



# The Dutch Revolt and Catholic Exile in Reformation Europe

GEERT H. JANSSEN



## The Dutch Revolt and Catholic Exile in Reformation Europe

The Dutch revolt of the sixteenth century sparked one of the largest refugee crises of Reformation Europe. This book explores the flight, exile and eventual return of Catholic men and women during the war. By mapping the Catholic diaspora across northern Europe, Geert H. Janssen explains how exile worked as a catalyst of religious radicalisation and transformed the world views, networks and identities of the refugees. Like their Protestant counterparts, the displaced Catholic communities became the mobilising forces behind a militant International Catholicism. The Catholic exile experience thus facilitated the permanent separation of the northern and southern Netherlands. Drawing on diaries, letters and evidence from material culture, this book offers a penetrating picture of the lives of early modern refugees and their agency in the Counter-Reformation.

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For Arnoud



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## Preface

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The idea to write a book about early modern exile first emerged when I emigrated from the Netherlands in 2005. In the following years, academic positions and visiting fellowships in the United Kingdom, Belgium and Germany enabled me to develop my ideas in stimulating international environments. In Cambridge in 2008/9 I was fortunate to teach a course on early modern refugees, which encouraged me to pursue a comparative approach to the topic. I eventually completed the book at Corpus Christi College, Oxford and I thank my colleagues there for their support. Living and working in different countries has been a real privilege, which has also made me more alert to the effects of migration and globalisation in our modern society. Hence, this book is about the experience of exile in a bygone age, but it is also informed by the thoughts and experiences of a travelling academic in the twenty-first century.

I am grateful to colleagues and institutions on both sides of the Atlantic for their support over the years. Special thanks go to the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) for awarding me a postdoctoral Veni grant in 2007. Additional funding was provided by the History Faculty at Cambridge, the British Academy, the History Faculty at Oxford and Corpus Christi College, Oxford. Alastair Duke kindly commented on an earlier, draft version of the book and shared his English translations of the diary of Wouter Jacobsz. Judith Pollmann has been a source of inspiration from the start. I should also like to thank Erik Aerts, Marten Jan Bok, Anne-Laure van Bruaene, Hans Cools, Liesbeth Corens, Diarmaid MacCulloch, Luc Duerloo, Eamon Duffy, Marianne Eekhout, Jim Gibbons, Katy Gibbons, Kees Gnrrep, Hanneke Grootenboer, Erika Kuijpers, Mary Laven, Anton van der Lem, Jan Machielsen, Guido Marnef, Johannes Müller, Henk van Nierop, Andrew Pettegree, Hilde de Ridder-Symoens, Lyndal Roper, Jay Sexton, Louis Sicking, Violet Soen, Andrew Spicer, Jasper van der Steen, Nick Terpstra, Johan Verberckmoes, Rienk Vermij and John Watts.

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## Abbreviations

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ARAB	Algemeen Rijksarchief, Brussels
ARSI	Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Rome
BMGN	<i>Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden</i>
BN	<i>Biographie Nationale</i>
CBL	Centrale Bibliotheek Leuven
DWf	Wouter Jacobsz, <i>Dagboek van broeder Wouter Jacobsz</i> , I.H. van Eeghen (ed.), 2 vols (Groningen: Wolters, 1959–1960).
EAD	Erfgoed Archief Delft
HAK	Historisches Archiv Köln
NA	Nationaal Archief, The Hague
OKKN	Oud-Katholieke Kerk Nederland
RAG	Rijksarchief te Gent
RAL	Regionaal Archief Leiden
SAA	Stadsarchief Amsterdam
SCJ	<i>Sixteenth Century Journal</i>
TvG	<i>Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis</i>
UA	Utrechts Archief
UBA	Universteitsbibliotheek Amsterdam
Weinsberg	Hermann Weinsberg, <i>Die autobiographischen Aufzeichnungen Hermann Weinsbergs. Digitale Gesamtausgabe.</i>

## Governors-general in the Low Countries, 1559–1609

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1559–67:	Margaret of Parma
1567–73:	Don Ferdinand Alvarez de Toledo, duke of Alba
1572–73:	Don Juan de la Cerda, duke of Medina Celi (designate)
1573–76:	Don Luis de Requesens
1576–78:	Don Juan of Austria
1578–92:	Alexander Farnese, duke of Parma
1592–94	Peter Ernst of Mansfeld
1594–95:	Ernest of Austria
1595:	Pedro de Fuentes
1596–98:	Albert of Austria
1598–1621/33:	Albert of Austria & Isabella of Spain (sovereigns)

# Maps

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Map 1 Map of the Habsburg Low Countries, 1566





Map 3 Map of the Northern and Southern Netherlands, 1609



## Introduction

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The St Nicolaikirche in the small German town of Kalkar owns a remarkable collection of sixteenth-century art. The church's holdings include a carved alabaster altarpiece [Fig. 1], an exquisitely painted epitaph [Fig. 2] and a gold-plated monstrance [Fig. 3].

