Power, Faith, and Pictures

Frans Hogenberg’s Account of the Beeldenstorm

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Frans Hogenberg’s depiction of the Beeldenstorm is one of the most popular and influential visual accounts of iconoclasm. However, it has been considered controversial in Academia due to the account’s complex visual rhetoric. To tackle this complexity this contribution offers a close reading of Hogenberg’s depiction as an historical source by exploring its various references and allusions. The printed image allows historians to gain insights into the religious and political culture of the second half of the sixteenth century. This essay argues that Hogenberg’s account of the Beeldenstorm is a reflection on the power of images and its limitations. As such, the print was directly involved in the battle of how to understand contemporary religious and political conflicts. Although the account appeals to a heterogeneous audience, it depicts the Beeldenstorm in neither a neutral nor in an objective way, but from a position of religious compromise and secular unanimity.

Macht, geloof, en afbeeldingen. Frans Hogenbergs uitbeelding van de Beeldenstorm

Frans Hogenbergs uitbeelding van de Beeldenstorm is een van bekendste en invloedrijkste visuele weergaven van iconoclasme. Binnen het academisch onderzoek hebben echter verhitte discussies gewoed als gevolg van de gecompliceerde visuele retoriek in de afbeelding. Om deze complexiteit te ontrafelen hanteert dit artikel een nauwkeurige lezing van de afbeelding als historische bron en onderzoekt het de verschillende verwijzingen en zinspelingen er in. De afbeelding verschaf historici de mogelijkheid inzicht te krijgen in de religieuze en politieke cultuur van de tweede helft van de zestiende eeuw. Het artikel stelt dat Hogenbergs weergave van de Beeldenstorm een reflectie is op de kracht van beelden en hun beperkingen. De gravure was als zodanig zelf onderdeel van de strijd over de vraag hoe de religieuze en politieke conflicten van die tijd moesten worden begrepen. Hoewel de afbeelding uiteenlopende toeschouwers...
Frans Hogenberg (1535-1590), The Iconoclasm (1566).
Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.
Two long ropes are tied around the statue’s neck and feet. Six men are pulling it down from its high pedestal. Two other sculptures are already lying shattered on the church floor, their heads and limbs hacked off. A chest is broken open with hammer and chisel: another is already cleared of its contents. Not far from the shattered lid, a chalice and a candle holder are lying on the ground. Two men are tearing a vestment apart, while a third destroys books. Another man is balancing on a ladder, a club ready to strike, eager to smash the church window. At the back a winged altar is hit by heavy blows. There are two ropes fixed to the crucifix in order to pull it down. Along with all the other objects associated with Catholic worship, every single image in the church is being destroyed, whether they are made of wood, glass or stone.

This iconoclasm is shown on a broadsheet that was printed and offered for sale in Cologne in 1570. It was made by the Dutch Protestant Frans Hogenberg and has become one of the best known representations of the iconoclastic riots that took place in the Low Countries during the so called ‘Wonder Year’ 1566.

Hogenberg’s etching depicts both the religious images and how they are attacked. As an image of image destruction it is reacting to the ostentatious violence against material representations of holiness. The observer not only sees the violent actions of the iconoclasts, but also the condemned images that are being destroyed. The iconoclastic violence aimed at demonstrating the sacral powerlessness of the images in order to curb or even disturb their effect on men, for in the perspective of the iconoclasts, cult images could

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1 This article originated from a paper given in May 2014 at the ‘Europe 1300-1700’ seminar, at the University of Leiden. I am indebted to Judith Pollmann, her research team and the audience for commenting on the subject of this article. Earlier thoughts on the subject were presented in Peter Burschel’s and Johannes Helmuth’s colloquium at Humboldt University Berlin.


seduce their viewers into mistaking the depiction for the depicted. This argument was not new, but in the sixteenth century the representation of transcendence once again became an issue. To believe in the sacred power of images had become a focal point where the differences between the developing confessional churches became apparent. The ostentatious destruction of sacred images therefore meant an open and provocative assault on what was seen in the pictures on the other side of the confessional divide. However, both the Catholic cult of images and the Protestant iconoclasm were based on the assumption that images could motivate people to act in certain ways. No matter whether one attributed a sacred quality to them or not, they were believed to exert power. Hence, in the Age of Religious Wars the representations of the sacred were at the same time both object and means of the conflict. By visualising the iconoclastic activities, the Hogenberg print negotiates the contradictory positions of the controversy on how images are able to affect their viewers.

