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Flandria Illustrata: Flemish Identities in the Late Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses identity formation in early modern Flanders. It argues that policy makers and their intellectual agents transformed the perception of a province that had been divided by urban rivalries, civil war and conflicts with the Burgundian and Habsburg overlords, into a bastion of the Catholic Counter Reformation with strong ties to the Spanish King and his representatives. It then assesses the role of the province as a ‘border region’ and suggests a future research agenda to understand further the role of Flanders and its political elite in the Habsburg Empire.

Der folgende Artikel untersucht die Identitätsbildung der niederländischen Provinz Flandern auf dem Hintergrund des Achtzigjährigen Krieges. Es wird aufgezeigt, wie durch die Frontstellung gegen die Nördlichen Niederlande von Politikern in Brüssel und Madrid und von Historiographen aus dem Kader der Katholischen Kirche aus einem heterogenen territorialen Gebilde mit starken Partikularinteressen eine einheitliche flandrische Identität konstruiert wurde, deren Träger sich als loyal zu Spanien und dem Katholizismus sahen. In diesem Zusammenhang wird auch die Frage diskutiert, ob Flandern deshalb als “Grenzregion” verstanden werden kann und welche Rolle die Provinz innerhalb des Länderkonglomerates des Spanischen Königreichs spielte.

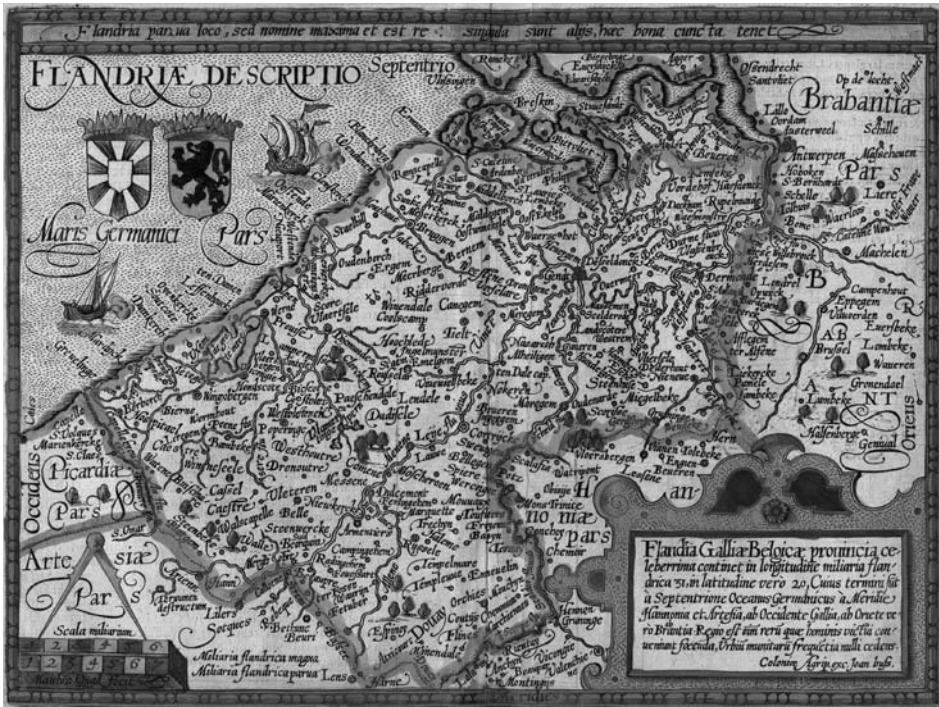
INTRODUCTION

On the eve of Belgium’s national holiday, 21 July 2008, a dinner party conversation in Antwerp steered, almost inevitably, towards the future of the Belgian state, which, despite the various political manoeuvres of Flemish and Walloon politicians, seemed then to be very much in the balance in its current form. The Flemish hosts, both academics with international careers and anything but a parochial outlook on national and regional identity, suggested to their foreign guests to go to Brussels for the day and

to watch what they deemed would be the last national parade as they knew it. The rift between the Flemish and the Walloon parts of the country seemed a painful reality which was based, so at least the argument around the dinner table, on different perceptions of the roles and responsibilities of the central and the regional governments. Two seemingly solid blocks of Flemish and Walloon identities were confronting each other with competing visions of financial policies and political rights. The identification of the Flemish core provinces, Flanders and Brabant, and their opposition to their French-speaking southern neighbours is undoubtedly based on developments in Belgium's earlier history, notably during the 19th and 20th centuries, when French was the dominant language of the political and social elites and decisions were made in the then more prosperous Walloon South.

However, Flemish identification with a region that encompassed the area south of today's Belgian-Dutch border and north of Brussels was not an 'inevitable' outcome of the linguistic similarities between the Netherlandish dialects spoken in Flanders and in Brabant¹. Since the Middle Ages, and, indeed, even earlier, identities in the Netherlands have been far from stable and have changed with the various political overlords who dominated the area over its long and chequered history². The 'seventeen' provinces, which formed the Spanish Netherlands until the outbreak of the Eighty Years' War in 1572 had only been united for a relatively short time under their Habsburg overlords and had fought aggressive wars against each other through most of the Middle Ages and during the Burgundian and early Habsburg period³. And even during the war dividing lines between the members of the Union of Utrecht and the southern provinces were often blurred and changed in the course of the armed struggle. These divisions were only settled in the Treaties of Westphalia in 1648, when the negotiators drafted a more permanent border line between the United Provinces and the Spanish, later Austrian, Netherlands.

The following chapter assesses the role of war and partition for the development of a distinct identity in one of the core provinces of the Spanish Netherlands: Flanders. It outlines the various layers of identity that Flemish men and women constructed and applied to themselves and the modifications to these concepts during the turbulent political times of civil war in the heartlands of the – somewhat misleadingly named – “Dutch Revolt” in its early stages⁴. The chapter will also analyse how the historians and politicians of the time transformed initially rather diverse identities into a more solid concept of what it meant to be in Flanders and what was within and what outside its boundaries. This process was the consequence of a prolonged conflict of the different powers and interest groups in the political and economic centres of Flanders. It was fuelled by the need of the Habsburg authorities in Brussels and in Madrid to construct an essentially “Spanish Netherlandish” identity. The chapter thus also addresses the questions concerning the relationship between border regions and the composite state which lie at the heart of this volume. Agents of this process of identity formation which



Map 6
 The County of Flanders by Matthias Qaed (cartographer) and Johannes Bussemacher (engraver),
 Cologne 1609.

are scrutinized here were both the indigenous provincial elites and the administrators of the central government and their supporters, notably the members of the Catholic Counter-Reformation Church⁵. The identity they created which utilized and found its expression in histories, commemorative practices and artefacts, civic rituals, poems, dramas and songs, often reacting to contemporary circumstances and amending the political memory of the region's or province's past according to a present-centred agenda⁶. This Flemish identity emphasized both the uniqueness of Flanders as a bastion of the Habsburg Empire and its role as part of the wider Habsburg world.

