

The Power of Custom and the Question of Religious Toleration in the Works of Marcus Zuerius Boxhorn (1612–1653): An Investigation into the Sources of the Transformation of Religion around 1700

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Abstract

In this chapter I trace the influence of the popular Dutch professor Marcus Zuerius Boxhorn (1612–53) into the early Enlightenment, and argue that especially his theories about religion found a warm reception among its more radical authors. As a good humanist, Boxhorn subscribed to the Greek appreciation of custom as the only realistic basis for public morality. The product of time and place, custom was flexible enough to be adapted to changing circumstances. Boxhorn defended the confessional state, but unlike orthodox Calvinists, who accepted only one True Religion as the public religion of the state, for Boxhorn any religion that proved able to unite the political elite could legitimately fulfill this role—as in any given case only such a religion could be an effective mainstay of moral and public order. Significantly, Boxhorn's works on political culture remained popular long after his death, until the beginning of the eighteenth century. One of them was even adapted to the political situation in England shortly after 1700, among other things to defend the exclusion of Catholics from an otherwise broad religious toleration for reasons of state. Boxhorn's political theory supported the growing notion that different nations and different times call for different religious regimes.

1 Introduction

In the seventeenth century the Dutch Republic acquired a legendary reputation—still alive today—as the most religiously tolerant state in Europe. While this was certainly true for the western part of the country and especially the mercantile towns of Holland, the same cannot be said for the inward provinces and the Generality lands. In Utrecht, Overijssel, and Gelre, for example,

citizenship was connected to one's adherence to the right religion, namely Calvinism.¹

Around the turn of the eighteenth century, this situation changed. After 1700 a "Holland-style toleration took hold in the outer provinces."² At the same time Pietist movements—born during the seventeenth century—flourished in Calvinist, Lutheran, Anabaptist, and Catholic circles.³

These developments were not restricted to the Dutch Republic. During the entire eighteenth century, lay devotion remained strong and sometimes flourished across Europe, giving birth to revival movements and other outbursts of popular piety. In England, the Glorious Revolution of 1688–9 opened up the way for Protestant Nonconformists to safely practice their religion and expand their activities. Thus, the eighteenth century remained very much a 'Christian century,' albeit more open and fragmented than the seventeenth.⁴

The transformation in European religious culture around 1700 did, of course, not materialize out of thin air. This study aims to investigate one of the sources of that transformation by looking at the historical and political works of the Dutch scholar Marcus Zuerius Boxhorn (1612–53). Now mostly remembered for his contributions to the field of linguistics, I will argue here that Boxhorn's works and their appropriation by later authors also provide a valuable insight into the intellectual origins of the transformation of religion around 1700.⁵ As a professor at Leiden University, Boxhorn wrote several political works in which he expressed rather instrumental views on the role of religion in society. Published in the 1640s and 1650s, these works were met with renewed interest around 1700. Taking this revived engagement with Boxhorn's works as its point of departure, this study will suggest that Boxhorn's ideas on custom and religion helped later authors to argue for religious toleration and to 'nationalize'

1 Maarten Prak, 'The Politics of Intolerance: Citizenship and Religion in the Dutch Republic (Seventeenth to Eighteenth Centuries),' in: *Calvinism and Religious Toleration in the Dutch Golden Age*, ed. Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia and Henk van Nierop (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 161–75.

2 Prak, 'The Politics of Intolerance' (see above, n. 1), pp. 169–70; Jonathan I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477–1806* (Oxford, 1st ed. 1995, 1998), pp. 1019–37.

3 See Willem Frijhoff, 'How Plural Were the Religious Worlds in Early-Modern Europe? Critical Reflections from the Netherlandic Experience,' in: *Living with Religious Diversity in Early-Modern Europe*, ed. C. Scott Dixon et al. (Farnham, 2009), pp. 49–50 as well as the literature cited there.

4 Tim Blanning, *The Pursuit of Glory: Europe 1648–1815* (London, 2007), pp. 262–3, 385–92.

5 The best study of Boxhorn's linguistics endeavors and legacy is Toon Van Hal, *Moedertalen en taalmoeders: Het vroegmoderne taalvergelijkende onderzoek in de Lage Landen* (Brussel, 2010), pp. 365–401.

certain specific types of religions, thereby preparing the grounds for the religious Enlightenments of the eighteenth century.

2 A Tainted Reputation

Marcus Zuerius Boxhorn was born in Bergen op Zoom on 28 August 1612.⁶ He did not come into this world alone. Just before he first saw the light of day, Boxhorn's mother had given birth to his twin brother, Hendrik Zuerius Boxhorn (1612–44). This seemingly trivial circumstance of birth would have a lasting impact on Boxhorn's life. It allowed Boxhorn, the younger son, to pursue an academic career, while his 'elder' twin brother Hendrik followed in their father's footsteps and became a minister.⁷ This academic career led Boxhorn to thoughts about religion which were at odds with the more militant attitude of the orthodox stream of Dutch Calvinism to which his family belonged.⁸

On 12 August 1626, young Marcus matriculated at Leiden University.⁹ Being something of a boy genius, he soon attracted the attention of Daniel Heinsius (1580–1655), at that moment probably Leiden's most famous professor. Under Heinsius's patronage Boxhorn started to climb the academic ladder.¹⁰ When he was only twenty, Boxhorn became professor of eloquence. Some sixteen years later, in 1648, Boxhorn took over the duties of professor of history from Heinsius, whose health was now seriously deteriorating after a life of petty quarrels and

6 J. G. Frederiks and F. J. P. van den Branden, *Biographisch woordenboek der Noord- en Zuidnederlandsche letterkunde* (Amsterdam, 1st ed. 1878, 1890), p. 105.

7 "Gemellus & quidem natu major Marco huic fuit Henricus, qui paternis insistens vestiigiis Ecclesiae pastoratum desideravit ..." Jacobus Baselius, 'Historia vitae & obitus, Viri Celeberrimi Marci Zuerii Boxhornii,' in: Marcus Zuerius Boxhorn, *Epistolae et poemata* (Frankfurt/Leipzig, 1679), p. ii.

8 Boxhorn's grandfather Hendrik Boxhorn (ca. 1544–ca. 1632) was one of the leading figures in the Calvinist offensive against Catholicism in Brabant. J. P. van Dooren, 'De kerken van de Reformatie,' in: *Geschiedenis van Breda*, ed. V. A. M. Beermann et al., 2 vols. (Schiedam, 1977), 2: 213–9. Boxhorn's twin brother Hendrik served as a minister in the armies of the Dutch Republic. Baselius, 'Historia vitae & obitus' (see above, n. 7), p. ii.

9 *Album studiosorum Academiae Lugduno Batavae MDLXXV–MDCCCLXXV* (The Hague, 1875), p. 194.

10 Baselius, 'Historia vitae & obitus' (see above, n. 7), pp. iii–iv. According to Pieter de Groot (1615–78), the son of Hugo Grotius, Boxhorn was to Heinsius what Heinsius was to Joseph Scaliger (1540–1609), i.e., his teacher's favorite pupil: "Vereor me, quandoquidem tamdiu Boxhornii convictor fuit, multum Heinsiani imbiberit, est enim ille Boxhorn hodie Heinsio quod olim Scaligero Heinsius fuit." Hugo Grotius, *Briefwisseling*, ed. B. L. Meulenbroek, 17 vols. (The Hague, 1928–2001), 10: 247 (no. 4060).

heavy drinking.¹¹ Heinsius's retreat from public life offered Boxhorn the chance to step out of the shadows of his patron, but his premature death at 41 prevented him from ever truly coming into his own.

