"SERVING THE KING AND RESISTING HIM": DILEMMAS OF LOYALTY AND TREASON IN THE REVOLT OF THE NETHERLANDS

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The great failure of Philip II's reign was his loss of the northern part of the Low Countries and his inability to stem the tide of heresy in that area. One may wonder whether he could have realized both aims, keep the Netherlands for the Spanish crown and maintain the monopoly of the Catholic Church. For it was precisely Philip's insistence on religious orthodoxy which blocked a political settlement. This reminds us that the fate of the Netherlands was not decided in the council rooms of the Escorial alone. Important as Philip's global strategic decisions may have been -allocating his resources against the Ottoman empire or against the heretics in the North- the attitudes of ordinary people in the Netherlands also played their part in determining the outcome of the conflict (1).

Our story begins on 21 May 1572, seven weeks after the Sea Beggars had captured the town of Brill, when the bustling commercial port of Enkhuizen was the first of the towns of Holland to rise in spontaneous rebellion against the government of the Duke of Alba. At some point during the crisis a town drummer summoned "all followers of the King of Spain and of William of Orange" to appear in arms. One of the burgomasters, a pro-government man, was perplexed. How could one, he asked himself, "serve the King and resist him at the same time?"(2)

It was a good question, and the Enkhuizen city fathers were not the only ones to be baffled. William of Orange and the other insurgents did indeed consistently present their revolt as one undertaken in the name of the King against the King's own "evil councillors," as the early modern cliche ran-chief amongst them the "tyrant" Alba(3). Of course Philip and his councillors in Spain and the Netherlands saw it differently. For them, the vassals and subjects in the Netherlands had violated the loyalty they were due to their liege lord and natural prince; they had to be dealt with accordingly. In the beginning of 1567, shortly after the iconoclasm and the first wave of armed resistance, Philip demanded a new oath of absolute loyalty from his vassals and high officials, "to serve the King towards and against all (4)." Apart from William of Orange, only a hand-
ful of nobles refused to swear the new oath; they left the country. The large majority of
nobles, high officials and town magistrates remained loyal, although in many cases
grudgingly. In 1572, again, the majority of the nobility, the high officials and town
magistrates remained loyal to the King, even if they were highly critical of Alba's regi-
me.

The political classes confronted with this dilemma, however, formed only a tiny part
of the population. The vast majority had no choice at all. The Revolt was something
that just happened to them. And when it came, it did so in the familiar shape of war.
This was not the heroic war of national liberation cherished by nineteenth century his-
torians. It was the brutal warfare all too familiar to us in the last decade of the twentieth
century, with bloody massacres, crimes against non-combatants, famines and plagues
and, as is the case with all wars, a tremendous refugee problem. Like our own, the six-
teenth century was an age of refugees.

The attitude of ordinary people towards the Revolt has hardly been studied (5). How
did common town burghers, peasants, fishermen, sailors and parish priests see the con-
lict? What were their options between loyalty and treason? To what extent did the reli-
gious question influence their attitudes? And what strategies were available to ordinary
people to survive the ordeal? In this paper I shall address some of these questions, con-
fining myself to what has been called the "heroic" phase of the Revolt, between the cap-
ture of Brill in 1572 and the Pacification of Ghent in 1576 (6). The geographical scope
of my narrative will be the northern part of the county of Holland, an area which was
at that time both physically and strategically cut off from the main body of the provin-
ce; it had its own military governor, its own states assembly and its own fiscal machi-
nery for financing the war.

The attitudes of the population varied widely. On one side of the spectrum there
were those who actively supported the Revolt, on the other side quite a few people
abandoned their property, friends and relatives and defected to the side of the enemy.
Between the two extremes there was a large group, in all likelihood the majority, who
kept a low profile and whose main purpose was to stay out of the conflict as well as
they could. They did their best to remain invisible and hence we know little about their
motives and feelings. A second point is that the attitudes among the population towards
the Revolt changed over time. During the honeymoon of the Revolt in the spring and
summer of 1572, when one town after another went over to the side of the rebels and
when the Spanish army was far away, the revolutionaries enjoyed a good deal of popu-
lar support. Yet by the fall of that year, when the disaster of Saint Bartholomew ended
prospects for French military aid, when Orange's offensive in the South and East collap-
sed and Alba sacked the towns of Mechelen, Zutphen and particularly Naarden, right
on Holland's doorstep, enthusiasm for the Revolt declined markedly.

