

Introduction

Beeldenstorm: Iconoclasm in the Sixteenth-Century Low Countries¹

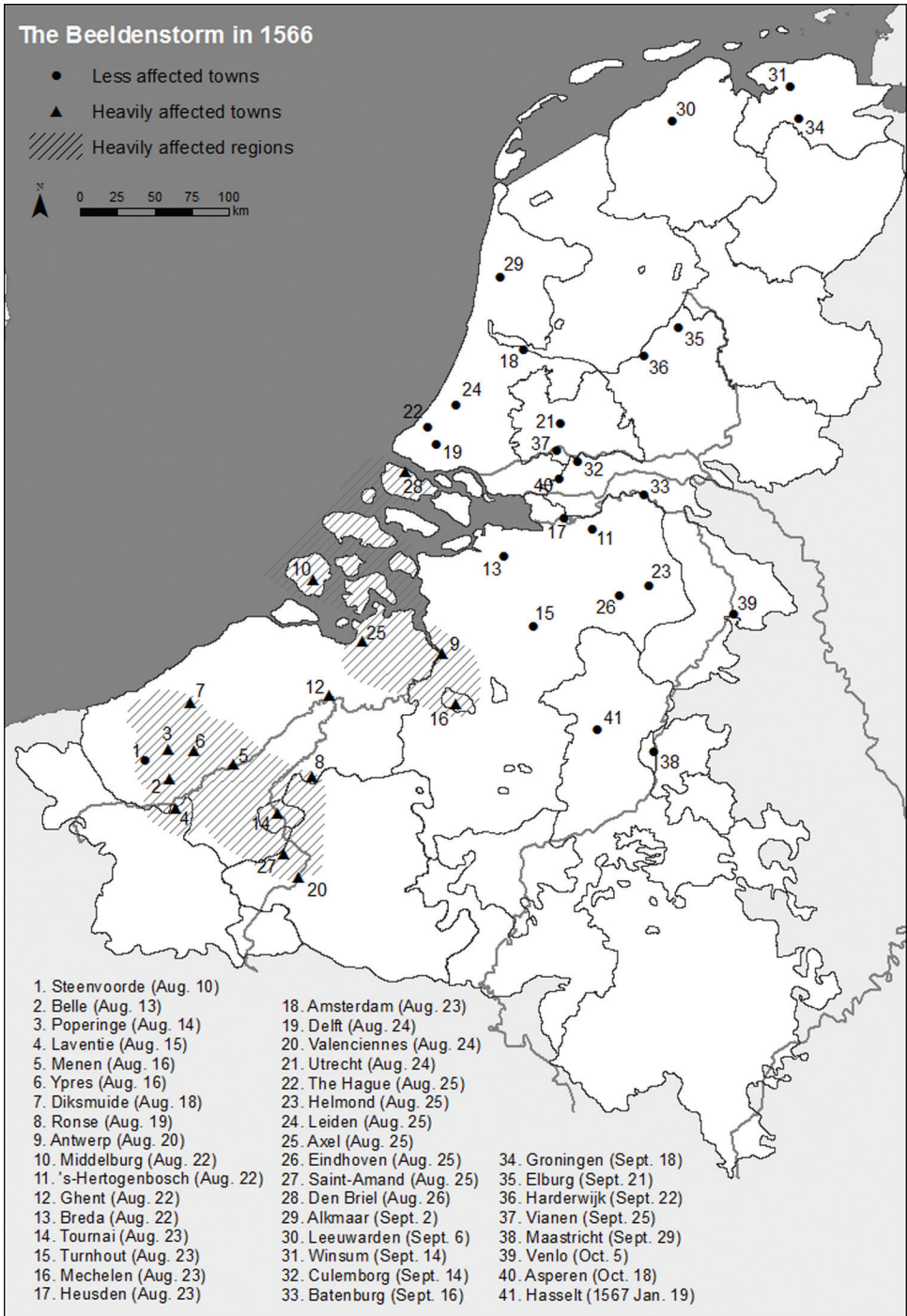
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After 450 years the *Beeldenstorm* of 1566 still deserves our careful historical analysis because it was unquestionably a game changer in Netherlandish politics and culture. More generally, we believe that iconoclasm breaks open cultural codes and thereby helps us to understand past societies. While we must thank the previous generations of historians for taking the iconoclasts seriously, the historians and art historians in this issue go a step further by also taking seriously the targets of iconoclasts – lay Catholic devotion and religious material culture. This theme number analyses the dialectics between iconoclasts and the material objects they targeted, between those who attacked and those who actively or passively defended the traditional community, between those who destroyed and those who restored or reinvented the religious patrimony, and in doing so reveals what was at stake in the sixteenth-century Low Countries.

