Introduction

The St Nicolaikirche in the small German town of Kalkar owns a remarkable collection of sixteenth-century art. The church's holdings include a carved alabaster altarpiece [Fig. 1], an exquisitely painted epitaph [Fig. 2] and a gold-plated monstrance [Fig. 3].

None of these treasures were originally made for the local parish. Indeed, on close inspection the items show hallmarks of Amsterdam design.[1] Burial stones graced with distinctly Dutch names reinforce the alienating impression. Behind this confusion about space and purpose in Kalkar's parish church lies the tale of a little-known refugee enclave in Reformation Europe. During the later sixteenth century this remote town in Cleves served as a hub for displaced Catholics from the Low Countries. More specifically, Kalkar accommodated a group of distinguished Amsterdam families who had escaped their homes after the Protestant takeover of their city in 1578. Expelled and dispossessed, the émigrés recreated something of their lost Amsterdam world in their German safe haven. The surviving church treasures of the St Nicolaikirche are the tangible remnants of this Catholic exile experience.

The Amsterdam émigré community at Kalkar was part of a diaspora of thousands of Catholic men and women who moved across Europe during the so-called Dutch revolt. Often described as a struggle for national independence and Protestantism, the revolt in the sixteenth-century Netherlands was part of a series of civil wars that shook Reformation Europe. The Netherlandish variant was particularly complex because religious disputes were intertwined with discussions about Habsburg rule in the Low Countries as well as with local sensibilities. There were, in fact, several Dutch revolts. In this messy war, the Amsterdam expatriates belonged to the hard-line supporters of the established order. Firmly committed to the Church of Rome and aligned with the Habsburg government, they refused to accept rebel authority in the Netherlands

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[1] Cremer, 'Die Amsterdamer Monstranz'; De Werd, *St. Nicolaikirche*, 26–7, 130–8.

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2   Introduction

Figure 1 Private Altar of Sybrant Pompeiusz Occo and Lisbeth Jacobsdr
Brouwer, *c*.1559. St Nicolaikirche, Kalkar.

and opposed religious freedoms to Protestants. These Catholic loyalists
eventually preferred an uncertain future in exile to life under what they
regarded as an illegitimate, heretical regime.

Like many losers in historical conflicts, the Catholic exiles have mostly
been neglected by later generations of scholars, who have generally
focused on the rebel party and the emergence of an independent
Protestant state in the northern Netherlands. Today, few history books
acknowledge that the birth of the Dutch Republic, which is now
remembered for its economic progress and religious tolerance, also
triggered an exodus of citizens who did not believe in its moral legitimacy
or future. This book seeks to uncover the history of flight and exile of these
opponents of the Dutch revolt.

Exile and the Dutch revolt

By recapturing the Catholic exile experience, the present study engages
with three larger debates in historical scholarship. First, it aims to offer a
new narrative of the Dutch revolt by highlighting the agency of its various

Figure 2 Pieter Pietersz, Epitaph painting of the Bam family, *c*.1575. St Nicolaikirche, Kalkar.

refugees.[2] The military conflict in the sixteenth-century Low Countries was one of the largest civil wars of Reformation Europe, sparking an unprecedented refugee crisis. Between 1566 and 1590 more than 100,000 men and women were forced to leave their homes in the Netherlands.[3] Historians have been aware of these dramatic migrations, but they have paid limited attention to their composition and impact. In line with tendencies in international scholarship, a good deal of research

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[2] For the historiography of the revolt see Darby, *The Origins*; Pollmann, 'Internationalisering', 515–35.

[3] This (conservative) estimate includes Protestants and Catholics. Compare figures in Parker, *The Dutch Revolt*, 118–19; Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 160, 219; Briels, *Zuid-Nederlanders*, 80; Janssens, 'Verjaagd uit Nederland', 102–19.

4   Introduction

Figure 3 Monstrance, *c.*1543. St Nicolaikirche, Kalkar.

has been carried out on the experience of Protestants who escaped perse-
cution by the Habsburg regime in the Netherlands. This strand of scholar-
ship has been particularly interested in the development of Calvinist
exile communities in England and the Holy Roman Empire.[4] Few of
these works have recognised that flight and displacement eventually
affected the 'persecutors', too. As soon as the rebellion gained ground in
the Netherlands, there emerged a group of refugees who wanted to remain
loyal to the Habsburg monarchy and the Church of Rome. The following
chapters will map this parallel yet unexplored Catholic diaspora across

[4] Examples include Backhouse, *The Flemish*; Dünnwald, *Konfessionsstreit*; Esser,
  Niederländische Exulanten; Grell, *Brethren in Christ*; Pettegree, *Emden*; Schilling,
  Niederländische Exulanten; Spicer, *The French-speaking*; Spohnholz, *The Tactics*.

sixteenth-century Europe; from Amsterdam, Antwerp and Douai to
Cologne, Paris and Rome.

