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## *“Civilian Lives in Wartime: Spanish Merchants in Antwerp During the Dutch Revolt.”*



*The Spanish Fury, engraving by Hans Collaert. (Public Domain, Museum of Amsterdam)*

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## Introduction:

Travellers strolling around Antwerp are often stunned at the sight of an imposing building on Antwerp's *Grote Markt*: the city hall. The restoration of a stunning masterpiece that was erected in between 1561 and 1565 according to the designs of Cornelis Floris de Vriendt only to be burned to ashes during the Spanish Fury, it is a quintessential piece of Renaissance art, reminiscent of the city's Golden Age.<sup>1</sup> Its construction was commissioned by the city's authorities as a symbol of the growing prosperity of the financial capital of Western Europe. Indeed, no longer dependent on its annual fair,<sup>2</sup> Antwerp had already turned into one of the most important nodes for international trade in Europe, or in Henry Kamen's words, the most important capitalist centre on the continent.<sup>3</sup> Not only did it serve as a market *per se*, with goods being imported and exported via its port, but it also operated as a transit station for goods that were to be sold in other European markets.<sup>4</sup> Boasting of a population that at its peak reached 104.081 inhabitants, of which at least 90.000 were permanent, it was the only northern European city other than Paris with a population over 100.000 people.<sup>5</sup>

This competitive environment had caught the attention of merchants aspiring to dominate the world's markets. Alongside their English, German, Portuguese and of course Italian colleagues, Spanish<sup>6</sup> merchants were amongst the most prominent international businessmen in the port of Scheldt. Comprising 10% of the city's merchants,<sup>7</sup> their presence in the Low Countries dates back to the 1230s when traders from the Bay of Biscay were involved in some transactions with locals. A century later, a handful of Catalans created the first Spanish consulate in Flanders.<sup>8</sup> Moving from one city to another, the bulk of Spanish merchants followed the stream of their partners who left Bruges to establish themselves in Antwerp in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century. Their choice proved rather wise, as by the early 1560s about

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<sup>1</sup> Watkin, David. *A History of Western Architecture*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1986. 271-272

<sup>2</sup> Marnef, Guido. *Antwerp in the Age of Reformation: Underground Protestantism in a Commercial Metropolis, 1550-1577*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996. 3

<sup>3</sup> Kamen, Henry. *Empire: How Spain Became a World Power, 1492-1763*. New York: HarperCollins, 2003. 77

<sup>4</sup> Gelderblom, Oscar. *Cities of Commerce: The Institutional Foundations of International Trade in the Low Countries, 1250-1650*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015. 32

<sup>5</sup> Marnef, *Antwerp in the Age of Reformation*. 5

<sup>6</sup> The term Spaniards will be used to refer to any person whose origins (i.e. Basque, Catalan) were somewhere within the borders of what is now Spain.

<sup>7</sup> Gelderblom, *Cities of Commerce*. 33. Guido Marnef argues that their number reached 300 merchants as of the 1550s (See Marnef, *Antwerp in the Age of Reformation*. 6) whereas Vázquez de Prada believes that they only reached that number in the following decade. (In Vázquez De Prada, Valentin. *Lettres Marchandes D'Anvers. Vol. I. Paris: 1960*. 162)

<sup>8</sup> Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol I*. 160

a third of them controlled the two-way trade with Spain, while still operating in Bruges and handling the wool imports that took place from the Flemish city.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, not all of them were rich enough to carry out that kind of business on their own. Indeed, trade on commission – a system where a rich distant merchant operated through local colleagues of him who acted in his name - “democratised” trade as Michael Limberger argues, bringing smaller merchants into play.<sup>10</sup>

One of the most prominent merchants operating in the Low Countries via his agents was Simon Ruiz who boasted a vast network spanning throughout all of Europe. Ruiz handled his business from Spain,<sup>11</sup> a situation that called for daily communication with his agents. Born in Belorado, a small Burgalese town, Ruiz established himself in Medina del Campo, an already important hub in wool trade, in 1550 and lived there until his death in 1597. Fluctuation of prices, market tendencies, shipments of merchandise, sociopolitical events with direct or indirect impacts on his business, and even personal matters such as a happy marriage or an honourable death, can all be retraced in the letters his colleagues sent him. As we will see in the paragraphs to come, letters from his correspondents in Antwerp offer us a comprehensive insight into both his and his partners’ lives and business during one of the most turbulent periods in the history of the Low Countries.