At his death Boxhorn left behind a corpus of more than fifty works. They cover a broad range of fields, including linguistics, history, and politics.¹² Boxhorn's productivity and seemingly eclectic choice of subjects—like a good humanist he edited, annotated, and published classical authors, but he also wrote treatises on such mundane topics as the wearing of long hair—earned him the reputation of being an erudite but superficial scholar, who sometimes had interesting but not really original ideas.¹³ Indeed, it cannot be denied that the quality of Boxhorn's work suffered from his tendency to try to do too many things at the same time.¹⁴ And yes, many of his comments and remarks—especially when examined in isolation—will not capture the hearts of anyone looking for new, brilliant, and exciting ideas.¹⁵

Boxhorn's tainted reputation can also partly be attributed to his occasional departure from well-trodden paths. Boxhorn's theory that many European languages—including Latin, Greek, and German—and several Near Eastern languages such as Turkish and Persian all derived from one common source, namely the language of the ancient Scythians, earned Boxhorn the distrust and mockery of more traditionally-minded humanists such as Johan Frederick Gronovius (1611–71) and Nicolaas Heinsius (1620–81), the son of Daniel.¹⁶ But

11 For Boxhorn, see P. C. Molhuysen, *Bronnen tot de geschiedenis der Leidsche Universiteit*, 7 vols. (The Hague, 1913–24), 2: 183–4, 247; 3: 20. For Heinsius, see Paul R. Sellin, *Daniel Heinsius and Stuart England* (London, 1968), pp. 64–5.

12 For an overview of Boxhorn's work, see the entry 'Boxhorn, Marcus Zuerius (1612–53),' in: *The Dictionary of Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century Dutch Philosophers*, Wiep van Bunge et al., 2 vols. (Bristol, 2003), 1: 146–51.

13 See, e.g., E. H. Kossmann, 'Enkele laat-zeventiende-eeuwse Nederlandse geschriften over Raison d'Etat,' in: idem, *Vergankelijkheid en continuïteit: opstellen over geschiedenis* (Amsterdam, 1995), pp. 102–13, there 103–6.

14 For example, in 1632, while he was busy compiling a topographical-historical description of the province of Holland, Boxhorn was also working on an new edition of the *Historia Augusta*. The latter, according to the German professor Johann Heinrich Boecler (1611–72), was 'full of faults' (*vittiosissimus*). Daniel Droixhe, 'Boxhorn's Bad Reputation: A Chapter in Academic Linguistics,' in: *Speculum historiographiae linguisticae*, ed. Klaus D. Dutz (Münster, 1989), pp. 359–84, there 360.

15 Boxhorn's works are littered with traditional humanist concepts, like the past being a mirror of the present. Marcus Zuerius Boxhorn, *Oratio inauguralis, dicta in Illustri Batavorum Academia, cum, Ex auctoritate publica, historiarum professionem aggrederetur* (Leiden, 1649), pp. 4–5.

16 While Boxhorn cannot be credited with the invention of the Scythian thesis, he did take this field of language comparison to a higher level by his innovative attention to intermediary words and grammatical similarities. Van Hal, 'Moedertalen en taalmoeders' (see

despite the scorn heaped upon him, Boxhorn's Scythian thesis proved to be a way forward. Bishop Brian Walton (1600–61), for example, who was responsible for the London Polyglot Bible, preferred Boxhorn's linguistic ideas to those of others.¹⁷ So did Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716), the great German polymath, who made good use of Boxhorn's labors.¹⁸

The reception of Boxhorn's Scythian thesis is symptomatic of the fate that befell a large part of his oeuvre. First of all, like his works on the Scythian language, Boxhorn's most popular works were all published at the end of his life or posthumously.¹⁹ These works include the *Commentariolus* (*Commentary*, 1649), an analysis of the nature, structure, and workings of the Dutch Republic; the *Disquisitiones politicae* (*Political Inquiries*, 1650), a collection of sixty case studies in which Boxhorn discusses various political dilemmas; and the *Institutiones politicae* (*Political Instructions*, 1656), an academic book about the origin, nature, and goals of the state. In the second half of the seventeenth century these works gained considerable popularity, which lasted until the beginning of the eighteenth century. Between 1649 and 1702, the *Commentariolus* ran through at least fifteen editions and was translated into Dutch and French; the *Disquisitiones politicae* was reprinted at least ten times and appeared in Dutch, French, German, and English; and at least eight editions of the *Institutiones politicae* were published, all in Latin.²⁰

After 1700 Boxhorn's works seem to have lost their appeal, although some of them were used well into the eighteenth century by people as diverse as the Dutch historian Jan Wagenaar (1709–73) and the American polymath Benjamin Franklin (1705–90).²¹ In general, however, Boxhorn's ideas had to give way to

above, n. 5), pp. 388–98; F. F. Blok, *Nicolaas Heinsius in dienst van Christina van Zweden* (Delft, 1949), p. 45; 'Heinsius, Nicolaas (1620–81),' in: *The Dictionary of Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century Dutch Philosophers* (see above, n. 12), pp. 407–8.

17 Peter N. Miller, 'The "Antiquarianization" of Biblical Scholarship and the London Polyglot Bible (1653–57),' *Journal of the History of Ideas* 62 (2001), 463–82, there 481.

18 Prys Morgan, 'Boxhorn, Leibniz, and the Welsh,' *Studia Celtica*, 8–9 (1973–4), 220–8. Some modern scholars hold that after Boxhorn "the Scythian thesis" was the standard form in which claims of northern origins and privilege were encoded.' Bruce Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago, 1999), p. 81.

19 Boxhorn first expressed his Scythian thesis in 1647. His most learned book on the topic—the *Originum Gallicarum liber* [Book about the Origins of the Gauls]—was published posthumously by George Hornius (1620–70) in 1654.

20 The first edition of the *Commentariolus* was published in 1649. In 1702 the last edition of the *Institutiones politicae* appeared.

21 For his famous *Vaderlandsche historie* [National History], 24 vols. (Amsterdam, 1749–74), Wagenaar made use of Boxhorn's historical works, especially *Theatrum Hollandiae* [Theater of Holland], (Amsterdam, 1632), *Nederlantsche historie* [Dutch History] (Leiden, 1649), republished in 1700 and 1743, and Boxhorn's edition of Jan Reygersbergh, *Chroniick van Zeelandt* [Chronicle of Zeeland], (Middelburg, 1644). For Franklin, see n. 58 below.

the moral philosophies and economic ideas of the Enlightenment. For us, however, Boxhorn's works and their appropriation by late-seventeenth-century and early-eighteenth-century authors offer an opportunity to locate some of the sources of the transformation of religion around 1700. For in his works Boxhorn articulated a number of potentially dangerous ideas concerning religion and its place in society. Central to these ideas was the role of custom.

