THE MARKET FOR ARCHITECTURE IN HOLLAND,
1500–1815*

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Introduction

In the last twenty-five years or so, the study of the arts in the early modern Low Countries has been revolutionised by an infusion of economic and social history.¹ Not only have economic historians broadened the agenda, by including such new topics as output measurement, marketing, and innovation, their research has also helped to provide new interpretations of the changing faces of sixteenth- and seventeenth century art. As a result of this work we now know, for instance, that the number of paintings produced in the Dutch Republic during the seventeenth and eighteenth century was simply enormous, an observation that has fundamentally altered our appreciation of the balance between what has been preserved and what is lost, and also

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highlighted the fact that the majority of Dutch painters were not Rembrandts or Vermeers, but rather poor craftsmen, struggling to make ends meet. Work on art markets in the Low Countries has demonstrated the extent to which this art reached far beyond the borders of the Low Countries, to find customers in the rest of Europe, as well as in Latin America. It has demonstrated, in other words, how, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but continuing into the eighteenth, painting developed into a veritable export industry. And rather than the traditional focus on “genre”, i.e. the scenes from everyday life deemed typical of the Holland School, we can now see how Dutch painters actually developed a whole range of new topics, designed to target a variety of niche markets.

This chapter hopes to make a contribution to a similar transformation in the study of architecture. As in the visual arts, many studies of architecture concentrate on the personality of the architect and

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5 In many ways the benchmark work still is Richard A. Goldthwaite, *The building of Renaissance Florence: An Economic and Social History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).