In the early stages of the conflict many people were prepared to aid the insurgents(7).
The people of Vlissingen in Zeeland and Enkhuizen and Hoorn in North Holland rebe-
lled spontaneously against their pro-government magistrates and brought their towns to
the side of William of Orange (8). In all towns, however, the unrest had the character of
civil war with part of the population supporting the forces of law and order. In Enkhiu-
zen armed citizens confronted each others. A massacre seemed imminent, but the civic
militiamen who had been summoned to protect the magistrates against the armed sailors and fishermen defected and thus sealed the town's fate. In the countryside, too, there was a fair amount of support for the rebels. When the Beggars hurriedly sent reinforcements to Enkhuizen, the peasants of North Holland, to whom the defence of the country had been entrusted, did not lift a finger to prevent their passage. Yet when a company of Spanish soldiers was brought in to stop the Beggars' regiments, the peasants rang the tocsin, broke down bridges and dug trenches to keep the soldiers out. Two drummers, sent by the stadholder Boussu to the countryside of North Holland to press sailors for the government fleet, returned without a single recruit; had they tried to enlist a thousand men for the Beggars, they asserted, they would have found them easily. Boussu was convinced that support for the revolt was almost universal: "it seems as if even the stones rise against me," he lamented.

The driving force behind the popular revolts in the towns of Holland had been a handful of determined exiles, for the most part committed Calvinists. Most of them had been banished by Alba's Council of Troubles for their part in the revolt of 1566. In Emden and other German towns they had actively schemed to return. After the Sea Beggars had more or less by chance captured Brill and when it turned out that Holland was virtually undefended, they grabbed their chance and came back, in an attempt to win over the indigenous population for the Revolt. Their motives are not difficult to fathom, but what induced the inhabitants of Holland to support them?

In the towns which chose the side of the Revolt more or less spontaneously the immediate cause had been the attempt by the town magistrates to bring in a government garrison. It is difficult to underestimate the unpopularity of the Spanish soldiery. The towns of the Netherlands were traditionally extremely independent and relied for their defence on their own armed citizens rather than on mercenary troops. Garrisons were thought fit for keeping a conquered people in subjection; free citizens defend themselves.

It was widely known that the Spanish soldiers did indeed treat the townsmen where they were billeted as an enemy population. Arnoldus Buchelius, the Utrecht lawyer, humanist scholar and diarist, remembered in a particularly vivid description how arrogant Spanish soldiers had seized his parents' house, removed all woodwork and refurbished it partly as a stable, partly as a field hospital for syphilis patients. The one-eyed Spanish soldier billeted on the hapless family voiced a general feeling among the Spaniards when he said that "all of the Netherlands were guilty of lese majesty and had been assigned as booty for the Spanish soldiers." The structural inability of the government to pay its army imposed a heavy burden on the garrison towns. The town of Utrecht was a case in point. In the spring of 1572 it housed no less than eight Spanish companies, which had remained unpaid for seventeen months. Since the government was unable to disburse the soldiers, the city was forced to provide loans, never to be paid back. No wonder that Granvelle's informer Morillon shortly after the loss of Brill wrote to his patron that "the way one treats those of Utrecht could one day induce [the towns of Holland] to turn their coats, to our great desolation and ruin."
The government could have capitalized on the fear for the marauding bands of Sea Beggars now threatening all maritime towns of Holland, but the royal army did little to ingratiate itself with the local population. Several regiments of Spaniards on their way through Rotterdam massacred without provocation a few dozen citizens of that town. Public opinion had it that no less than hundred and fifty people perished, and the magistrates of nearby Gouda believed that the soldiers "waded through blood and tossed the heads of children over the walls." Not surprisingly even Amsterdam, which was to remain loyal to the government until 1578, for a long time refused stubbornly to take in a government garrison and preferred to rely on its own militiamen to defend itself against the rebels.

