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Reviewed by John Grever (Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles)
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The Revolt of the Netherlands: Political and Religious Conflicts

The British historian Alistair Duke has published numerous studies on different forms of political and religious dissent that help to explain the outbreak and the outcome of the Revolt of the Netherlands. To honor his wide-ranging contributions, Judith Pollman and Andrew Spicer have edited a festschrift that except for two contributions cover a variety of topics directly related to this crucial conflict in early modern Europe. These contributions can be roughly grouped into two categories: the political and religious conflicts of the Revolt of the Netherlands; and the visual and artistic expressions of an interminable civil war that traditional Dutch historiography has called the Eighty Years War (1568-1648).

The contributions to the festschrift start with Hugh Dunthorne's well-written account of a selection of historiographical highlights that rehabilitated the dramatic and romantic interpretation of the Revolt. Even the early seventeenth-century histories by Pieter Bor, Emanuel van Meteren, and Jean-Francois Le Petit contained dramatic accounts, simply because the documentary record included stories of executions, massacres, assassination attempts, and protracted sieges. After these early publications, Dunthorne claims that in the mid-eighteenth century Jan Wagenaar's history of the Netherlands helped to revive Dutch interest in the dramatic character of the Revolt. The romantic view gained a European audience through Friedrich Schiller's *Don Carlos* (1787) and Johann Wolfgang Goethe's *Egmont* (1789) published during a decade of growing revolutionary fervor. After the independence of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands, the romantic view inspired historical painters to re-enact the Revolt's dramatic episodes through a careful review of the visual evidence.

Inspired by Schiller, these romantic sentiments also motivated the American historian John Lothrop Motley to write his nineteenth-century best-seller, *The Rise of the Dutch Republic.* While acknowledging the criticism of Robert Fruin and Pieter Geyl, Dunthorne prefers to focus on Motley's accomplishments: the use of printed sources and contemporary histories in a wide variety of European languages. He makes a convincing case for Motley's achievements, but he ignores the memory of the revolt among the large Dutch ruling class. During the 1660s the States of Holland commissioned Abraham de Wicquefort to write a history of the Dutch Republic that included an account of the Revolt. Leo van Aitzema's mostly documentary multi-volume history also contained numerous source documents related to the last two decades of the war with Spain. Many members of the Dutch ruling class were lawyers who were always digging into the past to find nuggets of evidence to explain current domestic and diplomatic conflicts. When grand pensionary (*raadpensionaris*) Johan de Witt faced the challenge of Louis XIV's invasion in 1672, he was inspired by the greater hardships inflicted by Philip II upon his ancestors. The genealogical interests of the members of the large ruling class helped to preserve the names of family members whose possessions had been confiscated by the Council of Troubles and who has fled the Southern Netherlands after the Duke of Parma's conquest of Antwerp.

One of the major causes of the dramatic impact of the Revolt was the public execution of heretics. Charles V and Philip II insisted on a harsh enforcement of the placards against religious dissenters. In his contribution, Juliaan Woltjer demonstrates that except for the Anabaptists the local authorities in the Netherlands were reluctant to enforce the anti-heresy placards. Thus, the inquisitor Pieter Titelmans complained about the lack of cooperation from the Council of Flanders. Even when Philip II was still in the Netherlands, Calvinists were conducting services outside the city of Antwerp during the late 1550s. In a number of cases, prosecution of religious dissenters were related to factional rivalries within the city council. In other cases, it showed that the two northern provinces of Friesland and Groningen favored a pre-Tridentine view of Catholic practice. Their

Diets (*landdagen*) refused to condone interference from Brussels and did not accept the strict Catholicism promoted by Franciscus Sonnius, who had attended the second session of the Council of Trent. The authorities in Brussels lacked the military force to impose their religious policy and preferred to avoid a policy of confrontation. They also thought it best not to inform Philip II about the widespread opposition against the persecution of heretics in order to avoid enforcing an unworkable policy.

