Jesse Spohnholz and Mirjam van Veen, ***Dutch Reformed Protestants in the Holy Roman Empire, c. 1550-1620: A Reformation of Refugees*** (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2024, 313 pp., ISBN 9781648250767).

The present study, based on the NWO-funded project *Rhineland Exiles and the Religious Landscape of the Dutch Republic (c. 1550-1618)* of Mirjam van Veen and Jesse Spohnholz and their team, is a very welcome addition to our knowledge and understanding of the many, often small Dutch exile communities in the Holy Roman Empire. Not since Heinz Schilling's survey on *Niederländische Exulanten im 16. Jahrhundert*, published in 1972, has there been an academic attempt to provide a comprehensive tableau of these communities. Even the few monographs and articles on individual communities – of which Jesse Spohnholz is a leading author – are surprisingly small in number and often of an older date. The present co-authored monograph provides an important new quarry of information on eleven Dutch exile communities, of which the majority were situated in the Duchy of Cleves, bordering the Dutch Republic, as well as of those in the international commercial centres of the Holy Roman Empire: Cologne, Aachen and Frankfurt. The work's study of the model community in Frankenthal provides an additional example of a purposefully designed refugee town for Dutch reformed exiles leaving the Low Countries as a consequence of religious persecution, economic downturn and civil war.

Like most studies on the topic, the investigation focuses on the first wave of exiles covering the second half of the sixteenth century until 1620. The framework of the study is distinctly bottom-up and transregional – a strategy that could only be realised through the efforts of a team of researchers. The large database of individuals, their itineraries, and the social networks that they created provides the opportunity to understand migrants' movements and strategies well beyond the official documentation of church and civic orders and reports, correspondence of ministers and elders, or registers of birth, marriage and death – the tried and tested staple of early modern migration studies, which are also investigated here. The merit of this study is that it brings together these data, which so far have only been used for the analysis of individual refugee communities. In six chapters, following a chronological logic starting with the exile and finishing with memories of the experience, the authors address key areas of refugee lives. These include the strategies of accommodation and coexistence with their new neighbours, managing confessional practices and beliefs, fostering networks across these communities and remembering the exile experience. While focusing on the officially established Reformed Church communities,

Published by Royal Netherlands Historical Society | KNHG

DOI: 10.51769/bmgn-lchr.24799 | www.bmgn-lchr.nl | e-ISSN 2211-2898 | print ISSN 0165-0505

the authors acknowledge that not all Dutch residents in the host towns under investigation were of the Reformed faith or members of that church. They nevertheless rely on the sources produced by and still available for these churches.

The book has been included in the University of Rochester Press' series *Changing Perspectives on Early Modern Europe* for good reasons: building on their earlier work and incorporating the findings of the two PhD students and the postdoc in the research team, the two authors make a convincing intervention in an old debate about the role of exile for the development of Dutch Calvinism, which dates back to Heiko A. Oberman's concept of a 'Theology of Exile', but has its roots in Dutch nineteenth-century historiography. Van Veen and Spohnholz demonstrate instead that the exile experience has not led to a particular, militant variant of Calvinism, which, according to Oberman and others, significantly influenced the development of the Reformed Church in the Dutch Republic. Navigating exile in a confessionally diverse, often officially hostile, but in many cases practically accommodating environment in the Holy Roman Empire and the task of carving out a living and fostering good social relations with their neighbours has, in fact, given rise to confessional compromise and its cultural and social expressions, as Spohnholz and Van Veen argue.

What the synthesis of the study of the eleven communities demonstrates, is the diversity of exile experiences of Dutch refugees and of their responses to the local traditions and confessional and social codes. Although not specifically referenced here, the team thus confirms Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger's concept of 'situative Konfessionalität', articulated already in 2013, which argues for the ambiguity and flexibility of confessionalisation as experienced and practiced by local communities in the sixteenth century. This concept is also successfully applied in Corinna Ehlers' recent study of sixteenth-century theologians' debates on the nature and practice of the Lord's Supper. These debates dominated confessional discourses at the beginning of the period investigated by Spohnholz and Van Veen when assessing the management of worship in chapter 4. Here, as elsewhere in the text, more references to the internal conflicts within the emerging Reformed spectrum, which are recognised in the work's introduction (61), might have been helpful. Guidelines for a 'reformation of the refugees' – hence the subtitle of the book (which, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, refers to Oberman's seminal study on the topic) – were not only developed in conversation with the dominant confessions of the host society, most notably with Lutheran doctrine and practice, but were also still very much in flux within and among reformed communities.

Refugees' wrestling with 'orthodoxy' is impressively demonstrated in chapter 5, 'Living in the Diaspora', in which the authors analyse the vivid epistolary exchanges and organised meetings between the exile communities

in England, the Holy Roman Empire, and in the Low Countries asking for advice in matters relating to confessional doctrines and church discipline. Two aspects emerge starkly from this chapter. Firstly, the transregional, rather than transnational outlook of these communities. Instead of being focused on their places of origin or the emerging Reformed Churches in the Dutch Republic, exile communities took the lead and fostered their networks among fellow refugees. Given their geographic vicinity, particularly in the Duchy of Cleves, this might not be surprising, but it does change traditional perceptions of exile studies, which, until recently, have interpreted exile experiences through the refugees' perceived focus on the place of origin – an interpretation that also fostered Oberman's theory. As Spohnholz and Van Veen emphasise, this reinterpretation of exile in a transregional framework is not specific to Dutch Reformed Protestant communities, but has already been convincingly demonstrated by, among others, Liesbeth Corens in her study on *Confessional Mobility and English Catholics in Counterreformation Europe* (2019).

The second observation that is further developed in this chapter is the multilingualism of the communities, which could often not only navigate languages as close to each other as the Lower German spoken in the Duchy of Cleves and the Flemish or Dutch of the refugees. As we know from recent studies, for instance by Alisa van der Haar, early modern contemporaries often had no difficulties in switching between Dutch and French – the language spoken within the Walloon exile communities, which were also established in the Holy Roman Empire, frequently side-by-side with the Dutch Reformed churches.

These conversations across linguistic borders are very present in this chapter, but are missing in the investigations in the earlier chapters of the book. In their introduction, Spohnholz and Van Veen acknowledge the lack of research on the Walloon sister communities in exile, which also follows a certain logic of the original research agenda of the team, namely their intervention in the debate about the development of the Dutch Reformed Church in the Netherlands. Given the findings of the project, which convincingly demonstrates the transregional perspective of these exile communities, the (relative) invisibility of the Walloon churches becomes even more problematic. Hopefully, future research can build on the existing findings of this study by enriching it with a broader perspective on exile communities.

Raingard Esser, University of Groningen