This raises the question of how Hogenberg’s broadsheet depicts the event. Which means of visual composition and rhetorical strategies to represent the Beeldenstorm have been applied in the print? Is the print advocating a position in the current conflict? By answering these questions, this essay seeks insights into the religious and political culture of the later sixteenth century. Since the Dutch Revolt was predominantly shaped by how people perceived and communicated the on-going events, the analysis of Hogenberg’s print promises to contribute to a better understanding not only of the Beeldenstorm as one of its main turning points, but also of the conflicts that followed.


8 Duke, ‘Calvinists and “Papist Idolatry”’, 190.


10 Such an artistic self-reflection of paintings after the Wonder Year of 1566 has already been examined by Koenraad Jonckheere, Antwerp Art after Iconoclasm: Experiments in Decorum 1566-1585 (New Haven, London 2012).

So far there has been no research done on the Hogenberg prints as a whole. Although Hogenberg’s etchings are virtually omnipresent in the literature on the Dutch Revolt, the complete corpus of his reports has not yet been an object of an extensive historical inquiry. Instead, his prints are commonly used as mere illustrations of already known facts. That means that until now Hogenberg’s accounts of the events in the Low Countries were not considered a historical source sui generis. The same is true for his depiction of the Beeldenstorm.

Art historians on the other hand, in recent years have developed an interest in Hogenberg’s etchings. The representation of the iconoclasm is one of his broadsheets that from time to time is a subject of inquiry, but even in these cases the opinions are deeply divided on how to interpret the meaning of the print. Contradictory interpretations came from, for instance Werner Hofmann, Horst Bredekamp and Mia Mochizuki. While Hofmann argues that the account conveys the impression of ‘Aufruhr, Raub und dunklen Machenschaften sowie eines merklichen Verlusts obrigkeitlicher Autorität’, Bredekamp insists that Hogenberg presents the iconoclasm ‘in Form einer eher nüchternen Bestandsaufnahme’. Mochizuki, on the other hand, spots ‘an organized and orderly endeavor’, ‘a well-orchestrated demolition’ and, thus, a ‘sanitized version’ of the iconoclasm.

In order to assess these different interpretations this essay offers a close reading of Hogenberg’s depiction of the Beeldenstorm. Firstly, essential information on Hogenberg, his workshop and the visual accounts of historical events will be compiled. This section will end by considering which insights the prints offer as historical sources in general. Secondly, Hogenberg’s etching on the iconoclastic riots will be analysed. For this purpose not only the composition and design of the print will be examined but its iconography as well. Finally, this essay will consider what could be deduced with regard to the relationship between power, faith and images in the last decades of the sixteenth century.


12 The only exception is Christi M. Klinkert, Nassau in het nieuws. Nieuwsprenten van Maurits van Nassaus militaire ondernemingen uit de periode 1590-1600 (Zutphen 2005) who analyses Hogenberg’s depictions among other news prints of military events from 1590 to 1600.


The Hogenberg prints as historical sources

The broadsheet on the Beeldenstorm first appeared on the book market in Cologne as part of a series consisting of nineteen broadsheets and an accompanying title page. The series of prints deals with the beginning of the Dutch Revolt and is devoted to crucial events reaching from the *annus mirabilis* of 1566 to September 1570. The depiction of the iconoclasm is preceded by two prints. The first one covers the handing over of a petition by several hundred members of what was known as the Compromise of the Nobility to Margaret of Parma, half-sister of Philip II and his regent in the Low Countries. In that petition the Compromise called upon Margaret to moderate the heresy laws. In an attempt to avoid open conflict with large sections of the Dutch nobility, on her own authority Margaret suspended the Inquisition. This decision made it possible for clandestine Protestant churches to abandon secrecy. The second print of Hogenberg’s series shows how they organised hedge preaching outside Antwerp in the summer of 1566. The broadsheet following the Beeldenstorm print covers the uproar of Calvinists near Antwerp the following year. As a whole, the series constitute a chronological narrative that deals with the outbreak of violence, first against objects, then against people.