False rumors about the introduction of the Spanish Inquisition created growing political and religious tensions during the 1560s. Henk van Nierop has written a vivid account of the impact of rumors in the early stages of the revolt. His most interesting information was derived from the diary of Wouter Jacobsz, the Augustinian prior of Gouda who had fled to Amsterdam, a city that only joined the revolt in 1578. This source shows how Jacobsz carefully evaluated the reliability of rumors. It also demonstrated how false rumors were spread to discredit the Duke of Alba or William of Orange. It helped to explain how the fear of Spanish capture of the rebellious towns led to Catholics being labeled as potential traitors. Jacobsz mentioned in his diary a procession of the Blessed Sacrament to celebrate the Spanish capture of Mons in 1572. Therefore, it was no surprise that the rebellious towns in Holland had prohibited the celebration of the Mass and did not permit contacts with towns under Spanish control. This local perspective helps to understand why slowly the active membership of the Reformed Church increased and how an anti-Spanish mentality was cultivated to unite towns and provinces with different political and economic interests.

One of the reasons for Spain's failure to end the revolt was the fateful decision by Philip II not to visit the Netherlands in 1567. In this way he could not act as the merciful ruler after his commander and governor, the Duke of Alba, had inflicted severe punishment on the rebels. It was only in 1570 in the absence of Philip II that a policy of clemency was introduced through the proclamation of a pardon. Gustaaf Janssens carefully explains how this policy of mercy was implemented through an analysis of the homily of Francois Richardot, bishop of Arras, a native of Franche Comté and a client of the Granvelle family. The homily included an indirect criticism of the repressive policies of the Duke of Alba. Janssens also shows that initially the policy was successful. In Antwerp there were 14,128 reconciliations. The replacement of the Duke of Alba by Luis de Requesens led to another attempt to abandon the policy of repression and to promote a respect of local privileges. Guido Marnef demonstrates that this approach received the strongest support among the members of the state assembly of Brabant. They defended the traditional view that a political contract could be terminated in case the ruler did not respect the local privileges. In particular, the Nine Nations of Brussels, representatives of the guilds and the civic militia, insisted on the importance of the Charter of Kortenberg (1312): if the ruler did not honor provincial privileges, the States could appoint their own governor. The pertinent medieval documents were published in Antwerp, one of the Four Cities of Brabant. In this way Marnef convincingly explains how the debates in Brabant about contractual obligations provided the States General with constitutional arguments to terminate their relationship with Philip II in 1581 through the Edict of Abjuration.

During the early 1590s it was becoming increasingly clear that the Netherlands would remain divided. The Spanish government had succeeded in reconquering the south and helped to establish a Tridentine Catholic church. In the Northern Netherlands a new state emerged, the United Provinces or the Dutch Republic, that succeeded in gaining control of most of the territories north of the Maas River. It was a commercial and fiscal state that used private investment capital and state subsidies to attack Spanish colonies in Asia and the Americas. At the same time, Spain was fighting France and England. A number of government officials in Brussels began to argue that Spain should cut its military commitments in order to focus on solving their own economic and political problems. Within this shift of public opinion in the final years of Philip II's reign, Nicolette Mout locates her analysis of a letter written by the neostoic humanist Justus Lipsius to the Spanish nobleman Franciscus de San Victores, who was employed by the government in Brussels. Although Lipsius had taught at the University of Leiden, Mout noted that he would have preferred to continue the war against the Northern Netherlands, if Spain could have ended the war against France and England. Yet in 1595 his recommendation was to focus on a truce with the Northern Netherlands. One of his revealing motives was that the war with the northern Netherlands was difficult to end, because it was a civil war. It was also striking that during the 1580s Lipsius had expressed a lack of confidence in a government by estates in the Northern Netherlands, even though this government imposed a higher tax burden than the Duke of Alba, not the least to increase its share of world trade at the expense of the Spanish empire. Lipsius himself declared in 1595 that the Northern Netherlands were becoming prosperous, an observation confirmed by the burgomasters of

Amsterdam who saw the 1590s as the decade when Dutch merchants began to overwhelm their European trade rivals.