3 Custom: Local, Authoritative, and Changeable

Custom—here defined as the amalgam of local customs and traditions—has been given a mixed reception in European thought. For the ancient Greeks, custom was king (*nomos basileus*). In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, humanists affirmed this verdict. In the words of Francis Bacon (1561–1626), custom was “the principal magistrate of man's life” whose “predominancy” was “everywhere visible.”

Cicero saw custom as an important force behind the greatness that was Rome, creating men of outstanding virtue, but also as something vulnerable to corruption by not-so-virtuous men. The early church father Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–ca. 215) spoke of custom in terms of a “deadly drug.” More importantly for our story, the attitude of Protestant reformers toward custom was downright hostile. Both Martin Luther (1483–1546) and John Calvin (1509–64) described custom as a “public pestilence.” Universal truths could be embodied only by the resurrected Christ, and not by local customs, which were inevitably contaminated by folklore and superstition.²²

By descent and upbringing Boxhorn was an heir of the Protestant Reformation. He adhered to the doctrine of the Trinity and believed in the two different natures of Christ.²³ Boxhorn also decried Pelagianism—and with it the notions of free will and salvation by good works—as heresy.²⁴ These convictions reveal the character traits of an orthodox Calvinist.

22 Quotes and references taken from Donald R. Kelley, “‘Second Nature’: The Idea of Custom in European Law, Society and Culture,” in: *The Transmission of Culture in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Anthony Grafton and Ann Blair (Philadelphia, 1990), pp. 131–72 and Andy Wood, *The Memory of the People: Custom and Popular Senses of the Past in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 123–7. See also Cicero, *De Re Publica* 5.1 and *In Catilinam* 1.1.

23 Marcus Zuerius Boxhorn, *Historia universalis sacra et profana, A Christo nato ad annum usque MDCL. in qua Illustrium Gentium ac Principum origines, res gestae, variae mutationes in ecclesia et republica, aliaque ex variis, etiam hactenus ineditis, monumentis traduntur* (Leiden, 1652), pp. 1–2.

24 Interestingly, Boxhorn did this by borrowing the words of Gerard Vossius, who in the midst of the Arminian controversy during the Twelve Years' Truce (1609–21) had written

By education and profession, however, Boxhorn was also an heir of the Renaissance and the humanist tradition. He could therefore side with the ancient Greeks on the problem of custom. As Boxhorn makes clear in the opening chapter of the *Institutiones politicae*, adaptation to local circumstances and customs—*usus*—is essential if one wants to achieve success. The fate of the ancient Parthian king Vonones illustrates the point. Brought up in Rome, Vonones had acquired virtues that the Parthians were unaccustomed with and hence considered bad. They therefore cast Vonones out of their kingdom.²⁵

Custom, however, is not something static. It is the result of a mixture of different ingredients such as geography and technological knowledge, and of the interplay of different actors. If one of these variables changes, custom can change accordingly.²⁶

Boxhorn was aware of this changeability of custom. He detected such changes in custom in the province of Holland. In his contribution to the ‘hairy war’ of the 1640s—a public debate about the propriety of the wearing of long hair—Boxhorn pointed out that under the influence of “strangers, mainly Spaniards and Italians, and ... natives, visiting Spain and Italy,” the Hollanders had changed their clothing and hair styles.²⁷ These foreign influences had not limited themselves to mere externals.

a history of Pelagianism to defend Remonstrants like Hugo Grotius. See Boxhorn, *Historia universalis sacra et profana* (see above, n. 23), pp. 314–20, and compare this with Gerard Vossius, *Historiae, De controversiis, Quas Pelagius ejusque reliquiae moverunt, libri septem* (Leiden, 1618), pp. 5–11.

- 25 Marcus Zuerius Boxhorn, *Institutiones politicae cum commentariis ejusdem et observationibus G. Horni* (Amsterdam, 1668), p. 2. Boxhorn quotes Tacitus, *Annals* 2.2.4. “Yet [Vonones] was readily accessible and had a forthcoming affability, virtues, unknown to the Parthians but novel as vices. And, because his forms of crookedness and honesty were alien to their own behavior, there was equal hatred for both.” In contrast, Zeno, whom the Romans had made king of Armenia but who was, as son of the Pontic king Polemon, a foreigner, had won the goodwill of the Armenians, “because from his earliest infancy he had emulated the customs and style of the Armenians.” Tacitus, *Annals* 2.56.2.
- 26 Kelley, “Second Nature” (see above, n. 22), p. 137; Wood, *The Memory of the People* (see above, n. 22), pp. 120–3.
- 27 “Dus vinde ick my genootsaeckt met dit tweede Spiegeltjen voor den dach te comen, om daer in duydelijck af te beelden, dat noch geen hondert jaer geleden soo door vreemde, voornaementlijc Spaenjaerts ende Italiaenen, als door ingeboorne, Spanien ende Italien versoeckende, ende by haer leerende het veranderen van de manieren [customs] ende drachten [clothes] van haer vaederlandt, het draegen van cort hayr hier te lande, niet sonder groote opspraecke van die welcke slecht ende recht het met de oude wet hielden, ingevoert is gheworden.” Marcus Zuerius Boxhorn, *Spiegeltjen Vertoonende 't corte hayr, By de Hollanders ende Zeelanders joncst ghedragen, ende van vreemde ontleent* (Middelburg, 1644), pp. 9–10. For the ‘hairy war’ and Boxhorn’s contributions to this debate, see Willem Otterspeer, *Groepsportret met dame*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam, 2000–5), 1: 320–1.

Commerce with other peoples had transformed the inhabitants of Holland from “rather simple” folk to a nation of merchants and entrepreneurs that “nowadays exceeds by far all other nations in cleverness and, during the planning and conducting of affairs, in diligence, dexterity and prudence.... Because thus it is common that we take upon ourselves the customs of them, with whom we frequently move about.”²⁸

Custom, then, has “a historical dynamic,” and Boxhorn held a keen interest in this phenomenon.²⁹ The motto of the *Metamorphosis Anglorum* (*Metamorphosis of the English*, 1653) tells us that the changeability of custom was a subject that occupied Boxhorn’s mind until his death: “times change, and we change with them.”³⁰ This seemingly simple observation has some far-reaching consequences. If, to be successful, one needs to adapt to the prevailing local customs and traditions, and if those customs and traditions constantly change over time, then success requires a flexible, non-dogmatic attitude. It mandates acceptance of the rule that “everything should be adjusted to the circumstances and times.”³¹ Following Francis Bacon, this orientation also implies accepting that one be willing to step into the unknown. “He that will not apply New Remedies, must expect New Evils: For Time is the greatest *Innovatour*: And if Time, of course, alter Things to the worse, and Wisdome, and Counsell shall not alther them to the better, what shall be the end?”³² Boxhorn agreed with the English philosopher. “The word ancient and its authority deceives many. Because new matters, which have replaced the ancient ones and

28 “Hodie certe Hollandi, quanto olim simpliciores, tanto solertiâ, & in rebus moliendis gerendisque industriâ, dexteritate, prudentia omnes alias gentes longius antistant: dum commerciis, quae non modo cum vicinis suis, sed cum remotissimis nationibus, atque alio sole calentibus contrahere solent, velut cotibus, indies acuuntur. Ita enim fieri solet, ut eorum mores induamus, quibuscum frequenter versamur.” Marcus Zuerius Boxhorn, *Theatrum sive Hollandiae comitatus et urbium Nova Descriptio* (Amsterdam, 1632), pp. 46–7. For a discussion of Boxhorn’s *Theatrum*, see Raingard Esser, *The Politics of Memory: The Writing of Partition in the Seventeenth-Century Low Countries* (Leiden, 2012), esp. pp. 231–47.