The title of the print series underlines the factuality of the account:

Kurtzer bericht/deß jenigen was sich ihm Niderlandt in Religionssachen/ Vnd sunst von Anno. M.D.LXVI. biß auff diß Gegenwertigen siebentzigsten Jars zugetragen hat/mitt sampt dem Krich zwisshen Duca d. Alba vnd dem Printzen zu Vranien/Vnd was drauß erstanden ist/alhie gar ordendtlich mit Figuren/ vnd auch schriftlich/nach der blussen warheit/einem jeden zuverstan geben/ Beschrieben auß glaubwirdigen schrifften/vnd auß dem Mundt dern/so es selbst schier alles gesehen.

Relying on trustworthy writings and the testimony of eyewitneses, the short report would truthfully describe the recent events in the Low Countries both with pictures and words. The title of the series, thus, presents its

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17 Arnade, Beggars, Iconoclasts, and Civic Patriots, 74-82.
21 *Ibid.*, 106. Translated to modern English: ‘A brief account of what had happened in the Netherlands concerning religious affairs and other things from 1566 up to this present year of 1570, including the war between the Duke of Alba and the Prince of Orange and what came out of it, properly and truthfully described with pictures and words for anybody to understand, relying on trustworthy writings and the testimony of those who saw it all themselves’ (My translation, R.V.).
nineteen broadsheets as visual reports. It also makes clear that the prints were published at the end of 1570, four years after the actual Beeldenstorm.22

By that time news of the iconoclastic riots had already reached the Free Imperial City of Cologne and frightened its population. The Cologne burgher and member of the city council Hermann Weinsberg noted in his family chronicle in 1566 that people were ‘very shocked’ and ‘diligently kept guard and watch’ in order to prevent iconoclastic riots in the Rhine metropolis.23 Although Cologne at that point was not yet connected to the network of the Habsburg post, the city maintained several messengers who brought information on the status quo of the troubles from cities in the Low Countries.24 Apart from this, many emigrants who left the Low Countries during the Dutch Revolt found refuge in the Free Imperial City of Cologne and spread the news about the on-going developments at home.25

Frans Hogenberg was one of them.26 He had left the Low Countries at some point in the 1560s and at the end of the decade had settled in

22 This becomes also evident by Bernhard Fabian (ed.), ‘Die Messkataloge Georg Willers. Herbstmesse 1564 bis Herbstmesse 1573’ (Hildesheim etc. 1972) 366.
26 On Hogenberg see Klinkert, Nassau in het nieuws, 57-67.
Frans Hogenberg, Aanbieding van het Smeekschrift van de edelen [Submission of the petition by the nobility] (1566).
Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.
Cologne. Since he was not able to hand in a testimony from his home parish proving that he was Catholic he was actually banned from the city. However, he managed to stay in Cologne somehow, perhaps due to the intercession of one of his well-established friends in the city’s book trade. In 1579, he was sentenced to pay a fine because he had not only attended underground meetings of a secret Protestant congregation, but also because he had married the daughter of one of the other members. The surviving records in the Historical City Archive of Cologne indicate that the members of that underground congregation were Lutherans; at least they claimed to be adherents of the Augsburg Confession. This suggests that Frans Hogenberg was a Lutheran, too. In any case, he was not a radical Protestant. One can assume that Hogenberg took a moderate stance with regard to iconoclasm as well. Despite his quarrels with the City authorities, he was one of the very few Dutch immigrants who were allowed to stay in the city despite the fact that the council was anxious to remain neutral in the conflicts that raged in the immediate vicinity. Over the years, Hogenberg managed to build up a successful and flourishing workshop. After his death in 1590 his son Abraham took it over and continued his father’s work.

In Cologne Frans Hogenberg contributed to most of the maps in Abraham Ortelius’ seminal atlas and made a fortune with a complementary project – the Civitates orbis terrarum, an atlas presenting views and maps of all the major cities in the world. The material for the city views and their short historical description was gathered by Georg Braun, a learned theologian and


Frans Hogenberg, Hagenpreken buiten Antwerpen
[Hedge preaching outside the walls of Antwerp] (1566).
Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.
tutor. \textsuperscript{33} Apparently Hogenberg had no qualms cooperating with someone clearly Catholic. Together with his collaborator Simon van der Neuvel, or Novellanus, Hogenberg’s primary task was to transfer the heterogeneous material into a uniform design.