Many contemporaries, however, agreed that the deepest cause of the revolt of 1572 was not the aversion of the soldiers but poverty. Morillon wrote that the situation in Holland "would make a stone weep. There were several towns and villages without one single beggar; in some places they now have multiplied to six- or seven hundred, for the most part sailors and fishermen;" and Boussu also thought that "the canaille of Enkhuizen has rebelled... mostly because of poverty." The cause underlying the destitution among the working classes of Holland was harvest failure and a resulting economic crisis which had hit all of north-western Europe in 1571. The mainstay of Holland's maritime economy, the Baltic grain trade, collapsed. One year earlier a particularly severe storm had caused many dikes to break and large parts of the country to be flooded. The economic crisis was aggravated by the actions of the Sea Beggars, the pirates commissioned by William of Orange, who from 1570 onwards increasingly scourged the countryside of Holland. Particularly sailors and fishermen suffered, precisely the groups that supported the rebels of 1572. During the worst of the crisis, Alba reintroduced his plans for fiscal reform, the notorious Tenth and Twentieth Penny Taxes. The hard-hit population of Holland blamed Alba, not the pirates.

It would be wrong, however, to presume that the entire population of Holland rose in spontaneous revolt. After Enkhuizen and Hoorn had defected other towns were far less enthusiastic. The neighbouring town of Medemblik refused entrance to the rebels, only to surrender after they had stormed its gates and wedged the town's women and children like a living shield between themselves and Medemblik's menfolk defending the citadel. Alkmaar did not open its gates before the magistrates were convinced that they were surrounded by a military force many times outnumbering the town's defences--a mistake, for the rebel commander Diederk Sonoy had cannily inflated his motley band of mercenaries by pressing the North Holland peasants into service, armed with rakes and pitchforks. Edam and Monnikendam did not join the Revolt spontaneously; they were forced to open their gates. The well-fortified towns of Holland could have kept the rebels out easily, had they wished to do so. In all towns only a small minority of returned exiles, aided by disgruntled sailors and fishermen, supported the Revolt actively. The majority, when confronted with the choice of letting in the Spanish or the rebel troops of William of Orange, apparently considered the latter to be the lesser evil.

Another minority, however, largely composed of deposed town magistrates and
various royal officers fled to territories unaffected by the Revolt. The Spanish officer Bernardino de Mendoça described in his memoirs how the royal army evacuated Holland in the summer of 1572, followed by "about four thousand people, carried on seven hundred wagons; they were the Council of Holland, the ecclesiastics, the members of the religious orders, noblemen and ladies and bourgeois of the party of His Majesty, who for living as Catholics and fulfilling their duty as faithful vassals of His Majesty sacrificed the natural affection that one has for one's fatherland and one's property." Four thousand people, seven hundred wagons: they must have formed a colossal traffic jam.

The decision to leave the country and wait until Alba would restore law and order was not taken lightly, for it entailed the loss of one's property to the rebels. On 23 August 1572 Orange had issued an ordinance, a masterpiece of cunning and astuteness, stating that he had heard that his army in Holland caused havoc by appropriating properties of clerics and fugitives. To restore order among the troops and to ensure that Catholics and Evangelicals live in peace, he ordered all fugitives, both clergy and laity, to return home within a fortnight. Those failing to comply were to be punished with confiscation of their property for the benefit of the common cause. Of course Orange was well aware that in the face of his Protestant soldiers wantonly killing priests and monks few Catholic refugees were likely to obey. By seizing their property he secured an important source for financing the Revolt. During the following years ecclesiastical and émigré property were to form the "sheet-anchor" of Holland's finances.

The mood in Holland changed after the Spanish army had sacked Naarden in December 1572, murdering practically the entire population, men, women and children, Catholics and religious dissenters alike, both clerics and laity. As Alba wrote smugly to Philip, the soldiers "cut the throats of burghers and soldiers, without a living soul escaping." Many peasants from villages who had so far favoured the rebels now fled to Amsterdam for safety. The outrage caused attitudes to harden. In Hoorn a number of Catholic citizens suspected of sympathy for the enemy were demanded to renew their oath; when they refused they were banished from the town. Alba's relentless behaviour did the Spanish cause more harm than good, for it convinced many people in rebel-held territory, even Catholics who had never felt much sympathy for Orange and the Calvinists, to defend themselves at all cost. They would rather live under the yoke of the Turk, they said, than under the Spanish.