Inleiding. Beeldenstorm. Iconoclasmie in de zestiende-eeuwse Lage Landen

Na 450 jaar verdient de *Beeldenstorm* van 1566 nog steeds een grondige historische analyse, aangezien er weinig twijfel kan bestaan over de enorme impact op de politiek en cultuur van de Nederlanden. Meer algemeen beschouwen wij iconoclasmie als een kraker van culturele codes die ons helpt samenlevingen uit het verleden te begrijpen. Vorige generaties historici hebben zich vooral verdiept in de motieven van de iconoclasten, deze groep historici en kunsthistorici gaat verder door ook de doelwitten van de iconoclasten – de katholieke lekendevotie en de religieuze materiële cultuur – tot object van studie te maken. Dit themanummer ontfaft de dialectiek tussen iconoclasten en de materiële cultuur die ze viseerden, tussen mannen en vrouwen die de traditionele gemeenschap aanvielen en deze die haar actief of passief verdedigden, tussen zij die het religieuze patrimonium vernielden en zij die het herstelden of herijkten. Op die manier wordt duidelijk waar het om draaide in de zestiende-eeuwse Nederlanden.



The spread of the Beeldenstorm in 1566.

Hans Blomme, based on the map in Geoffrey Parker, *The Dutch Revolt* (Ithaca, NY 1977).

On 10 August 1566 Sebastiaan Matte preached a notorious sermon in Steenvoorde, an industrialised village in the west of Flanders, inciting his followers to smash the images and other religious objects in the nearby convent of St. Lawrence. In the following week (10-18 August) many churches, abbeys and convents in what is called the *Westkwartier* were attacked by small bands of iconoclasts led by Calvinist preachers. On 20 August the *Beeldenstorm* first gained a supra-regional dimension: the Antwerp metropolis suffered severe iconoclasm at the hands of predominantly local image-breakers, and in the following days other cities in the Scheldt region – most importantly Ghent and Tournai – and in Holland followed. Finally, in September and October 1566, local authorities in the north of the Low Countries organised more orderly cleansings of churches (see map).²

Because of its comprehensiveness the *Beeldenstorm* was viewed by many contemporary and later commentators as a unique chain of events: over days, weeks and even months the familiar traditional world of the Low Countries was turned upside down. To give just one example, the essays in this theme number include several stories of people from high to low who became sick when confronted with the sight or the news of the ruined church interiors. Apparently the *Beeldenstorm* caused a physical experience of doom or at least upheaval.

As twenty-first-century observers, we of course are aware that iconoclasm is not brought on us by God's wrath nor even that it is historically or culturally specific. Iconoclasm is a recurring phenomenon from Antiquity to this very day and comes in many different religious, political and social guises.³ Even so, after 450 years the *Beeldenstorm* of 1566 still deserves our careful historical analysis. We believe that iconoclasm is a breaker of cultural codes that therefore helps us to understand past societies. By analysing the dialectics between iconoclasts and the material objects they targeted,

1 This volume is the published result of a workshop organised by the research project *Embodied piety in the age of iconoclasm: Church, artifact and religious routine in the sixteenth-century Low Countries* (Ghent University), financed by the Research Foundation Flanders (FWO).

