1.01.02, inv. 6019.

[74]NA 1.01.02, inv. 3191 (30 Nov. and 4 Dec. 1632) and inv. 3245 (24 Feb. 1639).

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Figure 1. Golden cup (1,287 grams) with the coat of arms of the States General of the United Provinces, given to General-Major Grovestin. 38.0 cm (height) × 10.9 cm (diameter). Made by Willem van Baatenburg, 1709. Private collection. Source: reproduced with permission from George Sanders, *Het geschenk van staat* (*The gift of state*) (Hilversum, 2013), p. 108.

When the death of a child occurred before the presentation of the baptism gifts, as it frequently did, awkward situations could arise for the dignitaries entrusted with them. The States, however, always conformed to the same principle: pensions were bound to the person of the godchild, but honour and courtesy required that any gold or silverware which they had resolved to give would be given regardless of whether the godchild survived or not. When the infant electoral prince Frederick August of Brandenburg died in January 1686, a week before reaching his fourth month, the Dutch envoy Johan Ham asked for instructions on what to do with the States' presents, which had just been delivered to Berlin. He was ordered to present them 'as if the same hereditary prince were still alive' and only afterwards assume mourning in the manner of the other ambassadors.[75] Sometime after the childhood death of Maurice Christian von Pfalz-Simmern, the Palatinate envoy Hippolyt von

[75]NA 1.01.02, inv. 3313 (9 Feb. 1686).

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De Staten Generael der Vereenichde Nederlanden

Figure 2. Pension letter of the States General bestowed on William Henry, electoral prince of Brandenburg, with the great seal of the United Provinces, 1648. For a transcription and translation of the letter, see appendix 3. Source: Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, BPH Urkunden IV, no. 134.

Colli appeared before the States General to return both the pension letter and the golden box in which it had been given. He was thanked for the letter, but told that the States would not accept the return of the box. Since the elector had ordered it to

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be returned, however, Colli insisted, whereupon the States donated it to the envoy himself to solve the conundrum.[76]

Voluntary as they may have been, spiritual kinship relations had real and occasionally far-reaching consequences. At the very least, godparenthood was seen as an indication of favour, and signalled the intention on the part of both coparents to create a long-standing relationship of mutual obligation.[77] In surprisingly many cases of the States' godfatherhoods, such a relationship did in fact materialize. Various natural parents maintained long-standing correspondences with the States, informing them of important life events, as one would with family. The former French ambassador to the Dutch Republic, Benjamin du Maurier, for example, had long been recalled when he still found it important to inform the States that their twenty-year-old godchild, Louise Belgica, had been married to a 'gentleman of quality'.[78] Various German dynasties who struck up kinship ties with the States remained allies and spiritual kin for several generations, if not throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[79] While some may have wavered in their affections, not a single princely coparent ever waged war on the Dutch Republic.

Nor was the choice of godparenthood completely symbolic or ephemeral: the forging of the familial bond entailed a responsibility to care for the well-being of a child, and thus a lifelong attachment. As the bishop of Aberdeen reminded the ambassadors in Stirling at the baptism ceremony for Prince Henry in 1594, Protestant baptismal sponsorship came with the promise to help raise and educate the child in the Reformed religion.[80] The States, of course, were well aware of such obligations. Indeed, they rejected some invitations 'in view of the consequences', while, in the case of Maurice de Coligny, son of their military commander the duc de Châtillon, they only accepted to stand godfather 'without responsibility (*prejuditie*) and consequence', signalling that such responsibilities were normally part of the deal.[81]

It was because of this responsibility that the States acted as executor of the wills of some of their godchildren, such as the prince of East Friesland, or as legal guardians of others, such as the princes of Bentheim. In 1653, the States General cited its godparenthood as a reason to take responsibility for the orphaned prince of Orange's future prospects and to 'designate' him as captain general.[82] Due to Holland's resistance, this proposal was blocked, but the discourse of parenthood would continue to affect the relationship between the prince and the States in the decades to come. When Holland sought to exclude the prince from power, in 1654, Friesland chided it for neglecting its role as godfather in a widely disseminated pamphlet.[83] Despite all the high-level party strife attending William's education in the 1660s, it was the

[76]RSG, I.ii, p. 503 (28 Nov. 1608).

[77]E.g. Melvill to Davison, 19 June 1577, TNA, SP 70/145, fo. 138.

[78]Benjamin du Maurier to States General, 24 Dec. 1634, NA 1.01.02, inv. 6764.

[79]For examples of godchildren becoming coparents themselves, see e.g. Appendix 1, nos. 38, 43, 72.

[80]RSH, 1594, p. 684.

[81]RSG, 20 Nov. 1626, NA 1.01.02, inv. 3177 (5 Nov. 1618).

[82]RSH, 1653, p. 534.

[83]Lieuwe van Aitzema, *Saken van staet en oorlogh* (*Matters of state and war*) (6 vols., The Hague, 1669), III, pp. 981–2.