THE TERRITORY: FLANDERS IN THE MIDDLE AGES AND THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD

In the Middle Ages the term “Flanders” encompassed a larger and more diverse territory than the province which would eventually form a part of the Southern Netherlands after 1648. Territorial divisions, not just in Flanders but also in neighbouring Brabant and elsewhere in the Netherlands, were the norm rather than the exception in

what was one of the most urbanized regions in Europe during the Late Middle Ages and the Early Modern period. The geographically and politically most prominent part of Flanders was the area under the sovereignty of the counts of Flanders (which became part of the Burgundian and later Habsburg territories in 1384, with the death of the last count of Flanders, Louis de Mâle). A small eastern area bordering Hainaut and Brabant, which was known as *Reichs-* or Imperial Flanders was initially given to the expansionistic Count Baldwin V of Flanders by the Holy Roman Emperor in 1050 as a feudal loan. This area was later renamed according to its largest city and administrative headquarters the “Land van Aalst”. In 1166 it became fully incorporated into the possessions of the counts of Flanders, but the regional memory of a different and distinct past survived well into Habsburg times. Flemish-speaking Flanders was bordered in the south by Artois and a small strip of land surrounding the cities of Lille and Douai, which was known as Walloon Flanders. These areas were annexed to France in 1640 and 1667/68 respectively thus turning Flanders into a border state with external boundaries both in the north and in the south. Moreover, the Flanders that emerged from the Treaties of Westphalia also suffered the loss of a small strip of northern territory with the strategic cities of Aardenburg and Terneuzen which were, as a consequence of the siege warfare in the early 17th century, incorporated into the Dutch province of Zeeland as *Zeeuws-Vlaanderen*. This area lost much of its initial economic and strategic power and became something of a backwater. It also remained something of a Catholic anomaly in an otherwise staunchly Protestant region⁷. Geographical particularism was thus a distinct feature of Flanders’ history and identity, and as will be demonstrated below, this is reflected in the historiographical traditions of the area.

More important, perhaps, than these geographical distinctions was Flanders’ eminently strong urban tradition. Ghent, Bruges and Ypres were powerful economic centres with highly international connections, notably through the Hanse, and with prosperous indigenous industries, which were largely based on cloth and other textiles. Until the very end of the 15th century the leading Flemish cities dwarfed all their competitors in their northern neighbourhood in terms of population and trade⁸. The “Four Members of Flanders”, the medieval representative council of the county, comprised of delegates of the three main cities and of the so-called Franc of Bruges, the area around Bruges. Significantly, the Flemish nobility was not included in this assembly⁹. It has been pointed out that this emphasis on towns and cities rather than on the land was a decisive marker of Flanders’ medieval and also early modern identity¹⁰. Relations between these cities and their overlords were often turbulent and frequently exploded in violent clashes, notably under the expansionist reign of the Burgundian rulers¹¹. It was during this period, as Jan Dumolyn has recently pointed out, that a new Flemish nobility which included not only the aristocratic elite, but also, by intermarriage, members of the urban patriciate, was rising to prominence in the emerging Burgundian state¹². This group became

particularly important in the establishment of the Habsburg regime in Flanders after the tumultuous first phase of the Eighty Years' War at the end of the 16th century.

REPRESENTATIONS OF FLANDERS: HISTORIOGRAPHY AND CHOROGRAPHY IN THE 16TH AND 17TH CENTURIES

Given the prominent role of cities in Flanders it seems, at first glance, surprising that none of these places developed a medieval chronicle tradition such as those in Italian and also German towns and cities of the time. It has been argued, however, that urban identity in Flanders and elsewhere in the Southern Netherlands found its expression in other, often non-textual media such as civic processions, tapestry and architecture rather than in histories or descriptions sponsored by the urban authorities or other civic interest groups¹³. The manifold manifestations of urban pride and self-confidence of a prosperous, but often heterogeneous elite, which encompassed both members of the various powerful craft guilds and merchants, were, however, not situated in a wider geographical context. Urban identity in Flanders, so it seems, was based on sharp comparisons and competition among the eminent cities of the region¹⁴. An identification with the wider geographical surroundings, be they the county of Flanders, the Burgundian Circle (as part of the Holy Roman Empire) or the whole of the Burgundian (later Habsburg) territories of the Netherlands, only emerged at the end of the 15th century, when Flemish towns and cities steered clear of internal strife and conflict. Texts, which also incorporated the dynasty and showed the Burgundians and later the Habsburgs in a positive light, were often the products of *rederijkers kamers*, chambers of rhetoric, whose members staged plays, and produced poems and songs in praise of their city. As Anne-Laure van Bruaene has pointed out, in the larger Flemish cities, these chambers were not only sponsored by the civic authorities, but also by the representatives of the Burgundian-Habsburg court, who thus influenced the content and the underlying messages of these works, which were often distinctly urban and emphatically dynastic in tone¹⁵. A Flemish master narrative outside the dynasty emphasizing the land rather than its rulers did not develop in the late medieval and early modern period¹⁶.