2 A detailed chronological overview in J. Scheerder, *De Beeldenstorm* (Bussum 1974) and a recent analysis in P. Arnade, *Beggars, Iconoclasts, and Civic Patriots: The Political Culture of the Dutch Revolt* (Ithaca, NY 2008) 90-165. For this chronology, see also: A.C. Duke and D.H.A. Kolff, 'The Time of Troubles in the County of Holland, 1566-1567', *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 82:3 (1969) 316-337; M. Backhouse, 'Beeldenstorm

en Bosgeuzen in het Westkwartier (1566-1568)', *Handelingen Koninklijke geschied- en oudheidkundige kring van Kortrijk* 38 (1971); H.F.K. van Nierop, *Beeldenstorm en burgerlijk verzet in Amsterdam 1566-1567* (Nijmegen 1978); S. Deyon and A. Lottin, *Les casseurs de l'été 1566: L'iconoclasm dans le Nord* (Paris 1981). Jozef Scheerder's monumental doctoral thesis on the *Beeldenstorm* in Ghent will be posthumously published in 2016 by the Maatschappij voor Geschiedenis en Oudheidkunde te Gent.

3 A recent volume with a broad chronological scope is K. Kolrud and M. Prusac (eds.), *Iconoclasm from Antiquity to Modernity* (Burlington, VT 2014).

between those who attacked and those who actively or passively defended the traditional community, between those who destroyed and those who restored or reinvented the religious patrimony, we can gain insight into what was at stake in the sixteenth-century Low Countries.

Therefore, first of all, we need to reconnect the *Beeldenstorm* to its broader contexts. The two-month wave of destruction was certainly exceptional in its scale and intensity, but has to be understood as part of a larger sixteenth-century pattern, fuelled by deeply rooted religious as well as political and social concerns. Indeed, before 1566 many European countries north of the Alps had already been confronted with iconoclasm. Though actually preceded by a number of incidents in the Baltic area, the *Wittenberger Unruhen* of late January 1522 are traditionally considered as the starting point of Protestant image-breaking. In response to Bodenstein von Karlstadt's tract *Von Abtuhung der Bylder* and to popular demand, the city council of Wittenberg decided to do away with the images in churches. This happened much to Luther's disappointment, since he took a more moderate stance. In a similar way, after popular attacks on religious objects in Zurich in September 1523, the magistracy organised a widely attended public debate on the matter of images in which Zwingli defended the harshest position.⁴

In the slipstream of Protestant reform, iconoclasm followed all over northern Europe: in Scandinavia (1530s), in England (especially between 1547 and 1553), in Scotland (from 1559 onwards) and in France (most violently between 1559 and 1562).⁵ Thus the events of August 1566 by no means came

4 See S. Michalski, 'Bilderstürme im Ostseeraum', in: P. Blicke et al. (eds.), *Macht und Ohnmacht der Bilder. Reformatorischer Bildersturm im Kontext der europäischen Geschichte* (Munich 2002) 223-238, as well as the many other relevant contributions in the same volume. Classic studies include S. Michalski, *The Reformation and the Visual Arts: The Protestant Image Question in Western and Eastern Europe* (London, New York 1993) especially 10-11, 52-54 and 75-98, and L. Palmer Wandel, *Voracious Idols and Violent Hands: Iconoclasm in Reformation Zurich, Strasbourg and Basel* (Cambridge 1995). For a more recent analysis of the 1522 Wittenberg events, see N. Krentz, 'Auf den Spuren der Erinnerung. Wie die Wittenberger Bewegung zu einem Ereignis wurde', *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung* 36 (2009) 563-595.

5 For England, see J. Phillips, *The Reformation of Images: Destruction of Art in England, 1535-1660* (Berkeley, CA 1973), and E. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c.1400-c.1580* (New Haven, CT, London 1992) especially 381, 453 and 480. For Scotland, see A. Spicer, 'Iconoclasm and Adaptation: The Reformation of the Churches in Scotland and the Netherlands', in: D. Gaimster and R. Gilchrist (eds.), *The Archaeology of the Reformation, 1480-1580* (Leeds 2003) 29-43. For France, see especially O. Christin, *Une révolution symbolique: L'iconoclisme huguenot et la reconstruction catholique* (Paris 1991), and D. Crouzet, *Les guerriers de Dieu: La violence au temps des troubles de religion (vers 1525-vers 1610)* (Seyssel 1990) 493-561. A general survey is provided by C.M.N. Eire, *War against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (Cambridge 1986).

