

William of Orange in France and the Transnationality of the Sixteenth-Century Wars of Religion

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William of Orange's French campaign of 1569 is one of the most curious and least-understood episodes in the life of the leader of the Dutch Revolt. The confusion over his motives for participating in the wars in France arises from the longstanding tendency to see the Dutch Revolt and French Wars of Religion as similar but separate conflicts. Yet Orange regarded them fundamentally as manifestations of the same struggle. This article unpacks the development of Orange's transnational outlook during the decade leading up to his French campaign – an outlook that was shared by many of his peers in the Low Countries and beyond and that shaped the course of the French Wars of Religion and the Dutch Revolt.

Willem van Oranjes veldtocht in Frankrijk in 1569 is een van de meest curieuze en slechtst begrepen episodes uit het leven van de leider van de Nederlandse Opstand. De verwarring rond zijn motieven om in Frankrijk te gaan vechten is ontstaan door de diepewortelde neiging om de Nederlandse Opstand en de Religieoorlogen in Frankrijk te beschouwen als vergelijkbare, maar op zichzelf staande oorlogen. Echter, Oranje zelf beschouwde ze in essentie als manifestaties van hetzelfde conflict. In dit artikel zal de transnationale kijk van Willem van Oranje ontrafeld worden. Dit perspectief is ook zichtbaar bij veel tijdgenoten en heeft grote invloed gehad op het verloop van de Religieoorlogen in Frankrijk en de Nederlandse Opstand.

Introduction¹

In the autumn of 1569 William of Orange, the leader of the nascent Dutch Revolt, found himself, disguised as a peasant and accompanied only by a small band of loyal followers, deep in the countryside of the French interior. Almost a year earlier the prince had launched his ill-fated invasion of Brabant. Despite his best efforts, this ambitious enterprise had failed to dislodge the Duke of Alba, Philip II's royal governor, from the Low Countries. Unable to achieve anything of military significance in the Low Countries, the prince briefly took the remnants of his army into Northern France, partly because his route back to Germany was blocked and partly in the hope to be of service to his French Protestant allies. Barely recovered from this disaster, Orange embarked on a new campaign, joining the Lutheran Duke Wolfgang of Zweibrücken on his mission to reinforce the Huguenot forces in France. After only a few months, the prince left his forces in the hands of the Huguenot leader Gaspard de Coligny and made his way back in disguise, ostensibly to face his many impatient creditors in Frankfurt.²

This most curious episode in the life of William of Orange has long puzzled historians. Why would the leader of the Dutch Revolt leave his 'beloved fatherland' in the hands of Alba whilst going off on a seemingly futile adventure in France? Despite early interest in Orange's diplomatic activities³, today the most prevalent explanation literally echoes the words of Petrus Blok, who in 1919 wrote that 'in 1569 Orange was effectively relegated to the rank of a German condottiere, a warlord like so many other at that time'.⁴ Others have deemed the whole affair rather unimportant. In Arie van Deursen's (admittedly very short) biographical sketch of William

1 I am grateful to Geert Janssen, Femke Deen and the anonymous reviewers for their valuable and insightful comments on earlier versions of this article and to Kate Delaney for proofreading the article.

2 Ronald de Graaf, *De Prins. Willem van Oranje, 1533-1584* (Elburg 2018) 141.

3 See for instance, Pieter van Herwerden, *Het verblijf van Lodewijk van Nassau in Frankrijk. Huguenoten en Geuzen, 1568-1572* (Assen 1932); Felix Rachfahl, *Wilhelm von Oranien und der Niederländische Aufstand, Volume 1* (The Hague 1906) 203-238; Felix Rachfahl, *Wilhelm von Oranien und der Niederländische Aufstand, Volume 2* (The Hague 1924) 536-555. It is telling, though, that Rachfahl's monumental biography of

Orange ends on the eve of Orange's French campaign.

4 'Oranje was in 1569 feitelijk teruggebracht tot den rang van een Duitschen condottiere, een benede hoofd zooals er zoo velen waren in dien tijd', Petrus Blok, *Willem de Eerste, Prins van Oranje* (Amsterdam 1919). Interestingly, Olaf Mörke and Ronald de Graaf use very similar words: 'Nach der Kampagne von 1568 war der frühere Grand Seigneur wenig mehr als ein abgebrannter Codottiere der sich vor seinen Gläubigern verbergen musste'. Olaf Mörke, *Wilhelm von Oranien (1533-1584): Fürst und 'Vater' der Republik* (Stuttgart 2007); 'Willem was feitelijk afgezakt tot het niveau van een condottiere, een warlord'. De Graaf, *De Prins*, 139.

of Orange, the campaign is simply described as ‘many wanderings and vicissitudes’.⁵

This reading of Orange’s French campaign of 1569 does not do it justice. It was not a distraction or an attempt to find meaning, prestige or wealth in the midst of a desperate situation. Rather, it was the product of the transnationality of his social and political worlds, of his transnational understanding of the nature of the Dutch Revolt, and of his conviction that this transnational struggle warranted a transnational strategy.⁶ This article aims to deconstruct Orange’s transnational outlook, which lay at the roots of the campaign of 1569, by examining its origins and development during the early stages of the prince’s career. Building on his cosmopolitan upbringing, a series of events led to an increasingly deep engagement with the affairs of France, culminating in military intervention in the French Wars of Religion. These events – the negotiations at Le Cateau-Cambrésis, the return of the principality of Orange, the expansion of his network, the advent of religious violence in France, and the drive towards the formation of transnational Protestant alliances – all helped reinforce Orange’s conviction that the violence in France and the Low Countries was deeply connected.

Orange’s outlook points towards the importance of transnational mentalities in the history of the sixteenth-century wars of religion. Since many contemporaries regarded these conflicts as entangled, it is important that historians also take heed of the manifold ties that connected the Dutch Revolt and the French Wars of Religion and of the way these ties shaped the interpretations and actions of all belligerents.

Le Cateau-Cambrésis and the origins of Orange’s French orientation

‘The connections between France and prince William I date from 1568, before that there is no trace of it [...] In those days he above all sought support in Germany’, wrote Pieter Lodewijk Muller in an influential article from 1906 on William of Orange’s relationship with France.⁷ Unlike Muller, who focussed primarily on diplomacy, historians of cross-border relations often now also study cultural and social ties. To understand why the Dutch *pater patriae* found himself deeply embroiled in the Wars of Religion in France it is therefore first

5 ‘veel omzwervingen en wisselvalligheden’, Arie van Deursen, *Willem van Oranje: Een Biografisch Portret* (Amsterdam 2016) 51.

6 In this particular context, the term transnational is preferred over the term transregional since Orange and his correspondents continuously used the language of nations to discuss the wars of religion, but also pointed to forces that

transcend the boundaries of France, the Low Countries, and the Holy Roman Empire (see section ‘transnational networks’ below). The term ‘international’ is not applicable here since it implies a relationship *between* states.