This fragmentation of a Flemish identity was undoubtedly further fuelled by the events surrounding the Iconoclastic Fury (1566) and the early phase of the Eighty Years' War, which in many instances was fought as a civil war between opposing factions within individual towns and cities. Here, dividing lines separated moderates (Catholics in search of a compromise with their Habsburg overlords) and radicals (Calvinists, who favoured a separate solution), which often correlated with the urban/rural divide. Most of the leading aristocracy and gentry in Flanders remained staunchly loyal to the Catholic Church and their Habsburg rulers, not least because many of the noble families had risen through the service of their Burgundian rulers and had lucrative and powerful positions at the court in Brussels and within the Habsburg administration¹⁷. Protes-

tant uprisings and support for the Dutch Revolt were more widespread in the Flemish cities. In this context, the city of Ghent rose to notoriety. In 1577 a Calvinist regime, recruited largely from artisan circles, took over urban government. Other cities such as Kortrijk, Arras and Ypres followed suit in 1578. These divisions, which further separated an already diverse area, also increased the difficulties of shaping an acceptable master narrative for Flanders which could accommodate both town dwellers and the regional elites. It is, therefore, perhaps not surprising that historiographical texts written in this period were often accounts of the events surrounding the Flemish uprising in one city or another rather than surveys of Flanders as a whole¹⁸. Moreover, the political and confessional vision that radical Calvinists in Ghent, Bruges and elsewhere developed was not based on territorial unity, but rather reflected an idealized medieval past based on a “city-state” system, so reversing the state-building initiatives of the Burgundians and Habsburgs and presenting Flanders as an area divided into cities and their respective hinterlands¹⁹. Politically, the Flemish cities sought to revive their medieval dominance over the surrounding countryside. These ideals and certainly also the composition of the Calvinist government with its strong influence drawn from craft guilds rather than the traditional urban elite further antagonized the Flemish nobility and strengthened their allegiance to the Habsburgs.

The events during the early phase of the Eighty Years’ War thus intensified the rifts between the various political groups within Flanders. More than neighbouring Brabant, for instance, Flanders was politically and ideologically divided, which made a unanimous response to the war impossible. The war itself did not provide a ‘usable’ master narrative of heroic defence or victory against antagonistic, ‘foreign’ forces, as was the case in the historiography of the northern Netherlandish provinces, notably Holland and Zeeland. More than neighbouring Holland, with its iconic sieges and heroic defeats of cities such as Haarlem and Leiden, Flanders became the battleground of a war, whose ‘narrative’ could only be told by multiple and conflicting voices²⁰.

In 1584 the Spanish forces under the Duke of Parma crushed the urban strongholds of Protestantism, inaugurating an exodus of thousands of Calvinists to the North. Ghent and other cities were garrisoned with Castilian troops and Flanders was fortified as a Habsburg stronghold. The brief period of the Calvinist regime, notably in Ghent, however, remained a vivid point of reference in later narratives of Flanders from a Southern perspective: these often portrayed the inhabitants of Ghent as fanatical heretics drawn from the lower strata of society who had driven from home and hearth those who did not follow their vision of a godly government²¹. The story of Ghent’s Calvinist regime was frequently invoked as a warning against an all-too-lax approach towards tolerance of non-Catholic minorities in the country. Joannes van Waesberghe, for instance, in his study of Geraardsbergen, a city in Imperial Flanders and his adopted home – after his family had been expelled from Ghent – never missed an opportunity to discredit Ghent’s Calvinist period. Joannes van Waesberghe was canon of the collegiate church of St.

Omaars te Lilaar with a doctorate in Law and a keen interest in promoting the history of his home town. His *Gerardimontium* was published in Latin in Brussels in 1627. In the present context, his book is remarkable not just for its snide comments against Ghent, but also for the underlying theme of the text, which was a eulogy of Geraardsbergen, but at the same time an acknowledgement of the characteristic disunity of Flanders which could only be kept at bay by a strong centralized power such as the Habsburgs. Not surprisingly, most references to Ghent described the place as a hotbed of iconoclasm and dissent.

A *patria* rhetoric is well developed in van Waesberghe's text. In his dedication he cited his patriotic feelings as the motor for his enterprise and he also did not forget to point out that the history of his own family gave him both incentive enough and also the expertise to undertake this enterprise. He used terms such as *natale solume*, which here served as a descriptor of his home town rather than his province or the whole of the Netherlands²². At the same time he firmly embedded Geraardsbergen into the county of Flanders. Here, however, he was more specific, as can be seen from the sub-title of his book, *Gerardimontium, sive Altera Imperialis Flandriae Metropolis eiusque Castellania*, and focused on Imperial Flanders, rather than on all of Flanders. This reference to the area's past as part of the Holy Roman Empire fitted well into the eulogy that van Waesberghe constructed. Here, he emphasized in particular the medieval prominence of the city with its ecclesiastical "jewel", the Benedictine Abbey of St. Adrian, which kept the relics of the early warrior saint of the 4th century²³. He also highlighted the city's rights, which he claimed, were the earliest granted to a city in Flanders by Baldwin van Bergen (ca. 1039-1070, also known as Baldwin VI Count of Flanders and Baldwin I of Hainaut) in 1067. The common bond between the neighbouring provinces – and here van Waesberghe concentrated mainly on Hainaut and Brabant – was Habsburg rule. Geraardsbergen was a border town in the political triangle between Hainaut, Flanders and Brabant, and as such it had suffered, so the reader was told, many assaults from its neighbours. Quarrels, even wars between the various parts of what were then the Burgundian and later Habsburg lands, were not played down or blended out of the story. On the contrary, these struggles, based on the expansionist ambitions of the powerful nobility, thus in van Waesberghe's interpretation, were the norm rather than the exception: it needed a strong overlord to keep them at bay²⁴. The common bond between the neighbouring provinces was Habsburg rule. In his interpretation, the city of Geraardsbergen and the land were inhabited by the noble and clerical protagonists of the Habsburg regime. Given the noble patron, whom he had chosen for his work, Claude de Croÿ-Roeulx, he could not have presented a different picture. His dedicatee was the representative of Archduchess Isabella in Geraardsbergen. The House of Croÿ in its several branches was certainly one of the most eminent noble families in the Spanish Netherlands, with close links to the Habsburg government. The Croÿs had substantial landholdings scattered across the Southern Netherlands and had embarked on a mas-

sive project to chart their possessions, appointing their own artist, Adrien de Montigny to create a series of 2,500 pictures of their properties, which were produced with accompanying descriptions in 23 volumes between 1598 and 1614 and are known as the “Albums de Croÿ”. This splendid collection offers the most comprehensive survey of land in Hainaut, Brabant, Flanders and elsewhere in the Low Countries then in the possession of the various branches of the Croÿ family. It provides an eminently rural scenario of the country, which invoked memories of an idyllic medieval peasant society²⁵.