In addition to these well-known maps and city plans, Hogenberg’s workshop published about 250 visual reports during Frans’s lifetime and another 170 under the guidance of his son Abraham. \textsuperscript{34} All in all, the workshop manufactured approximately 420 visual reports from 1570 to 1631, most of them covering political and military events in an area reaching from the Ottoman Empire to the British Isles. The reports focused mainly on the Dutch Revolt and the French Wars of Religion however. \textsuperscript{35} Hogenberg devoted about three quarters of his publications to these Western European conflicts. \textsuperscript{36} It is more than likely that Hogenberg turned to the same network of informants who supplied the material for the book of cities. Hogenberg sold the visual reports both as single broadsheets covering recent events and later as compiled series. \textsuperscript{37} His visual reports represented their subject in such a way that they not only passed the city’s censorship, but also occasionally gained the approval of the authorities to be sold ‘cum privilegio’. \textsuperscript{38} They were bought throughout Europe, not least in the Low Countries. \textsuperscript{39}

The broadsheets have entered collections in contemporary archives and libraries mostly in the form of compiled series. \textsuperscript{40} Hogenberg also integrated his prints in two large-scale historiographical narratives of the Dutch Revolt, with the result that most of the prints have survived in


\textsuperscript{34} Hogenberg, ‘Geschichtsblätter’.


\textsuperscript{36} For an overview, see Hellwig, ‘Einleitung’, 32-43.


\textsuperscript{38} The only exception are prints covering the conflict between Cologne and its former ruler, see Hellwig, ‘Einleitung’, 7. For the censors see Isabel Heitjan, ‘Die Stellung der Burchgewerbetreibenden in der Stadt Köln und zu ihrer Universität (15. bis 18. Jahrhundert) (mit Register)’, \textit{Archiv für Geschichte des Buchwesens} 11 (1970-1971) 1203-1205. For visual reports sold ‘cum privilegio’ see Hogenberg, ‘Geschichtsblätter’, 166, 237-238 and 260.

\textsuperscript{39} For prices see Duke, ‘Posters, Pamphlets and Prints’, 170.

\textsuperscript{40} Hogenberg, ‘Broadsheets. Vol. 2: Text’.
stand-alone compilations or these voluminous accounts. As they were widely disseminated when produced, they have been used to account for the nature of the conflict and in our own times becoming a part of the collective memory of the Dutch Revolt. This massive success was only possible because they offered their audience something other oral or written accounts of the events could not – the impression of seeing the main occurrences with one’s own eyes. They appear to make visible what actually was invisible for most of the people. In other words Hogenberg’s prints bridged a gap in the market of publications on contemporary history.

As historical sources, the Hogenberg prints therefore are not as instructive concerning what the actual events really looked like as one might expect at first glance. The broadsheets do not make clear on what information they are based. They indeed claim to depict the occurrences truthfully and to rely on accounts of trustworthy eyewitnesses, but they do not give their audience the possibility to examine their sources of information. On the contrary, one has to suspect that, as commercial products, they incorporated what the majority of their audience were willing to buy. That means it is most likely that they represented the events in ways that would meet the approval of their buyers. The reference to the eyewitnesses and their testimonies could therefore work as a means to underline the prints’ public approval. From this point of view Hogenberg’s visual reports become even more revealing concerning how people successfully ascribed sense to the current conflicts on religious and political authority.

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41 Michael von Aitzing, AD HISPANÆ ET HUNGARÆ REGES TER MAXIMOS DE LEONE BELGICO, eiusque Topographica atque histo rica descriptione liber Quinque partibus Gubernatorum Philippi Reni gis Hispaniarum ordine, distinctus, Insuper et Elegantissimi illius artificis francisci hogenbergii Centum & xii. figuris ornatus; Rerumque in Belgio maxime gestarum, inde ab anno Christi M. D. LIX. vsque ad annum M. D. LXXXIII perpetua narratione continua. (Cologne 1583). The second account is Emanuel van Meteren, Historia unnd Abcontrafeytungh fürnemlich der Niderlendischer Geschichten und Kriegßhendelen mit höchsten fleiß beschrieben durch Merten von Manevel (Cologne 1593).


Hogenberg’s depiction of the iconoclasm and the power of images

The etching representing the Beeldenstorm was the third sheet in Hogenberg’s first series of prints on Dutch contemporary history. Each broadsheet measures about 21 cm in height and 28 cm in length. They all follow the same layout and consist of an image, a caption and a frame connecting both. The focus clearly lies on the visual representation as the caption covers only a small part of the sheet. The caption is comprised of eight verses that offer additional information:

Nach wenigh Predication/ Die Caluinsche Religion/ Das bildensturmen fiengen an/ Das nicht ein bildt daun bleib stan/ Kap Monstrantz, kilch, auch die altar/ Vnd weß sonst dort vor handen war/ Zerbrechen all in kurzer stundt/ Gleich gar vil leuten das ist kundt.