7 Pieter Muller, ‘Prins Willem I en Frankrijk’, in: *Verspreide Geschriften* (Leiden 1906) 265-281, 258.



Antonis Mor, *Portrait of William of Orange*, 1555. Public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Antonio_Moro_-_Willem_I_van_Nassau.jpg.

important to briefly consider to what extent Muller's assessment still holds. How 'French' was Orange's cultural, social, and political world before 1568?

At a time when geographical boundaries were fluid and notions of nationhood were just as easily applied to one's hometown as to one's wider polity, language was a powerful marker of belonging.⁸ Of course, French and France did not neatly overlap in the sixteenth century, but it is clear that the prince was steeped in Francophone culture from an early age. Habsburg court culture in the Low Countries was in origin Burgundian, and this was reflected in his upbringing. His governor, Claude de Bouton, lord of the Burgundian *seigneurie* of Corbaron, undoubtedly instilled in him, in the words of the historian Willem Frijhoff, 'the unwritten rules of international relations, the code of conduct in society, including the relationship between men and women, etiquette [and] reading culture [...] that were derived from the international model of French court culture'.⁹ And, as is evident from his private correspondence with his younger brother Louis, he communicated most easily in French.¹⁰ As he grew older and took charge of his own affairs, this Francophone orientation grew even stronger. The *gentilhommes* of his household were primarily from the southern provinces of the Low Countries, from Habsburg Franche-Comté, or from the region around the principality of Orange.¹¹ And after the prince had experienced the splendour of Valois court life, he decided to model his own household and library after that of Henry II.¹²

All this, of course, did not necessarily imply a deep engagement with the politics of France, though it certainly facilitated it. Orange's debut on the French political stage came in 1558. For many people the Habsburg-Valois Wars deepened the divide between France and the Low Countries – decades later anti-French sentiments were almost as strong as anti-Spanish feelings – but for Orange, the conflict reinforced his connections with France and its aristocracy.¹³ After playing a relatively minor role on the battlefield, Orange was allowed the opportunity to step into the limelight as the warring parties began to pursue peace. After the Battle of St Quentin (1557), he was entrusted with housing the French captive Jacques d'Albon, seigneur de Saint-André.

8 Geoffrey Parker, *The Dutch Revolt* (London 2002) 35.

9 Mörke, *Wilhelm von Oranien*, 27; Willem Frijhoff, 'William of Orange and France: a nobleman of international stature', in: Alistair Duke et al. (eds.), *Liberté et Tolérance. Une Sculptuur van Willen van Oranje in Parijs. Une Sculpture de Guillaume d'Orange à Paris. A Statue of William of Orange in Paris* (Paris 2016) 10-45, 12.

10 See for instance: Louis of Nassau to William of Orange, 7-8-1562, De correspondentie van Willem van Oranje [hereafter cwo] no. 1454, 29-1-2019, <http://resources.huylgens.knaw.nl/wvo/app/brief?nr=1454>.

11 Marie-Ange Delen, *Het Hof van Willem van Oranje* (Amsterdam 2002) 92-93 and 98-99.

12 *Ibidem*, 227.

13 Koenraad Swart, *William of Orange and the Revolt of the Netherlands, 1572-84* (Aldershot 2003) 129.

Though the prince was initially apprehensive about this undoubtedly expensive responsibility, it put him at the heart of the political developments of the following years.¹⁴ As Marshal of France and confidant of the king, Saint-André was an important political player and Orange's new proximity to the Marshal was utilised to initiate the first secret discussions about peace.¹⁵

These overtures proved successful, and when negotiations started in earnest in September 1559, Orange was among the carefully picked Habsburg representatives. Each member of the four-man delegation had his own brief. Whereas the formidable Duke of Alba and the Bishop of Arras were entrusted with the hard negotiations, the Prince of Orange and Ruy Gómez de Silva were expected to oil the wheels of the negotiations by ensuring that relations between the negotiators remained amicable.¹⁶ This role suited the prince well, as he had proven himself to be, in the words of the historian Marie-Ange Delen, 'neither a gifted joustier, nor brilliant general, but an ambitious and expert networker'.¹⁷ Moreover, the Habsburg negotiating team was designed to mirror that of the French. Orange reported to Philip II after the first meeting that 'after the customary embraces, we were all taken apart, pairing the Constable with me the Duke of Alba, the Marshal Saint-André with me the Prince of Orange, and the Cardinal of Lorraine with me the Bishop of Arras'.¹⁸ Throughout the negotiations Orange remained close to the Marshal.

This personal approach to diplomacy reflects the early modern understanding that a successful negotiation was achieved not only through a carefully structured process of formal deliberations, but also by putting trusted representatives in one place together for a prolonged period of time. Even before the main negotiations commenced at Le Cateau-Cambrésis, the plenipotentiaries spent much of September and October 1558 in Lille and the Somme valley (Authie, Auxi-le-Château, and the Abbey of Cerkamp). A detailed body of correspondence between Philip and his representatives shows that much of the progress was made at chance meetings: over dinner, in church, and at late-night sessions in the quarters of one of the negotiators. One of William's letters addressed to Philip II, clearly written after the day's business was wrapped up, illustrates the informal character of the negotiations: 'Sire, after writing the above, we found the Cardinal of Lorraine in the quarters of *madame* the Duchesse of Lorraine. We, the Duke of Alba and the Prince of Orange, went there to see *madame la Connestable* and *madame de Montmorency*. We talked gently amongst ourselves about the business'.¹⁹ There is plenty of evidence of such unofficial gatherings, often

14 Delen, *Het Hof van Willem van Oranje*, 224.

15 Mörke, *Wilhelm von Oranien*, 64.

16 Bertrand Haan, *Une paix pour l'éternité: la négociation du traité du Cateau-Cambrésis* (Madrid 2017) 105-124.

17 Delen, *Het Hof van Willem van Oranje*, 175-176.

18 William of Orange to Philip II, 15-10-1558, CWO no. 7283, 29-1-2019, <http://resources.huylgens.knaw.nl/wvo/app/brief?nr=7283>.

19 William of Orange to Philip II, 20-10-1558, CWO no. 7277, 29-1-2019, <http://resources.huylgens.knaw.nl/wvo/app/brief?nr=7277>.

held late at night in the quarters of French noblewomen.²⁰ Though the negotiations went through various difficult phases, it is likely that such conversations in the margins of the formal diplomatic process contributed to their success.