The surrender, in July 1573, of Haarlem which had valiantly defended itself against the Spaniards during a long and bloody siege lasting seven months, formed another turning point. Many of those who during the long hot summer of 1572 had believed that the government might be cajoled into granting concessions must have deplored their earlier optimism about the outcome of the conflict. The fall of the town, which controlled the narrow isthmus forming the only access to North Holland, caused panic. On 16 July, only days after Haarlem had opened its gates to the Spanish, the magistrates of Alkmaar, clearly the next target, had to issue a bylaw ordering all citizens who had fled to the nearby town of Hoorn to report home at once, on punishment of forfeiture of their clothes and such money as would be found on them. A week later the governor of North Holland, Sonoy, desperately wrote to William of Orange that
since the fall of Haarlem all people (including those most committed to our cause) have so much anxiety, that they are only concerned with how to get away from these lands, trying to dispose of their property by day and night by various means, as well as they can (...) The common people say that if your Princely Grace has no other means [to defend them], our true and committed friends would best escape by ship with their wives, children and such poor belongings (armoetken) as they can gather, rather than allow all towns to be taken and die as wanton and obstinate [rebels].

Who were these refugees? How many were they, and what were their motives? As compared to the Protestant exile communities, little is known about the Catholic and loyalist refugees of the Revolt. Protestant refugees from the Netherlands formed exile churches of their own or created a recognizable presence within the existing churches; hence, the Protestant exile communities can be identified easily. By contrast, Catholic exiles fleeing the Orangists in Holland and Zeeland merged with their host communities and hence remained largely invisible. There is no way to estimate the volume of the Catholic emigration, but scattered remarks, buried in the archives and contemporary memoirs do suggest that it was very substantial.

Take, for example, the town of Hoorn, where in 1573 the magistrates complained that the town was unable to pay its taxes because no less than three quarters of the wealthy citizens had left the town. Since the aim was a reduction of Hoorn's tax burden the burgomasters may well have overstated the numer of fugitives, but a long list with the names of those absent does indeed suggest that a very large part of the rich burghers had disappeared.

Most refugees went to Amsterdam, conveniently close to their various home towns, yet relative safe and staunchly Catholic. Life in Amsterdam was hard for the exiles. Since the rebels had instituted a naval blockade in Amsterdam's sea approaches, famine and plague were rampant. The town's magistrates, hardly able to feed the town's indigenous population, were far from happy with the stream of destitute war refugees, who posed a security risk as well. They decreed that new immigrants should report to a special committee and show an attestation from their parish priest that they had been faithful Catholics; for Amsterdamers it was forbidden to lodge unregistered foreigners. Massive searches were undertaken to detect and arrest illegal aliens. Many fugitives, among them priests and monks, were in fact sent back.

An Augustine friar from Gouda, Wouter Jacobszoon, a Catholic exile himself who has left a diary describing life in Amsterdam during the war years in fascinating detail, sketched a vivid picture of their predicament. It is worthwile to quote him at length:

The good Catholic people who had run away from their towns because they did not want to mingle with such ungodliness as was perpetrated by the rebels--the distress they suffered can hardly be described. They had always been people of honour. They were used to affluence, and had never sojourned anywhere against their will when travelling abroad for pleasure. And now they found themselves in a very different condition, because they saw that they had been expelled from their towns almost as exiles, as villains, with little hope soon to come back to their own folks. In addition the money they had to live from became very scarce and they saw no means to find more, since everybody during this time had been deserted by his kith
and kin. And on top of that they experienced that they were not at home, but amongst strangers. This grieved them, because they lacked the service of their relatives they were accustomed to rely on. And finally it cost them great effort to keep a place in the towns where they wished to settle, on account of the scarcity of provisions everywhere and because of the multitude of exiles now leaving all towns. Anybody with any sense at all can understand the distress and anxiety these good people must have experienced during this time. Yet everybody had to go on with his charge, as imposed by God, and maintain his patience.

Why did these people leave their friends and relatives to live as outcasts in an alien and often hostile society? Brother Wouter (understandably) suggests that they wished to live as good Catholics. For many people the banning of Catholic worship in rebel-held Holland was indeed the main reason to take to the road. Many peasants refused to have their children baptized in the new Church and came to Amsterdam to bring their children to the font.