It was a disastrous war that tore apart any plans businessmen made in the hope that prosperity and peace would last forever. A disastrous incident, the iconoclasm of 1566, triggered a series of events that escalated an already tense situation beyond any reparable point. Turning down the advice of his officials in Brussels, Philip II of Spain decided to preserve the heresy laws in his lands in the Low Countries, as well as to claim full authority for his Council of State.<sup>12</sup> His reluctant to the heretics’ demands attitude culminated when he sent the Duke of Alba and his fearsome *tercios* to suppress those who had revolted. Alba’s harsh reputation, his efforts to impose the tenth penny<sup>13</sup> as well as his bloodthirsty treatment of those whom he believed to be behind the upheaval, were a turning point in this

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<sup>9</sup> Phillips, Carla Rahn. "Spanish Merchants and the Wool Trade in the Sixteenth Century." *Sixteenth Century Journal* 14, no. 3 (1983): 268

<sup>10</sup> Limberger, Michael. "Economies of Agglomeration and the Golden Age of Antwerp." In *Urban Achievement in Early Modern Europe: Golden Ages in Antwerp, Amsterdam, and London*, edited by Patrick Karl. O'Brien. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. 50

<sup>11</sup> Lapeyre, Henri. *Une Famille De Marchands, Les Ruiz: Contribution À L'étude Du Commerce Entre La France Et L'Espagne Au Temps De Philippe II*. Paris: A. Colin, 1955. 68

<sup>12</sup> Darby, Graham. *The Origins and Development of the Dutch Revolt*. London: Routledge, 2001. 16-17

<sup>13</sup> This ill-reputed tax, a 10% levy on sales, unified the opposition despite being quickly revoked. See Ibid. 18

confrontation. Philip was adamant; he had to control the most precious jewel in his crown,<sup>14</sup> the Low Countries the economic and strategic position of which was of enormous importance to his ambitions.<sup>15</sup> Little did he know that it would take almost eighty years for the Habsburds to acknowledge that they could no longer rule the whole of the Low Countries.

The events that are usually referred to as the “Dutch Revolt” or the “Eighty Years’ War” in Anglophone literature have been put under scrutiny numerous times by some of the most brilliant and prolific historians. An enumeration of even the most important of these studies would require a paper all of its own. The bulk of these studies is dedicated to the presentation of the events,<sup>16</sup> the logistics of the armies,<sup>17</sup> as well as its peculiar culture,<sup>18</sup> strategic innovations,<sup>19</sup> ideas and political culture,<sup>20</sup> etc. There is little doubt that these studies are of paramount importance in our effort to fully comprehend what was going on in the Low Countries from 1566 to 1648. Nevertheless, it is only possible to do that when we study both the incident and the social meaning it bore. Although recent historiography has attempted to shed light on the views of Spanish civilians who were physically present in the Low countries at the time, there is still a dearth of meticulous research on this particular aspect of the history of the Dutch Revolt<sup>21</sup>.

The letters from Ruiz’s associates provide us with much valuable information needed to paint a picture of their lives in wartime. Surprisingly enough, the first historian to fully appreciate the value of these letters was not Spanish. An American scholar called Earl J. Hamilton studied them as early as 1934, in order to enrich his research on sixteenth century inflation.<sup>22</sup> But historiography had to wait for another couple of decades -until Henri Lapeyre

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<sup>14</sup> Rodríguez Pérez, Yolanda. *The Dutch Revolt through Spanish Eyes: Self and Other in Historical and Literary Texts of Golden Age Spain (c. 1548-1673)*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008. 11

<sup>15</sup> Darby, The Origins. 35

<sup>16</sup> See for instance among others Graham Darby’s *The origins*, Parker, Geoffrey. *The Dutch Revolt*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977. etc.

<sup>17</sup> On the Spanish army, the masterpiece of Geoffrey Parker: Parker, Geoffrey. *The Army of Flanders and the Spanish Road, 1567-1659; the Logistics of Spanish Victory and Defeat in the Low Countries’ Wars*. Cambridge: University Press, 1972.