After the successful conclusion of the negotiations, Orange was sent to Paris as a hostage and to witness the ceremonial implementation of the peace.²¹ In September, on the insistence of Francis II and the Cardinal of Lorraine, Orange was recalled again, this time to attend the coronation of the new king in Reims.²² Orange's weeks in Paris and Reims, filled with ostentatious ceremony and lavish hospitality, were also an opportunity for building lasting influence in France. The proclamation of peace and the wedding of Philip II (represented by Alba) and Elisabeth Valois, of course, brought together a host of *grand seigneurs* from France and beyond, including the future Huguenot leaders the Coligny brothers.²³ In Paris, the prince seems to have thrown himself headlong into French court life. At jousts, dances, and dinners, he considerably extended his French network, which included the French royal family.²⁴ Orange was among the select group of nobles invited to visit the mortally injured Henry II, and his correspondence with various Valois monarchs starts in 1559.²⁵ There is also some evidence that the council of the King of France offered the prince a substantial pension in exchange for the promise to levy troops in Franche-Comté.²⁶ This shows how the intensification of contact with the circle around the king drew the prince closer into the orbit of this 'foreign' monarch, laying the groundwork for his later interest and participation in the Wars of Religion in France.

The principality of Orange

The peace negotiations at Le Cateau-Cambrésis underscore the complexity of the relationship between monarchs and their leading nobles. Though

20 See for instance William of Orange to Philip II, 15-10-1558, CWO no. 7281, 29-1-2019, <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/wvo/app/brief?nr=7281>; William of Orange to Philip II, 23-10-1558, CWO no. 7275, 29-1-2019, <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/wvo/app/brief?nr=7275>; William of Orange to Philip II, 30-10-1558, CWO no. 10947, 29-1-2019, <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/wvo/app/brief?nr=10947>.

21 Haan, *Une paix pour l'éternité*, 153-169.

22 Francis II to William of Orange, 3-9-1559, CWO no. 6706, 29-1-2019, <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/wvo/app/brief?nr=6706>;

Charles of Lorraine to William of Orange, 3-9-1559, CWO no. 6707, 29-1-2019, <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/wvo/app/brief?nr=6707>.

23 Lucien Romier, *Les origines politiques des Guerres de Religion* (Geneva 1974) 377-378.

24 Frijhoff, 'William of Orange and France', 19.

25 Delen, *Het Hof van Willem van Oranje*, 173.

26 It is, however, unclear if this initiative was ever carried through. The letter from the council of Henry II to Orange suggests the pension survives only as a draft. Council of Henry II to William

Orange represented his monarch, he also took part as a sovereign prince.²⁷ The sovereign status of the principality of Orange, however, did by no means ensure that the prince was able to independently govern the territory. The strategically located enclave on the banks of the Rhône, sandwiched between papal Avignon and the Dauphiné – a Protestant hotbed – was also of interest to the French crown and the papacy. In wartime, the remote principality was an easy prey. At Le Cateau-Cambrésis, the prince was not only handed back control of Orange and its revenues, but also of his many lordships scattered throughout the Rhône Valley and Dauphiné.²⁸

Though regaining control of Orange was a triumph – the small principality was the cornerstone of his international prestige – it was also an administrative nightmare. Years of severed ties between the prince and his principality meant that its governance had been seriously neglected. Moreover, the Rhône valley, downstream from Geneva, was extremely volatile, leading to vicious religious disputes in Orange. But the principality's remoteness meant that it was impractical to resolve these issues face-to-face. Everything instead had to be managed through correspondence or the sending of representatives, who lacked the personal clout of the prince. Moreover, some cases that needed resolving forced the prince to go through the French judicial system. The ink on the peace had barely dried when Orange was forced to engage in a legal dispute with Dauphiné nobleman Jean de la Chambre over the ownership of the *seigneurie* of Montbrison.²⁹ A month later, Orange's lawyer complained about 'the difficulties he had encountered in the recovering of property and the revoking of rulings that have been made against you over the course of the war'.³⁰ The challenges of governing his remote French possessions even led Orange twice to contemplate selling them. In 1559, he corresponded about a deal with the Bourbon family in which the principality would be exchanged for the duchy of Enghien, just south of Brussels.³¹ In the 1570s, severe financial troubles even forced him to think about selling Orange to the pope.³²

of Orange, 10-7-1559, CWO no. 10706, 29-1-2019, <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/wvo/app/brief?nr=10706>.

27 Mörke, *Wilhelm von Oranien*, 66.

28 The treaty specifically mentions 'des terres et seigneuries d'Orpiere, Trecluz, Montbrison, Curvier, la parerie Novesan et autres lieux à luy appartenans ès pays de Daulphyné, Cuiseaux, Varennes et Beaurepaire, assises ès visconté d'Auxonne, ressort de Saint Laurens, maison, vignes et chevanche de Dijon, leurs appartenances et dependences', Haan, *Une paix pour l'éternité*, 197-224.

29 Council of the King of France to William of Orange, 24-7-1559, CWO no. 11437, 29-1-2019, <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/wvo/app/brief?nr=11437>.

30 Thomas Perrenot to William of Orange, 22-8-1559, CWO no. 6618, 29-1-2019, <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/wvo/app/brief?nr=6618>.

31 William of Orange to Philip II, 18-1-1559, CWO no. 7188, 29-1-2019, <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/wvo/app/brief?nr=7188>.

32 Swart, *William of Orange*, 53.

The return of the principality of Orange in 1559 had two major consequences for the prince. First, William was now forced to liaise with different French authorities, regional and national, and with its aristocracy about all sorts of matters, ranging from estate management to religious policy.³³ Secondly, since tensions in Orange in many ways resembled France's predicament in microcosm, William could never again afford to take his eyes off developments in France. After 1559 he was dragged into the increasingly complex and volatile confessional conflicts that plagued France and especially the Midi. In order to suppress religious tensions, the prince first outlawed 'heresy' in July 1561, only to change his mind and introduce a policy of tolerance two years later.³⁴ Since the unrest continued despite his best efforts, the outbreak of open warfare in France a year later could hardly have come as a surprise. In the years between the first and second Wars of Religion Orange also kept a close eye on France, expecting that a new unrest might arise soon that is 'much worse than that which came before'.³⁵ Though the campaign of 1569 was not directly intended to resolve the troubles in the principality, the prince's responsibilities in Orange drew him into the endemic religious conflict that afflicted the Kingdom of France and the Midi in particular. Since his tiny sovereign enclave could never be isolated from the violence that swept through the region, Orange was forced to engage deeply with the Wars of Religion in France.

Transnational networks

A third important influence that underpinned Orange's transnational outlook was his social network. His upbringing at the cosmopolitan Habsburg court in Brussels had alerted him to the importance of forging ties with peers from across Europe and subsequent experiences allowed him to construct an impressive European network. His integration into French political life after 1568 meant that Orange continued to expand his French connections. Through his German family and his work as patronage broker for Philip II, Orange also managed to construct an impressive network in the Empire.³⁶ It

33 See for instance: William of Orange to consuls and inhabitants of Orange, 26-8-1563, CWO no. 12000, 29-1-2019, <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/wvo/app/brief?nr=12000>; Catherine de' Médicis to William of Orange, 18-11-1561, CWO no. 12220, 29-1-2019, <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/wvo/app/brief?nr=12220>.