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States' godparenthood that underpinned and legitimated their decision to declare him 'child of state' in 1666.[84]

Another long-standing commitment on the part of the States was the annuities they bestowed on many of their godchildren. The pensions were evidently a means to bind princely houses to the state, but they were also a matter of honour, and the States attached great importance to their actual payment. It was mostly practical issues (especially war) that prevented payment. Sometimes war depleted the States' resources, as in the case of the princess of Denmark in 1653; sometimes defaulting was directly related to warfare. In the case of the duc de Trémoille, these problems were exacerbated by the fact that the duke was a subject of the king of France, with whom the States were at war: in this case, not only did the pension divert funds from the actual war effort but paying it was a practical challenge. After the war, however, the States ensured that all debts were paid and resumed the annual instalments. One problem for the States in fulfilling their promise was that the pensions were divided among ('stood to the repartition of') the budgets of individual provinces.[85] While the province of Holland, which was responsible for most of the pensions, seems to have been a reliable payer, other provinces had more difficulties. More than once, the poor county of Drenthe had to be sternly reminded by the States General of arrear payments to foreign princes. In 1698, for instance, the States wrote that there was 'no excuse' for the four-year default on the elector of Brandenburg's pension, which 'hit the honour of the state in the heart'. When it came to paying up, then, they clearly strove to be reliable godparents, noting explicitly that 'default of payment' was to the 'disrespect of the state'.[86] Importantly, this reliability was unaffected by regime changes within the Republic, creating a sense of continuity in its international relationships regardless of internal turmoil.

On principle, only the death of a child broke the bond of obligation between godparents and natural parents, as well as the obligation to pay the annuity. Only in exceptional cases did the States deviate from this rule. This first happened in 1629, after the tragic death of the States' fifteen-year-old godchild Prince Henry Frederick of the Palatinate. The boy's parents, the king and queen of Bohemia, were of vital importance to the Protestant cause in Europe, and for the Republic's policy in the empire. Moreover, Henry was the grandson of the king of England, which made it even more important to be lenient. The States therefore approved the transfer of the pension they had granted in 1614 to Henry's younger brother Charles Louis (1617–80), stipulating that the Dutch ambassador in London should acquaint the king of their decision.[87] The States were careful not to make this extraordinary courtesy to the king and queen of Bohemia into a precedent, however. When the landgravine of Hesse later in the year asked for the transfer of her deceased daughter Juliana's annuity to herself, they respectfully declined, despite her long, pleading letter citing

[84]RSG, 12 Jan. 1651. On the education and guardianship of the States, see e.g. Rowen, *John de Witt*, pp. 513ff.

[85]See also NA. 1.01.02, inv. 3261 (6 Sept. 1655).

[86]NA 1.01.02, inv. 4604 (6 Jan. 1698). In similar terms, the States reprimanded the States of Groningen when they had defaulted on the pension of the prince of Hesse in 1619 and 1620.

[87]RSG, 1626–30, 20 Mar. 1629.

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the 'sad state' of the Reformed in Germany, and her 'suffering for her affection' to 'Their High Mightinesses' by the devastation of her lands in the Thirty Years' War. Even her expectation that she would probably not live much longer could not mollify the States.[88]

In contrast to other diplomatic gifts, there could be no economic reciprocation in the case of corporate godparent gifts. In this particular context, the States clearly expected reciprocation to be of moral rather than economic value: the gift created an obligation of future service, loyalty, or friendship towards the godparents.[89] Towards lower-ranking officials, they sometimes made this expectation explicit. When the States decided to stand godfather over the newborn son of the acting ambassador in Paris, they explicitly noted that this 'benefice' was meant to 'animate him all the more to the service of the state'.[90] In the case of the aforementioned French commander Châtillon, the States even asked a very concrete service in return for their godfatherhood.[91] It would have been improper to make such expectations explicit to princes, yet the obligation created by godparenthood and the baptism gifts were clearly understood and expressed in numerous letters of thanks. The count of East Frisia in a letter of thanks stated that the States General's godparenthood of his eldest son, Enno Ludwig (1632–60), 'greatly obliged him to the United Provinces', inspiring him always to render them 'good and agreeable services' and to 'raise the young lord in all gratitude and devotion to Your High and Mightinesses'.[92]

What this meant in practice, was partly dependent on gender. A general subservience and diplomatic services were expected of godchildren of both sexes. As Charlotte de Bourbon wrote to Queen Elizabeth I when the latter had accepted the godparenthood of her daughter in 1577, boys and girls were expected to serve their godparents and to 'recommend' them to 'all princes and princesses'.[93] Male godchildren, in addition, were destined for military service. The landgravine of Hesse, who 'prayed continuously for the prosperity of the Republic', assured the States that she would raise her children in gratitude to them and for their service.[94] Similarly, the count of Hanau, when inviting the States General to be the godfathers of his son Heinrich Ludwig, stipulated that he intended to raise the boy 'for the service of the States'.[95] Such assertions were extremely common, and they were not empty. Fulfilling both his father's promise and his duty to his godfathers, the Hanau child did indeed grow up to fight in the States army, and died doing so (at the tender age of twenty-three) in the siege of Maastricht in 1632. Similarly, Johann Ernst von Nassau-Siegen was granted an annuity upon his baptism in 1619, and died twenty years later in Dutch service in Brazil. While both princes may well have followed the

[88]Landgravine of Hesse to States General, 28 Feb. 1629 (in RSG, 1626–30, 24 Apr. 1629).