The caption serves as a means to qualify the visual statement of the image. In the case of the Beeldenstorm print, it points to the Calvinist hedge preaching as the trigger for the iconoclastic riots and refers thereby to the preceding print of Hogenberg’s series showing the sermons outside the city walls of Antwerp. The depiction of the iconoclasm, thus, zooms further in. Underneath the caption the date the riot took place is mentioned: ‘Anno Domini M. D. LXVIIII Augusti’.

Ten days after the iconoclastic riots started in the Westkwartier they reached the big cities of the southern Low Countries in the third week of August 1566. In Antwerp the tinderbox that sparked iconoclasm was the Onze-Lieve-Vrouw procession on Sunday, 18 August, the most prestigious ommegang of the metropolis. The next day William of Orange, who had tried to appease the city’s confessional factions, was summoned to an urgent meeting of the Order of the Golden Fleece and left the city. Outside the gates hedge preachers attracted thousands of listeners. On Tuesday, 20 August, the riots broke out as the canons of the Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerk tried to save their most precious effigy of the Virgin. From there the attacks spread

46 Ibid., 111. James Tanis and Daniel R. Horst (eds.), De Tweedracht Verbeeld – Images of Discord: A Graphic Interpretation of the Opening Decades of the Eighty Years’ War (Bryn Mawr 1993) 41 offers a translation to modern English: ‘After a little preaching/ Of the Calvinist religion,/ The breaking of images commenced/ Which left no statue standing,/ Cowl, monstrance, goblet, also the altar/ And all else that was at hand,/ All was broken in short time/ As many people soon learned.’
47 Ibid., 110.
48 Ibid., 111.
49 Arnade, Beggars, Iconoclasts, and Civic Patriots, 90.
50 Ibid., 139, 143-148.
52 Arnade, Beggars, Iconoclasts, and Civic Patriots, 144-148.
to all the other churches and religious houses. As all the written accounts by contemporaries make clear, the chapel and statue of Onze-Lieve-Vrouw constituted the centre of the Antwerp iconoclasm: but how does Hogenberg’s print represent the Beeldenstorm in Antwerp?

The layout of the picture is clearly structured. The perspective constitutes a visual space the vanishing point being situated at the crucifix behind the rood screen. As the point of view is directly opposite to it, the viewer occupies an elevated and distanced position to the scene on the ground, but is at the same time at eye level with the crucified Christ. The columns and half-columns inside the church stress the geometrically regular structuring of the print and at the same time emphasise the verticals. This arrangement acquires dynamism from, or is even disturbed by, both the ladder leaning against the wall and the taut diagonal ropes with which the crucifix and the statues of the saints are being pulled down. The images are about to fall from the level of the viewer to the ground.

The events outside the church frame the Iconoclastic Fury. Several groups of people can be discerned who are distinguished not only by their clothing and arms but also by their actions. On the left side, three people are standing in the doorways of neighbouring houses, armed with halberds and pikes, apparently eager to guard them, pointing to the church with their free hands. Two men, both equipped with clubs, are passing them. In the bottom left corner the observer sees a man and a woman facing each other. They are wearing expensive looking clothes and point to what is happening inside the church, looking as if they were talking about it.

Next to them there is a person covering his or her face in a cloak. He or she is clearly smaller than the couple. Left and right of the vertical centreline, there are two men standing in the foreground, vested with harnesses, helmets and halberds. A dog is trotting away from the man standing on the left; another dog is leaping towards the one on the right. Both dogs are moving in different directions, but their motions are perspectively orientated towards the vanishing point of the picture. Between the two halberdiers and directly next to the vertical centreline, a female person can be seen who carries a bundle in her arms. Her gaze follows the direction of that of the left halberdier and the dog to the right. The other halberdier seems to be looking back to his comrade-in-arms. Both are pointing with their free hands towards two men armed with clubs. The first one wears a cuirass; the other one lacks armour and carries a candle. They are moving towards the right margin of the sheet. Their route crosses that of several people who seem to come out of an annex of the Gothic church and who are heavily laden. Another figure is descending the staircase of the adjacent building. An absurdly huge sack is balanced on his overloaded back. On the second floor of the building, four people are sitting around a laid table, eating and drinking. In the cellar another person is breaking open barrels and spilling their contents.
With the direction and gestures of the people portrayed, a movement is generated that starts at the left and the right in the upper third of the picture, following the reading direction in the lower part and running up to the lower right margin of the picture. This movement is underlined by the way shadows are cast. In fact, the etching shows two different cohesive spaces of action with no interaction, but in both cases the eyes of the viewer are guided downwards and from one scene to another.