34 William of Orange to the presidents and councils of the Parlement of Orange, to the inhabitants and governor of Orange, 6-7-1561, CWO no. 11041,

29-1-2019, <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/wvo/app/brief?nr=11041>; William of Orange to the consuls and inhabitants of Orange, 26-8-1563, CWO no. 11041, 29-1-2019, <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/wvo/app/brief?nr=12000>.

35 William of Orange to Wilhelm of Hesse, 13-8-1564, CWO no. 1106, 29-1-2019, <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/wvo/app/brief?nr=1106>.

36 Femke Deen, *Anna van Saksen. Verstoten bruid van Willem van Oranje* (Amsterdam 2018)

has proven a challenge to make sense of the relationship between Orange's French and German interests. Most biographies of the prince identify distinct German and French phases in Orange's career. An important train of thought about his diplomatic strategies holds that his roots encouraged him to first seek aid among his German peers, but that their refusal to provide support forced the prince to look to France and the Huguenots instead.³⁷ This reorientation from Germany to France is often said to have been reflected by his marriages. Marie-Ange Delen, for instance, writes that 'William in 1575 married Charlotte de Bourbon, a deed with which he diverted his hopes for moral and financial aid from the mostly-Lutheran German princes to the French Huguenots'.³⁸ This change in marital strategy is also said to have helped Orange realise who his natural allies were. According to Arie van Deursen, 'It is understandable that the Germans did not want to help. Their direct interests were not at stake'.³⁹ The marriage with Louise de Coligny, by contrasts, 'symbolises the unity of goals and interests between the French and the Dutch'.⁴⁰

But this reading underestimates the importance of France during the prince's early career as well as the extent to which his French and German interests were connected. For one, a match with the house of Saxony had in 1561 not even been Orange's first choice. He had first considered Renée of Lorraine, like Orange a member of a truly transnational noble house with interests in France, the Holy Roman Empire, and Denmark.⁴¹ His second choice was Marie, widow of the Count of Enghien and daughter of François de Bourbon, Count of St Pol, but this match was blocked by the French crown, who feared that Orange would come to own too much land in France.⁴² And rather than being proof of the pre-eminence of Germany in Orange's dynastic strategy, it was due to his French orientation that the wedding between Orange and Anna of Saxony could even go ahead. An important argument that convinced August of Saxony to agree to the match was Orange's strong ties with the French court, ties that the Elector himself lacked.⁴³ And his next marriage with Charlotte de Bourbon was by no means proof of a radical reorientation away from Germany and towards France. Orange's match with this absconded

98-102; Liesbeth Geevers, *Gevallen vazallen. De integratie van Oranje, Egmont en Horn in de Spaans-Habsburgse monarchie (1559-1567)* (Amsterdam 2008) 77-81 <https://doi.org/10.5117/9789089640697>.

37 This is, according to Alastair Duke, the cornerstone of Koenraad Swart's interpretation of Orange's career before 1572. Alastair Duke, 'Koenraad Swart's interpretation of William of

Orange, 1533-72', in: Koenraad Swart et al., *William of Orange and the Revolt of the Netherlands, 1572-84* (Aldershot 2003).

38 Delen, *Het Hof van Willem van Oranje*, 18.

39 Van Deursen, *Willem van Oranje*, 42.

40 *Ibidem*, 79.

41 Delen, *Het Hof van Willem van Oranje*, 244-245.

42 *Ibidem*, 244-245.

43 Deen, *Anna van Saksen*, 60.

daughter of the Duke of Bourbon-Montpensier was not brokered by her kin, but by the German Elector of the Pfalz. It took until 1581 before Orange was reconciled with his French father-in-law and he could hope to reap the benefits of this connection.⁴⁴

This insistence by his biographers to separate Orange's German and French interests, however, is easily explained as his correspondents also frequently made this distinction. German networks were formed at Imperial Diets and meetings of the *Reichskreisen*, conversations were largely conducted in German, and Orange's German correspondents saw themselves as a distinct group: 'the princes of the Augsburg confession'. French networks, by contrast, centred more on the monarchy or on important regional powerbrokers.⁴⁵ Yet, these German and French networks were connected by the manifold ties that transcended the Franco-Imperial frontier. As we shall see below, it was Orange who, as a member of a German aristocratic house and an important player in the politics of France, acted as a node for the transfer of information from one network to the other.

Such networks are testament to the permeability of early modern borders. Much like transnational Calvinist networks, Orange's social ties criss-crossed the boundaries of the Low Countries, France, and the Holy Roman Empire. Yet despite these cross-border ties, some sense of nationhood, though much more fluid than its nineteenth- and twentieth-century equivalent, can be detected. Orange and his correspondents regularly used terms such as 'Germany', 'France', 'the German princes', or 'the French Christians', indicating that national categories were used to structure their own experiences and their perception of the world around them. This sense of belonging, however, was flexible – Orange at different times referred to the Holy Roman Empire, the Low Countries as a whole, or Brabant as 'my beloved fatherland'.⁴⁶ The fact that he professed to love different polities, however, does not mean that the sentiment was not real. As lord of *Herrschaften*, *heerlijkheden*, and *seigneuries* in the Empire, the Low Countries, and France, Orange's outlook, like that of many of his peers, was shaped by a number of overlapping and interconnected identities. It was precisely because of this rootedness in multiple polities that the prince was so aware of the similarities, linkages, and shared causes that connected the conflicts. That is also why the term 'transnational', a term that implies the presence of the concept of the nation but also the importance of forces that transcend it, accurately describes his network.

44 Swart, *William of Orange*, 83.

European History Quarterly 16 (1986) 275-311

45 Mark Greengrass, 'Noble affinities in early modern France: The case of Henri I de Montmorency, Conestable of France',

<https://doi.org/10.1177/026569148601600301>.