Van Waesberghe wrote a local account of a specific part of Flanders close to his heart. More comprehensive works on Flanders, which focused on the entirety of the province rather than on specific areas, were written by members of the clerical elite who set out to chart the country for the Counter Reformation initiatives of the Spanish Habsburgs. The great chorographical works on Flanders of the 17th century, notably Jean Baptiste Gramaye’s *Antiquitates comitatus Flandriae*, published in Brussels in 1611 and Antonius Sanderus’ *Flandria Illustrata* published in two volumes in 1641 and 1644 in Amsterdam, but with a false Cologne imprint, set their mark on a description of the country which was portrayed as decidedly Catholic with strong regional autonomy through powerful estates dominated by a regional elite unquestionably loyal to the House of Habsburg. The authors of these monumental surveys, which set the agenda for a whole range of chorographical writings on the Southern provinces, were part of the wider network of Counter Reformation agents, who kept close contacts with academics and intellectuals in the Netherlands and elsewhere in the Catholic world²⁶. Their European agenda was expressed in the fact that their works were written in Latin, not in the vernacular or in French, which was the language of the ruling elite in Brussels. Both men had links to the court in Brussels: Gramaye had been appointed as court historian by the Archdukes in 1606. He also served as their agent in the Holy Roman Empire and was particularly involved in the purchase and translation of relics from Germany to Brabant²⁷. Sanderus’ family had close links to the Habsburgs: his grandfather had been the personal doctor of Charles V. Sanderus himself had been secretary of Cardinal Alfonso de la Cueva, minister of Philip IV since 1625.

Both surveys followed a distinct form of chorographical writing and highlighted the continuing traditions of the Catholic Church and its clerical and noble protagonists in the province. A closer look at the latter of the two works will outline the strategies used by the author to create the Catholic bastion of Flanders. Antonius Sanderus had read History in Douai before embarking on a clerical career, which brought him to the position of Canon of St. Maarten in Ypres in 1625²⁸. His heart, however, remained with the study of history. When the then royal historian Erycius Puteanus died in 1646 Sanderus applied for the post, but was rejected. Inspired by Jean-Baptiste Gramaye, he was interested in chorographical studies and started collecting information on his native Flanders from 1627 onwards. With a letter of recommendation from Philip IV, he then began his research, travelling across Flanders, which all too frequently brought him into

conflict with his colleagues and superiors in Ypres who were frowned upon his long absences. Sanderus' letters to potential sponsors among the aristocratic and urban elite in Flanders met with mixed responses and the money that he had expected to raise for his enterprise came rather sparsely²⁹. Sanderus, however, was so dedicated to his project that he invested substantial sums of his own money in it, largely to finance the numerous engravings he had commissioned from Jodocus Hondius in Amsterdam. The first volume of the *Flandria Illustrata* was eventually published in 1641. The second volume with the subtitle *Flandria Illustrata* which was published in 1644 was to be followed by a third and fourth volume, *Flandria Gallicana* and *Paralipomena Flandriae*, but these two were not published during Sanderus's lifetime.

The first volume was dedicated to Philip IV, the second to Francisco de Mello, a Portuguese nobleman and protégé of Olivares and General Governor of the Spanish Netherlands between 1641 and 1643. In both books, the Spanish overlords and the nobility of Flanders were generously praised as the custodians of the country. After a long dedication to the regional nobility supplied in volume 1, it does not come as a surprise that much space was dedicated to noble houses, castles and other residences of the noble families of Flanders, which were covered in great detail and with numerous engravings. The larger and smaller religious houses were also presented in great detail. Although Flanders' eminent cities, and first and foremost Sanderus' home town, Ghent, were presented with lavish illustrations of the most eminent religious and secular places, the reader leaves the books with the impression that the nobility and landed elite with their castles, ornate gardens and manor houses scattered throughout the country were equally, if not more, important than the old urban centres of the province. Sanderus started his discussion of the lie of the land with the Romans and highlighted the administrative units of the country, which were mostly the results of Roman structures. This presentation of the administrative organization of the country from Roman times led Sanderus to a discussion of the establishment of bishoprics, which were a more important frame of reference for the clerical administrator than potential ancestors and (legendary) founding fathers. A *gentium origines*, that had become so important in Northern studies, was not necessary in a land that was marked by well-established administrative units³⁰. Clear and strong traditions were thus drawn from the Roman Empire to be applied the Roman Church and its administrators. This emphasis on administrative units also allowed Sanderus the opportunity to confirm the role of the nobility as the bearers of administrative responsibility in the country. Continuity from Roman times was the strength of his argument and thus the strength of Flanders. This strategy was pursued throughout the chorographical description, which has an air of timelessness. Events of the Dutch Revolt, when Flemish cities and towns had been on the frontline, were not mentioned. In Sanderus' description of Nieuwpoort, for instance, the epic battle fought in 1600 between Prince Maurice and Archduke Albert was ignored³¹. This might still have been explicable, given that the battle ended in defeat for the Span-

ish forces. The significance of the battle of Ostend (1604), however, which brought victory to the Archduke and his forces, was also understated. However, some rather laconic comments about the Eighty Years' War were scattered through the text. In the vignettes of the counts of Flanders, for instance, where Sanderus discussed Philip II, he briefly mentioned the Revolt: "The Netherland have turned against themselves and staged the saddest tragedy ever played on the world theatre"³². Indeed, at those points where the Dutch Revolt sneaked into the description, the United Provinces were labelled the "Hollanders", a descriptor, which, in a way, reflected the leading role that the province of Holland had ascribed to itself in its own historiography³³. The Dutch opponents were also simply labelled "the enemy"³⁴. The internal strife that had arisen in Flanders itself was thus externalised. Enemies came from outside, not from within Flanders. Not surprisingly, the Habsburgs were presented in a positive light. Although references were made to the devastating war, the reign of Philip II was noted not only for his politics towards the Netherlands. Highlighted instead were the international commitments of the king in defence of Christianity throughout the world. These included his fight against the Turks, and, notably, the battle of Lepanto (1571) which was especially mentioned³⁵. The history of the Counts of Flanders was presented as world history, which had already been a feature of earlier generations. Robert II (1065-1111), for instance, was mentioned with the title "Hierosolymitanus", of Jerusalem, for his participation in the First Crusade. Another count, Baldwin IX was remembered with the title "Caesar Augustus Constantinopolitanus", for his role in the Fourth Crusade against Constantinople, where he was crowned Emperor Baldwin I in 1204³⁶. This history made it easy for Sanderus to present Flanders as belonging to traditionally highly international dynasties and as just one theatre of war in the struggle of the current rulers, the Habsburgs, for the true religion. Cathedrals, abbeys and monastic houses featured prominently in the chorographical surveys, where long lists of abbots and bishops supported the underlying message of Sanderus' work as an appreciation of the longevity of Catholic organizations in the country. Although there were three life-size images of Archdukes Albert and Isabella, Philip III and Philip IV, Sanderus' historical survey terminated with the death of Philip II in 1598. Contemporary history was certainly not on Sanderus' agenda. For a more recent account of the lives of the Archdukes he referred the reader to the works of his contemporary and fellow-historian, Aubert le Mire, alias Miraeus³⁷. Although the picture of a timeless, eminently Catholic region under Habsburg leadership is the grand scheme of Sanderus' work, he, like his predecessors, was aware of the subdivisions of Flanders. It is not surprising that his coverage of Geraardsbergen, which was firmly based on van Waesberghe's account, was included in volume 2, *Flandria Subalterna*. The eastern parts of Flanders, notably Imperial Flanders, were distinguished from what Sanderus, as an inhabitant of Ghent, saw as the heart of Flanders, the prosperous western part of the county. The title of his third volume is unsurprising: it was never published, but was intended to cover Wal-