out of the blue. Yet the scope and actual development of the attacks in the Low Countries had never been seen before. They were not commanded nor approved by local or royal authorities, nor were they limited to a small number of places. Multiple attempts to feign legal approbation notwithstanding, there was absolutely no consent of the central government, and yet almost all of the provinces of the Habsburg Netherlands were hit in an impressively short time span.⁶ The dynamics of the *Beeldenstorm* even had cross-border consequences, for it triggered similar outbreaks in the neighbouring but politically independent Prince-Bishoprics of Cambrai and Liège.⁷

The reasons why iconoclasm in the Low Countries was so comprehensive are complex. The more traditional, but still pertinent, view is that it was an effect of the very tense political and religious circumstances of the so-called 'Wonder Year', when a general resistance to the centralising politics of King Philip II crystallised in the rejection of the heresy laws. On 5 April 1566, the confederate lesser nobility presented the governess Margaret of Parma with a petition to abolish the Inquisition and to suspend the edicts against heresy. This was only one step in a wider media campaign against the persecution of Protestants. Shortly thereafter, Calvinists ventured into the open, organising hedge-preaching outside many cities, and attracting huge crowds of men and women.⁸ Therefore in the summer of 1566 Calvinism rapidly grew from a persecuted underground church to a large popular movement. Not all Reformed leaders endorsed image-breaking, but there is no doubt that in many places the *Beeldenstorm* was instigated by Calvinist preachers or planned by local consistories that adroitly orchestrated the anger of the crowds.⁹

Why large groups of men and women followed their Calvinist leaders in this outburst of violence is another question of course.¹⁰ In his work with the provocative title *Het Hongerjaar* (The Hunger Year), the Marxist historian Erich Kuttner claimed that the *Beeldenstorm* was all about class struggle. He

6 Michalski, *The Reformation and the Visual Arts*, 86 speaks of an 'iconoclastic psychosis' in the Low Countries. See for examples of forged letters of instruction: Scheerder, *Beeldenstorm*, 24, 27, 52, 77 and 100.

7 A. Spicer, 'Iconoclasm on the Frontier: Le Catéau-Cambrésis, 1566', in: Kolrud and Prusac, *Iconoclasm from Antiquity to Modernity*, 119-137, and J.G.C. Venner, *Beeldenstorm in Hasselt 1567. Achtergronden en analyses van een rebellie tegen de prins-bisschop van Luik* (Leeuwarden 1989).

8 See in particular P. Mack Crew, *Calvinist Preaching and Iconoclasm in the Netherlands, 1544-1569* (Cambridge 1978).

9 There is an excellent synthesis of the events in the Wonder Year in J.J. Woltjer, *Tussen vrijheidsstrijd en burgeroorlog. Over de Nederlandse Opstand 1555-1580* (Amsterdam 1994), and G. Marnef, 'The Dynamics of Reformed Militancy in the Low Countries: The Wonderyear', in: N. Scott Amos, A. Pettegree and H. van Nierop (eds.), *The Education of a Christian Society: Humanism and the Reformation in Britain and the Netherlands* (Aldershot 1999) 193-210.

10 P. Arnade, 'The Rage of the Canaille: Iconoclasm and the Problem of Authority in the Wonder Year of 1566', in: E. Lecuppre-Desjardin and A.-L. Van Bruaene (eds.), *Emotions in the Heart of the City (14th-16th Century)* (Turnhout 2005) 93-111.

pointed to the severe social and economic tensions in the years leading up to 1566, especially in the *Westkwartier* where proto-industrialisation had led to proletarianisation.¹¹ Herman Van der Wee has presented a more nuanced view in a brilliant article on the economy as a factor in starting of the Dutch Revolt. The prosperity of the middle-classes, slowly built up since the Burgundian period, came under severe pressure in the 1560s because of a combination of economic and climatologic circumstances. The sense of imminent loss drove these middling groups into the arms of Calvinist preachers, who propounded a more rationalist and exclusivist economic theory than the traditional Catholic Church.¹² More recently, Peter Arnade has reframed these insights by adding the rich texture of Burgundian political traditions and workers' revolt in the Low Countries: after all, collective action was deeply engrained in the political culture of the Low Countries.¹³