46 Swart, *William of Orange*, 144.

Religious violence in France

William of Orange's active participation in the French Wars of Religion was shaped by both his German and his French contacts. From 1560 onward, the religious tensions in France were among the most hotly debated topics in Protestant German circles.⁴⁷ Only a decade earlier, the German Protestant princes had fought their own religious war and they recognised the dangers of the rapidly escalating confessional strife in France. Moreover, in 1560 the Huguenots started to make overtures to leading German Protestants, further drawing them into the conflict. For Orange, membership of German aristocratic epistolary networks implied the responsibility to share the latest information about France. Wilhelm of Hesse, one of the Empire's most influential Protestant princes, put it straightforwardly: 'Of the news that has reached us yesterday from France, we have sent you copies. And we therefore kindly ask you to relate to us the other news that you have heard'.⁴⁸

Few of the German princes had such privileged access to information about France as did the Prince of Orange. Much of what Orange's German correspondents had to say about the situation in France was derived from the 'official' accounts that were communicated by the warring parties. In April 1563, for instance, Wilhelm of Hesse sent Orange 'copies of what the (Huguenot leaders) the Prince of Condé and Andelot from France have sent our father and me'.⁴⁹ Representatives of the French crown, who presented a starkly different interpretation of events, also make their appearance. In a letter from January of the same year Hesse carefully recounted 'the news that has come from the Guise themselves' and the interpretation that 'the Condeans' have placed on it.⁵⁰ The German princes must have understood that a large dose of spin was applied to the information that these sources provided. Philip and Wilhelm of Hesse time and again turned to Orange to verify these often confusing and conflicting accounts.⁵¹

They were not disappointed. The sheer volume of information sent by Orange to his German correspondents is impressive.⁵² Many letters had

47 Jonas van Tol, *Germany and the French Wars of Religion, 1560-1572* (Leiden 2018).

48 Wilhelm of Hesse to Wiliam of Orange, 12-2-1563, CWO no. 5907, 29-1-2019, <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/wvo/app/brief?nr=5907>.

49 Wilhelm of Hesse to Wiliam of Orange, 4-4-1563, CWO no. 1072, 29-1-2019, <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/wvo/app/brief?nr=1072>.

50 Wilhelm of Hesse to Wiliam of Orange, 13-1-1563, CWO no. 1058, 29-1-2019, <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/wvo/app/brief?nr=1058>.

51 Philip of Hesse to William of Orange, 15-1-1563, CWO no. 5893, 29-1-2019, <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/wvo/app/brief?nr=5893>; Philip of Hesse to William of Orange, 30-3-1563, CWO no. 5896, 29-1-2019, <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/wvo/app/brief?nr=5896>.

52 Most of this epistolary traffic is between Orange and the Landgraves of Hesse, but they in turn passed it on to their peers. They also provided summaries and copies of reports that they

detailed reports attached, often in different hands and languages.⁵³ Secrecy is a dominant theme in these texts. Orange monitored the moves of the warring parties carefully, hinting at his intimate knowledge of French affairs without revealing his sources, but also often admitting that it was impossible to say anything concrete about the future course of events. There was a strong sense that much of this information was highly sensitive. Occasionally the princes corresponded in cypher, for instance in 1563 about a possible German campaign in France, or the reader was 'kindly asked to throw [the letter] into the fire after reading it'.⁵⁴ On other occasions their thoughts were not committed to paper, but related in person.⁵⁵

But what did Orange and his correspondents make of the wars in France? Of course, information was not just simply passed on, but often accompanied by interpretation and analysis. There were many different interpretations of events, but one dimension of the analysis was shared by virtually everybody on all sides: the violence in France was not simply a domestic affair, but a conflict with transnational causes and ramifications. A scholarly appreciation of the transnationality of the sixteenth century has long been absent – the historians' understanding of the transnational dimension of the Dutch Revolt has slowly grown over the last decades, and the French Wars of Religion are only now being studied from a transnational perspective.⁵⁶ And though the similarities between the two conflicts have long been noted, there are still few transnational studies.⁵⁷ This makes it easy to overlook how widely this understanding was shared, not only among aristocrats, but among the broader population as well. The print culture emanating from the two conflicts highlights these entanglements.⁵⁸

had received from other German princes. See for instance: Wilhelm of Hesse to William of Orange, 21-3-1568, CWO no. 1199, 29-1-2019, <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/wvo/app/brief?nr=1199>.

- 53 A good example is a letter from January 1565, which has no fewer than eight attached reports about France, totalling 29 pages: William of Orange to Wilhelm of Hesse, 24-1-1565, CWO no. 1116, 29-1-2019, <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/wvo/app/brief?nr=1116>.
- 54 Wilhelm of Hesse to William of Orange, 23-3-1563, CWO no. 1069, 29-1-2019, <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/wvo/app/brief?nr=1069>; Wilhelm of Hesse to William of Orange, 3-11-1567, CWO no. 1161, 29-1-2019, <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/wvo/app/brief?nr=1161>.

55 William of Orange to Wilhelm of Hesse, 3-4-1563, CWO no. 1074, 29-1-2019, <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/wvo/app/brief?nr=1074>.

- 56 Judith Pollmann, 'Internationalisering en de Nederlandse Opstand', *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review* 124 (2009) 515-535 <https://doi.org/10.18352/bmgn-lchr.7045>; See also a recent conference on the transnational dimensions of the French Wars of Religion organized by Eric Durot at the University of York: <https://www.york.ac.uk/history/news/news/2018/transnational-approach-french-war/>.
- 57 A key publication comparing France and the Low Countries is Philip Benedict et al. (eds.), *Reformation, Revolt and Civil War in France and the Netherlands, 1555-1585* (Amsterdam 1997).
- 58 Andrew Pettegree, 'France and the Netherlands: the interlocking of two religious cultures in print



▲
 Anonymous, *Alva vermoordt de onschuldige inwoners van de Nederlanden, 1572* [Alba murders the innocent civilians of the Low Countries]. © Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, RP-P-OB-79.012, <http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RMO001.COLLECT.444753>.

A well-known Dutch pamphlet from 1572, for instance, depicts a baby-eating Duke of Alba, who is aided by a three-headed monster wearing cardinals' hats. The heads represent not only Granvelle, but also the cardinals of Lorraine and Guise, two brothers from the infamous French Guise family.⁵⁹ The same Cardinal Granvelle, far from advocating a transnational religious war, warned Philip of the danger that the 'heretics' in the Low Countries could count on aid from their coreligionists in France, 'with whom they share strong ties'.⁶⁰

The connection between the troubles in France and the Low Countries was thus widely seen as a terrifying fact of life. Orange, who had experienced the difficulties of containing confessional strife in his small principality, shared this fear of a major religious conflict that transcended borders. In the margins of a remarkable letter to his brother Louis, who was a leading member of the Compromise and who had himself sought to strengthen his connections with the Huguenot leadership, William tells of his nightmares: 'My brother, I have dreamt all night that you are all Frenchmen and you did not leave my dream until I woke'.⁶¹ Not surprisingly, the same interpretation appears in discussions between Orange and his German contacts. It is illustrative of this attitude that Wilhelm of Hesse's first reaction to the execution of Egmont and Horne, an event that sent shockwaves through Europe, was that he feared that the same fate would befall the Huguenot leadership.⁶²

These ideas were reinforced when Orange crossed paths with Hubert Languet. This influential Protestant writer and diplomat later came to play an important role in Orange's life. At the time of their first meeting, however, this French admirer of Melanchthon was in the service of the Elector of Saxony. As the embodiment of the ideal of international Protestantism, Languet 'always interpreted events without borders'.⁶³ Convinced of the interconnectedness of the various wars of religion, he sought to persuade others of this fact through the gathering and disseminating of evidence. Underlining the dangers of international Catholic aggression – he, for instance, insisted that the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre was engineered by Alba – he tirelessly advocated cross-border and cross-confessional cooperation.⁶⁴

during the era of the religious wars',
Dutch Review of Church History 84 (2004)
318-337, 327-331 <https://doi.org/10.1163/187607504x00165>.