Redressing the imbalance enables us to reconsider the remarkable
outcome of the war: the split of the Low Countries into two distinct states.
It is a commonplace that the Dutch revolt, unintentionally, led to the
creation of a predominantly Protestant Dutch Republic in the north and a
Habsburg Catholic monarchy in the south [Map 3]. This division, which
has largely held up through the present, is so familiar that historians have
often taken it for granted. Whereas the causes of the Netherlandish wars
have been fiercely debated, their dramatic results have provoked far less
controversy. Some historians have argued that the separation between
north and south in fact predated the war. The Dutch revolt merely
reaffirmed the existing dominance of the province of Holland in the
northern areas and cemented the influence of Flanders and Brabant in
southern territories.[5] Others have pointed to military factors to explain the
lasting frontier. According to this line of thought, the river delta and
wetlands in the north prevented royal armies from recapturing the rebel-
lious towns of Holland and Zeeland. Priorities of the Habsburg monarchy
elsewhere in Europe further contributed to the unexpected resilience of
the rebellion in the northern provinces.[6]

These different interpretations have left some problems unaddressed.
For example, they do not really explain the growing cultural divide
between north and south over the course of the conflict. Nor do they
clarify the shifting popular support for the revolt in both areas. The
eventual perseverance of the rebellion in the northern provinces is sur-
prising considering that the heartland of the Protestant movement had
initially been in southern areas. Antwerp and Ghent, rather than
Amsterdam and Groningen, had served as the seedbeds of Calvinist
militancy during the early phases of the troubles.[7] An analysis of the forces
of migration may help to provide some new explanations for this para-
doxical development. This study will show how refugees on both sides of
the conflict played a formative role in the construction and exploitation of
opposing confessional identities. As the war forced Protestant and
Catholic refugees to move to northern and southern strongholds, these
exiles were able to shape contrasting collective self-images in the Dutch
Republic and the Southern Netherlands. There was nothing inevitable

[5] Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, v-vi, 16–29; Tracy, *The Founding*, 1–8. Compare Stein and
Pollmann, *Networks*; Woltjer, *Op weg*, 20–5, 44–50, 211–23.
[6] Geyl, *The Revolt*; Parker, *The Army of Flanders*. More recent Groen, *De tachtigjarige oorlog*.
Compare Duke, *Dissident Identities*, 11–15.
[7] Marnef, *Antwerp*; Woltjer, *Tussen vrijheidsstrijd*, 64–88, 131–45.

about the emergence of a Protestant state in the northern Netherlands or
the resurgence of Catholic loyalism in the south. This book contends that
unforeseen movements of religiously committed refugees effectively
sealed the cultural cleavage of the two Netherlands at the end of the
sixteenth century.

Exile and the Counter-Reformation

A focus on the radicalising effects of exile also furthers our understanding
of the Counter-Reformation in northern Europe, which is the second aim
of this book. Scholars have long noted how Catholicism experienced an
unexpected revival in the Southern Netherlands after $c.$1585.[8] By 1600,
places such as Antwerp, Ghent and Brussels had become bastions of
Tridentine renewal. The causes of this religious metamorphosis have
long divided historians. Some have asserted that the rejuvenation of
Catholic religiosity was enforced by top-down ecclesiastical reform
and Habsburg sponsorship.[9] This popular reading of the Counter-
Reformation resonates with conclusions in international historiography.
The post-Reformation Catholic Church has long been viewed as a repres-
sive, elitist institution that effectively imposed confessional discipline
and doctrinal uniformity. But in recent decades this image has been
challenged. An increased focus on the religious world of the laity has
made scholars more aware of the variety of Catholic cultures that
coexisted in early modern Europe and of the limits of state–church coop-
eration. Some have seen the rise of confessionalised Catholicism as
the outcome of popular initiatives on the ground or have noted that a
revival of Catholic spirituality in fact predated the implementation of the
decrees of the Council of Trent.[10]

Such observations are also pertinent for a re-evaluation of Catholic
renewal in the Low Countries. Recent scholarship has suggested that
the progress of a popular Counter-Reformation movement in the
Dutch revolt was grounded in the traumatic experience of rebel
violence and Protestant militancy.[11] Calvinist radicalism in places such