loon or French Flanders (as it then was). Despite all financial difficulties, *Flandria Illustrata* enjoyed a very successful further life. A second Latin edition appeared in 1732 and 1753 in The Hague published by Christiaan van Lom. An amended Dutch version under the title *Verbeerlijckt Vlaandre* appeared in Leiden, Rotterdam and The Hague published by Jan vander Deyster, Jan-Daniël Beman and Cornelius and Frederik Boucquet in 1735. This, however, was not the original translation of Sanderus' work³⁸.

THE POLITICS OF UNITY: RITUALS, NETWORKS AND POWER RELATIONS BETWEEN THE FLEMISH ELITES AND THE HABSBURG COURT

While the Catholic Church thus provided an eminently strong framework of identity in Flanders, particularly since the recapture of the county for the Habsburgs in the 1580s, the loyalty of the Flemish power elites provided the second important pillar which held the county together in these turbulent times and which fostered a sense of both regional identity and an identification with the wider Habsburg world that had been missing in earlier centuries³⁹. This loyalty was, as has been pointed out, a result of the career opportunities for a new elite which rose to power and prominence during the Burgundian attempts at state formation. Their successors, the Habsburgs, were well aware of the fact that this loyalty had to be rewarded, if they wanted the nobility to continue their contributions to the increasingly protracted war effort which, from the outbreak of hostilities between Spain and France in 1635, was fought on two fronts. As René Vermeir has recently pointed out, the Habsburgs responded to this challenge with a series of highly symbolic measures that assured the Flemish elite that their position and their county were central to the wider Spanish strategy and to the success of the Counter Reformation⁴⁰. From the death of Archduke Albert in 1621, when the Spanish Netherlands returned to direct rule of Madrid, the Spanish kings ensured that the Governor General of the Netherlands would always be of royal blood. During her lifetime, until 1633, Archduchess Isabella, who was eminently popular in the Habsburg provinces, remained ruler of the Netherlands. After the brief interim of the Marquis of Aytona, a protégé of the powerful duke of Olivares, the governorship was then given to the Cardinal-Infante Don Fernando de Austria, King Philip IV's younger brother, in 1634. When the young and charismatic Spanish heir apparent, whose appointment had aroused high expectations both for his promise as a military leader and as a diplomat, died of smallpox at the age of 39 in 1641 he was replaced by two internationally well-connected first-class bureaucrats: first by Don Francisco de Melo, then by the marquis of Castel Rodrigo who succeeded him in 1643. The latter was replaced in 1647 by a high-ranking member of the Austrian Habsburg line, Emperor Ferdinand III's brother, Leopold-William. The three governors who were not princes of the blood royal were regarded as interim governors, who had each held posts at the court of Vienna before their secondment to Brussels.

The presentation of these candidates and especially the arrival of the Archdukes and of Cardinal-Infante Don Fernando as the guardians of Flemish security within the Habsburg empire was carefully orchestrated, particularly through the traditional ceremonies of the *Blijde Inkomst*, or Joyous Entry, which formed an essential part of the political and constitutional ritual of government in the Netherlands. These progresses by the new governors into the most prominent cities of the Southern Netherlands were eminently political events which constituted, rather than merely confirmed, the relationship between ruler and ruled. More than any other encounter, the Joyous Entries gave dramatic and symbolic expression to the complicated interplay of rights and privileges characteristic of Burgundian and later Habsburg rule in the Netherlands. The details of each individual entry, which every new ruler had to undergo, gave both sides, but, perhaps, even more specifically the town oligarchies, considerable room for manoeuvre which they exploited with eminently political statements concerning their expectations of the new sovereign. While career opportunities at court appealed to the Flemish nobility's loyalties, the Joyous Entries targeted the hearts and minds of the urban elite in Flanders.

Much has been written in recent years on the well-documented entries of Archdukes Albert and Isabella and also of their predecessor Philip II into Brussels and Antwerp. An assessment of the use of these highly symbolic events in Flanders is still missing. Moreover, research into the later period and notably on Cardinal-Infante Don Fernando and his successors is insufficiently developed so far⁴¹. René Vermeir, however, has pointed out that the entry of Don Fernando into Ghent had been carefully orchestrated to remind the participants, spectators as well as actors in the royal procession, of the long Habsburg tradition in the city, which, after all, was the birth place of Don Fernando's great ancestor, Charles V⁴². The Habsburg dynasty thus became the unifying bond of Flemish identity and loyalty. It remained such a powerful tool that the Flemish power elites did not hesitate to contribute to an increasingly difficult war effort without considering changing sides and responding to the overtures of either the Dutch Republic or the French monarchy. Constitutionally, their loyalty was rewarded by the strict adherence of the Spanish Governor Generals to the Estates' rights⁴³.

FLANDERS – A “BORDER REGION”?

Flanders was constructed as a bastion in the Habsburgs' battle against their enemies in the North and in the South. While the conflict with the Dutch Republic was clearly seen as a fight for Catholicism as the only true religion, French fellow-Catholics in the South had to be repainted as significantly 'other' by reference to French absolutism, which was incompatible with and a threat to the traditional rights and liberties of the Flemish power elites.