The viewer can look into the three-aisled church because the front wall is missing. This was a common technique, also used for example in what is called the Quarante Tableaux from which Hogenberg copied several prints for his first series on the French Wars of Religion.\textsuperscript{53} It is akin to the cross section of architectural drawings.\textsuperscript{54} Additionally, the view created by this technique resembles the appearance of antique ruins and thus connotes the decline of Rome’s greatness and power.\textsuperscript{55} Following these image traditions, the fictitious view into the church makes clear that this representation of the iconoclasm is not meant to be a one-on-one depiction of the actual occurrence. The missing wall underlines that this picture is a well-composed staging. It shows artistically an event that for most of its audience was impossible to see.

The vanishing point on the crucified Jesus points to the issues both of the print and the iconoclastic controversy: that is the relation between transcendence and earthly existence. Revealingly, the image of the incarnate son of God is most remote from the viewer so that it is hardly seen. Instead, the audience looks at how idols are destroyed and the Decalogue’s prohibition of images is violently executed. The vertical centreline on which one sees the crucifix, two patrolling iconoclasts with club and pickaxe, the tearing of vestment and books, the open relic chest and the beheaded statue, summarises the whole subject.

The coordinated interaction of the participants make the iconoclasm appear to be a planned and well-tuned endeavour. The different clothes of the iconoclasts makes it clear that people of different social backgrounds are working together across the borders of status and rank. The destructive cooperation establishes a counter-order in comparison to the socially stratified order that was led by the Habsburg rulers.\textsuperscript{56} The commitment to the Beeldenstorm transcends normal social boundaries and constitutes a community among equals. This disturbance of the political order even

\textsuperscript{53} Benedict, Graphic History, 26-27, and broadsheet 11.

\textsuperscript{54} Francesco Fiore and Arnold Nesselrath (eds.), La Roma die Leon Battista Alberti: Umanisti, architetti e artisti alla scoperta dell’antico nella città del Quattrocento (Milan 2005) 196.

\textsuperscript{55} See, for instance, Museum Boymans-van Beuningen Rotterdam (ed.), In de Vier Winden. De prentuitgeverij van Hieronymus Cock 1507/10-1570 te Antwerpen (Rotterdam 1988) 32-35.

\textsuperscript{56} Arnade, Beggars, Iconoclasts, and Civic Patriots, 12-49. How these different social orders are performed in Antwerp and Brussels is the subject of Margit Thøfner, A Common Art: Urban Ceremonial in Antwerp and Brussels during and after the Dutch Revolt (Zwolle 2007).
corresponds to the disorder of the geometric structure of the Hogenberg print by the taut diagonal ropes, thereby transferring the disorder of the scene depicted to its visual medium.

Apparently, the city authorities assume a passive or even sympathetic attitude towards the iconoclastic violence. Instead of protecting the church, armed members of the city militia are standing aside from the action. Some of them seem to be involved in the destruction of images. Nevertheless, the cautious attitude of the majority of the city militia prevented violence escalating further. The dogs, barking and walking to and fro, could be understood as a sign of their ambiguous loyalties and conflicting duties, too.

Furthermore, Hogenberg’s print shows the event not during the day but at night: the iconoclasts are acting in the dark. This is made clear by the candles and torches the guards are carrying. Hogenberg’s print compresses the actual event that needed three days to one nocturnal action. Although the iconoclasts are operating under the veil of darkness, they want their deeds to be seen in daylight. This discrepancy between secret action and public effect gives the Beeldenstorm the appearance of being illegal. The disguised person in the foreground strengthens the impression of secrecy and indecency. In this manner, the whole enterprise is called into question. Thus, Hogenberg’s print is pointing to the main danger of Protestant iconoclasm: the reformative counter order could lead to social disorder.