Beyond these specific political and socio-economic contexts, the importance of popular religious conceptions cannot be denied. Natalie Zemon Davis has reminded us that violence is usually about what it claims to be about, in this case deeply felt religious concerns.¹⁴ David Freedberg in particular, has argued that the popular theology of ordinary Calvinists was part of a universal obsession with the power of images.¹⁵ In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Decalogue explicitly forbids the production and veneration of 'graven images'. As is well known, the discussion on the religious use of images led to the Byzantine iconoclasm of the eighth and ninth centuries.¹⁶ After this episode discussions on the pros and contras of religious art caused fierce theological debates throughout the centuries. However, in the Middle Ages these discussions were limited to an intellectual discourse in scholastic circles.¹⁷

In the sixteenth century, when the Reformation challenged age-old Catholic dogmas, the debates on imagery burst out of the scholastic milieu. First in Germany and Switzerland and later in England, France and the Low

11 E. Kuttner, *Het hongerjaar 1566* (Amsterdam 1949). See more generally, H. Bredekamp, *Kunst als Medium sozialer Konflikte. Bilderkämpfe von der Spätantike bis zur Hussitenrevolution* (Frankfurt am Main 1975).

12 H. Van der Wee, 'The Economy as a Factor in the Start of the Revolt in the Southern Netherlands', *Acta Historiae Neerlandicae* 5 (1971) 52-67. See also E. Coornaert, *La draperie-sayetterie d'Hondschoote, XIV-XVIII siècles: Un centre industriel d'autrefois* (Paris 1930). A critical note in H.F.K. van Nierop, 'De troon van Alva. Over de interpretatie van de Nederlandse Opstand,' *BMGN-Low Countries Historical Review* 110:2 (1995) 218 DOI: 10.18352/bmgn.lchr.3999.

13 Arnade, *Beggars, Iconoclasts, and Civic Patriots*.

14 N. Zemon Davis, 'The Rites of Violence: Religious Riot in Sixteenth-Century France', *Past & Present* 59 (1973) 51-91. See also, M.P. Holt, 'Putting Religion Back into the Wars of Religion', *French Historical Studies* 18:2 (1993) 524-551.

15 D. Freedberg, *Iconoclasm and Painting in the Revolt of the Netherlands, 1566-1609* (New York 1988).

16 L. Brubaker, *Inventing Byzantine Iconoclasm* (London 2012).

17 M. Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art* (Cambridge 1989); A. Besançon, *The Forbidden Image: An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm* (Chicago, IL 2000) 109-164.

Countries, an unprecedented societal debate on the justification of images in general, and religious images in particular, erupted.¹⁸ Unlike in previous centuries, the image debates had a broad popular appeal that intensified significantly in the years leading up to the *Beeldenstorm*. Until the early 1560s the Church authorities in Rome had more or less ignored the issue, but the image-breaking in France in 1561-1562 prompted the Council of Trent to treat religious images in its penultimate session of 3 and 4 December 1563.¹⁹ As a consequence, a whole series of polemical writings in Latin and the vernacular appeared. First in France and later in the Low Countries, erudite theological treatises were translated into accessible pamphlets in the vernacular, published in large print-runs and explained on street corners and in open fields.²⁰ The mere fact that the *Beeldenstorm* of 1566 started in the rural and proletarian *Westkwartier* shows that theological questions were no longer the privilege of the intellectual elites.

The *Beeldenstorm* was unquestionably a game changer in Netherlandish politics and culture. What happened in the immediate aftermath of iconoclasm is a question recently raised from two different perspectives. Andrew Spicer has drawn attention to the initiatives of the secular and religious authorities to restore the ruined church interiors quickly. In this manner they tried to re-establish their crumbled authority in the Low Countries, no easy venture in the context of growing unrest on the eve of the Dutch Revolt. It is also proof that (attempts at) the restoration of Catholicism in this region came much earlier than is usually assumed.²¹ Koenraad Jonckheere has treated a similar issue: how did visual artists react to the violent image criticisms? Analysing the work of painters such as Michiel Coxie and Adriaen Thomasz Key, Jonckheere has argued that before the introduction of the Baroque style, artists had already developed a new visual idiom that directly addressed the persistent uneasiness with religious images.²²

In fact, in the two decades after the *Beeldenstorm*, iconoclasm remained endemic in the Low Countries. Religious buildings came under attack again in the 1570s and early 1580s, during the first and most intensive phase of the Dutch Revolt, when both in the North and the South of the Low Countries Calvinist civic regimes were installed. As in 1566, violent image-breaking went hand in hand with more orderly cleansings. Churches and convents were

18 Blickle et al., *Macht und Ohnmacht der Bilder*.

19 Michalski, *The Reformation and the Visual Arts*, 73, and H. Jedin, 'Entstehung und Tragweite des Trienter Dekrets über die Bilderverehrung', *Theologische Quartalschrift* 116 (1935) 143-188 and 404-429.