Flanders thus had foreign borders north and south of its territory, but does this justify labelling the county a “border region” – a term which has been much discussed in recent historiography?⁴⁴ Research into the nature of border regions and their role in

(national) identity formation has, so far, mainly addressed the relationship of border regions in the geographical periphery to the centre of a nation-state⁴⁵. With its eminently important role as one of core provinces of the Spanish Habsburg possessions in the Southern Netherlands (together with Brabant), Flanders cannot be described as peripheral to the centre in Brussels, even if much of the Habsburgs ceremonial display of their power, expressed for instance in the highly publicized pilgrimages of Albert and Isabella to the shrines of Our Lady of Scherpenheuvel or Halle, took place in Brabant⁴⁶. Flanders was also not peripheral in its relation to Madrid, although conflicts between the Governor Generals in the Netherlands and the Escorial over the war effort and Spanish strategy in the Netherlands frequently erupted. However, not only Charles V, born in Ghent, but also his son Philip II and his grandson Philip III still regarded the Low Countries as the jewel in the imperial crown: *Belgicum coronae Regiae gemma prestantior* was the motto that Philip III had inscribed on a triumphal arch erected in Lisbon in 1619⁴⁷. In terms of the nomenclature used in Spanish texts to describe their Southern Netherlandish subjects, they were referred to as *Flamencos*, while the Eighty Years War was known in Spanish as *la guerra de Flandes* or *las guerras de Flandes*. At the same time the term could also be used to describe the province of Flanders rather than the whole of the Netherlands. As with Sanderus' "Hollanders", "Flamencos" became a *pars pro toto*, highlighting the importance of the province in Spanish eyes⁴⁸. Together with its eastern and southern neighbours under Habsburg rule, Flanders was elevated to the status of a bastion of the Counter Reformation and of Habsburg power. If the term "border region" can be applied here, then it should encompass the whole of the Spanish Netherlands within the wider, Habsburg, or even Counter-Reformation world. Through the intermediaries of local political, administrative and religious elites this vision was transported to, but also accommodated into the specifically Flemish scenario. Recent research into border regions has challenged the perception of a "weak, conservative" border area which was confronted by a "dynamic, modern" nation-state⁴⁹. It is attractive to test this hypothesis for 17th-century Flanders and Spain. Whether and how events and political, social and cultural practices in Flanders and in the Spanish Netherlands in general influenced Spanish court and political culture, educational systems or social norms has, however, not to date been adequately assessed by historians. Yolanda Rodríguez Péres has suggested that perceptions of the enemy other, the *Holandeses*, were much further developed, albeit in negative terms, than the ideas that Spaniards had of Netherlandish subjects who were loyal to the Spanish monarchy⁵⁰. The *relaciones*, newsletters on the war distributed in Spain, which she has studied report events in the Netherlands, but largely refrain from detailed value judgements on the Southern Netherlanders, who are stereotypically described as Catholic and loyal⁵¹. How far Flemish nobles or merchants could and did make a career in Spain or elsewhere in the wider Habsburg world also need further research⁵². On the regional level of Flanders and its border, again, a number of questions remain unanswered. It is difficult to assess, for instance, how porous the borders were between Flanders and its lost

territories in *Zeeuws-Vlaanderen* and also with French Flanders. So far, no in-depth study has addressed the question of intermarriage on a local level or the role of a black, cross-border economy.

SUMMARY AND AGENDA FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The Eighty Years' War played an important role in the development of a Flemish identity, which was firmly embedded within the Habsburg world. It was Catholic, pro-Spanish and international. This transformation was far from clear in the first phase of the hostilities, when Flemish identity was even more fragmented through the different interest groups in the country which supported different camps in the war. Only from the last decades of the 16th century onwards did the Spanish overlords succeed in their military and ideological efforts to unify the region that was left of its Netherlandish possessions. In Flanders they were supported by a power elite which expected greater gains from its loyalty to Spain than from joining the rebellion. On the fringes of this general picture of identity formation of a province which bonded with its eastern neighbours to the extent that we can use the term regional identity here, there remain, however, a number of unanswered questions which need further investigation: relations to the lost border regions in the north and in the south are still unclear. Likewise, relations between Flanders and the wider Habsburg world in terms of career networks, intermarriage, and cultural exchange have not yet been adequately researched and would certainly provide closer insights into the relationship between border regions and composite states, which are at the heart of this collection.

NOTES

- ¹ I use the term Netherlandish here to denote issues and phenomena applicable to both parts of the Netherlands. This reflects the usage in the Netherlandish language. On the difficulties of nomenclature see, for instance, A. Duke, *The Elusive Netherlands. The Question of National Identity in the Early Modern Low Countries on the Eve of the Revolt*, in "Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden", 2004, 119, pp. 10-35.
- ² See, for instance, R. Stein, *Seventeen. The Multiplicity of a Unity in the Low Countries*, in D'A. J.D. Boulton, Jan R. Veenstra (eds.), *The Ideology of Burgundy*, Leiden 2007, chapter 17.
- ³ On identity in the pre-Revolt Low Countries: Duke, *The Elusive Netherlands* cit.
- ⁴ On the history of the term "Dutch Revolt", see, for instance, H. van Nierop, *Making Sense of the Revolt of the Netherlands*, in G. Darby (ed.), *The Origins and Development of the Dutch Revolt*, London - New York 2001, pp. 29-47.
- ⁵ It needs to be pointed out, however, that identity formation is not understood as a merely top-down process, but that it is also fed by bottom-up initiatives of individuals and groups in society on the margins of political (and social) power. This is certainly also the case with regional identities and their relationship to a centre.
- ⁶ The argument of tradition was certainly one of the most powerful tools in early modern discourse.

