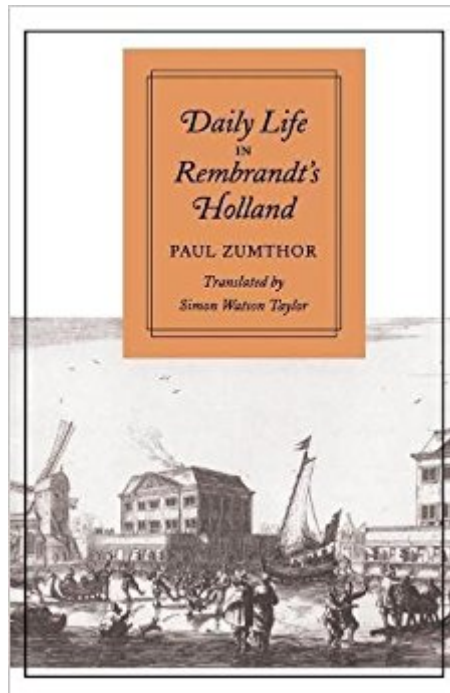


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Daily Life In Rembrandt's Holland



Synopsis

Rembrandt's life coincided with what the Dutch refer to as their "golden age." This engagingly written study presents a rich picture of a dynamic society that had torn itself away from the mediocrity of its past - a stagnant nation of peasants and fishermen - to pursue an overseas empire that led to great financial wealth and a highly sophisticated cultivation of the arts. This classic work first appeared in English translation in 1963. Among the myriad topics covered are homes, gardens, clothing, food, religion, childrearing, education, medicine, sports and games, holidays and celebrations, painters, musicians, writers, the theater, publishing, aristocrats, workers, peasants, the merchant fleet, the armed forces, trading and colonizing companies, fisheries, and the famous Holland dikes.

Book Information

Series: Daily Life

Paperback: 376 pages

Publisher: Stanford University Press; 1 edition (June 1, 1994)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0804722013

ISBN-13: 978-0804722018

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 1 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 14.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars 2 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #937,206 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #148 in Books > History > Europe > Netherlands #35891 in Books > History > World

Customer Reviews

Text: English (translation) Original Language: French --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

This engagingly written study presents a rich picture of dynamic society that had torn itself away from the mediocrity of its past- a stagnant nation of peasants and fisherman- to pursue an overseas empire that led to great financial wealth and a highly sophisticated cultivation of the arts.

If you can, imagine a slice of time and space from The Structures of Everyday Life set in the world of An Embarrassment of Riches. If you keep that idea in your head, and spice it with the tone of an occasionally ironic French medievalist then you have a fairly good idea what it is like to read Daily

Life in Rembrandt's Holland. Daily Life looks at what living would have been like in the Netherlands from the years 1606 to 1669. These years were not only the demarcation of the life of Rembrandt, but also corresponded with the Dutch golden age. Instead of focusing on the great political and military movements that happened during that period (the end of hostilities with Spain and participation in the Thirty Years War), Zumthor chooses to write about the commonplace. The book is structured in eight chapters, with the first seven chapters addressing major subject groupings. The chapters include: The Background of Daily Life, The Dutch Interior, The Course of Life, Recreations, Arts and Letters, Dutch Society, and Holland At Work. The final chapter is a brief summing up in which Zumthor makes a number of points about Dutch life during that period that I believe would still be interesting and relevant when related to the Dutch society of today. Living in the Netherlands as an expatriate, I have read quite a few books about the history of the country in both English and Dutch. Daily Life is a fine addition to my collection, and a very enjoyable reading experience. The translation by Simon Watson Taylor is clean and smooth and managed to capture the obvious quirks of the tone of the author. It is a good complement to Schama's book An Embarrassment of Riches. If it is less of a book than the Schama it is because the more encyclopedic nature of the project lacked a bit of depth and narrative flow. I would recommend this book to other expatriates living in the Netherlands who would like to know a bit more about the history of the country. I can imagine that it would also be invaluable to someone who wanted to get a feel for the background of life at that time. Please note that Rembrandt is not the subject of the book, and his life is only used as a ruler to mark the relevant time period.

If you don't feel like reading Simom Schama's 600+ page EMBARRASSMENT OF RICHES, or Israel's 1100+ page THE DUTCH REPUBLIC, Simon Zumthor's DAILY LIFE IN REMBRANDT'S HOLLAND may be the book for you. Zumthor's book was written in French, and first published in English the early 1960s. My paperback copy was published in 1994 by Standford University as part of the "Daily Life" series. If you're not particularly interested in the politics of the 17th Century, or the military action that took place during the various wars (which Schama and Israel cover in more detail), and you want to delve right into the everyday lives of the people, Zumthor's book allows you to do so. Zumthor covers everything from clothing to food to employment to housing to you name it--all those things all of us do that make up our daily lives. The section on the artistic elements of Dutch society is relatively short, and Rembrandt is really only mentioned in passing, but you do get an impression of what he, and Vermeer, and other painters probably experienced as they went about their business. Rembrandt and the other painters were not seen as "artists" but rather as

"painters" and as such were members of guilds--Medieval organizations that were organized by various occupational groups and still thrived in the first part of the 17th Century in the Netherlands. Zumthor spends some time discussing how the guilds worked and how they were regulated by not only their members but the towns and villages. Zumthor also provides much interesting information about Dutch church life, community life, and home life and the obsession of the people with cleaning -- stoops, linens, clothes, but according to Zumthor, not always bodies. The Dutch in the 17th Century were a complicated folk, and although I have read Schama and Israel, I enjoyed this book. It's great background reading, especially if you wonder how your own ancestors lived. Read it with Poortvliet's illustrated books, however, as it lacks illustrations (my paperback copy did).

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