<sup>18</sup> León, Fernando González De. *The Road to Rocroi: Class, Culture, and Command in the Spanish Army of Flanders, 1567-1659*. Leiden: Brill, 2009.

<sup>19</sup> See among others Hart, Marjolein ‘t. *The Dutch Wars of Independence: Warfare and Commerce in the Netherlands 1570-1680*. London; New York: Routledge, 2014.

<sup>20</sup> As in Arnade, Peter J. *Beggars, Iconoclasts, and Civic Patriots: The Political Culture of the Dutch Revolt*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008.

<sup>21</sup> Yolanda Rodríguez Perez tries to paint a picture of the impact this war had on Spaniard’s beliefs and ideas in *The Dutch Revolt Through Spanish Eyes: Self and Other in Historical and Literary Texts of Golden Age Spain (c. 1548-1673)*

<sup>22</sup> Hamilton, Earl J. *American Treasure and the Price Revolution in Spain: 1501 - 1650*. Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard Univ. Press, 1934. Cited in Villanueva, 'Oscar Lucas, *El Comercio Internacional Castellano a través del*



used them in his thesis on the family of Simon Ruiz - for this correspondence to become popular amongst scholars.<sup>23</sup> This paper will be based on a compilation of letters that were transcribed by Valentín Vázquez de Prada, a Spanish disciple of Fernand Braudel.<sup>24</sup> Vázquez de Prada dug in the “*Archivo Simon Ruiz*” which is located in Medina del Campo, picking out almost half of the 2.400 letters that came from Antwerp to Ruiz and his successors, from 1556 to 1624<sup>25</sup> Although there is little doubt that Ruiz’s network included other Flemish cities as well<sup>26</sup>, this compilation consists of letters sent from Antwerp. Ruiz had correspondents in cities such as Bruges<sup>27</sup>, which still remained a commercial hub of significant importance. Vázquez de Prada studied these letters in order to describe the economic activities of those merchants as well as to offer us a broader image of trade during the second half of the sixteenth century. Indeed, the vast majority of the brilliant studies undertaken in the following half a century that utilised this rich source material were carried out by economic historians.<sup>28</sup> As a result, the precious information on the ongoing war contained in these letters, often plays an auxiliary role if it is not completely neglected. The present study will try to examine the same letters from a completely different angle, focusing on the merchant’s sayings on the war. It goes without saying that their activities as merchants will be scrutinised too, however the activities that concern us here are those who were close-connected to the ongoing war.

Of course, correspondence is not the only source of information for this period. By all means, studying chronicles written by authors such as Mendoza or Cornejo<sup>29</sup> offers us an illuminating point of view on the war. On the other hand however, these people formed a group that in a sense cannot be perceived as a group of civilians *sensu stricto*. Their task, at least when it comes to these texts, was to offer contemporary readers a description of the war.

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*puerto de Laredo en la época de Felipe II, según la correspondencia de Simón Ruiz*. (PhD thesis, Universidad de Santander 2009). 20

<sup>23</sup> Lapeyre, *Une Famille De Marchandes*.

<sup>24</sup> Vázquez De Prada, Valentin. *Lettres Marchandes D'Anvers*. Vol. II-IV. Paris: 1960.

<sup>25</sup> In total there are more than 56.000 letters from all across the globe. See [www.catedrasimonruiz.es](http://www.catedrasimonruiz.es), the website of a chair under the auspices of Hilario Casado Alonso that focuses on the history of trade.

<sup>26</sup> Laso Ballesteros, Ángel, “Noticia del Archivo de los Ruiz” in Ángel. *Francesco Datini, 1335-1410, Jacob Fugger, 1459-1525, Simón Ruiz, 1525-1597: Los Legados Histórico Artísticos Y Documentales De Tres Grandes Hombres De Negocios*. Compiled by Antonio Sánchez Del Barrio. Valladolid: Junta De Castilla Y León, 2009. 183-201.