29 Wood, *The Memory of the People* (see above, n. 22), p. 120.

30 “Tempora mutantur et nos mutamur in illis.” Marcus Zuerius Boxhorn, *Metamorphosis Anglorum* (s.l., 1653), p. 274. The *Metamorphosis Anglorum* was published anonymously in 1653, probably just before Boxhorn’s death on 3 October 1653, although an exact date cannot be given.

31 “Omnia rebus ac temporibus accommodanda sunt.” Marcus Zuerius Boxhorn, *Disquisitiones politicae. Id est, Sexaginta casus politici Ex omni historiâ selecti* (The Hague, 1650), p. 154.

32 Bacon had acknowledged that “if Time stood still” custom should be preferred to “New Things.” However, time “moveth so round that a Froward Retention of Custome, is as Turbulent a Thing, as an *Innovation*: And they that Reverence too much Old Times, are but a scorne to the New.” Francis Bacon, ‘Of Innovations,’ in idem, *The Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 75–6.

that have already been observed for some time, have, if they are in good condition, more authority than those ancient ones.”³³ In short, if custom was king, then Chronos was emperor and Clio the emperor’s mistress. The effect of this ‘epistemological’ hierarchy on the role of religion in Boxhorn’s works and their republications around 1700 will be the focus of the remainder of this study.

4 Custom and the Protestant Nation: Melchior Leydekker and the *Nederlantsche historie*

Around 1700 a number of Boxhorn’s works were republished. First was a new edition of the *Nederlantsche historie* (Dutch History) in Utrecht in 1700. The man responsible for this edition was Melchior Leydekker (1642–1721). Born in Middelburg, Leydekker studied theology, first at Utrecht under Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676), then at Leiden under Johannes Hoornbeeck (1617–66) and Johannes Cocceius (1603–69). At the age of 21 Leydekker became a minister in his native province of Zeeland. In this capacity he developed into such an ardent defender of Reformed orthodoxy and advocate of the Further Reformation that Voetius dubbed him “the Zealot of orthodoxy” (*orthodoxiae Zelota*). In 1678 these credentials earned Leydekker an appointment as professor of theology at Utrecht University. There Leydekker continued his defense of orthodox Calvinism, picking fights with Dutch radicals such as Balthasar Bekker (1634–98) and Frederik van Leenhof (1647–1713).³⁴ Leydekker’s zeal to defend the true faith led him to Boxhorn’s *Nederlantsche historie*.

The first edition of the *Nederlantsche historie* had been published in 1649. Brought out a year after the peace of Münster, the book was meant to offer a justification of the Dutch Revolt against King Philip II of Spain. The immediate cause is not hard to discern. The Dutch, according to Boxhorn, had revolted for “no other cause than the forced and wrested defense of our innocence and freedom.”³⁵ Boxhorn, however, does not believe that the more fundamental

33 “Fallit plerosque antiquitatis autoritas & nomen. Nam nova, quae in veterum locum substituta & jam aliquandiu observata sunt, si bene se habeant, majoris sunt, quam vetera illa autoritatis. Sed & quae nunc antiqua dicuntur, & non alio titulo quam isto repetuntur, aliquando fuere nova, sicut ille apud Tacitum est locutus.” Boxhorn, *Disquisitiones politicae* (see above, n. 31), pp. 184–5. Reference to Tacitus, *Annals* 11.24.7.

34 J. P. de Bie et al., ed., *Biographisch woordenboek van Protestantische godgeleerden in Nederland*, 6 vols. (The Hague, 1907–49), 5: 772–85; Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650–1750*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 2002), pp. 27–8, 383, 391, 410–3; P. C. Hoek, *Melchior Leydekker (1642–1721): Een onderzoek naar de structuur van de theologie van een gereformeerd scholasticus* (Amsterdam, 2013), pp. 36–78.

35 “Eenen oorlooch, waer van ten laetsten geene andere oorsaeck is geweest als de opgedrongen ende afgeperste verdedinge van onse onnooselheit ende vryheit....” Boxhorn, *Nederlantsche historie* (see above, n. 21), pp. 4–5.

causes behind the Revolt can be so easily comprehended. “The change in religion and the worldly government in the Netherlands ... did not happen so suddenly.”³⁶ To understand this change in Dutch society, Boxhorn takes the reader back to the twelfth century, when members of the Waldensians, a proto-Protestant sect, moved to the Netherlands, as they were by “either the peculiar freedom that they understood to belong to the inhabitants there; or the said and known character of this people [i.e., the Dutch].”³⁷ Boxhorn thus makes a positive connection between local Dutch customs and the arrival of the true faith in the Netherlands.

In stark contrast to this positive connection stands the antithesis Boxhorn draws between the clergy and Dutch customs and traditions. As Boxhorn explains, the Waldensians’ arrival triggered a historical process in which the spread of the true faith in the Netherlands went hand in hand with a mounting oppression of Dutch society by the clergy, who disregarded and trampled on local privileges, as during the misguided witch trials in Arras during the second half of the fifteenth century.³⁸

From his preface to the 1700 edition of the *Nederlantsche historie*, it becomes clear that it was precisely the positive and negative correlations between Dutch local customs, on the one hand, and Protestantism and Catholicism, respectively, on the other, that made the book so attractive to Leydecker. He lists “the venerability of our ancestral antiquities” and “the Love for our Reformed Religion” as two of the reasons that led him to republish the *Nederlantsche historie*.³⁹ These two reasons are closely connected, because Leydecker ranks the Reformed religion among the ancestral antiquities of the Dutch. To substantiate this view, Leydecker brought out Boxhorn’s *Nederlantsche historie* together with a Dutch translation of the *Sulpitius Belgicus* (The Dutch Sulpicius, 1656), written by Boxhorn’s friend and biographer, the minister

36 “veranderinghe in de Godtsdienst ende het Weereltlijcke bestier in Nederlandt ... soo plotselijck niet gesciet wesen.” Boxhorn, *Nederlantsche historie* (see above, n. 21), p. v.

37 “t sy aengelockt door de sonderlinge vryheit, die sy verstonden aldaer den ingeseten toe te comen; t sy de geseggelijcke ende bekende inborst van dit volck.” Boxhorn, *Nederlantsche historie* (see above, n. 21), p. 10. The Waldensians were the followers of Peter Waldo († ca. 1205), a merchant from Lyon. To substantiate his view that the Waldensians can be seen as the predecessors of contemporary Protestantism, Boxhorn supplies the readers with some articles of faith. Thus the Waldensians denounced the primacy of the bishop of Rome, pleaded for the destruction of images, and abhorred the worship of saints and the practices of Roman rituals. *Ibid.*, pp. 12, 34–5.