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[8] Recently re-assessed in Pollmann, *Catholic Identity*.
[9] Tracy, 'With and without', 547–75; Cloet, 'De gevolgen', 53–78; Marinus, *De contra-
reformatie*, esp. 39; Thijs, *Van geuzenstad*, 33–60.
[10] For this historiography see De Boer, 'An Uneasy Reunion', 366–87; Ditchfield, 'Of
Dancing Cardinals', 386–408; Forster, 'With and without', 315–43; Forster, *Catholic
Revival*, 1–17; Johnson, *Magistrates*, 1–13; Laven, 'Encountering', 706–20; Louthan,
Converting Bohemia, 1–15, 317–24; Reinhard and Schilling, *Die katholische
Konfessionalisierung*.
[11] De Schepper, 'De mentale rekonversie', 420–8; Stensland, *Habsburg Communication*,
89–113; Thøfner, *A Common Art*, 146–67; Weis, *Des villes en révolte*.

as Ghent, Bruges, Antwerp and Brussels bred a self-conscious Catholic counter-culture in the early 1580s. Judith Pollmann has shown that this resentment was particularly fervent among Catholic loyalists who escaped the rebel towns and moved to Cologne, Douai or Liège. Pollmann suggested therefore that a militant Catholic party first took shape in the émigré communities of the 1570s and 1580s.[12] Yet it is still unclear how exactly this link between exile and the rise of Counter-Reformation zeal should be understood, since Catholic refugees have never been properly studied. A decade ago Henk van Nierop analysed the living conditions of émigrés in royalist Amsterdam, but a more comprehensive picture of the Catholic exile experience is lacking.[13]

The present study seeks to probe the formative impact of exile on changing Catholic identities, both in the northern and in the southern Netherlands. More specifically, it will argue that many displaced Catholics became receptive to militant strands of Catholicism during their years in foreign safe havens. Local media, clerical leadership and forms of sociability facilitated and shaped this process of religious radicalisation among Catholic refugees. When the changing course of the war allowed the exiles to return home, these spiritually reborn men and women promulgated their radical beliefs in areas recovered by the Habsburg monarchy. To assess the long-term consequences of the exile experience also serves to highlight the international origins of Catholic renewal in the Low Countries. Forced migrations across northern Europe made the Counter-Reformation project a truly transnational enterprise.

Exile and migration scholarship

This book proceeds from a cross-confessional perspective on exile. Hence its third objective is to build bridges between different strands of migration scholarship. More specifically, this comparative approach aims to link the experiences of Catholic refugees in the Dutch revolt to those of their Protestant counterparts, to assess international collaborations between Catholic émigrés in communal asylum hubs, and to place the study of Catholic exile within the context of forced migrations of religious minorities elsewhere in early modern Europe.

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[12] Pollmann, *Catholic Identity*, 131–42.
[13] Now available in English translation: Van Nierop, *Treason*. References to Catholic exiles can also be found in Donnet, *Les exilés*; Fasel, 'De Leidse glippers'; Hoogland, 'De Friesche vlugtelingen'; Noordeloos, 'Fugitieve personen'; Vermaseren, *De katholieke*; Viaene, 'Vlaamse vluchtelingen'.

The noted dominance of Protestant exile in current historiography has not only created a misleading picture of the refugee crisis in the sixteenth-century Low Countries, it also fails to appreciate the dialectical links that existed between opposing religious groups. As we will see, Protestant and Catholic refugee movements in fact run parallel during the war in the Netherlands. Whereas evangelical dissenters escaped persecution by Habsburg authorities, committed Catholics fled when Protestant rebels and returning refugees took power. Those who had been persecuted thus turned into persecutors and vice versa. Such interconnections are relevant because they invite us to reconsider the roles of victims and oppressors in this early modern conflict, and to explore their common concerns and strategies. It will become clear that exile served as a catalyst for religious radicalisation in both refugee communities. A comparative approach also elucidates how Catholic and Calvinist exile cultures in fact bred each other.

Catholic émigrés did not constitute an isolated, inward-looking community. In asylum towns they continuously interacted with their host environment. In places such as Douai and St Omer, Netherlandish refugees exchanged ideas with Catholic émigrés from the British Isles, notably England, and expanded their social networks. The dynamics of this 'International Catholicism', comparable to the better-known phenomenon of 'International Calvinism', has not been sufficiently studied. In British historiography, Catholic exiles have mainly been viewed through the lens of a national religious culture.[14] The present study considers asylum towns as transnational spaces that fostered a new, internationally informed Catholic mentality.

Drawing such connections finally serves to engage with existing scholarship on Protestant refugees and Jewish diasporas elsewhere in Europe. So far, migration scholarship of the early modern period has been limited by national and confessional angles.[15] Yet the forces that created these different refugee communities were surprisingly similar. It is a commonplace that the Reformation period witnessed a European-wide refugee crisis, which affected all religious denominations, including Catholics, Protestants, Jews and Muslims.[16] If Catholic exiles in the Dutch revolt were thus part of a larger, international phenomenon, the

[14] Gibbons, *English Catholic Exiles*; Guilday, *The English Catholic Refugees*; Loomie, *The Spanish Elizabethans*; Marshall, 'Religious Exiles'; Walker, *Gender and Politics*.