- ⁷ On the impact of the cessation of Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, see R. Vermeir, *De grens verlegd. Het zuiden zonder Sluis tijdens de Tachtigjarige Oorlog, 1604-1648*, in “Archief. Mededelingen van de Koninklijk Zeeuwsch Genootschap der Wetenschappen”, 2004, pp. 49-60.
- ⁸ For further details and figures, see J. Israel, *The Dutch Republic. Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall 1477-1806*, Oxford 1995, p. 5.
- ⁹ H. De Schepper, J.-M. Cauchies, *Legal tools of the public power in the Netherlands, 1200-1600*, in: A. Padoa-Schioppa (ed.), *Legislation and Justice (The Origins of the Modern State in Europe C)*, Oxford 1997, pp. 229-268.
- ¹⁰ See, for instance, K. Tilmans, *De ontwikkeling van een vaderland-begrip in de laat-middeleeuwse en vroeg-moderne geschiedsschrijving van de Nederlanden*, in N.C.F. Van Sas (ed.), *Vaderland. Een geschiedenis van de vijftiende eeuw tot 1940*, Amsterdam, 1999, pp. 41-45. For a recent discussion of the lack of urban chronicle traditions in Flanders and Brabant, see A.-L. van Bruaene, *L'Écriture de la Mémoire Urbaine en Flandre et en Brabant (XIVe-XVIIe Siècle)*, in E. Crouzet-Pavan, E. Lecuppre-Desjardin (eds.), *Villes des Flandres et d'Italie (XIIIe – XVIIe Siècle)*, Turnhout 2008, pp. 149-164.
- ¹¹ On the Burgundian State see W. Blockmans, W. Prevenier, *The Burgundian Netherlands*, Cambridge 1986. See also W. ter Brake, *A Plague of Insurrection. Popular Politics and the Peasant Revolt in Flanders, 1323-1328*, Philadelphia 1993.
- ¹² J. Dumolyn, *Nobles, Patricians and Officers. The making of a regional political elite in late medieval Flanders*, in “Journal of Social History”, 2006, 40, 2, pp. 431-453.
- ¹³ See, for instance, E. Lecuppre-Desjardin, *La ville des cérémonies. Essais sur la communication politique dans les anciens Pays-Bas bourguignons*, Turnhout 2004. See also W. Rösener, *Einleitung*, in Id. (ed.), *Adelige und bürgerliche Erinnerungskulturen des Spätmittelalters und der Frühen Neuzeit*, Göttingen 2000.
- ¹⁴ van Bruaene, *L'Écriture de la Mémoire Urbaine* cit.
- ¹⁵ A.-L. van Bruaene, *Om beters wille. Rederijkerskamers en de stedelijke cultuur in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden (1400-1650)*, Amsterdam 2008.
- ¹⁶ This contrasts with developments in neighbouring Brabant, where histories of the Duchy emphasize the role not only of the dynasty, but the land itself. See V. Souche-Hazebrouck, *Le Brabant, terre de sainteté à travers l'oeuvre de Jean Gielemans († 1487)* in S. Boesch Gajano, R. Michetti (eds.), *Europa Sacra, Raccolte agiografiche e identità politiche in Europa fra Medioevo ed Età moderna*, Rome 2002, pp. 34-44. See also her *Patriotic saints or patriotic hagiography in Brabant at the end of the Middle Ages?*, in D. Bauer, K. Herbers, G. Signori (eds.), *Patriotische Heilige. Beiträge zur Konstruktion religiöser und politischer Identitäten in der Vormoderne*, Stuttgart 2007, pp. 113-122.
- ¹⁷ Dries Raeymaekers is currently preparing a PhD dissertation (University of Antwerp) on the Habsburg Court in Brussels, 1598-1647. I am grateful for his information on the administrative structures at court.
- ¹⁸ See, for instance, J.P. van Male (ed.), *Philip de Kempenare, Vlaemsche Kroniek of Dagregister van al het gene gedenkwaardig voorgevallen is binnen de Stadt Gent sedert den 15 Julij 1566 tot 15 Julij 1585*, Ghent 1839; *Memorieboek der Stadt Ghent van't Jaar 1301 tot 1737*, Ghent 1852-54 (Maatschappij der Vlaemsche Bibliophilen, 2. series No.15), F. Vanderhaeghen (ed.), *Marcus van Vaernewyck, Van die beroerliche tijden in die Nederlanden en voornamelijk in Ghendt, 1566-1568*, Ghent 1872.
- ¹⁹ W. Blockmans, *Alternatives to monarchical Centralisation: The Great Tradition of Revolt in Flanders and Brabant*, in H. G. Koenigsberger (ed.), *Republiken und Republikanismus im Europa der frühen Neuzeit*, Munich 1988, pp. 145-154.
- ²⁰ It needs to be remembered, however, that the narratives constructed around the iconic sieges in Holland also weeded out the existing divisions in places like Haarlem, where it was by no means clear that

- the city would become a symbol of Dutch resistance against Spanish forces. On the internal strife in Haarlem, see Joke Spaans' still seminal: *Haarlem na de Reformatie: Stedelijke Cultuur and kerkelijk leven, 1577-1620*, The Hague 1989.
- ²¹ This view on events in the short-lived Calvinist city states was, however, also often used in Northern debates as a warning against intolerance. Radical Calvinism was, in fact, associated with Southern refugees rather than seen as an "indigenous" Northern confessional pattern. Civic authorities in cities such as Haarlem emphasized tolerance rather than exclusivity as a means for peaceful and prosperous co-existence. On debates on religious tolerance in the Dutch Republic see, for instance, R. Po-Chia Hsia, H. van Nierop (eds.), *Calvinism and Religious Toleration in the Dutch Golden Age*, Cambridge 2002.
- ²² I. van Waesberghe, *Gerardimontium sive Altera Imperialis Flandriae Metropolis eiusque Castellania*, Brussels 1627, p. 99.
- ²³ He was martyred in Nicomedia on 4 March 306.
- ²⁴ van Waesberghe, *Gerardimontium* cit., p.103.
- ²⁵ J.-M. Duvosquel, R. Berger, F.-Ph. Jacquet-Ladrier, B. Minnen (eds.), *Albums de Croÿ, Dl. 3, Bezittingen der Croÿ's in Brabant, Vlaanderen, Artesië en het Naamse*, Brussels 1985; B. Minnen (ed.), *Het hertogdom Aarschot onder Karel van Croÿ (1595-1612); Kadasters en gezichten*, Brussels 1993. Members of the Croÿ family were frequently used as dedicatees for works in praise of the Southern Netherlands. Justus Lipsius' chorography of Leuven, for instance, had been dedicated to Charles de Croÿ, who resided in the seignory of Heverlee, in close vicinity to the city of Leuven. See J. Papy (ed.), *Justus Lipsius. Leuven. Beschrijving van de Stad en haar Universiteit*, Leuven 2000.
- ²⁶ For the Catholic Counter Reformation networks in the Holy Roman Empire and its neighbourhood, including the Netherlands, see S. Benz, *Zwischen Tradition und Kritik. Katholische Geschichtsschreibung im barocken Heiligen Römischen Reich*, Husum 2003.
- ²⁷ A biography of this important Counter Reformation intellectual is still missing. For further details in his career, see Benz, *Zwischen Tradition und Kritik* cit.
- ²⁸ Details of Sanderus' life are collected in: C. de Vleeschauer, *De Flandria Illustrata van Antonius Sanderus*, in "Archives et Bibliothèques de Belgique/Archief- en Bibliotheekswezen in België", 1978, XLIX 1-2, pp. 1-115. See also J. de Saint-Genois, *Antoine Sanderus et ses écrits. Une page de notre histoire littéraire*, Ghent 1861, reprint Utrecht 1980.
- ²⁹ For details on his correspondence with the local nobility and with the administrators of the Spanish Netherlands, see J. de Saint-Genois, *Antoine Sanderus et ses écrits* cit.
- ³⁰ Much has been written on the role of the Batavian myth in Dutch historiography. See, for instance: E.O.G. Haitsma Mulier, *De Bataafse mythe opnieuw bekeken*, in "Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden", 1996, 111, pp. 344-367; S. Langereis, *Van botte boeren tot beschaafde burgers. Oudheidskundige beelden van de Bataven, 1500-1800*, Exhibition Catalogue: *De Bataven. Verhalen van een verdwenen volk, De Bataafsche Leeuw, Amsterdam*, Museum Het Valkhof, Nijmegen 2004, pp. 72-108.
- ³¹ A. Sanderus, *Flandria Illustrata*, Amsterdam 1641-1644, vol. 2, p. 636.
- ³² *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 72.
- ³³ Id., *Verheerlijkt Vlaandre*, Leiden 1735, vol. 1, 105.
- ³⁴ Sanderus, *Flandria Illustrata* cit., vol. 1, p. 72.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 37, 44.
- ³⁷ See, for instance, A. Le Mire, *Rerum Belgicarum Chronicon ab Iulii Caesaris in Galliam adventu etc.*, Antwerp 1636.