<sup>27</sup> We know for a fact that a merchant under the name Francisco de Cruzat was communicating with Ruiz c.1576. See Rodríguez González, Ricardo. *Los Libros De Cuentas Del Mercader Simon Ruiz: Análisis De Una Decada (1551-1560)*. (PhD thesis, Universidad de Valladolid, 1990). 101

<sup>28</sup> For a brief review on the renewed interest of historians on Simon Ruiz see Bennassar, Bartolomé. "Simón Ruiz." In *Simón Ruiz: Mercader, Banquero Y Fundador*, edited by Antonio Sanchez Del Barrio. Medina Del Campo: Medina Del Campo: Fundacion Museo De Las Ferias, 2016.

<sup>29</sup> Mendoza, Bernardino De. *Comentarios De Don Bernardino De Mendoza: De Lo Sucedido En Las Guerras De Los Payses Baxos, Desde En Año De. 1567. Hasta El De. 1577*. En Madrid: Por Pedro Madrigal, 1592. And Cornejo, Pedro, and Philippe Tinghi. *Sumario De Las Guerras Ciuiles, Y Causas De La Rebellion De Flandres*. En Leon: En Casa De Phelipe Tinghi, 1577. Cited in Pérez Rodriguez, *The Dutch Revolt Through Spanish Eyes*. 69

As they aspired to justify Spanish claims as well as to set an example for the future generations, their works clearly display a propagandistic nature. Moreover, since they personally followed the campaigns led by Alba, Requesens, Don Juan of Austria and Farnese, it was almost impossible to differentiate themselves from the soldiers or the generals of the *tercios*. A mentality similar to those in the battlefields is thus forged, a mentality certainly different from that of the merchants who were living there.

Although the latter led a very different kind of life, being neither directly nor indirectly involved in military operations, they wrote extensively about the war. Their physical presence at the theatres of war renders their narratives priceless. Forming a *sui generis* group, that of Spanish civilians who lived in the lands of the “enemy” with whom they had already forged strong economic ties and networks, the merchants’ views on the war are an important complement to those of the generals, soldiers, chroniclers and religious figures. Let us not forget that both their personal lives and their businesses were gravely affected by the war. Their “national” interests may have even clashed with their personal ones, putting them in a delicate position. The wartime experiences of Spanish merchants can never be fully comprehended if the impacts of the Revolt on their means of survival and prosperity are not taken into account. As a matter of fact, this study will try to investigate the everyday problems, successes, failures, bankruptcies, opportunities and inconveniences faced by these merchants as presented in their letters.

There is little doubt that studying correspondence from Early Modernity can be quite revealing. People and especially merchants, put considerable time and effort into writing letters and keeping in contact with associates living far away. Manuals on letter-writing were printed *en masse*, and addressed merchants in particular<sup>30</sup> or the general public.<sup>31</sup> According to James Daybell, a letter can be informative to modern day students in many ways that go beyond the mere words it contains. A thorough examination can inform us about the level of literacy of the writer, the route connecting the place of dispatch to the place of delivery, the

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<sup>30</sup> Trivellato, Francesca. "Merchants' Letters across Geographical and Social Boundaries." *In Cultural Exchange in Early Modern Europe. Correspondence and Cultural Exchange in Europe, 1400-1700*, edited by Robert Muchembled, Heinz Schilling, István György Tóth, Donatella Calabi, Stephen Turk Christensen, Francisco Bethencourt, Florike Egmond, and Herman Roodenburg. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. 84

<sup>31</sup> In the Low Countries alone, prominent scholars such as Erasmus and Lipsius, wrote treatises on letter-writing which demonstrates how important this topic was at the time. See Erasmus, Desiderius, Juan Luis Vives, Konrad Celtis, and Christoph Hegendorph. *De Conscribendis Epistolis* .. Mogvntiae: Excudebat Ivo Schoeffer, 1547. Lipsius, Justus, R. V. Young, and M. Thomas. Hester. *Principles of Letter-writing: A Bilingual Text of Justus Lipsius Epistolica Institutio*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996.



postmasters through whose hands the letters passed, the delivery conditions, etc.<sup>32</sup> His meticulous analysis of sixteenth and seventeenth century England has led him to conclude that the Early Modern Period can boast a variety of cultures of correspondence, differing according to gender, social status and generation.<sup>33</sup> Merchants of course had their own. Information was vital for their survival and prosperity. Their correspondence was the principal means for the dissemination of information, and their networks ensured that it would be available to everyone.<sup>34</sup> They were so reliable when it came to events that bore economic repercussions that even diplomats used their correspondence as a source for their reports. Such was the case for Zaccaria Barbaro, the Venetian ambassador in Naples whose invaluable intelligence services relied on the correspondence of merchants.<sup>35</sup> The increase in long-distance trade and the number of sedentary merchants rendered regular correspondence the only way for merchants to control their agents. At the same time, letters were used as evidence in court, which had a direct impact both on the language merchants used and on the things they said; they were bound to their words.<sup>36</sup>