59 Pollmann, 'Internationalisering en de Nederlandse Opstand', 532.

60 De Graaf, *De Prins*, 91.

61 William of Orange to Louis of Nassau, 1-8-1566, CWO no. 4486, 29-1-2019, <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/wvo/app/brief?nr=4486>; Ook geciteerd voor De Graaf, *De Prins*, 107.

62 Wilhelm of Hesse to William of Orange, 21-6-1568, CWO no. 1214, 29-1-2019, <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/wvo/app/brief?nr=1214>.

63 Béatrice Nicollier-de Weck, *Hubert Languet (1518-1581): un réseau politique international de Melanchthon à Guillaume d'Orange* (Geneva 1995) 281.

64 *Ibidem*, 281-282.

Not long before Orange's campaign in France, Hubert Languet spent a fortnight in the Nassau residence at Dillenburg where he discussed the troubles in the Low Countries with the prince.⁶⁵ Though Languet was simply expected to convey Orange's rationale for his resort to arms against Alba to the Elector of Saxony, it seems unlikely that the Frenchman stayed silent on the subject of France. Though Languet was markedly more militant in his calls for transnational Protestant cooperation – we should certainly not see Orange as the Protestant hero of nineteenth-century historiography – their fundamental understanding of the interconnectedness of Europe's troubles overlapped. It is therefore likely that Languet played some part in laying the intellectual foundation for Orange's French campaign.

Treaties and alliances

Confronted with a continuous flow of disconcerting news about the endemic violence in France, Orange and his German correspondents felt a growing pressure to contribute to a solution.⁶⁶ Friedrich III, who would come to play such an important role in matching William and Charlotte, was at the vanguard of those Germans who advocated an active role in France. The Reformed Elector ceaselessly reminded his Lutheran peers of their responsibility to protect their 'coreligionists' in France.⁶⁷ The printing presses in his city of Heidelberg churned out large volumes of printed material in German about the French Wars of Religion.⁶⁸ Whereas Friedrich's position was met with scepticism in 1562, it soon gained currency as the conflict in France dragged on. Spurred on by Friedrich and by growing rumours of an international Catholic alliance intended to destroy Protestantism region by region, the Protestant princes of the Empire increasingly played an active role in France.⁶⁹

This process was complicated by the difficult relationship between Lutherans and Reformed Protestants in the Holy Roman Empire. Princes and theologians alike quarrelled about the question of whether the divide between

65 *Ibidem*, 191-193.

66 My monograph *Germany and the French Wars of Religion, 1560-1572* explores the development of this increasingly interventionist stance among the Protestant princes of the German Rhineland.

67 *Ibidem*, 76-78.

68 Cornel Zwierlein, 'Une propagande huguenote internationale: le début des guerres de Religion en France perçues en Allemagne, 1560-1563', in: Jérémie Foa and Paul-Alexis Mellet (eds.), *Le Bruit des armes. Mises en formes et désinformations en*

Europe pendant les Guerres de Religion (1560-1610) (Paris 2012) 397-415.

69 A number of these princes, including the Elector Palatine, the Landgraves of Hessen, the Count of Zweibrücken, and the Duke of Württemberg, involved themselves in the wars in France by applying diplomatic pressure, acting as mediators, donating or lending money to the warring parties, allowing the recruitment of German mercenaries, or by active participation on the battlefield.

the two branches of Protestantism could be bridged. Different Lutheran princes held different positions, with some advocating rapprochement and solidarity and others refusing cooperation with the Reformed. This debate, however, is too complex to do justice to here, but I have discussed it in detail elsewhere.⁷⁰ There was also great apprehension about the possible political consequences of direct German involvement, but the important thing to note here is that the idea that the domestic affairs of France or the Low Countries were none of the Germans' business was not among the many arguments presented against intervention.⁷¹

The calls for pan-European Protestant alliance-building that were voiced by Friedrich and others were not just empty words. Though a coalition including such diverse participants as the monarchs of England, Sweden, and Denmark as well as the German princes and the Dutch and French rebels never materialised (not least because of the deep-seated Lutheran apprehensions about cooperation with the Reformed), the idea was seriously considered at various moments after 1560.⁷² Smaller pacts – formal or informal – were a more realistic prospect. The wars in France and the Low Countries inspired a burst of network- and alliance-building as letters and envoys circled Europe and monarchs and princes strove to draw 'foreign' nobles into their orbits.⁷³

Against the backdrop of this push for transnational Protestant cooperation, Orange in 1568 attempted to formalise his ties to the Huguenot leaders the Prince of Condé and Gaspard de Coligny.⁷⁴ The text of the treaty – which may never have been formally concluded – points towards the two main predicaments that the three princes faced.⁷⁵ Echoing tropes that were heard throughout Europe during the wars of religion,

70 Jonas van Tol, 'The Rhineland and the Huguenots: Transregional confessional relations during the French Wars of Religion', in: Violet Soen, Alexander Soetaert, Johan Verberckmoes, and Wim François (eds.), *Transregional Reformations: Crossing Borders in Early Modern Europe* (Göttingen 2019) 27-52 <https://doi.org/10.13109/9783666564703.27>.

71 Van Tol, *Germany and the French Wars of Religion*, 192-197.

72 David Scott Gehring, *Anglo-German Relations and the Protestant Cause: Elizabethan Foreign Policy and Pan-Protestantism* (London 2016) <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315654812>; E.I. Kouri, *England and the Attempts to Form a Protestant Alliance in the*

Late 1560s: A Case Study in European Diplomacy (Helsinki 1981).

73 Hugues Daussy, *Le Parti huguenot: chronique d'une désillusion (1557-1572)* (Geneva 2014) 673-721; Monique Weiss, 'Philip of Marnix and "international Protestantism": The fears and hopes of a Dutch refugee in the 1570s', *Reformation & Renaissance Review* 11 (2010) 203-220 <https://doi.org/10.1558/rrr.v11i12.203>.

74 A (draft) text from August 1568 survives: Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Archives ou correspondance inédite de la Maison d'Orange-Nassau* (Leiden 1836) part 3, 282-286.