- ³⁸ The Dutch edition also incorporated unpublished material of the projected volumes 3 and 4 of Sanders' original work.
- ³⁹ I use the term "regional identity" deliberately here to indicate that developments in Flanders were similar to the other prominent Counter Reformation bullwark in the Spanish Netherlands: Brabant. Brabant, however, had a less heterogeneous and divisive medieval past than Flanders. For identity in late medieval Brabant, see, in particular, R. Stein, *Politiek en Historiografie. Het onstaansmilieu van Brabantse kronieken in de eerste helft van de vijftiende eeuw*, Leuven 1994; Id., *Brabant en de Karolingische dynastie. Over het ontstaan van een historiografische traditie* in "Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden", 1995, 110, 3, pp. 329-351.
- ⁴⁰ R. Vermeir, *Power Elites and Royal Government in the Spanish Netherlands during the Last Phase of the Eighty Years' War (1621-1648)*, in A. Cimdiņa (ed.), *Religion and Political Change in Europe: Past and Present*, Clío's Workshop II, 8, Pisa 2003, pp. 87-102.
- ⁴¹ On the public ceremonies of the Joyous Entries in the Netherlands, see H. Soly, *Plechtige Intochten in de steden van de Zuidelijke Nederlanden tijdens de overgang van Middeleeuwen naar Nieuwe Tijd; communicatie, propaganda, spektakel*, in "Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis", 1984, XCVII, pp. 341-361. On the entry of Philip II, see M.A. Meadow, *Ritual and Civic Identity in Philipp II 1549 Antwerp "Blijde Incompst"*, in R. Falkenburg et al. (eds.), *Hof- Staats- en Stadceremonies*, "Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art", 1998, 49, pp. 37-68. On public ceremony in the Southern Netherlands in the second part of the 16th century, see M. Thöfner, *A Common Art: Urban Ceremonials in Antwerp and Brussels during and after the Dutch Revolt*, Zwolle 2007.
- ⁴² Vermeir, *Power Elites and Royal Government* cit., p. 92.
- ⁴³ On the interplay between the Southern Netherlandish estates and the Spanish monarchy, see L. Duerloo, *Verbeelde gewesten. Zelfbeeld en zelfrepresentatie in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden*, in "De Zeventiende Eeuw", 2000, 16, pp. 3-13 and Id., *Discourse of conquest, discourse of contact: competing visions on the nature of Habsburg rule in the Netherlands*, in G. Ammerer (ed.), *Bündnispartner und Konkurrenten der Landesfürsten? Die Stände in der Habsburgermonarchie*, Vienna 2007, pp. 463-478. More critical about the loyalty of the Flemish nobles to the Spanish monarchy is K. van Honacker, *The Archdukes and Their Subjects: The Political Culture of the Citizens in the Netherlands*, in: W. Thomas, L. Duerloo (eds.), *Albert & Isabella 1598-1621*, Turnhout, 1998, pp. 241-248.
- ⁴⁴ See, for instance, the Special Issue of the "European Review of History: Revue Européenne d'Histoire" 2008, 15, 3, "Municipalism, Regionalism, Nationalism: Hybrid Identity Formations and the Making of Modern Europe", and here especially the article by D. Lavan, T. Bancroft, *Border regions and identities*, which discusses several models of spatial identities and their application to border regions such as French Flanders and Trieste (pp. 255-275).
- ⁴⁵ See M. Umbach, *Introduction*, in: *Municipalism, Regionalism, Nationalism: Hybrid Identity Formations and the Making of Modern Europe*, "European Review of History: Revue Européenne d'Histoire", 2008, 15, 3, pp. 235-242.
- ⁴⁶ On the role of pilgrimages in the Habsburg propaganda effort in the Netherlands, see L. Duerloo, M. Wingens, *Scherpenheuvel. Het Jeruzalem van de Lage Landen*, Leuven 2002; Thöfner, *A Common Art* cit.
- ⁴⁷ Reference taken from Y. Rodríguez Pérez, *De Tachtigjarige Oorlog in Spaanse ogen*, Nijmegen 2003, p. 17.
- ⁴⁸ Information on the Spanish nomenclature is taken from Y. Rodríguez Péres, *De Tachtigjarige Oorlog* cit.
- ⁴⁹ See Umbach, *Introduction* cit.
- ⁵⁰ Rodríguez Péres, *De Tachtigjarige Oorlog* cit.

- ⁵¹ On the *relaciones*, see H. Ettinghausen, *The illustrated Spanish news. Text and image in the seventeenth-century press*, in: C. Davis, P. J. Smith (eds.), *Art and Literature in Spain: 1600-1800. Studies in Honour of Nigel Glendinnen*, London 1993, pp. 117-133.
- ⁵² Studies which have addressed this subject so far include W. Thomas, E. Stols, *La integración de Flandes en la Monarchiá Hispánica*, in: W. Thomas, R. A. Verdonck (eds.), *Encuentros en Flandes*, Leuven 2000, pp. 1-73.

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