20 D. Freedberg, 'The Structure of Byzantine and European Iconoclasm', in: A. Bryer and J. Herrin (eds.), *Iconoclasm: Papers given at the Ninth Spring*

Symposium of Byzantine Studies (Birmingham 1977) 165-177; Mack Crew, *Calvinist Preaching*, 107-139.

21 A. Spicer, 'After Iconoclasm: Reconciliation and Resacralization in the Southern Netherlands, ca. 1566-1585', *The Sixteenth-Century Journal* 44:2 (2013) 411-433.

22 K. Jonckheere, *Antwerp Art after Iconoclasm: Experiments in Decorum* (London 2013).

whitewashed and refurbished to be used for Reformed services; others were used as storehouses or fell into dilapidation. Many abbeys and convents outside the city-walls were razed for military reasons.²³ Although less studied, the iconoclast destructions of the 1570s and the 1580s had much longer lasting material effects. In the Dutch Republic 'old' churches were rearranged for Protestant services and secular memorial practices.²⁴ After the Fall of Antwerp in 1585 a baroque refurbishing campaign started in the re-Catholicized South that culminated around the middle of the seventeenth century and wiped away many traces of late medieval religious material culture.²⁵

This volume focuses on the traumatising events of 1566, although some authors also include the iconoclasm of the 1570s and 1580s in their analysis. As Judith Pollmann reviews the historiography of the *Beeldenstorm* in the concluding essay, we can limit ourselves in this introduction to one more general observation: twentieth-century historiography has concerned itself basically with the motives of the iconoclasts. Following Erich Kuttner's Marxist reading in *Het Hongerjaar*, originally social and economic circumstances were stressed. This interpretation has been challenged both by social historians and art historians, but their focus remained on the image-breakers.²⁶ While we must thank the previous generations of historians for taking the iconoclasts seriously, this present group of historians and art historians takes a step further by also taking seriously the targets of iconoclasts – lay Catholic devotion and religious material culture.

In recent years early modern lay Catholicism has received much attention in international scholarship. For the Low Countries, the work of Charles Parker, Judith Pollmann, Geert Janssen and others has significantly changed our ideas about the agency and world-views of ordinary Catholics.²⁷

- 23 O. Cammaert, 'L'iconoclasmie sous la République calviniste à Bruxelles', in: M. Weis (ed.), *Des villes en révolte: Les 'Républiques urbaines' aux Pays-Bas et en France pendant la deuxième moitié du xvie siècle* (Turnhout 2010) 47-52.
- 24 M.M. Mochizuki, *The Netherlandish Image after Iconoclasm, 1566-1672: Material Religion in the Dutch Golden Age* (Aldershot 2008).
- 25 See most recently Jeffrey Muller's research: J.M. Muller, 'Confraternity and Art in the St Jacob's Church, Antwerp: A Case Study of the Altar of the Brotherhood of St Rochus', in: H. Vlieghe, A. Balis and C. Van de Velde (eds.), *Concept, Design & Execution in Flemish Painting (1550-1700)* (Turnhout 2000) 97-110, and idem, 'Institution and Framework: The New Chapter of Canons and Its

Choir Space in the St. Jacob's Church, Antwerp', in: H. Vlieghe and K. Van der Stighelen (eds.), *Sponsors of the Past: Flemish Art and Patronage 1550-1700* (Turnhout 2005) 117-134.

- 26 A. Duke, 'Calvinists and "Papist Idolatry": The Mentality of the Image-Breakers in 1566', in: idem, *Dissident Identities in the Early Modern Low Countries*, Judith Pollmann and Andrew Spicer (eds.) (Aldershot 2009) 179-197.
- 27 C.H. Parker, *Faith on the Margins: Catholics and Catholicism in the Dutch Golden Age* (Cambridge 2008); J. Pollmann, *Catholic Identity and the Revolt of the Netherlands, 1520-1635* (Oxford 2011); G. Janssen, *The Dutch Revolt and Catholic Exile in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge 2014).

