



Monica Stensland, *Habsburg Communication in the Dutch Revolt* (Amsterdam Studies in the Dutch Golden Age; Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012, 235 pp., ISBN 978 90 8964 413 8).

Up until the seventies of the previous century, the research concerning the Dutch Revolt focused on the rebellion against Spanish polities in the Netherlands. Thereafter, the loyal opposition, the rituals and the representation of power and repression as well as the peace making in the years 1565-1598 became the object of study. Pamphlets that had appeared between 1566 and 1584 had already been object of research. A study of the Spanish Habsburg discourse, however, was until recently lacking.

In *Habsburg Communication in the Dutch Revolt*, based on the doctoral dissertation of the author presented at Oxford University in 2008, Monica Stensland addresses the vision on government, politics and warfare in the Netherlands as they were discussed by the government and the royalists between 1567 and 1609, i.e. from the arrival of the Duke of Alba in the Netherlands until the Twelve Years' Truce. Stensland is well aware that the word 'propaganda' is so unsuited to early modern realities, but she very deliberately chooses not to talk about polemic publications. These, indeed, suppose an open and forthright debate, and that did not take place. Therefore, the author chooses to speak about 'public communication'.

The study follows a chronological order and devotes attention to public ceremonies, to sermons, to visual media such as pictures, medals and paintings, and, of course, to printed proclamations and commentaries. The nearly three hundred preserved pamphlets stemming for the period investigated constituted the main source for the study. Concerning visual media (pictures, monuments et cetera) the author has relied on literature. Archival investigations were limited. That is a pity. More information about how, in the cities of Flanders, Brabant and Holland, one dealt with announcements and 'royal' events, or how local authorities in the loyal but also in the rebellious provinces reacted to the dissemination of loyal publications, can be found in city archives and in court records. L.-P. Gachard's summeries, published in his *Correspondance de Philippe II*, cannot replace the formulations in the original letters.

The 'Habsburg discourse' took form from 1567, only with difficulty and rather late. It is correct to say that it only took élan after the reconciliation of the Walloon provinces

in 1579, when with Farnese clemency became clearly a topic in the reconciliation discourse. Farnese and the royalist commentators deliberately avoided the image of the 'bad governor'. After the duke of Alba had left the Low Countries (winter 1573), but even more after the beginning of the governance of Farnese (1578), the times of the Iron Duke served as a point of reference in the royalist communication. Everyone in the Netherlands associated the duke's government with war and terror. Alexander Farnese, therefore, tried everything to avoid to be compared with Alba. Hence, the picture of the Duke of Alba became even grimmer. Monica Stensland aligns herself to some degree with this practice. Incorrectly, she associates the 'criminal ordinances' of 1570, intended to improve and humanize the administration of justice and to guarantee the legal rights of those arrested, with the measures taken against rebels and religious dissidents, published around the same time. She also seems to overlook that many of Alba's ordinances were not repressive in nature and originated in his concern for good government and the protection of agriculture, trade and industry in war time.

William of Orange could count on quite a lot of sympathy in Flanders and Brabant. For Spain, during a long period this was a big problem. After 1577 there was a beginning of 'separation of minds'. While in the Union of Utrecht (1579) a number of southern provinces and cities took part, the reconciliation of the Walloon provinces, the successful military and political action of Farnese and the diabolisation of William of Orange discredited the opposition against the Spanish Habsburg politics. The Spanish Habsburg discourse, in my mind royal propaganda, played an important role in this evolution.

The years 1567-1589 in the Netherlands were very chaotic. There was not only the civil war, from which several parties tried to gain. From the beginning, the political oppositions were mingled with religious dissidence. One of the more important concerns of successive governors was to maintain the authority of the King and, where necessary, to restore it. Once the Archdukes were in power the position of the King in the Spanish Habsburg Netherlands was again ascertained. In the meantime, the unity of the Netherlands was broken, in the political as well as in the religious field. The last chapter of Stensland's study is therefore devoted to the new beginning in the years 1596-1609. The fact that Albert and Isabella directly descended from the Austrian Habsburgs and from the Dukes of Burgundy, was an important theme in the discourse. The image of the pious catholic sovereigns, that was deliberately spread during the reign of Albert and Isabella and that was also confirmed by their deeds, contributed to the flourishing of the Catholic Netherlands. *Tableaux vivants* and publications presented the 'good sovereigns' explicitly as bringers of peace who reigned over the Netherlands legitimately, with dignity and respect.

Monca Stensland's book reads nicely, and the research is very well situated in the new insights that the historiography of the last forty years has produced concerning opposition and rebellion, war and civil war in the Netherlands. The author demonstrates that the governors in the Netherlands were unsuccessful in convincingly communicating about their actions. Only with Farnese, there is a hero who appeals. By communicating

about peace and reconciliation, he succeeded in creating the view that his military conquests were successes in the fight for peace in the country, and this in spite of them being accompanied, as were those of his predecessors, with plundering and violations of the royal army against the civilians and the country people. With the archdukes, peace came finally and that laid the basis for a stable government in the Netherlands' part of the Spanish Habsburg kingdom. *Habsburg Communication in the Dutch Revolt* makes, no doubt, an important contribution to the study of war and peace in the Netherlands from the arrival of Alva until the Twelve years' Truce.

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