[15] Bade et al., *Enzyklopädie Migration*; Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact*, 92–107; Moch, *Moving Europeans*, 22–31; De Munck and Winter, 'Regulating Migration', 1–22; Norwood, *Strangers and Exiles*.

[16] Braun, 'Katholische'; Kaplan, *Divided by Faith*; Terpstra, 'Imagined Communities', 222–5.

possible parallels between different groups of religious refugees deserve more attention. Recently, a number of historians have started to compare Catholic, Protestant and Jewish exile narratives, identifying common responses to displacement that had long been regarded as 'typically Calvinist' or 'distinctly Jewish'.[17] This study builds on this comprehensive approach, enabling readers to draw cross-confessional comparisons.

Approach

This study does not pretend to offer an exhaustive overview of all Catholic migrations during the Dutch revolt. Rather, it seeks to illuminate the formative impact of exile on Counter-Reformation culture and on the history of the Low Countries. As much as possible it will call upon the voices of the refugees themselves. Migration scholarship of the early modern period has traditionally been grounded in quantitative analyses of networks, living conditions and labour markets. For all its virtues, this approach has perhaps less value for the study of refugees who were not systematically registered and for whom we are left with patchy data. What is more, statistically focused studies of migration tell us little about shifting perceptions, changing identities and cultural interactions within émigré communities. This book seeks to capture the experience of exile for sixteenth-century individuals. As we will see, the lives and world views of all Catholic refugees were deeply affected by the years of flight and displacement, but each responded to these challenges in distinct ways. While most sources in this book relate to the middle and upper strata of Netherlandish society, we aim to do justice to the variety of Catholic cultures in which exiles participated. In any case, Catholic refugees were not mere passive victims of a gruesome religious conflict, but agents of change who made a profound impact on their societies.

To trace how exile transformed the refugees' identities and subsequently influenced those of others, this study pursues a chronological approach. The first Part, 'Flight', sketches the origins of the Dutch revolt in the 1560s (Chapter 1) and shows how the outbreak of war triggered a Catholic exodus during the 1570s and 1580s (Chapter 2). The following Part, 'Exile', maps the living conditions in various asylum hubs (Chapter 3), explains how local facilities encouraged refugees to transform their religiosity (Chapter 4) and considers how international collaborations influenced the refugees' shifting world views (Chapter 5). The last Part, 'Return', assesses the remigration of exiles to the Low

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[17] Greengrass, 'Two Sixteenth-Century', 317–37; Schilling, 'Christliche und jüdische', 407–44; Schunka, 'Konfession', 28–63.

Countries in the 1580s and 1590s and compares their lasting agency in the Southern Netherlands (Chapter 6) and the Dutch Republic (Chapter 7).

Terminology

A few words on the use of terminology may be helpful. In the sixteenth century the words 'exile' [*balling*], 'refugee' [*vluchteling*] and 'fugitive' [*voortvluchtige*] could have different semantic meanings, but they were often used interchangeably. The condition of exile sometimes referred to a formal banishment, yet distinctions between forced and voluntary migration were generally blurred in the Dutch revolt. Labelling refugees in clear-cut categories is therefore misleading and obscures our understanding of the thoughts and anxieties of those involved. The present study will follow the historical flexibility of terminology, in order to show how refugees described themselves and how the outside world expressed their position in society.

Geographical vocabulary calls for pragmatism. Changing borders and linguistic preferences in this part of Europe can be confusing. In this book, the terms 'Low Countries' and 'the Netherlands' will be used as synonyms, thus referring to the entire Habsburg polity, which at the time encompassed the present-day Netherlands, Belgium, Luxemburg and parts of northern France [Map 1]. The adjective 'Dutch' will be used more sparingly; that is, only in the context of the newborn Dutch Republic in the north. For pragmatic reasons the expression 'Dutch revolt' will be followed throughout, also with reference to the rebellion in the southern provinces. Regarding the use of place names we will follow common practice in English, which is not always consistent. Notably, the towns of Louvain and Courtrai are here referred to as Leuven and Kortrijk, but Antwerp, Bruges, Brussels, Ghent, The Hague and Ypres have been anglicised. Finally, it has long been customary to label the Habsburg government and its armies in the Netherlands as 'Spanish'. The use of this adjective is partly the outcome of successful rebel propaganda that sought to discredit the royal party by portraying it as an alien, 'Hispanic' force. To allow a more neutral reading of the revolt, we prefer to use the term Habsburg rather than Spanish.