It is also evident that many others, particularly from the countryside, merely tried to escape from the horrors of war. Each new Spanish campaign brought about a new wave of refugees. The peasants living in the no-man land between the Spanish and the rebels trenches, in Kennemerland and Waterland, were particularly hard hit. Their houses were looted and burnt, their cattle razed and their womenfolk raped by soldiers from both sides. But those living behind the rebel lines had reasons to escape, too. The rebels had inundated large tracts of land to keep out the Spanish army. Their regiments, although not as badly paid as the Spanish ones, were billeted in the villages, where the peasants had to foot the bill. To assist his mercenary regiments, William of Orange had enlisted the peasantry in his army. Armed with rakes and pitchforks they had to man the trenches and fulfill guard duties. In wintertime, organized in huge gangs, they were forced to cut holes in the frozen lakes and rivers that formed Holland's main defence line. They were also pressed to row the galleys in the rebels' navy; failure to show up could result in a death sentence.

Yet unpopular as the rebel troops might be, compared to the Spanish army most people continued to regard them as the lesser evil. They were fully aware of what to expect should the Spanish succeed in breaking the lines. During a Spanish campaign against North Holland in May 1575 the inhabitants were said to be prepared "to wade in their own blood up to their knees, rather than return to the Catholic religion and the obedience of the King." This was less surprising than it may seem, for the military commander Hierges had received explicit orders to bum the entire countryside of North Holland and put all living souls to the sword.

The Spanish failure to capture the town of Leiden (October 1574) was another turning point in the war. A mutiny broke out and the Spanish army abandoned most of their strongholds in Holland, which in turn were occupied by the rebel troops. For the Catholic exiles living in Amsterdam and elsewhere it now became evident that the war might last for many years to come. So miserable was their existence that many of them decided to return to their rebel-held home towns. The book of resolutions of the Council of Hoorn shows a steady trickle of exiles requesting to be readmitted; after paying a stiff fine they were restored to their forfeited property. Having lived with the
enemy, however, they remained a security liability. When in 1575 the authorities worried about an alleged treason plot, a number of returned exiles were among the first to be arrested (38).

In 1576, the Pacification of Ghent allowed the return of all refugees. It is remarkable that after four years of bloody civil war they were reintegrated into their home communities without apparent difficulty. Sense of community in the towns of Holland was apparently strong enough to resist the disruptive forces of civil war and religious schism. The spectacular economic growth Holland was to experience during the last quarter of the sixteenth century may have helped to ease the pain.

In conclusion, it was their desire to live as Catholics and fear of the Spanish army which induced people to become refugees. On the other hand, fear of the Spanish might also convince people that they should take a stand with the rebels, even if they had no taste at all for their religious reforms. Not all people were in a position to run away; the example of Hoorn suggests that it was particularly the rich and powerful who defected, even if they were most at risk due to the confiscation policy of the rebel authorities.

Conspicuously absent in the sources as a motive for defection is any deeply felt sense of personal loyalty to the "natural prince" Philip II. This is not surprising. The King was a remote figure, who lived in Spain since 1559, and had not visited his subjects in Holland since his joyous entry in 1549. Even before his reign the Dutch had a long experience of being ruled by foreign, absentee princes. That was congenial to them, as long as the Prince allowed the inhabitants to govern themselves according to their own laws and privileges. Only fiefholders, nobles, high officials, town magistrates and the military were bound to the King by a personal oath. Urban citizens had sworn an oath of loyalty to their home town, peasants to the lord of the manor. Their loyalty to the prince was indirect, mediated as it was through their superiors. After a town had joined the Revolt and demanded a new oath of its citizens to obey the town magistrates, William of Orange and the King, who could tell how the King might best be served?
NOTAS


(6) PARKER, *Dutch Revolt*, chapter 3.


Cf. Correspondence Granvelle, IV, pp. 222, 258 (Morillon to Granvelle, 12 May and 17 June, 1572): Enkhuizen and Hoorn did not want a Spanish garrison "que sont fort abhoriz par tout;" the magistrates of Hoorn, Almama, Medemblik and other towns declared that they would live and die in the service of the King, but that they would not allow the Spaniards to enter, nor the Waloons, "que font encore piz."


