

ARMS, INTEREST, AND PIETY:
DUTCH CALVINISTS AS FINANCIERS
OF THE THIRTY YEARS' WAR

Regina Schulte

Not infrequently, in the framework of the historical debate about the origins of modern capitalism, one comes across a small group of eminent businessmen and bankers, who had their hand, among other things, in providing finance for the Thirty Years' War. Regardless of whose side they were on, these were mainly Protestants and Calvinists, most of them of Flemish origin; they went abroad because in the southern part of the Netherlands the conditions for freedom of religious and economic action were deteriorating. On the background of Weber's theory that a connection exists between Protestantism and Capitalism, the fact hitherto has escaped attention that although an influential group of financiers shared a common origin and religious conviction, members of this group could be found on the Catholic as well as on the Protestant side. In this article, the biographies of the Amsterdam-based arms trader Louis de Geer who provided the money for Gustav Adolf of Sweden, and of Hans de Witte, the banker appointed to the court of Emperor Ferdinand II, are taken to illustrate some aspects which are of paramount importance for putting the history of Bohemia in perspective.