75 Junko Shimizu, *Conflict of Loyalties: Politics and Religion in the Career of Gaspard de Coligny, Admiral of France, 1519-1572* (Geneva 1970) 127.

it was argued that an alliance was necessary in order to resist a powerful enemy ‘who has the intention to destroy the true religion and also the nobility’.⁷⁶ These twin concerns over the suppression of the ‘true Christian religion’ and the infringements on the rights and prerogatives of the nobility were shared by their German sympathisers. ‘The right to resist a monarchical power grab, real or imagined’, dominated political discourse ‘not only in the Empire and the Netherlands, but also in France’, as Olaf Mörke has observed.⁷⁷ Themes like the execution of Egmont and Horne and the exclusion of the Bourbon family from the guardianship of France’s underaged kings reverberated in princely circles in the Empire. And the narrative of a Catholic conspiracy that was quickly gaining traction among the German Protestant princes also warned of a plan to eject the Protestant aristocracy and replace it with Catholics.⁷⁸ Given the force with which these ideas were voiced it is no surprise that support for an intervention in France was growing among Europe’s Protestants – Lutheran and Calvinist – after 1567.

The campaign of 1569

William of Orange’s French campaign was thus the dramatic climax of a long period during which he became a key figure among those princes whose political playing field was essentially transnational. The campaign itself, by contrast, was not the result of long and careful planning, but of a set of unforeseen circumstances. The prince first moved some forces across the border into France after his 1568 invasion of Brabant had failed because Alba avoided a decisive clash and Orange’s forces melted away when his funds ran out.⁷⁹ Orange’s first foray into France was thus born out of necessity, but it also made strategic sense. The prince’s Dutch and French allies had long since put their ideals of cross-border confessional solidarity into practice and were accustomed to slipping across the border when the situation on either side became untenable.⁸⁰ It is unlikely that the prince expected to achieve much aside from relieving some of the pressure on the Huguenot forces. He spent a short time in northern France, pillaging and burning, before moving to Strasbourg where he managed, with much difficulty, to disband his remaining troops. He returned to France only four months later as part of a much more substantial and better organised attempt to alter the course of the war.

76 Groen van Prinsterer, *Archives ou correspondance*, 282-286.

77 Mörke, *Wilhelm von Oranien*, 54.

78 Van Tol, *Germany and the French Wars of Religion*, 179-186.

79 Anton van der Lem, *De Opstand in de Nederlanden 1568-1648. De Tachtigjarige Oorlog in woord en beeld* (Nijmegen 2014) 73-74.

80 Parker, *The Dutch Revolt*, 98.

It is telling that Orange's road to France, literally and figuratively, ran through Germany. Wolfgang of Zweibrücken's campaign, in contrast with Orange's earlier raid, was long in the making. In 1563 he had been the first Lutheran prince to consider supporting the Huguenots militarily, but this had been prevented by his peers.⁸¹ In 1569 opinion had shifted enough, mainly due to developments in the Low Countries and the fear of a transnational Catholic conspiracy, to ensure that Wolfgang could count on significant Lutheran backing.⁸² It seems that Orange's decision to join the German prince was the product of a mix of contributing factors. First, his carefully laid plans for the Revolt in the Low Countries had failed and the prospects for a next move did not look good. Secondly, in 1568 and 1569, the Huguenots stepped up their attempt to rally support abroad.⁸³ In a letter from February 1569, the Huguenot leadership begged Orange to 'cross the river Loire' and 'to join us in order to make us masters of our enemies' [...]'we pray, my cousin, that you believe that there is no means of achieving this but through a good and advantageous victory'.⁸⁴ The Huguenot leadership also promised to reimburse Orange's costs after peace was secured – a vital precondition for the cash-strapped prince. Finally and most importantly, this was the first time that the idea of active intervention in the wars of religion could count on substantial backing in Lutheran circles. It must have seemed like folly to Orange not to capitalise on this new mood. Since the conviction that the wars in France and the Low Countries were essentially the same conflict was growing among German Protestants, it was possible that German involvement in the Low Countries would follow their efforts in France.⁸⁵

The prince therefore made sure that his German contacts were fully aware of the reasoning behind his actions in France and he reminded them of the interconnectivity of religious strife. Before setting off, Orange wrote a long letter to the German princes in which he expounded on the tyranny of Alba and the plight of the 'besieged Christians in France' who were already 'attacked by the followers of the Antichrist'.⁸⁶ He also spoke of the pleas he had received 'not only from the said the Prince of Condé,

81 Orange and the landgraves of Hesse corresponded in 1563 about Wolfgang's dangerous ambitions. Wilhelm of Hesse to William of Orange, 23-3-1563, CWO no. 1069, 29-1-2019, <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/wvo/app/brief?nr=1069>; Philip of Hesse to William of Orange, 24-4-1563, CWO no. 1039, 29-1-2019, <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/wvo/app/brief?nr=1039>.

82 Van Tol, *Germany and the French Wars of Religion*, 202-207.

83 Daussy, *Le Parti huguenot*, 639-697.

84 Condé, Navarre, and Coligny to William of Orange, 10-2-1569, CWO no. 12484, 29-1-2019, <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/wvo/app/brief?nr=12484>.

85 As it turned out, however, the lack of German success in France made intervention in the Netherlands less likely.

86 William of Orange to the German princes, 6-2-1569, CWO no. 1660, 29-1-2019, <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/wvo/app/brief?nr=1660>.



Map of William of Orange's Campaign of 1569.

but also from the King of Navarre' and their promises 'after the attainment of the hoped for peace in France, to provide for the Low Countries a good ten thousand troops and three thousand horse'.⁸⁷ 'In this way hopefully not only the poor Christians in France and the Low Countries are relieved from the current tyranny, but also our common fatherland of the German nation [. . .] will be very usefully served'.⁸⁸ From Confolens, a small town not far from La Rochelle, Orange wrote another letter to his German peers. He again spoke of the persecution of 'the poor Christians in France and also in the Low Countries and other countries in which the Word of God has already been planted' and warned of the 'danger, sorrow, and misery for our beloved fatherland of the German nation that might follow from this'.⁸⁹ Moreover, Orange claimed that 'all the most important lords, save the Cardinal of Lorraine and his party, have advised the crown to strive for peace and religious liberty'.⁹⁰ Lorraine was said to have backed up his 'advice' with the threat of Spanish force of arms – a chilling prospect for the Protestant aristocracy of the Empire.