[89]For an example of the language in which such expectations were expressed, see Figure 2 and appendix 3.

[90]NA 1.01.02, inv. 3194 (9 June 1635).

[91]Appendix 1, no. 19. He was asked to appeal to the king of France (not in RSG, but see NA 1.01.02, inv. 3177, fo. 390).

[92]NA 1.01.02, inv. 3192 (10 Mar. 1633).

[93]Charlotte de Bourbon to Elizabeth I, 2 June 1577, TNA, SP 70/145, fo. 79.

[94]Landgravine of Hesse to States General, 28 Feb. 1629, RSG, 1626–30, 24 Apr. 1629.

[95]RSG I.xiv, p. 752 (5 June 1609).

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same trajectories without the States' godparenthood, it is still remarkable that the ritual promises at birth were actually carried out in most of the cases investigated.

The expectance of military service, like every obligation inherent to spiritual kinship, worked both ways. For some princes at least, the States' godparenthood implied entitlement to military positions in the States army. When Siegfried von Hohenlohe-Weikersheim (1619–84) offered the States his military services in 1662, he appealed to their godfatherly obligation to care for him.[96] Similarly, in 1701, Christina von Braunschweig-Lüneburg reminded the States of their obligations as godfather when she asked for a company for her son Ferdinand Christian to command.[97] While I have not been able to discover what happened to Hohenlohe's claim, the States General's commission books show that Ferdinand Christian did indeed obtain the desired position.[98] The mutual intention to prolong the existing military relationship by transferring both friendship and loyalty to the next generation apparently had considerable force.

V

The history of diplomacy has often used the term 'international relations' in abstract ways, pretending that relations are a timeless, natural given. Yet relations have to be continuously made, remade, and maintained, and the ways in which people do this are both historically and culturally inflected – also, or perhaps especially so, in the diplomatic realm. The new diplomatic history has in recent years stressed the importance of investigating the diplomatic practices and symbolic systems involved in making relationships. From this perspective, the Dutch Republic's corporate godfatherhood is extremely significant. The treatment of the republican state as a natural person, the metaphorical action of the state as godparent, illustrates the power and resilience of the familial, monarchical model of political and diplomatic relations, the relativity of the difference between monarchies and republics in the period, and the continuing dominance of personal conceptions of obligation, affection, and honour in early modern Europe in the face of political change.

In the eighteenth century, the culture of republican godparenthood persisted, but, as the Dutch Republic's centrality in international politics waned, its political importance gradually diminished. By 1732, the States had resolved not to accept any more foreign invitations to godfatherhood.[99] As a result, the institution lost the function as a tool of alliance-building that had been so prominent throughout the long seventeenth century. As appendix 1 shows, documented cases after this decision were limited to the house of Orange. From 1732 onwards, Protestant, republican spiritual kinship was therefore predominantly a national, rather than an international, affair. During the final revolutionary decades of the eighteenth century, even those ties were broken. In 1790, in a highly symbolic gesture, the last stadholder, William V, had the golden boxes in which the States General had presented their pension

[96]NA 1.01.02, inv. 3268 (10 June 1662).

[97]NA 1.01.02, inv. 3344 (24 Mar. 1701).

[98]NA 1.01.19, inv. 1539, fo. 71v (undated, but 1702–6).

[99]RSG, 1732, p. 463 (4 Aug. 1732).

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letter at his birth melted down for hard cash.[100] With the stadholderate, corporate godparenthood had become a relic of the past.

Throughout the preceding two centuries, the practice of corporate godparenthood had been an important instrument for the Dutch republican state, allowing it to manage relations in the long term, cement military alliances, groom military officers for its army, and assert itself in the society of princes. Vital questions about the extent of the practice of corporate godparenthood remain, however. To what extent was it used by other corporate authorities, both within and without the Republic? Was it, or did it become, an exclusively Protestant custom? Did the Dutch ever export the practice to their overseas territories? Corporate godparenthood is not easily visible in the archives, and the States General's case studied above could only be systematically explored thanks to massive digitization projects. It is to be hoped that similar projects may soon reveal whether corporate godparenthood was a European or even global, as opposed to a Dutch or German, phenomenon.

Supplementary material. The supplementary material (appendices 1, 2, and 3) for this article can be found at https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X25000019.

Competing interests. The author declares none.

[100]Koninklijk Huisarchief (Royal House Archive), The Hague, A31, 201.

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