38 Boxhorn dedicates around fifty pages—almost one-fourth of the *Nederlantsche historie*—to the witch trials in Arras.

39 “de eerbiedigheid voor onse vaderlijke oudheden, de Liefde van onse Gereformeerde Godsdienst ... gaf ons daer toe meningvuldige reden.” Melchior Leydecker, ‘Voorreden tot den leser,’ in: Marcus Zuerius Boxhorn, *Nederlantsche historie*, ed. Melchior Leydecker (Utrecht, 1700), p. i.

Jacobus Baselius (1623–61).⁴⁰ In the *Sulpitius* Baselius traced the beginnings of the Christian faith in the Netherlands back to Saint Maternus of Cologne (ca. 285–315), who, in Baselius's anachronistic account, started to preach the Gospel in Dutch towns as Maastricht and Tongeren from the year 90 onwards.⁴¹ Armed with both Boxhorn and Baselius, Leydecker claims that the Reformed religion—and especially its tenet of justification by faith—was and is “the old Religion of the Dutch.”⁴²

This claim enables him to attack not only Catholicism but also Arminianism as a degeneration of ancient Dutch culture and custom.⁴³ For it was in defense of “the ancient *Teaching, Freedom and Privileges*” that the Dutch had taken up arms against Philip II, who had connived with the Pope “to dominate the free Netherlands”—a freedom “which Christianity and the Fatherland had given to her”—“and to rule the Citizens, in *Ecclesiastical and Civil* matters, with an unlimited tyranny and power.”⁴⁴

In Leydecker's description of the past, the Protestant religion in its orthodox Reformed guise had been an integral part of Dutch society since the first century. Even when, during the Middle Ages, its proto-Protestantism had temporarily been eclipsed by the doctrines of Rome, it had lent a sense of stability to Dutch custom, with which it was intimately intertwined. Such a static view of custom and society, however, was far from Boxhorn's mind, as we have noticed above. Boxhorn emphasized change, not continuity, as Leydecker does. The implications of this emphasis on change for the place of religion in society would be great.

40 For Baselius, see De Bie, *Biographisch woordenboek* (see above, n. 34), 1: 333–4; P. C. Molhuysen et al., ed., *Nieuw Nederlandsch biografisch woordenboek*, 10 vols. (1911–37; repr. Amsterdam, 1974), 9: 68–9. Baselius probably named his book after Sulpicius Severus (363–ca. 425), a Christian author from Aquitaine, who had written a history of the world.

41 Among Maternus's audience were the Batavians, the legendary forefathers of the Hollanders. Jacobus Baselius, ‘Den Nederlandschen Sulpitius,’ in: Boxhorn, *Nederlantsche historie* (see above, n. 39), pp. 1–11.

42 “Zy wilden dog de oude Religie der Nederlanders verandert hebben, en 't is haer ook gelukt in de X. Provincien....” Leydecker, ‘Voorreden’ (see above, n. 39), p. xxii.

43 “De Leere van de genade is dog het oude geloof in Nederland.” ‘Voorreden’ (see above, n. 39), pp. xxiv, xxxiii–xxxiv.

44 “De *Vrye Nederlanders* moesten hare *vryheid* bewaren, welke haer het Christendom en het Vaderland toebagten ... 't Geen daer na te meer bleek in de raedslagen van *Philips* Koning van *Spanjen* met de Paus van *Romen*, gesmeed om het vrye *Nederland* te overheer[s]en, en de *Borgeren Kerkelyk en Politijk* met een onbepaalde dwinglandy en mogentheid te regeren. Dog daer tegen streed de edelmoedigheid der *Nederlanders*, welke haer aenrade en drong om de aloude *Leer, Vryheid* en *Voorregten* te verdedigen.” ‘Voorreden’ (see above, n. 39), p. xxx.

5 Custom and the Confessional State: Gerard de Vries and the *Institutiones politicae*

Boxhorn's political works were met with a last flash of early-eighteenth-century interest with the 1702 publication of the *Institutiones politicae*. This final edition of Boxhorn's political *magnus opus* was issued thanks to the Utrecht professor of philosophy Gerard de Vries (1648–1705). A native of Utrecht, where he had studied with Gisbertus Voetius, De Vries moved to Leiden in 1671 to pursue an academic career at the town's renowned university. However, the audacity of Cartesian philosophers such as Abraham Heidanus (1597–1678) and Johannes de Raey (1622–1702) so disgusted him that in 1674 he decided to leave Leiden and return to Utrecht. There De Vries became professor of logic and metaphysics and developed a philosophical empiricism to combat Cartesianism and its evil offspring Spinozism.⁴⁵

As a professor of philosophy, De Vries also considered it his duty to teach politics, which he treated as a branch of moral philosophy. In his teachings, De Vries used a range of historical examples and modern authors, including Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) and Samuel Pufendorf (1632–94).⁴⁶ Yet De Vries still felt that his lectures lacked certain “unique examples,” especially regarding the Dutch Republic. Hence he jumped at the chance offered by Johannes Visch, a local publisher, to republish Boxhorn's *Institutiones politicae*. De Vries believed that this work not only was full of relevant material but also contained political advice that respected the time-honored connection between what was morally right (*honestum*) and what was useful (*utile*)—a holy bond that Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) and Hobbes had rendered asunder.⁴⁷ For my present purpose, I will focus on what the *Institutiones politicae*—and by proxy De Vries—has to say about the relationship between religion and the state, and the role that custom plays in that relationship.

In the *Institutiones politicae* Boxhorn—like Hobbes in *Leviathan*—depicts the state as an artificial construct that runs contrary to man's natural equality

45 For biographical details, see the entry ‘Vries, Gerard de (1648–1705),’ in: *The Dictionary of Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century Dutch Philosophers* (see above, n. 12), 2: 1052–5. For an interpretation of De Vries's philosophy, see Israel, *Radical Enlightenment* (see above, n. 34), pp. 479–80.

46 For an analysis of De Vries's political thought, see E. H. Kossmann, *Political Thought in the Dutch Republic: Three Studies* (Amsterdam, 2000), pp. 93–5.

47 Marcus Zuerius Boxhorn, *Institutiones politicae* (Utrecht, 1702), pp. i–xi.

and freedom.⁴⁸ A device is therefore necessary to create some unnatural inequality and to keep that ambitious, greedy, and egocentric animal called man in check.⁴⁹ Religion, according to Boxhorn, is precisely that instrument of inequality and restraint. On the one hand, religion gives rulers a certain air of divinity, thus allowing them to appear special or superior in the eyes of their fellow men.⁵⁰ On the other hand, religion instills fear in people's hearts by threatening subjects and rulers alike with "very severe punishment" if one of them does not properly fulfill their expected duties—a view also held by the famous Dutch etcher Romeyn de Hooghe (1645–1708).⁵¹

Now, ideally, every state has only one religion, for "there can be only one true religion and only one religion that can please God." Boxhorn, however, immediately pulls the rug out from under this axiom by pointing out that the state's religious configuration depends not on a religion's veracity but on its contribution to the state's welfare. Hence, religious toleration is not only admissible but even obligatory if it will benefit the state.⁵² To prove his point, Boxhorn refers

48 For Hobbes's view of the artificial nature of the state, see Glenn Burgess, 'England and Scotland,' in: Howell A. Lloyd et al., ed., *European Political Thought, 1450–1700: Religion, Law and Philosophy* (New Haven, 2007), pp. 332–75, there 366–8.

