

Values in early modern administration:  
Cornelis Schrevelius and the 18<sup>th</sup> century practice  
of bestowal of office.

M.P. Hoenderboom  
VU University Amsterdam

### Approach

- Locating, defining and understanding (the development of) values underlying the 18<sup>th</sup> century practice of bestowal of office

→ gaining insight into (changing) conceptions of ethical behavior in early modern organizations

- Corruption scandals as moments of crisis

→ values become apparent in clashes, conflict and contest over boundaries: from implicit understanding to explicit debate

→ finding the *unacceptable*, *unwanted* and *intolerable*: tracing the values underpinning ethical behaviour in public administration

### Case study

- Presenting a political conflict (1747) in the Dutch city of Leiden between two magistrates, Cornelis Schrevelius and Johan van den Bergh.

→ Schrevelius accused Van den Bergh of not honouring a *promise* to get him the lucrative office of sheriff of Leiden

→ Riots and unrest in Leiden in the same year serve to illustrate contrasting ideas on the proper way to obtain an office in early modern administration

→ (Possible) shifts in the values impact what behavior was deemed ethical (or unethical), thereby defining a magistrate's desirable conduct, his qualities and characteristics

### Administration and office in Leiden

- Government organized around city council ('council of forty')

→ elaborate network stemming from council taking care of all relevant affairs on local/provincial/ national level

→ election of magistrates according to rank and seniority

→ promotion through a fixed series of offices

→ 'Contracts of correspondence' to guarantee smooth proceedings during election of new magistrates

- 23rd of February 1722: a new contract

→ a majority of the city council united itself under a new contract (1722-1747), excluding Cornelis Schrevelius and others

→ the career of the outcasts would be an unfortunate one

### Quarrels in 1747: honoured promises?

- 1725 Johan van den Bergh wished to expand his influence as the position of dike reeve of Rijnland became vacant

→ in June a delegation from Leiden toured the cities of the province of Holland to win support for the candidanship of Van den Bergh

→ Van den Bergh managed to obtain the lucrative office

- 1747 Cornelis Schrevelius had a different account of Van den Bergh's tour past the cities of Holland

→ claimed that Van den Bergh had made a promise to reinstate him as a member of the correspondence as well as get him the office of sheriff of Leiden

→ Van den Bergh had broken his promise

- Reaction by Schrevelius' opponents

→ Van den Bergh's freedom to make such a promise was quite limited, because in 1727 several other, more senior, members of the correspondence, had to be taken into consideration

→ observing rank and order of seniority were the foundation of politics

→ reinstatement of Schrevelius would mean a serious disruption of the existing correspondence in Leiden

- Summary

→ pamphlet strife Schrevelius and Van den Bergh still firmly established on accepted ideas of correspondence, seniority and rotation of office

→ practices not considered unethical

→ an upright magistrate should be trustworthy and respect his promises

### 1747 For the benefit of the 'common good'?

- 1747 Discontent about decades of economic decline and exclusion of many from participation in government
  - questions regarding the desirability of delegation of sovereignty to the ruling oligarchy and obedience to patrician authority
  - reformers advocating an end to the abuses associated with the bestowal of office/ entire removal of the old clique of magistrates
  - abuses detrimental for the 'welfare and order' of city/ province
- Solution: the public auctioning of offices for the benefit of the 'common good'
  - revenues not into the pockets of the magistrates
  - generating income for the treasury on a daily basis
  - eventually this proposal failed

### Conclusion

- What could the conflict in Leiden and the call for reform of 1747 tell us about the values underlying early modern administration?
  - Contextual meaning of political corruption/ multiple coexisting standards
  - A focus on wrongful individual behaviour/ focus on the political system
  - Attitudes and assumptions concerning administration or an official's desirable conduct, qualities and characteristics did not change overnight