This volume contributes to these debates by discussing how lay Catholics from different social backgrounds reacted to the *Beeldenstorm*, how it affected Catholic community-building (Bauwens) and challenged Catholic authority (Suykerbuyk, Soen). Our interest in lay Catholicism goes hand in hand with a reappraisal of religious material culture. It is strange that many studies of iconoclasm do not really engage with the objects that were destroyed. Fortunately, a material turn in the study of religion has brought the focus back to what it was all about – the question whether matter could embody spirit. As argued above, this is a fundamental issue in the history of Christianity (and religion in general). Presenting a cross-disciplinary dialogue between social historians and art historians, this volume discusses Catholic material culture before and after the *Beeldenstorm* (Van Bruaene, De Boer), analyses evolving image theories (Jonckheere) and looks at the iconographical representation of iconoclasm itself (Voges).

Contributions

‘What if?’ – Ruben Suykerbuyk deftly opens with what can be seen as a counter-factual history: he focuses on the considerable number of towns that managed to avert iconoclasm in 1566. This immediately makes clear that the *Beeldenstorm* was not the overarching force of nature many commentators have considered it to have been, but that it was contingent upon local circumstances and people’s deliberate but often mistaken choices. Most civic authorities recognised the need to guard the civic body both on the outside and from the inside. First, there was the conviction – only partly true – that the Iconoclastic Fury came from outside and that therefore it was necessary to guard against the entry of foreigners. Second, city magistracies were aware that in order to control their own population they depended greatly on the local civic militia. Suykerbuyk shows that both ‘good’ and ‘bad’ towns – as they were labelled by the central authorities after the *Beeldenstorm* – used similar strategies and that therefore only a close reading of local actions can explain why a *Beeldenstorm* did or did not take place.

Anne-Laure Van Bruaene and David de Boer place iconoclasm back in its historical context by contrasting it with the Catholic material culture it attacked. Van Bruaene focuses on the rise and demise of one type of material object – the sacrament house. De Boer surveys the religious and social value of the whole range of objects destroyed. The sacrament house, an often meters-high, monstrance-like shrine for the Holy Sacrament, is representative for how late medieval Catholic devotion was embodied in material objects. Not an ‘image’ in the strict sense of the word, the sculpted sacrament house was venerated because the consecrated host – or body of Christ – was kept there. There was a close connection with other expressions of the Corpus Christi devotion, such as processions and miracle host cults.

Calvinists rejected the idea of Christ being physically present in the host – and thus the holiness of wafers, monstrances, sacrament houses and the like. However, using the notion of ‘embodied piety’, Van Bruaene argues that the issue at stake was not simply that of (Calvinist) spirituality versus (Catholic) materiality. The engagement of both Catholics and Calvinists with the Corpus Christi devotion was intensely physical – from devoutly walking in procession with the Holy Sacrament to ostentatiously walking away, from kneeling in prayer before a sacrament house to attacking it with hammers and axes.

David de Boer widens the perspective by reviewing the broad range of objects that were targeted in the *Beeldenstorm* – hosts, relics, images et cetera. He considers the hierarchies of holiness and how Catholic devotees reacted to their loss. Moreover, he makes the important observation that not all objects in a church were sacred and that contemporaries also viewed them in other than religious terms. The broken objects were always someone’s property, whether it was that of the community or an individual donor. By framing it as an attack on individual or communal belongings, iconoclasm was seen as not only disruptive of religion but also of society. Through his analysis of the reactions of Catholics to iconoclasm De Boer thus makes our reading of the *Beeldenstorm* and its aftermath more complex.