49 For an analysis of Boxhorn's view of human nature and the nature of the state, see Jaap Nieuwstraten, 'Why the Wealthy Should Rule: Marcus Zuerius Boxhorn's Defence of Holland's Aristocratic Mercantile Regime,' in: Jan Hartman et al., ed., *Public Offices, Personal Demands: Capability in Governance in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2009), pp. 126–49.

50 "Sed & Legislatores antiqui Deorum se uti Consillis fingebant, quod & observavit *Liv. Lib. I. Hist. de Numâ, cap. 19*. Tantumque ejus fictio haec profuit Reipublicae ut *Augustinus* dicat, *Romulum urbis, Numam Reipublicae Romanae Conditorem extitisse.*" Boxhorn, *Institutiones politicae* (see above, n. 25), p. 13. Reference to Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 1.3.

51 "Ea, quae Magistratus subditis, & hi vicissim illis debent, non alia ratione, aut sanctiora fiunt, aut facilius obtineri possunt, quàm si supremam aliquam potestatem, illâ supremorum Magistratum majorem, esse agnoscant, & Imperantes & obsequentes, cujus scilicet jussu Imperia sint constituta, injectoque metu gravissimae poenae, in eos, qui aut male imperaturi, aut debitum obsequium detrectaturi sunt." Boxhorn, *Institutiones politicae* (see above, n. 25), p. 1. For De Hooghe, see the contributions of Frank Daudeij and Trudelien van 't Hof to this volume.

52 "Equidem una tantum religio vera esse potest, & una Deo placere, sed interim Magistratui placere plures possunt religiones, cum plures, quantumvis falsae, Rempublicam possint juvare; neque illa tolerantia adversa est aut divinis, aut gentium institutis." Boxhorn, *Institutiones politicae* (see above, n. 25), p. 82; "Itaque si fieri possit, & in eâ abunde prospectum sit Reipublicae, una; sin aliter expediat ad Reipublicae augmentum, non tantum una, nec tamen omnis tolerari debet." *Ibid.*, p. 82.

to the Dutch Republic, where such a policy of religious tolerance had led to great prosperity.⁵³

Boxhorn's defense of religious toleration did not mean that he believed that all religious creeds should be treated equally. On the contrary, even in a religiously plural society one creed should dominate, especially among the governing elite, in order to prevent dissension.⁵⁴ "Which means, that those who are of one and the same religion, are in charge of the state and promote their one religion as much as possible."⁵⁵ This statement shows that Boxhorn, despite his rather instrumental views on religion and religious toleration, had not entirely given up on the ideal of the confessional state. In turn, this helps to explain why Gerard de Vries—one of the champions of Reformed orthodoxy and an anti-Machiavellian—still found it possible to promote a book in which—when push comes to shove—religious and ethical considerations are subordinated to the material interests of the state.

But Boxhorn's defense of the ideal of the confessional state also carried a great risk. The desirability of having a state in which ideally all citizens belong to a national or public Church had now become a matter of political convenience. For Boxhorn the religious composition of society depended no longer on the revelation of God's will but on a certain religious composition's chance of success. In turn, this success depended on its adaptation to local circumstances and customs, as Boxhorn had explained in the opening chapter of the *Institutiones politicae*. That this principle also holds good in the religious realm Boxhorn made clear by pointing to the Inquisition. In Boxhorn's view, the Spanish had made a crucial mistake by introducing the Inquisition into the Low Countries. Their error had not been that the Inquisition was an instrument of the devil but that its methods had been at odds with the freedom-loving nature particular to the Dutch. This mismatch between local customs and religious institutions had ensured that in the Low Countries the Inquisition

53 "Ubi autem Resp. ad ornamentum aut augmentum sui plures requirit, admittendae quoque sunt. Id enim facit i. ad augmentum Reip. ac multitudinis. Sic in his locis, quod tanta sit hominum frequentia, id praecipue effecit; quod omnis ferè religio recipiatur." Boxhorn, *Institutiones politicae* (see above, n. 25), p. 87.

54 "Diximus §. 19. etiam, ubi diversae sunt religiones, expedire unam praedominari, ne diversae religionis hominibus rerum summae admotis quilibet eorum ad sua trahat & distrahat Remp. quod incommodum regnum Poloniae experitur: quia enim diversarum Religionum Nobiles ad comitia conveniunt, frequentes existent dissensiones." Boxhorn, *Institutiones politicae* (see above, n. 25), p. 88.

55 "Adeò ut cautè agendum sit, initiis, si fieri possit, oppressis, si tamen vires acceperint, abstinendum. Sed &, ubi diversae religiones sunt in usu, expedit unam dominari, hoc est, qui unius ac ejusdem religionis sunt, Reipublicae praeesse, & quantum fieri potest, unam eorum promovere." Boxhorn, *Institutiones politicae* (see above, n. 25), p. 83.

had failed to garner the successes it had achieved in Italy.⁵⁶ The Spaniards had not known their history—and had paid dearly for it.⁵⁷

Custom, then, triumphs over religious purity and veracity, and is not—as Leydecker had pictured it to be in the case of the Netherlands—a symbiotic partner of the true faith. That someone like De Vries, who shared Leydecker's religious sympathies, had no qualms about promoting a book that expressed such views indicates that even the religiously orthodox were not immune to the variety of intellectual and political impulses which, around 1700, led Europeans to rethink their religion and its role in society. Indeed, they were among the drivers of these impulses, which resonated throughout the Continent and across the sea to the British Isles and beyond.

6 Custom and Religious Toleration: Charles Davenant and the *Disquisitiones politicae*

In 1701 an anonymous English edition of Boxhorn's *Disquisitiones politicae* appeared under the title *Arcana imperii detecta* (State Secrets Revealed). The book became quite popular, especially among England's political elite. Benjamin Franklin tells us that during his first stay in England, between 1725 and 1726, he had learned that “a certain very great Personage” frequently studied the *Arcana imperii detecta*. Franklin subsequently bought the book and later used it in his famous correspondence with the mysterious ‘Charles de Weissenstein’ to illustrate the perversity of the English—the book containing some Machiavellian advice.⁵⁸

56 “Ex hac quoque *ingeniorum & circumstantiarum diversitate* illud est, quod una eademque res saepè alio atque alio nomine, prout usurpata fuit, nominetur. *E.g.* Inquisitioni Hispanicae quidam Tyrannidem, quidam prudentiam inesse existimant, & utrumque verum. Nam, quia eâ usi Hispanio in Belgarum gente in libertate & *ad libertatem natâ*, meritò Tyrannidem dixerunt. At prudentiae usus apparuit in regno Neapolitano expugnando atque retinendo: Quod constitui non potuisset, nisi inquisitio fuisset adhibita ... Atque hinc videre est, quàm peccatum sit ab Hispanis, quod *non consideratâ gentium diversitate*, uno eodemque modo cum Belgis atque Italis egerint ... Sic adaeque ad Reipubl. membrorum medelam, quorum animi saepe corporis vitio laborant, *oportet semper ad ingenia & mores incolarum attendere.*” Boxhorn, *Institutiones politicae* (see above, n. 25), p. 3 (italics mine).

