

Raymond Fagel, Leonor Álvarez Francés, and Beatriz Santiago Belmonte (eds.), *Early Modern War Narratives and the Revolt in the Low Countries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020, 256 pp., ISBN 9781526140869).

The outbreak of the Dutch Revolt in 1566 brought widespread violence and civil conflict to the early modern Low Countries. Decades of religious and civil warfare gradually split the Low Countries along confessional lines, as an independent northern Netherlands with a strong Calvinist affiliation broke away from the loyalist provinces of the southern Netherlands, which reinforced their Catholic identity under continued Spanish rule. The ordeal of war is often seen as forging new national histories for the emerging United Provinces of the Netherlands, the Spanish monarchy, and the future nation of Belgium. *Early Modern War Narratives and the Revolt in the Low Countries* re-examines the historical memory of the Dutch Revolt. Raymond Fagel, lead editor of this collective volume, argues that ‘these grand national narratives were not conceived at the historical moment they took place, as they are the result of a process taking several centuries. In order to deconstruct these national myths it is necessary to return to the simple episodic narratives describing the actual events’ (3). The collective volume explores the ways in which the soldiers and civilians who experienced the Dutch Revolt and the ensuing Eighty Years’ War (1568-1648) crafted narratives to relate war news and to record their memories of the conflict.

The book emerged from a conference organized by Leiden University in 2018 on episodic war narratives in chronicles, histories, pamphlets, news reports, poems, and other contemporary sources. War narratives of the Dutch Revolt often focus on the major battles, sieges, and massacres, such as the seizure of Brill (1572), siege of Haarlem (1572-1573), sack of Antwerp (1576), and the siege of Breda (1624-1625). The chapters in this collective volume, however, construct a transnational approach that considers how contemporary war narratives related overlapping episodes of violence in the interconnected conflicts of the Dutch Revolt, the French Wars of Religion (1559-1629), and the Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648). The chapter authors collectively argue that competing narratives of the Dutch Revolt shaped contemporaries’ understandings of war and trauma in the Low Countries and beyond.

Army commanders and military officers figure prominently in many of the war narratives analyzed in this volume. Jasper van der Steen finds that the politicization of historical memory developed early in the Dutch Revolt from political propaganda published by army commanders such as

Fernando Álvarez de Toledo, Duke of Alba, and William I of Orange, Prince of Orange. Polemical writings later shaped divergent northern and southern Netherlands historical narratives of the conflict. Chronicles of the siege of Leiden constructed inconsistent characterizations of Francisco de Valdés, the Spanish army commander who directed the besieging forces. Leonor Álvarez Francés argues that Valdés was ‘a seasoned military commander’, yet various Dutch and Spanish chronicles criticize him in different ways. Tuscan military commander Chiappino Vitelli represented Medici dynastic interests while serving with Spanish forces in the Low Countries, yet he emerges as a hero in various Italian accounts of the Dutch Revolt, according to Cees Reijner. Italian narratives extolled Vitelli’s military virtues as a reflection of his Italianness, rather than as an extension of Medici dynastic ambitions and Tuscan state power.

Printed pamphlets, manuscript relations, and letters communicated war news within the Low Countries and throughout Europe. M. J. Rodríguez-Salgado analyzes how war news circulated in Spanish diplomatic correspondence, revealing the dense epistolary networks and complex patterns of exchanges of information among Spanish diplomats and military officers. She finds that Diego Guzmán de Silva, Spanish ambassador in Venice, played an especially important role in communicating news from the Low Countries during the Dutch Revolt. Guzmán de Silva’s previous diplomatic experience in the Low Countries and his ongoing contacts with agents there gave him a privileged view of the conflict. Rodríguez-Salgado demonstrates the diplomatic practices of composing and copying manuscript letters, *relaciones*, news digests, and summaries. Ambassadors and their secretaries and copyists controlled the flow of war news and information, giving them considerable power to shape royal policies. Rodríguez-Salgado concludes that ‘by circulating information critical of the Duke of Alba and the policy of repression in the Low Countries [...] Guzmán de Silva contributed significantly to overturning these policies and to the removal and disfavor of Alba and Don Fadrique de Toledo, proving that information was also an important tool of political dissent’ (31).

