

PART ONE

The Appeal of Pamphlets

To argue that the gemeente came to occupy a more prominent place in Dutch political thinking—not in “high” theory but in everyday assumptions and practices, reflected not in treatises but in snatches of writings and prints—is to assume that they were interested in political and religious issues. And to argue that pamphlets played a role in these developments is to assume that they were accessible to small merchants, craftsmen, non-nobles, and modest burghers.

The following three chapters focus on the problems of pamphlet audience, general interest in political affairs, and specific interest in pamphlets. They outline some of the further conditions which encouraged pamphleteering, namely literacy, relatively low prices, and the lure of profits for printers and booksellers. But the central theme of this section is the extensive interest in the political and religious issues of the Dutch Republic, and how the increasing prominence of pamphlets not only reflects that interest but undoubtedly served to stimulate it as well.