57 In the *Disquisitiones politicae*, Boxhorn uses the discussions about the Dutch Revolt in the secret council of Philip II (1527–98) as a case study to demonstrate that by opting for violence, the Spaniards had taken recourse to measures that were out of touch with local circumstances and hence impossible to carry out successfully. Boxhorn, *Disquisitiones politicae* (see above, n. 31), pp. 272–4.

58 Edwin Wolf 2nd and Kevin J. Hayes, *The Library of Benjamin Franklin* (Philadelphia, 2006), pp. 8, 146–7; *Letters from France: The Private Diplomatic Correspondence of*

The *Arcana imperii detecta* merits attention for at least two reasons. First, in addition to the original sixty historical case studies by Boxhorn, the book contains ten extra case studies. These ten case studies all deal with issues that were particularly relevant at the time of its publication, such as the English union with Scotland, the succession to the English throne, and the two partition treaties signed by William III (1650–1702) and Louis XIV (1638–1715) to divide the Spanish Empire. In other words, Boxhorn's *Disquisitiones politicae* was translated into English and deliberately reworked to contribute to contemporary English debates. Important for the present study is that one of these debates centered on the question of the proper religious organization of English society.

The other reason why the *Arcana imperii detecta* warrants consideration concerns the person or persons responsible for its translation and the additional material. Information on this topic is extremely scarce. Only one source, the Scottish politician Sir John Sinclair (1754–1835), provides a name, namely that of the political economist and Tory pamphleteer Charles Davenant (1656–1714).⁵⁹ Sinclair's claim can be supported by a number of arguments. For the sake of brevity only two will be mentioned here. First, there is much overlap between the political advice to be found in the *Arcana* and Davenant's own political positions. The *Arcana*, for example, defends the notion of excluding foreigners from political office and argues against the Spanish partition treaties.⁶⁰ Davenant was in cahoots with 'old' Whigs like Robert Harley (1661–1724) and Tories who lambasted William III's Dutch advisers, while in his *Essays*—published the same year as the *Arcana*—Davenant attacks the Spanish partition treaties.⁶¹ Second, both the *Arcana* and Davenant's works of the late 1690s and early 1700s were all published by the London bookseller and publisher James Knapton (†1736).⁶² Since no other candidate presents himself at

Benjamin Franklin 1776–1785 (New York, 2006), pp. 24–8; Neil L. York, 'Benjamin Franklin, the Mysterious "Charles de Weissenstein," and Britain's Failure to Coax Revolutionary Americans Back into the Empire,' in: *Benjamin Franklin's Intellectual World*, ed. Paul E. Kerry and Matthew S. Holland (Lanham, Md., 2012), pp. 43–76.

59 Sir John Sinclair, *The History of the Public Revenue of the British Empire. Part III*, 2nd ed. (London, 1790), p. 132.

60 Marcus Zuerius Boxhorn, *Arcana imperii detecta* (London, 1701), pp. 282–93.

61 J. A. Downie, *Robert Harley and the Press: Propaganda and Public Opinion in the Age of Swift and Defoe* (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 37–56.

62 Richard Stone, *Some British Empiricists in the Social Sciences, 1650–1900* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 469. Besides the *Essays* of 1701, these works include Davenant's *Essay on East India Trade* (1696); *Discourses on the Public Revenues*, 2 vols. (1698); *An Essay on the Probable Methods of Making a People Gainers in the Balance of Trade* (1699); *Discourse upon Grants and Resumptons* (1700); and *The Essays on the Balance of Trade* (1702).

the moment, I will stick to Charles Davenant as the person behind the English translation of the *Disquisitiones politicae* and the new material added to it.

Born in London in 1656, Davenant traveled to the Dutch Republic in the mid-1670s. It is quite possible that during this trip he came across and acquired some of Boxhorn's works, for, as we will see, his ideas and those of Boxhorn show some interesting similarities. Back in England, he became a Commissioner of Excise and, under James II (1633–1701), sat in Parliament for Saint Ives. The 'Protestant winds' of the Glorious Revolution deprived him of office, however, and turned Davenant into a Tory pamphleteer. In this capacity he wrote the *Essays*, which contained "a highly partisan attack on William III's foreign policy."⁶³ It is against this background of party rivalries between Whigs and Tories, and between 'court' and 'country,' that we must interpret Davenant's appropriation of Boxhorn's *Disquisitiones politicae*.⁶⁴

Davenant has received a mixed assessment. His biographer David Waddell dismissed him as "neither an original thinker, nor a practical man of affairs, but merely a competent publicist."⁶⁵ John Pocock, on the other hand, heralded Davenant as "the most ambitious neo-Machiavellian thinker of the early Augustan period."⁶⁶ Many subsequent scholars have agreed with Pocock's verdict, although interpretations differ about the precise nature of Davenant's 'Machiavellianism.'⁶⁷

To these interpretations can now be added the assertion that Davenant also had a particular 'Boxhornian' twist to him. Like Boxhorn, for example, he perceives the state as an artificial 'body, composed of many individuals.'⁶⁸ Second, both Boxhorn and Davenant see trade as a means to wealth, which,

63 The best biographical information on Davenant can still be found in David Waddell, 'Charles Davenant (1656–1714): A Biographical Sketch,' *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 11 (1958–9), 279–88.

64 These two opposite blocks were not always identical. Indeed, English politics during the reign of William III was characterized by a fluidity of party divisions. Barry Coward, *The Stuart Age: England, 1603–1714* (Harlow, 2012), pp. 359–416.

65 Waddell, 'Charles Davenant' (see above, n. 63).

66 J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition: With a New Afterword by the Author*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, 2003), pp. 423–61.

67 See, e.g., Istvan Hont, 'Free Trade and the Economic Limits to National Politics: Neo-Machiavellian Political Economy Reconsidered,' in: idem, *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the National-State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 201–46.

68 "Respublica est corpus multorum ad agnoscendam ejusdem Imperii Majestatem, iisdem legibus, omnium & singulorum utilitatis causa, imbutum." Boxhorn, *Institutiones politicae* (see above, n. 25), p. 8; Charles Davenant, 'Peace at Home,' in: idem, *The Political and Commercial Works*, 5 vols. (London, 1771), 5: 17.

in turn, forms the backbone of a country's military prowess.⁶⁹ Davenant is also 'Boxhornian' in the sense that he adheres to the principle that political effectiveness necessitates adaptation to local circumstances and customs. Compare, for example, the following three statements:

That form of ruling must be judged the best that suits the characters and the interests of its inhabitants the most. (Boxhorn, *Institutiones politicae*, p. 258)

The Laws of all Countries must be suited to the Bent and Inclinations of the People. (Charles Davenant, *An Essay on the East-India Trade* [James Knapton, 1696], p. 114)

All things are to be suited to Times and Things. (Boxhorn/Davenant, *Arcana imperii detecta* [James Knapton, 1701], p. 91)

In one of the case studies added to Boxhorn's *Disquisitiones politicae*, Davenant applies this line of reasoning to the religious situation in England around 1700. The question it specifically addresses concerns religious toleration. Or, to be more precise, the question whether Catholics should be allowed freedom of worship in England. The answer is revealing.