Though reports about France in the late fifteen-sixties were full of talk of conspiracy, secret alliances, and hidden agendas, these panic-stricken stories did contain a (small) grain of truth. Orange's forces took part in a series of exchanges that illustrate the transnationality of the conflict. Troops from much of Catholic Europe were present on the battlefields of France, as is illustrated by the Battle of Moncontour (3-10-1569). A Italian print from 1570 shows the composition of the opposing armies and their commanders.⁹¹ The Catholic force consisted, besides French *gendarmes* and *harquebusiers*, of 1500 Italian and 'Walloon' cavalry and infantry, 6000 Swiss mercenaries, and 4000 German *Reiters* led by two German Protestants, the Rhinegrave and the Marquis of Baden. Some of these forces had previously served in Alba's armies in the Low Countries.⁹² The bulk of the Huguenot army consisted of German *Landsknechte* and *Reiters*.

This clash ended in a painful defeat for Orange's allies.⁹³ But despite this disaster on the battlefield, the campaign did prove a success. Financially, the campaign had not served our 'condottiere' well. Orange had hardly crossed the border back into the Empire before he was forced to write a long letter to August of Saxony pleading for financial support.⁹⁴

87 *Ibidem*.

88 *Ibidem*.

89 William of Orange to Friedrich III, 9-7-1569, CWO no. 488, 29-1-2019, <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/wvo/app/brief?nr=488>.

90 *Ibidem*.

91 It is difficult to verify whether the numbers are entirely correct.

92 Parker, *The Dutch Revolt*, 111.

93 Robert Knecht, *The French Religious Wars 1562-1598* (Oxford 2002) 44.

94 William of Orange to August of Saxony, 12-10-1569, CWO no. 4518, 29-1-2019, <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/wvo/app/brief?nr=4518>.



Anonymous, L'Ordine del Fattodarme Fatto tra Catolici et Ugonotti alli 3. di Ottobre 1569, 1570. Universitätsbibliothek Salzburg, G 40 III, <http://www.ubs.sbg.ac.at/sosa/graphiken/G40III.jpg>.

But by engaging so directly in the conflict, the prince had managed to move even closer to the epicentre of French politics. In contrast with Orange's campaign itself and its lead-up, the aftermath has been studied in detail and does not need to be repeated here in full.⁹⁵ Whilst Orange left his troops in September 1569, his brother Louis of Nassau stayed on in France and became part of the entourage of Jeanne d'Albret, the Queen of Navarre, from where he exercised remarkable influence on French politics. Louis worked hard to secure what Orange had been promised by his French allies: that following peace in France there would be an intervention in the Low Countries. And even though the 'Netherlandish enterprise', as it has been christened by Nicola Sutherland, miscarried, the foundations laid in this period shaped the course of the Dutch Revolt for many years to come.

Orange's French campaign had a long-lasting impact on the course of the Dutch Revolt. First, his short stay with the Huguenot forces inspired Orange to radically overhaul the organisation of his own troops. Dismayed by the lacklustre and unreliable performance of his *Landsknechte* and impressed by the relative efficiency and discipline of Coligny's men, he reformed his armies along French lines.⁹⁶ Moreover, the presence of Orange and Louis of Nassau in France in 1569 laid the foundations for a long-term relationship between the prince and Charles IX. Whereas ambitious plans for French military intervention failed, the French crown provided substantial financial aid to keep the Revolt going.⁹⁷ The final dimension was intellectual. Though, as discussed above, Orange was already deeply imbedded in the affairs of France, the campaign of 1569 forced the prince to align his interpretation of the conflicts even more closely with that of the Huguenots. Adept as he was at finding ideas and thinkers that could help shape and support his position, Orange must have been fully aware that the aristocratic leadership of the Huguenots was grappling with the exact same issues.⁹⁸ After his campaign, the prince surrounded himself with advisors from Huguenot circles. These, of course, included Languet and Philippe du Plessis-Mornay, who may have been the author of the *Vindiciae contra Tyrannos* and who helped draft Orange's *Apology*.⁹⁹

95 Nicola Sutherland has carefully reconstructed the diplomatic and political manoeuvrings of 1571 and 1572. Nicola Sutherland, *The Massacre of St Bartholomew and the European Conflict, 1559-1572* (London 1973) 133-311.

96 Erik Swart, *Krijgsvolk. Militaire professionalisering en het ontstaan van het staatse leger, 1568-1590* (Amsterdam 2006) 62.

97 Parker, *The Dutch Revolt*, 149.

98 Nicolette Mout, 'Het intellectuele milieu van Willem van Oranje', *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review* 99 (1984) 596-625, 624 <https://doi.org/10.18352/bmgn-lchr.2530>; Mörke, *Wilhelm von Oranien*, 142.

99 Swart, *William of Orange*, 145.



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Adriaen Thomasz Key, *Louis, Count of Nassau*, 1570-1574. Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, 011548-000, <https://www.museunacional.cat/en/colleccio/portrait-louis-count-nassau/adriaen-thomasz-key/011548-000>.

Conclusion

The historians' understanding of William of Orange is beginning to shift from Dutch Protestant 'hero' to European prince. Yet, the echoes of the nationally interpreted histories of the French Wars of Religion and Dutch Revolt remain so strong that they still have the potential to shape interpretations of the past. Orange's forgotten French campaign of 1569 is a case in point. The dismissal of this episode as a distraction from the real focus of Orange's attention – the Revolt in the Low Countries – is the product of the deeply ingrained tendency to draw lines between the histories of Germany, France, and the Low Countries. Though recognising the similarities of the conflicts in France and the Low Countries, from a Dutch national perspective, it is still seen as strange that the *Father of the Fatherland* would put his life in jeopardy in a 'foreign' conflict. And since Orange still had not given up the hope of German backing, why would he risk everything for the Huguenots?

This article proposes that there are three reasons why the campaign of 1569 should be regarded as an integrated and important component of Orange's strategy. First, since regaining control of his principality, Orange had effectively become a player in the French Wars of Religion. He was part of the King of France's orbit, was preoccupied with managing religious tensions in the Midi, and was imbedded in French noble networks. It is thus not accurate to see him as an outsider meddling in the affairs of France. Furthermore, there was no clear distinction between Orange's German or French policies as the question of France was in the 1560s at the top of the agenda of the Protestant princes of the Empire. Finally, this transnational outlook meant that Orange was among those who were most adamant that the wars were intimately connected. From this perspective, his campaign in France was not a distraction but a logical next move in his attempt to regain the land and positions he had lost and to relieve the Low Countries from 'tyranny'.

The case of Orange's French strategies reveals much about the mentalities of Europe's aristocracy at the time of the wars of religion. The transnationality of his outlook was not a trait that uniquely belonged to the prince. We have seen that it was shared by his fellow negotiators at Le Cateau-Cambrésis, his German correspondents, his marriage partners, and his French allies and enemies. Grasping their frame of reference, rooted in the lordships that formed the foundation of their wealth and prestige and at the same time transcending the borders that divided polities, is crucial for understanding the nature and course of the major conflicts that shaped the history of sixteenth-century Europe.



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