This disorder can also be identified at the right margin of the sheet. Here, not only people looting the Church’s goods are shown but also carousing and feasting. The wine barrels in the cellar are broken, their content is wasted. Hogenberg’s print reflects not only the theological, political and social impacts of the iconoclasm. It points out that the violence against images produces what it actually tries to combat – deeds that go directly against God’s commandments. The inherent tension between aspiration and reality counteracts the whole iconoclastic enterprise.

By showing how the iconoclasts try to destroy a statue of Saint Simon the Apostle, the print reveals itself as a polyvalent play of references and reminiscences. Simon’s attribute, the saw, refers not only to his cruel martyrdom but also to his position as patron of lumberjacks. In the medieval tradition,
for instance in the *Legenda Aurea*, Saint Simon fought against evil sorcerers by destroying their pagan idols. In fact, the whole story of Saint Simon is concerned with the truthfulness and power of images: it shows the conflict that the Apostle’s main task is to spread and propagate the words of Christ, but that it is not possible to depict him. When, for instance, King Abgarus of Edessa sent a painter to draw a picture of Jesus, the human face of the incarnation of God glowed so brightly that the painter could not see anything. Instead, it was Jesus who accomplished the task: ‘Quod cernens dominus uestimentum lineum ipsius pictoris accipiens et sua faciei superimponens, sui ipsius ymaginem eidem impressit ac desideranti rege Abagaro destinauit’. Stories like this from the *Legenda Aurea* were wide-spread and circulated in many forms; the Acts of Saints by Jacobus de Voragine, apart from the Bible, was the most widely read book in late medieval Europe. So it is more than likely that Hogenberg and his contemporaries were aware of these stories.

As Hogenberg’s print depicts how the cult image of Saint Simon the Iconoclast is going to be destroyed, the sheet plays the tradition of the Old Church off against itself. Since the punch line of this motif is the implied analogy between early Christian and early modern iconoclasm, this way of criticism corresponds with the way humanists on both sides of the confessional divide usually argued. The iconoclast Saint Simon who is going to be a victim of iconoclasm himself contradicts the daily practice of creating and adoring cult images. This tradition is confuted in the same manner as the Protestant iconoclasm that easily led to violence and the breaking of God’s Commandments. One could, therefore, conclude that Hogenberg’s representation reveals the paradox of the present cult of images in a humanist way.

The couple in the left corner in the foreground illustrates that the consequences of iconoclasm were discussed among contemporaries. Both are bigger than any other person presented in the picture and resemble the figures used in the *Civitates* to show how inhabitants of the towns depicted usually looked. In this print, they represent well established citizens of Antwerp observing and discussing the ongoing Iconoclastic Fury. In fact, they could be two of the eyewitnesses the title of the series mentions. Such a strategy of referring visually to an eyewitness is also used by Jan Cornelisz Vermeyen


63 Ibid., 1081. In English: ‘As the Lord saw this, he took the linen vestment of the painter, laid it upon his face, pressed his image on it and left it to King Abgarus who wanted to possess an image of Christ’ (My translation).


66 Braun and Hogenberg, *Civitates*.
for his tapestries of which Hogenberg published a copy in the same year he released his first series on the Dutch Revolt. The couple fulfils the same task as Vermeyen’s self-portrait on his tapestries: both claim that the depiction is based on authentic observations. This in turn, suggests that the beholder of Hogenberg’s print could become an eyewitness him- or herself by looking at it. The couple underlines not only the truthfulness of the representation, but also serves as an example of how to react in face of the Beeldenstorm: one possible response is to discuss the whole issue.

This proposal must not be mistaken for an ambivalent attitude towards iconoclasm. Hogenberg’s print is clearly taking a stance. Since the point of view lies on the crucifix, the beholder is looking down at the people’s deeds. By choosing this perspective, the viewer is given a position literally above the conflicting parties. The print does not show the Beeldenstorm from the point of view of the people involved or as a fight against the Antichrist. Rather, it states that neither the iconoclasm nor the cult of images conform to godly behaviour. To that end, it applies an argumentation aimed at being compatible with a Catholic audience, but at the same time it obliges the viewer to a critical and distanced attitude. On the one hand, the print advises against a radical and violent overthrow of the established social order. On the other hand, it criticises the Old Church for its cult of images and thus demands its reform. Therefore the print is ascribing to its viewers a trans-confessional point of view that could be identified with a via media. However, this is not a position of neutrality or objectivity. In the Age of Religious Wars, it is a partisan position of religious compromise. It is the humanist-irenic point of view of the moderate middle party.