Tho' it seems to be as it were an Injustice to allow some that dissent from the National Church, the Liberty of their Religion and Worship, when others are totally denied it; yet there may be some Circumstances of time when it may very equitably and prudentially be done, as in the Case of our present settlement in *England*; when to encourage any of the Religion of the abdicated Prince, would be to encourage the loss of our own Religion and Liberty to boot: But otherwise a right Tolleration ought to be extended unto all, since all equally plead Conscience, of which God alone is the Judge.⁷⁰

Three things stand out in this answer. First, Davenant accepts the existence of a national church—here, the Church of England—as a given and does not call into question its place in society. In this, he followed the opinion of the

69 For Boxhorn, see Jaap Nieuwstraten, 'Empire, Economy and the Dawn of the Enlightenment: Some Explorations into Seventeenth-Century Dutch Intellectual History,' in: *The Enlightenment: Political, Economic and Social Aspects*, ed. Evert School, special issue of *United Academics Journal of Social Sciences*, 3, no. 15 (2013), 30–47, there 34–8. For Davenant, see Hont, 'Free Trade and the Economic Limits' (see above, n. 67), esp. pp. 201–22.

70 Boxhorn, *Arcana imperii detecta* (see above, n. 60), pp. 263–6.

majority of the English population.⁷¹ Second, Davenant seems to regard religious toleration as a kind of divine right that all human beings possess—a view shared by Boxhorn.⁷² Third, in typical ‘Boxhornian’ style, Davenant denies Catholics this right on the grounds that local circumstances dictate that in England religious toleration could be extended to certain religious groups outside the Church of England—as indeed was the case, albeit grudgingly and within certain confined limits—but not to Catholics.⁷³ The risks of allowing Catholics the right to worship freely are simply too great “in the Case of our present settlement in *England*.”

With his denial of extending religious toleration to Catholics, Davenant once again opposed the policy of William III, who wanted English Catholics to have freedom of worship—a wish which Parliament refused to grant. Davenant’s ‘total’ denial also contrasts with the position taken by men like John Locke (1632–1704), who denied Catholics the right to worship in public but not in private.⁷⁴ But it was in tune with the view—commonly held in England around 1700—that England was a Protestant nation, to whose political and religious culture Catholicism was completely alien.⁷⁵ In that sense, Boxhorn’s *Disquisitiones politicae* offered Davenant the intellectual ammunition to attack the paper bulwarks of his enemies in a war in which he had custom and popular opinion on his side.

7 On the Threshold of a New Era? Custom, Religion and the Ascent of Historical Relativism around 1700

Boxhorn was very much a man of his time. An orthodox Calvinist by birth and upbringing, he saw no problems with following the latest trends in Late Humanism, such as the rise of Neo-Aristotelianism, Grotian Natural Law, and

71 Julian Hoppit, *A Land of Liberty? England 1689–1727*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 2002), pp. 214–5, 222–3.

72 “Et nihil magis Religioni & paci publicae est adversum, quàm vim usurpare, & acerbitate suppliciorum in eos grassari, qui non ejusdem nobiscum sunt religionis. Nam in negotio religionis divino juri, & *privatae unius cujusque conscientiae, in quam solus sibi Deus imperium servavit*, cedere oportet jus dominationis.” Boxhorn, *Institutiones politicae* (see above, n. 25), p. 84 (italics mine).

73 Coward, *The Stuart Age* (see above, n. 64), pp. 374–8.

74 John Marshall, *John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture: Religious Intolerance and Arguments for Religious Toleration in Early Modern and ‘Early Enlightenment’ Europe* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 135, 682–94.

75 Hoppit, *A Land of Liberty?* (see above, n. 71), pp. 214–5, 221–2; Tony Claydon, *Europe and the Making of England, 1600–1760* (Cambridge, 2007), passim, but esp. pp. 28–44.

Tacitism. In that sense, Boxhorn was merely tracking the shadows of the great men of his age, especially Grotius and Hobbes.⁷⁶

The mixing of all these different currents of thought produced in Boxhorn a historical relativism in which almost everything was subjected to the winds of time. This included custom—as the outcome of a mixture of different ingredients which were all liable to change—and religion—both as an independent phenomenon and as part of a particular culture. Both custom and religion were historical products which differed from place to place and from time to time. Intentionally or not, that observation reduced the place of religion in society to a mere historical category. It also delegated questions concerning religious toleration to the realm of political prudence, even though Boxhorn had not entirely given up on more conservative ideas like the ideal of the confessional state.

The mixed reception of Boxhorn's ideas by Leydecker, De Vries, and Davenant indicates that around 1700 neither a purely instrumental nor a modern view of religion had yet been accepted. None of these three men advocated a separation of church and state, nor did they plead for a form of religious toleration which would embrace all faiths. Leydecker, De Vries, and Davenant take for granted a public or national Church, as well as the exclusion of certain religious minorities. Indeed, none of these three authors seem to have questioned the desirability of a confessional state. While they may have quarreled about the content of the ideal true religion—as Leydecker certainly did!—all three men would probably have agreed that in a perfect world the congregation of true believers would overlap with the association of the citizens of the state.

The world, however, was anything but perfect. Men were foul, corrupted creatures and their dispersion around the world meant that a range of differences existed among them—custom and religion being prime among them. Leydecker tried to bridge the gap between custom and religion by basically merging the true faith with local Dutch customs. Luther or Calvin, who detested local customs, would have abhorred such a merger. They would have had an equally vehement aversion to Boxhorn's—and in his wake De Vries's

76 For the influence of Tacitism on Grotius, see e.g. Jan Waszink, 'Your Tacitism or Mine? Modern and Early-Modern Conceptions of Tacitus and Tacitism,' *History of European Ideas* 36 (2010), 375–85. For the influence of Neo-Aristotelianism and Grotian Natural Law on Hobbes, see Annabel S. Brett, *Changes of State: Nature and the Limits of the City in Early Modern Natural Law* (Princeton, 2011), *passim*. For the influence of all three currents of thought on Boxhorn, see Jaap Nieuwstraten, *Historical and Political Thought in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic: The Case of Marcus Zuerius Boxhorn (1612–1653)* (Rotterdam, 2012).

and Davenant's—subjection of the religious to the political, and, in turn, to the historical.

That religiously orthodox figures such as Leydecker, De Vries, and Davenant could accept Boxhorn's views of custom and religion, and use them for their own purposes, demonstrates that around 1700 the conservative confessional clouds that had loomed over Europe during the sixteenth and a large part of the seventeenth centuries were slowly moving away. The connection Leydecker and Davenant made between local customs and a specific type of religion contributed to the notion—popular during the Enlightenment—that different nations can and may have different creeds that are more suited to their particular characters and level of development. The acceptance of the universal application of freedom of conscience by De Vries and Davenant can be said to symbolize the advance of a more tolerant atmosphere in the Dutch Republic and Europe during the eighteenth century. Editing, customizing, and republishing the works of writers like Boxhorn, made Leydecker, De Vries and Davenant living examples of that very Boxhornian notion: “times change, and we change with them.”