The second category of contributions to the festschrift relates to the visual and artistic responses to the conflict with the king of Spain. The first form of visual evidence is presented by Paul Regan, who argues that the publication of maps of the Netherlands showed the survival of a common bond among all seventeen provinces, even after the 1590s when the religious and political separation between the north and the south had become permanent. The first surviving Dutch map by Hieronymus Cock in 1557 mentioned that its purpose was to develop a love of the fatherland. Soon large numbers of maps were printed, especially by the Antwerp publisher Christopher Plantin, who in 1574 was using a record number of sixteen presses during a critical time in the Revolt of the Netherlands. In 1570 Abraham Ortelius published the first atlas that was frequently reprinted by Plantin. Although failing to emphasize that through this popular atlas the Netherlands became part of a European view of the world, Paul Regan argues that the maps of the Netherlands depicted the cartographical equality of the provinces and without clear differences between provincial and state boundaries. It also created a view of the Netherlands that oriented Flanders, Zeeland and Holland to the north or to the west, an orientation still popular on Johan Vermeer's paintings. Regan does not explain that the proliferations of printed maps helped the viewer to compare the size of the provinces and the presence of foreign enclaves. In particular, the maps clearly showed that Gelderland and Holland were the biggest provinces in the Northern Netherlands. Regan also discusses the importance of chorographies and emphasized the overwhelming impact of Lodovico Guicciardini's *Description*, first published in 1567 that focused on the three core provinces of Brabant, Flanders, and Holland.

The popularity of chorographies helped to assure the survival of urban and provincial identities. There was also an institutional reason, not discussed in this festschrift. It was the organization of the States General. Seven of the eight northern provinces kept a federal delegation in The Hague with a rotating president of the week. Faced with the fiscal power of the States of Holland, which met next to the assembly room of the States General, the other provinces sought to preserve their identity by remembering the glories of their past. Within this political perspective of provincial rivalries, Raingard Esser makes an important contribution by investigating this preoccupation with the past in two provinces. In the case of Gelderland, Arend van Slichtenhorst, who had been Gelderland's clerk in the States General, published in 1654 a provincial history that contained great of information about the importance of Gelderland before 1543, the year it became part of the Habsburg Netherlands. It explained why Gelderland was ranked first in the republic, because it had been a duchy since 1339. This ranking helped Gelderland's politicians. They always headed the federal committees and domestic or foreign deputations. The same awareness of the achievements of the past was promoted by Marcus Zuerius Boxhorn who in 1644 published a chronicle of Zeeland, that was a revised and expanded version of Johan Reygersbergen's chronicle of 1551. It is striking that Boxhorn received support from members of two of the six voting cities in the province of Zeeland: Middelburg and Zierikzee. In the first version of the chronicle the destructive force of the sea had been Zeeland's main enemy; Boxhorn made Spain the most dangerous adversary. In spite of appeals to provincial pride, both Slichtenhorst and Boxhorn referred to a common fatherland. It also helped to preserve harmony, when their histories ended with the Edict of Abjuration in 1581. In this way they did not cover the decades after the 1590s when there were many conflicts among the provincial members of the confederate state of the Dutch Republic, such as between Zeeland and Holland about ending the war with Spain. Esser is persuasive in explaining that a strong sense of provincial identity survived within the Dutch Republic. Yet, the rhetoric of provincial rivalries, though real, should not be overstated. Deputies of Gelderland and Zeeland gained international influence, because as members of a federal state they participated in the government of one of Europe's major powers during the seventeenth century. There was also a great deal of intermarriage between the provincial ruling classes.