As the conflict of the sacred status of images is presented in a picture, Hogenberg’s print refers to the capacity of visual representations. That is why

68 This is not a unique feature of the Hogenberg prints, see Jonckheere, Antwerp Art, 81-261.
70 Compare a perspective from below, for instance, Benedict, Graphic History, broadsheet 11. For iconoclasm as a fight against the Antichrist see De Tweedracht Verbeeld, 38-39.
his depiction could be understood as a reflection on the extent and limits of
the power of images. Hogenberg’s print appeals affirmatively to its audience
by displaying an occurrence and providing the observer with insights into
an event that was well-known, but could not be seen by the majority of
Hogenberg’s customers. The power of images, the visual report therefore
claims, does not lie in their metaphysical transcendence, but rather in their
artistic quality of revealing what is actually invisible.

Coming back to the three diverging interpretations of this print, one
has to admit that, to some extent, all three of them were right, but each of
them grasps only one aspect of Hogenberg’s multi-layered visual report. The
print does indeed criticise the use of violence and the ‘Verlust obrigkeitlicher
Autorität’, as Hofmann writes73, but it emphasises the need for religious
reform as well. The print does show the iconoclasm as ‘an organized and
orderly endeavor’, as Mochizuki points out74, but it does so in order to show
the dangers that could emerge from a social counter-order. The print does look
like a ‘eher nüchterne Bestandsaufnahme’, as Bredekamp summarised75, but
that is because it applies a complex visual rhetoric in order to establish a third
point of view, a plea for religious reform and political unanimity.

Conclusion

This essay argued that Hogenberg’s series of prints is not only a visual means
of news reporting or historiography aiming at the long term remembrance of
the conflicts depicted. As an account of the religious and political troubles in
the second half of the sixteenth century, the Hogenberg series were directly
involved in the battle of how to understand the current developments. They
shed light on the struggle for interpretational sovereignty and thus for
political power. As historical sources the visual reports do not portray reality
in the sense of demonstrating for instance, what the iconoclasm really looked
like. Rather, they give insights into how Hogenberg and his contemporaries
fought for the interpretation of recent seminal events. Using his visual report
on the Beeldenstorm as an example, this article showed that the impression of
objectivity and impartiality is caused by a complex visual rhetoric.

As a commercial product made by an apparently moderate Protestant,
Hogenberg’s representation of the Beeldenstorm was designed to pass
Cologne’s censorship and to obtain as much approval as possible from a
denominationally heterogeneous, non-radical audience. Placing his visual
report on the book market caused Hogenberg to take care to avoid any

73 Hofmann, Luther und die Folgen für die Kunst,
146-147.
74 Mochizuki, The Netherlandish Image after
Iconoclasm, 106-108.
75 Bredekamp, ‘Bildersturmzyklen’, 204.
confessional polemics. His print therefore does not show any metaphysical or transcendent aspects of iconoclasm. Instead, denominational differences are de-emphasised, only their political impacts are addressed. That is why religious issues appear only insofar as they result in perceivable actions. Hence, Hogenberg’s print not only promises its viewers the impression of becoming eyewitneses themselves. It also offers the opportunity to judge the Beeldenstorm not with reference to religious beliefs, but to what could be observed of their actual effects.

This suggestive power of the print derives from standing aloof from the conflicting parties. Instead of advertising one of them, Hogenberg’s representation transfers visually its audience to a moderate point of view. Therefore the print, on the one side, was compatible with a heterogeneous audience and on the other side, advocated a position of religious compromise. In view of a profound social change, it favoured political as well as religious unanimity and conciliation. Hogenberg’s broadsheet could even be understood as a means of visually generating this via media.

The print was part of the struggle for authority and religion, but not in the sense of dull propaganda. On the contrary, the visual report demanded a great deal from its audience: the viewer must be ready to make up his or her own mind on what they see, although Hogenberg’s print nudges them to criticise both radical change and unwillingness to reform. The visual report does not claim to portray what the depicted event really looked like. Quite the opposite is true: it flirts with the virtuosity and craftsmanship of its visual representation. The print promises to show its audience what the conflicts were about. Hogenberg’s depiction of the Beeldenstorm makes clear that this power of images results from their ability to provide an understanding of the events depicted by looking at them. As a new form of both reporting news and historiography, Hogenberg’s visual report therefore addressed and reflected the complex relationship between power, faith and pictures.