None of these treasures were originally made for the local parish. Indeed, on close inspection the items show hallmarks of Amsterdam design.<sup>1</sup> Burial stones graced with distinctly Dutch names reinforce the alienating impression. Behind this confusion about space and purpose in Kalkar's parish church lies the tale of a little-known refugee enclave in Reformation Europe. During the later sixteenth century this remote town in Cleves served as a hub for displaced Catholics from the Low Countries. More specifically, Kalkar accommodated a group of distinguished Amsterdam families who had escaped their homes after the Protestant takeover of their city in 1578. Expelled and dispossessed, the émigrés recreated something of their lost Amsterdam world in their German safe haven. The surviving church treasures of the St Nicolaikirche are the tangible remnants of this Catholic exile experience.

The Amsterdam émigré community at Kalkar was part of a diaspora of thousands of Catholic men and women who moved across Europe during the so-called Dutch revolt. Often described as a struggle for national independence and Protestantism, the revolt in the sixteenth-century Netherlands was part of a series of civil wars that shook Reformation Europe. The Netherlandish variant was particularly complex because religious disputes were intertwined with discussions about Habsburg rule in the Low Countries as well as with local sensibilities. There were, in fact, several Dutch revolts. In this messy war, the Amsterdam expatriates belonged to the hard-line supporters of the established order. Firmly committed to the Church of Rome and aligned with the Habsburg government, they refused to accept rebel authority in the Netherlands

<sup>1</sup> Cremer, 'Die Amsterdamer Monstranz'; De Werd, *St. Nicolaikirche*, 26–7, 130–8.



Figure 1 Private Altar of Sybrant Pompeiusz Occo and Lisbeth Jacobsdr Brouwer, c.1559. St Nicolaikirche, Kalkar.

and opposed religious freedoms to Protestants. These Catholic loyalists eventually preferred an uncertain future in exile to life under what they regarded as an illegitimate, heretical regime.

Like many losers in historical conflicts, the Catholic exiles have mostly been neglected by later generations of scholars, who have generally focused on the rebel party and the emergence of an independent Protestant state in the northern Netherlands. Today, few history books acknowledge that the birth of the Dutch Republic, which is now remembered for its economic progress and religious tolerance, also triggered an exodus of citizens who did not believe in its moral legitimacy or future. This book seeks to uncover the history of flight and exile of these opponents of the Dutch revolt.

### **Exile and the Dutch revolt**

By recapturing the Catholic exile experience, the present study engages with three larger debates in historical scholarship. First, it aims to offer a new narrative of the Dutch revolt by highlighting the agency of its various



Figure 2 Pieter Pietersz, Epitaph painting of the Bam family, c.1575. St Nicolaikirche, Kalkar.

refugees.<sup>2</sup> The military conflict in the sixteenth-century Low Countries was one of the largest civil wars of Reformation Europe, sparking an unprecedented refugee crisis. Between 1566 and 1590 more than 100,000 men and women were forced to leave their homes in the Netherlands.<sup>3</sup> Historians have been aware of these dramatic migrations, but they have paid limited attention to their composition and impact. In line with tendencies in international scholarship, a good deal of research

<sup>2</sup> For the historiography of the revolt see Darby, *The Origins*; Pollmann, 'Internationalisering', 515–35.

<sup>3</sup> This (conservative) estimate includes Protestants and Catholics. Compare figures in Parker, *The Dutch Revolt*, 118–19; Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 160, 219; Briels, *Zuid-Nederlanders*, 80; Janssens, 'Verjaagd uit Nederland', 102–19.



Figure 3 Monstrance, c.1543. St Nicolaikirche, Kalkar.

has been carried out on the experience of Protestants who escaped persecution by the Habsburg regime in the Netherlands. This strand of scholarship has been particularly interested in the development of Calvinist exile communities in England and the Holy Roman Empire.<sup>4</sup> Few of these works have recognised that flight and displacement eventually affected the ‘persecutors’, too. As soon as the rebellion gained ground in the Netherlands, there emerged a group of refugees who wanted to remain loyal to the Habsburg monarchy and the Church of Rome. The following chapters will map this parallel yet unexplored Catholic diaspora across

<sup>4</sup> Examples include Backhouse, *The Flemish*; Dünwald, *Konfessionsstreit*; Esser, *Niederländische Exulanten*; Grell, *Brethren in Christ*; Pettegree, *Emden*; Schilling, *Niederländische Exulanten*; Spicer, *The French-speaking*; Spohnholz, *The Tactics*.

sixteenth-century Europe; from Amsterdam, Antwerp and Douai to Cologne, Paris and Rome.

