

Raymond Fagel and Judith Pollmann, 1572. *Burgeroorlog in de Nederlanden* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 2022, 248 pp., ISBN 9789044650129).

Fernand Braudel, in his classic survey of the Mediterranean in the era of Philip II, described 1572 as a ‘dramatic year.’ Even that least *événementiel* of historians had to admit that a lot was going on in Europe during those particular twelve months: the Saint Bartholomew’s day massacre, a papal election, the final conquest of the Inca Empire by Spain, the publication of the Puritan manifesto *An Admonition to Parliament*, a supernova observed by Tycho Brahe, the initial printing of Braun’s *Civitatis Orbis Terrarum* – one could go on. The Low Countries were not spared this tidal wave of events. Indeed, 1572 can also be said to be one of the most dramatic years in the history of the Habsburg Netherlands. In that year, as Raymond Fagel and Judith Pollmann adroitly describe in this superb new book *1572. Burgeroorlog in de Nederlanden*, civil war, in the guise of rebellion, broke out in the Netherlands.

Rebellion against the Habsburg government had of course already begun in the Low Countries in the late 1560s, but in April 1572 the unanticipated incursion of the Sea Beggars into the south-Holland town of Brielle coincided with a larger military campaign by William of Orange’s rebel armies to invade the Netherlands from the east and south. Holland, however, was a sideshow; the real prize was the wealthy provinces of Brabant and Flanders, and the combined forces of William and his brother Louis of Nassau tried to conquer these regions, ultimately unsuccessfully. Indeed, very little went according to the rebels’ plan during this campaign. By year’s end the only victories Orange secured were toeholds in Holland and Zeeland, peripheral provinces at best that were secondary to his war aims. His military operation that year was to a considerable extent a failure.

Despite this, these events in 1572 have been touted for generations by mostly Protestant and Dutch historians as the ‘birth year’ of the modern-day Netherlands. While this may have become true in retrospect, at the time no one foresaw such an outcome. Furthermore, the conflict very quickly took on the character of a civil war, as the fighting divided Netherlanders against each other. This is the authors’ central framing device, following in the footsteps of distinguished historians such as Juliaan Woltjer and Henk van Nierop, and it is persuasive. Local populations in all the theaters of the war, principally in besieged cities, found themselves trapped between two deadly armies that were more than willing to massacre civilians and plunder property to achieve their aims. Burghers were split in their political allegiances; it was an often unpopular political minority that took over city regimes in the wake

of the Beggar armies. The discord was compounded still further by religious difference. On the heels of the rebel troops, a zealous minority of Reformed Protestants assumed control of the ecclesiastical fabric of many cities, leaving the Catholic laity bereft and its clergy terrorized. Militant reformation ensued.

In four chapters that follow the seasons, Fagel and Pollmann present a compelling and readable narrative of the year's events, performing the nimble feat of presenting chaos in a commendably lucid manner. This is a story with many moving parts – military, political, religious, economic, social, cultural – yet the authors relate it all with admirable seamlessness. Intended for a broad audience, the book's narrative is clear and its prose vivid. Scholars will also learn much from it. The authors place the events of spring 1572 in Holland and Zeeland into a larger context of fighting that swept across nearly the entirety of the Low Countries. Orange's opponent the Duke of Alba also recognized that Brabant and Flanders were the true target, and so he ignored Holland and moved most of his forces south and east to check the rebels' advances; the most decisive fighting was for control of such cities as Mons, Mechelen and Zutphen. This was a story of all of the Netherlands, not just Holland and Zeeland.

Contingency, the authors make clear, played a large role in determining the course of events in the Netherlands that year. With the unexpected takeover of Brielle and then most of Holland by the unruly Sea Beggars, William of Orange, whose leadership was by no means absolute, had difficulty controlling some of his commanders; hotheads like the count of Lumey indulged in a degree of murder and plunder that terrified and infuriated local populations and did much damage to the rebel cause. Furthermore, the Parisian massacre of Saint Bartholomew in August effectively put an end to any possibility of aid to the rebels from the French, something Orange had fervently hoped and worked for. William of Orange was perhaps luckiest in his enemies: the Duke of Alba and his master Philip II, king of Spain. Philip's religious and fiscal policies in the Netherlands, as executed by Alba, proved so deeply unpopular that many local communities saw the rebellion as a lesser evil than the Habsburg government. Because of these kinds of unforeseen and uncontrollable variables, the rebels wound up winning a lesser prize, Holland and Zeeland in the northwest, rather than the richer provinces in the south, and that only at the frightful price of civil war.

Fagel and Pollmann have done readers the great favor of placing the Netherlandish events of this dramatic year back in their proper setting, that is, the whole of the Netherlands. Although 1572 is currently being commemorated and celebrated in the Netherlands as a 450th 'birth year', 1572 reminds us that the events of that year traversed the entire Low Countries and that they consumed both political elites and ordinary burghers. The Belgians, it appears, do not have a corresponding interest in commemorating the events of that year. This book accomplishes what good history is supposed to do: offer

a new perspective, refute long-standing mythologies and convey its argument with detail, persuasiveness and vibrancy. The year 1572 is well-trodden historical ground, but in these pages it comes splendidly alive once again.

Christine Kooi, Louisiana State University