Some war narratives focused on the ordinary soldiers of the Spanish Army of Flanders, which was a multinational force composed of Spanish, Flemish, Italian, and German contingents. Gregory Hanlon reflects on methodological approaches for analyzing ordinary soldiers’ experiences of war. Miguel Martínez explores ‘the ways in which participant soldiers imagined mutiny during the Eighty Years’ War by narrating it in epic verse’. These poems reveal the relationships between soldiers’ ‘repertoires of collective action’ and the ‘tropes and emplotment strategies’ that they utilized in composing their narratives (90). Spanish soldiers in Flanders wrote about religious issues and complained about the lack of pay. ‘Soldierly discontent is as much the narrative stuff of these texts as the sieges and assaults of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century military history,’ according to Martínez

(102). Fagel examines accounts of soldiers' defections during the Dutch Revolt, emphasizing that 'side-changing to the rebels also implied for the Spanish military partly deserting one's religion, as they were to join a side dominated by Protestants' (108).

Chronicles and histories of the Dutch Revolt depict soldiers' violence against civilians. The Spanish forces under the Duke of Alba occupied the Low Countries and prosecuted numerous subjects for the crimes of heresy and sedition. The Spanish Army of Flanders attempted to suppress the revolt by besieging and sacking rebellious cities. Many war narratives accused Spanish soldiers of engaging in widespread rape, pillage, destruction, and summary executions. Women and gender issues emerge in these discussions of violence against civilians. The Spanish military officer Francisco de Valdés allegedly spared the city of Leiden because his fiancée Magdalena Moons had family members in the city. Interestingly, some Spanish soldiers wrote poetry that celebrated 'masculinized friendship and same-sex love in the army of Flanders' (101).

Contemporary accounts of the Dutch Revolt related numerous large-scale army mutinies, especially during the 'year of the Furies' in 1576. Beatriz Santiago Belmonte emphasizes that the sudden death of Luis de Requesens, Governor-General of the Low Countries, in March 1576 created a serious power vacuum. Many soldiers in the Spanish Army of Flanders were upset over lack of pay and supplies, as the military correspondence clearly shows, producing a series of army mutinies. Depictions of soldierly riots have often blamed mutineers for mindless violence against civilians. Yet, a close analysis of accounts of the sack of Maastricht demonstrates that 'the power vacuum, the distrust between the military and the locals, and the lack of resources were all factors that increased the tension within the city until 20 October, when a series of events provoked a battle within the city and a subsequent sack' (66).

Italian histories of the conflict often criticized Spanish soldiers' conduct of war in the Low Countries. Cees Reijner analyzes the depiction of the sack of Antwerp in Cardinal Guido Bentivoglio's *Della Guerra Fiandra*, arguing that 'when at last the Spanish troops had crushed all opposition and "their lust for blood was fully satisfied" they began looting the houses and property of the Antwerp population, over a period of three days. In his description of the looting of the city, Bentivoglio talks only about Spanish soldiers who indulged in violence against the citizens of Antwerp' (77). The disorderly conduct by Spanish soldiers in the Low Countries became part of the notorious 'Black Legend' of Spanish cruelties.

The confessional dimensions of the Dutch Revolt strongly shaped most contemporary war narratives. Jesuits organized military chaplains to serve with the Spanish Army of Flanders during the conflict. Vincenzo Lavenia shows how Jesuits crafted narratives of their heroic 'Christian soldiers' who motivated the Spanish army to fight against the heretical Calvinists in the Low Countries. Werner Thomas compares many accounts of the siege of Ostend,

which lasted for three years and became a focal point for confessionalized war news across Europe. Dutch siege narratives reshaped the loss of Ostend into a heroic victory for the Estates-General. Raingard Esser and Dániel Moerman reveal a fascinating case of the nobleman Christopher Schele and his son, Sweder, who both tried to remain neutral in the confessionalized conflict by using *sauvegardes* from multiple armies and crossing borders when necessary.

*Early Modern War Narratives and the Revolt in the Low Countries* succeeds in constructing a transnational history of the Dutch Revolt through contemporary war narratives. The chapters explore Dutch, Spanish, and international accounts of the conflict in the Low Countries, challenging the separate Spanish and Dutch national historiographies that have dominated discussion of the Eighty Years' War. The result is a fascinating exploration of war, culture, and society in the early modern Low Countries.

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