Redressing the imbalance enables us to reconsider the remarkable outcome of the war: the split of the Low Countries into two distinct states. It is a commonplace that the Dutch revolt, unintentionally, led to the creation of a predominantly Protestant Dutch Republic in the north and a Habsburg Catholic monarchy in the south [Map 3]. This division, which has largely held up through the present, is so familiar that historians have often taken it for granted. Whereas the causes of the Netherlandish wars have been fiercely debated, their dramatic results have provoked far less controversy. Some historians have argued that the separation between north and south in fact predated the war. The Dutch revolt merely reaffirmed the existing dominance of the province of Holland in the northern areas and cemented the influence of Flanders and Brabant in southern territories.<sup>5</sup> Others have pointed to military factors to explain the lasting frontier. According to this line of thought, the river delta and wetlands in the north prevented royal armies from recapturing the rebellious towns of Holland and Zeeland. Priorities of the Habsburg monarchy elsewhere in Europe further contributed to the unexpected resilience of the rebellion in the northern provinces.<sup>6</sup>

These different interpretations have left some problems unaddressed. For example, they do not really explain the growing cultural divide between north and south over the course of the conflict. Nor do they clarify the shifting popular support for the revolt in both areas. The eventual perseverance of the rebellion in the northern provinces is surprising considering that the heartland of the Protestant movement had initially been in southern areas. Antwerp and Ghent, rather than Amsterdam and Groningen, had served as the seedbeds of Calvinist militancy during the early phases of the troubles.<sup>7</sup> An analysis of the forces of migration may help to provide some new explanations for this paradoxical development. This study will show how refugees on both sides of the conflict played a formative role in the construction and exploitation of opposing confessional identities. As the war forced Protestant and Catholic refugees to move to northern and southern strongholds, these exiles were able to shape contrasting collective self-images in the Dutch Republic and the Southern Netherlands. There was nothing inevitable

<sup>5</sup> Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, v–vi, 16–29; Tracy, *The Founding*, 1–8. Compare Stein and Pollmann, *Networks*; Woltjer, *Op weg*, 20–5, 44–50, 211–23.

<sup>6</sup> Geyl, *The Revolt*; Parker, *The Army of Flanders*. More recent Groen, *De tachtigjarige oorlog*. Compare Duke, *Dissident Identities*, 11–15.

<sup>7</sup> Marnef, *Antwerp*; Woltjer, *Tussen vrijheidsstrijd*, 64–88, 131–45.

about the emergence of a Protestant state in the northern Netherlands or the resurgence of Catholic loyalism in the south. This book contends that unforeseen movements of religiously committed refugees effectively sealed the cultural cleavage of the two Netherlands at the end of the sixteenth century.

### Exile and the Counter-Reformation

A focus on the radicalising effects of exile also furthers our understanding of the Counter-Reformation in northern Europe, which is the second aim of this book. Scholars have long noted how Catholicism experienced an unexpected revival in the Southern Netherlands after c.1585.<sup>8</sup> By 1600, places such as Antwerp, Ghent and Brussels had become bastions of Tridentine renewal. The causes of this religious metamorphosis have long divided historians. Some have asserted that the rejuvenation of Catholic religiosity was enforced by top-down ecclesiastical reform and Habsburg sponsorship.<sup>9</sup> This popular reading of the Counter-Reformation resonates with conclusions in international historiography. The post-Reformation Catholic Church has long been viewed as a repressive, elitist institution that effectively imposed confessional discipline and doctrinal uniformity. But in recent decades this image has been challenged. An increased focus on the religious world of the laity has made scholars more aware of the variety of Catholic cultures that coexisted in early modern Europe and of the limits of state–church cooperation. Some have seen the rise of confessionalised Catholicism as the outcome of popular initiatives on the ground or have noted that a revival of Catholic spirituality in fact predated the implementation of the decrees of the Council of Trent.<sup>10</sup>

Such observations are also pertinent for a re-evaluation of Catholic renewal in the Low Countries. Recent scholarship has suggested that the progress of a popular Counter-Reformation movement in the Dutch revolt was grounded in the traumatic experience of rebel violence and Protestant militancy.<sup>11</sup> Calvinist radicalism in places such

<sup>8</sup> Recently re-assessed in Pollmann, *Catholic Identity*.

<sup>9</sup> Tracy, 'With and without', 547–75; Cloet, 'De gevolgen', 53–78; Marinus, *De contra-reformatie*, esp. 39; Thijs, *Van geuzenstad*, 33–60.

<sup>10</sup> For this historiography see De Boer, 'An Uneasy Reunion', 366–87; Ditchfield, 'Of Dancing Cardinals', 386–408; Forster, 'With and without', 315–43; Forster, *Catholic Revival*, 1–17; Johnson, *Magistrates*, 1–13; Laven, 'Encountering', 706–20; Louthan, *Converting Bohemia*, 1–15, 317–24; Reinhard and Schilling, *Die katholische Konfessionalisierung*.

<sup>11</sup> De Schepper, 'De mentale reconversie', 420–8; Stensland, *Habsburg Communication*, 89–113; Thöfner, *A Common Art*, 146–67; Weis, *Des villes en révolte*.