Michal Bauwens also looks at Catholic reactions, but from a different perspective: she focuses primarily on the challenges of immaterial community building after the loss of its material foundations. Her unit of analysis is the parish that effected both religious and social roles. Bauwens takes the example of the parish of St. James in Ghent, where the *Beeldenstorm*’s most prolific chronicler Marcus Van Vaernewijck resided. Using Van Vaernewijck’s account, but also the parish’s administrative sources, Bauwens probes how ordinary parishioners reacted to the *Beeldenstorm* and how they rebuilt their parish – both materially and immaterially – after 1566. Restoring the church interior was one important undertaking of the parish community. In addition, parishioners attended religious feasts and sermons with renewed awareness. Although most people preferred to avoid confrontation, there was a growing interest in theology, leading Bauwens to the conclusion that the years immediately following 1566 were crucial in Catholic identity formation.

Yet Bauwens also refers to the perverse effect the Duke of Alba’s campaign had on the attitudes of lay Catholics. Violet Soen continues this line of argument by analysing the measures taken by the central authorities between 1566 and 1570. The King and his Governors-General – first Margaret of Parma, then the Duke of Alba – chose a double strategy by punishing the main culprits and forgiving the broad masses. Most famous – or notorious – are the institution of the Council of Troubles in 1567 and the issuing of the General Pardon in 1570, but Soen also zooms in on earlier, less clear-cut measures by Margaret of Parma. She makes the interesting point

that the central authorities did their utmost to frame iconoclasm as an act of common thievery or of secular rebellion, devoid of any religious meaning. Of course this was a clever strategy to rob the iconoclasts of their motives, but as the essays of Suykerbuyk and De Boer show, ordinary people shared some of these ideas. It is a useful warning for us historians always to be aware of the complexity of the contemporary understanding of the events of 1566 and of the notion of ‘iconoclasm’.

How iconoclasm itself was understood, is also the subject of the essays of Ramon Voges and Koenraad Jonckheere. They both borrow a visual perspective by engaging with images of the *Beeldenstorm*. Voges tackles the image of the 1566 iconoclasm *par excellence*, Frans Hogenberg’s famous print issued in Cologne around 1570. Representing the *Beeldenstorm* in Antwerp via a view into an open church building, the image has itself gained an iconic status. Voges reminds us of the need to recontextualise this seemingly neutral newsprint by sketching both its historical and iconographical context. He puts forward the hypothesis that Hogenberg, himself a Lutheran, advocated a moderate, *politique* view of iconoclasm, urging his audience to moderation and the softening of religious differences. It is also important to remember that for most observers outside the Low Countries the Hogenberg print would become the most tangible testimonial of the *Beeldenstorm*.

Koenraad Jonckheere takes a more theoretical stance when discussing the effects of iconoclasm on art and imagery after 1566. He introduces the idea of the ‘iconic memory’, the mental image of the lost object that haunted the victims of the *Beeldenstorm*. Each time they were confronted with the ruined and altered church interiors, they were painfully reminded of what once had been there. In a sense, this ‘iconic memory’ was stronger and more disturbing than the original icon, since it could not be physically destroyed. Jonckheere discusses the relevance of the iconic memory for ordinary observers, but also its value for artists who used it as a subtle marker to refer to religious and social unrest in their artwork. It is also a reminder that perhaps more than anything the *Beeldenstorm* forms a watershed in Netherlandish art history, since after 1566 artists were confronted with the daunting task of reinventing their practice and imagery and especially rethinking art.

Finally, Judith Pollmann tackles a related problem: how to forge a memory of iconoclasm that soothed religious and political sensibilities. The answer of course, is that rather than one, many memories were constructed, mainly along confessional and political lines. In the Southern Low Countries, which were swiftly re-Catholicised after the Fall of Antwerp in 1585, the attention was focused on the images and religious objects themselves that heroically and miraculously had survived iconoclasm. Catholics in the Dutch Republic shared similar stories, but for their Calvinist counterparts the memory of the *Beeldenstorm* was an embarrassing stain on their self-image of order and control. It took Marxism to re-appraise the iconoclasts of 1566. First typecast as proto-revolutionaries, in more recent decades, their religious zeal

and political repertoires have been rediscovered. However, Pollmann warns us that no single master narrative has emerged.

With this theme number we do not offer such a single narrative either, but by taking seriously Catholics as well as Calvinists and by exploring the multiple meanings given to religious material culture before and after its destruction, we hope to add new layers of complexity that perhaps do not offer a straightforward explication of the Beeldenstorm, but show its significance for the religious, social, political and art history of the Low Countries.