BOR, Oorsprong, I, pp. 357-361.

Correspondence Granvelle IV, p. 170 (Morillon to Granvelle, 5 April 1572).


Correspondence Granvelle, IV, p. 148 (Morillon to Granvelle, 24 March 1572).

VAN VLOTEN, Nederlands opstand, II, p. lxii (Boussu to Alba, 22 May 1572).


VELIUS, Chroniek, p. 175; D. BURGER VAN SCHOOREL, Chronyk van de stad Medemblik (Jacob Duijn: Hoorn, 1736), pp. 294-295.


BOR, Oorsprong, I, p. 377; D. BURGER VAN SCHOOREL, Chronyk, pp. 22-23.

C. VAN DER WOUDE, Kronyk van Alckmaar met zyn dorpen...tot den jaren 1658 (Johannes de Cros: The Hague, 1746), p. 64; G. BOOMKAMP, Alkmaer en deszelfs geschiedenissen uit de nagelaten papieren van Simon Eikelenberg, en veel andere echte stukken en bescheiden (Philippus and Jakobus Losel: Rotterdam, 1747), p. 179.


WOLTJER, Tussen vrijheidsstrijd, p. 52.


BOR, Oorsprong, I, pp. 399-400.

The best source for the "war crimes" committed by the rebels' army is P. OPMEER, Historia
martyrum batavicum, sive defectionis a fide maiorum Hollandiae, in duas decades distributa (Sumptibus Bernardi Gualtherii & Petri Henningii: Cologne 1625), translated as Martelaarsboek ofte Historie der Hollandse martelaren...etc. (2 vols., Antwerpen: Petrus Pratanus, 1700).


(34) BOR, Oorsprong, I, pp. 417-420.

(35) Correspondence Philippe II, II, p. 300 (Alba to Philip, 19 December 1572): the soldiers "degollaron burgeses y soldados, sin escaparse hombre nascido."

(36) Dagboek Broeder Wouter Jacobsz, p. 92, 6 December 1572.

(37) VELIUS, Chronick, p. 199.

(38) BOR, Oorsprong, I, p. 420.


(40) BOR, Oorsprong, I, p. 446 (Sonoy to Orange, 24 July 1573).


(43) Hoorn, Archiefdienst West-Friese Gemeentes, Stadsarchief Hoorn, inv. no. 2530.

(44) VELIUS, Chronick, p. 189.

(45) Numerous regulations on immigrants in Amsterdam, Gemeentearchief, Vroedschapsresoluties, inv. no. 2 (1565-1575), from 29 May 1572 onwards.

(46) Dagboek Broeder Wouter Jacobsz, p. 123.

(47) Dagboek Broeder Wouter Jacobsz, pp. 158-159.

(48) Dagboek Broeder Wouter Jacobsz, pp. 355, 713.

(49) e.g. Dagboek Broeder Wouter Jacobsz, pp. 141, 374.

(50) Numerous passages, e.g. Dagboek Broeder Wouter Jacobsz, p. 141 (Kennemerland) and p. 374 (Waterland).

(51) VELIUS, Chronick, pp. 200-202.

(52) VELIUS, Chronick, p. 198.

(53) Hoorn, Archiefdienst West-Friese Gemeentes, Oud-rechterlijk archief Stede Westwoud, inv. no. 4713, 20 October, 1 December 1573. Jan de Bruin was so kind as to draw my attention to these documents.

(54) Dagboek Broeder Wouter Jacobsz, p. 500.

(55) Correspondence Philippe II, III, pp. 312, 315 (Requesens to Philip, 10 May 1575); Hierges' commission in Madrid, Instituto de Valencia de Don Juan, Caja 93, envío 68, ff. 75-78; cf. M. C. WAXMAN, "Strategic Terror: Philip II and Sixteenth-Century Warfare," War in History, 4 (1979), pp. 339-347.

Streekarchief West-Friese Gemeentes, Stadsarchief Hoorn, inv. no. 91, ff. 70 vo.-77.

I am presently preparing a book on the North Holland treason plot of 1575.