



PROJECT MUSE®

The Beeldenstorm

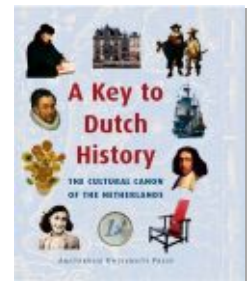
Published by

Slings, Hubert and Frits van Oostrom.

A Key to Dutch History: The Cultural Canon of the Netherlands.

Amsterdam University Press, 2007.

Project MUSE. <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/76693>.



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1566

The *Beeldenstorm* (iconoclastic outbreak)

Religious conflict

Contemporary accounts refer to 1566 as the year of wonders. And indeed, the dramatic events that took place in quick succession made it a “wonderful” year. On 5 April, two hundred noble landowners presented a petition to Margaret, Duchess of Parma. The nobles wanted religious persecution to cease and a meeting of the States General to be held to discuss the country’s problems. The Duchess was shocked by the numbers of the nobles but a councillor whispered in her ear: “They are just “gueux” (beggars)”. Several days later, when the same nobles entered into an alliance with one another, they decided to call themselves “Beggars”. In recognition of this name, from that time on they

carried begging bowls attached to their belts and wore a special medal around their neck. Profiting from the indecision that was rampant in the administration of the country after the submission of their petition, the dissatisfied nobles offered increasingly open resistance in subsequent months, while supporters of the “new faith” gathered in public to listen to the sermons of travelling Calvinist preachers. On 10 August, one of these open-air sermons resulted in the plundering of a nearby monastery. This happened near Steenvoorde, in the Flemish Westhoek, the highly industrialised textile centre of the Low Countries. In the weeks and months that followed, other churches and monas-

teries were stormed and plundered, first in the rest of the Westhoek and then in other parts of Flanders and Brabant, and from the end of August, in the north of the Low Countries as well. With hindsight, there had been lots of omens. As a result of the severe persecution of heretics with the victims including ordinary, perfectly innocent men and women, unemployment and successive poor harvests, the situation had been inflammable for some time already. In the summer itself, the mood was predominantly one of surprise and astonishment and the wildest of rumours were rife.

The iconoclasts came from every layer of society. The high and low, rich and poor, male and female and young and old all stormed churches, destroyed images of saints and other works of art and plundered monasteries' stores. Their motives were as different as their backgrounds. Some hated the clergy with all their privileges, others were unhappy about

their own meagre existence, while still others were simply curious, and the Calvinists believed the Church had to be purified of "papist superstitions". By drinking the communion wine, trampling consecrated wafers underfoot or feeding them to birds and smashing images of saints, they aimed to rid these Catholic symbols of their mystical value and make clear that Catholicism had been twisted into a sacrilegious puppet show of the true faith. By purifying the churches of their images of saints, altars, works of art and other unnecessary luxuries, the Calvinists believed they were restoring ties with the earlier, in their eyes more pure, Christians and washing away centuries of corruption and the worship of false saints. The purified churches would be suitable from now on for reformed services in which the Word of God was the focal point: Bible reading and explanations of the Bible by a preacher.

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Sub-topics

Primary education sector

The Beggars (and the martyrs of Gorkum)
Catholic and protestant churches
Houses of prayer and worship in different religions

Secondary education sector

The Inquisition
Religion and rituals
Religious wars in France
Beggars' songs and church organs
Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck (1562-1621)
Painted church interiors (Saenredam, Bosboom)

In the Treasure Chest

Geuzenpenning (Medal of Honour)
Begging bowl
Images of saints

References

Places to Go

Amsterdam: Oude Kerk
Utrecht: the Catharijneconvent
Local: Catholic and Protestant churches

Books for young people

Bies van Ede, *Oorlog op het ijs* (12+)
Bies van Ede, *De meester van het scherpe zwaard* (Haarlem) (12+)
Rob Ruggenberg, *Het verraad van Waterdunen* (12+)
Simone van der Vlugt, *De bastaard van Brussel* (12+)
Thea Beckman, *De val van de Vredeborch* (12+)
Willy van der Steen, *De geuzen* (cartoon)
Fiona MacDonald, *De Reformatie* (series: Oorzaak en gevolg) (14+ info)

Background literature

H. Kaptein, *De Beeldenstorm*. (Verloren verleden 18), Hilversum 2002.

Websites

www.schooltv.nl/vroegerenzo/pagina.jsp?nr=vz_werkstuk&wsnr=443836#filmpje
dutchrevolt.leidenuniv.nl
www.dbnl.org (Beggars' songs)