Andrew Sawyer demonstrates that the visual impact of political prints began to emerge during the rise of the beggar protest movement and the iconoclastic riots in 1566. The print culture of the opponents of the Spanish regime began to contrast two models of government: the hierarchical/monarchical and the confederal/constitutional model. The protesters saw their constitutional model as superior by focusing on the themes of liberty, preservation of privileges, state assemblies, and popular sovereignty. In the political prints, the lion became a symbol of vigilance and eventually a symbol of the emerging republic and the senior and junior members of the House of Orange became the guardians of republic's independence. In the early stages of the revolt the political prints also focused on the hierarchical character of the Catholic Church and the religious orders, closely

linked with the Duke of Alba's alleged tyrannical style of government. Once the Northern Netherlands had attained *de facto* independence, the political images of the conflict between Spain and the Netherlands in terms of two models of governments were transferred to the conflict between supporters of a government led by provincial state assemblies and a government headed by the States General and the House of Orange. Sawyer does not emphasize this transformation, which became visible during the domestic conflicts of the Twelve Years Truce (1609-1621) and remained an intrinsic part of the political dynamics of the Dutch Republic.

Visual messages were not only expressed through prints but also through the traditional medium of stained glassed windows. In spite of the iconoclastic riots and the transformation of Catholic churches into reformed places of worship, many stained glass windows survived, although some with offensive themes were removed or modified. The importance of Andrew Spicer's article is that his study of the stained glass windows in the churches of Holland help to uncover a network of patronage, in particular among the towns of Holland. In some cases, the stained glass windows were ranked based on the seating position of the sponsoring towns in the States of Holland. Some donor cities also selected the themes of the stained glass window, executed by their own artists. Here Spicer might have explored at greater length, if there were hidden political messages in the selection of biblical themes, aside from emphasizing the economic links between the sponsor and the beneficiary.

Another artistic expression of political messages was through the performance of vernacular plays by the chambers of rhetoric, amateur theatre societies in the Dutch towns. Joke Spaans analyzes the competition of fifteen chambers of rhetoric during the summer of 1616 in Vlaardingen, a fishing port that was not a member of the States of Holland. One of the two main themes of the contest included a political message: what is needed for the common good? This was a controversial topic, because in 1616 the intertwined conflicts between the Remonstrants and the Counter-Remonstrants, between *stadholder* Maurits and land's advocate (*landsadvocaat*) Oldenbarnevelt was rapidly escalating into a dangerous domestic crisis. Spaans claims that most plays by the chambers of rhetoric promoted the need for unity and harmony. There were only a few chambers of rhetoric which through their plays supported Maurits or Oldenbarnevelt. However, she does not relate these messages to the political views and make-up of the city councils of the chamber of rhetoric's home towns. The next year, in 1617, one of the most famous plays of seventeenth-century Dutch literature was produced, *The Spanish Brabander*, by Gerbrant Bredero. In her analysis of this play, Judith Pollmann, the author of a fascinating biography of Utrecht's Protestant convert, Arnoldus Buchelius, attempts to deconstruct the purpose of the play. Amsterdam contained a large number of religious and political exiles from the Southern Netherlands as a result of Parma's reconquest during the 1580s. These exiles hoped to free Flanders and Brabant from Spanish rule, but the Flemish campaign in 1600 had revealed that the local population did not welcome the Calvinist liberators. Like the Northern Netherlands, the Southern Netherlands had begun to develop their own identity. Pollman claims that the Northern Netherlands, with its large Catholic population, saw the promotion of anti-Hispanicism as a way to unite the country. A successful accommodation with the Habsburg regime in the Southern Netherlands undermined this anti-Spanish campaign platform. Therefore, according to Pollman the true targets of the play were the "hispanicized Netherlanders," who had had lost their patriotic virtue by sleeping with the enemy.

The only two articles in the festschrift that do not directly refer to the main topics of Duke's publications are Andrew Pettegree's meticulous study of printed newsletters in Rouen and Jonathan Israel's penetrating analysis of Pierre Bayle's controversial toleration theory. The festschrift is carefully edited and contains a detailed, helpful index. It is preceded by an informative introduction that shows that the public sphere began to emerge during the sixteenth century in the Netherlands, instead of in early eighteenth-century Europe as claimed by Jürgen Harbermas. This collection of articles offers many insights into the formation of public opinion in the early modern Netherlands and the emergence of different identities in the Northern and Southern Netherlands, in spite of the lingering memories of a common bond among the core provinces dating back to the rule by the Valois dukes of Burgundy.

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