Of course their correspondence would have been of little or even no significance whatsoever if it were not based on reliable networks of information. Their business networks were of paramount importance when it came to staying informed about news and trends.<sup>37</sup> A number of studies have shown beyond doubt that merchants relied on each other for information,<sup>38</sup> and it is fair to assume that any travelling merchant would share the news with his colleagues. Indeed, it was through their social circles that they were kept updated, and it was in their very meeting points, such as hotels, taverns, *fondacos*, that this exchange of information took place. The more formal their transactions were, the more sources of information they could make use of; correspondence between them, letters of exchange, accounting books etc., passed on precious information from one businessman to another.<sup>39</sup> But merchants were not patiently waiting for the information to knock on their doors. Their

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<sup>32</sup> Daybell, James. *The Material Letter in Early Modern England: Manuscript Letters and the Culture and Practices of Letter-writing, 1512-1635*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 26

<sup>34</sup> Infelise, Mario. "From Merchant's Letters to Handwritten Political Avvisi In Cultural Exchange" in *Early Modern Europe. Correspondence and Cultural Exchange in Europe, 1400-1700*, edited by Robert Muchembled, Heinz Schilling, István György Tóth, Donatella Calabi, Stephen Turk Christensen, Francisco Bethencourt, Florike Egmond, and Herman Roodenburg. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. 33

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 35

<sup>36</sup> Trivellato, "Merchant's letters across Geographical and Social Boundaries". 83-84

<sup>37</sup> Infelise, "From Merchant's Letters to Handwritten Political Avvisi In Cultural Exchange". 35

<sup>38</sup> See Gelderblom's convincing analysis in *Cities of Commerce*

<sup>39</sup> Casado Alonso, Hilario. "Los Flujos De Información En Las Redes Comerciales Castellanas De Los Siglos XV Y XVI." *Investigaciones De Historia Económica* 4, no. 10 (2008): 36.

business demanded frequent travel from one place to another and significant public activity. A walk down the docks or in the city's square could prove to be as informative as any letter from a colleague.<sup>40</sup> Some even had direct contact with Spanish officials and army commanders, and through these were informed about the war developments in great detail.<sup>41</sup>

After all, it was not always possible for them to differentiate between news regarding the war and that which involved business. Not only because in the mindset of mercantilist scholars war was to paraphrase Clausewitz, the continuation of economy by other means,<sup>42</sup> but because the two of them were not always clearly separate. As Echevarría Bacigalupe points out, both the Spanish and the rebels put considerable time and effort into hampering each other's trade activities, believing that this could be the key to winning the war.<sup>43</sup> Blockades and privateering were frequently used by strategists as Farnese and William of Orange. Nevertheless, trade was not put under extreme duress solely because of direct actions against merchants. War created its own reality that was far from idyllic for those who still aspired to carry out business. The needs of the armies were the top priority, and both local and distant economies worked in large part to provide soldiers with what they needed. Prices rose and shortages of basic commodities such as grain were frequent in wartime. Increased taxation only added to these crises, making everyone's life harder.<sup>44</sup> Suffice to say that taxes such as the tenth penny were not met with joy among merchants. While it is true that some merchants profited from war, this depended more on the products they traded than the new sociopolitical superstructure created by the war. Even those who supplied the army with products such as uniforms did not necessarily profit, if their incomes are compared to those they would have generated in peacetime.<sup>45</sup> According to Marjolein 't Hart however, the effects of war on trade are perhaps slightly exaggerated. Not everyone's situation was exacerbated and many of the crises that struck major economic centres such as Antwerp took place in wartime without war being their sole or even their principal cause. Depending on the circumstances and the advantages or disadvantages of each city or region, war could either create business opportunities or doom large groups of people. For instance, in the case of the newly born Dutch Republic, as long as these lands were theatres of war, the economy was

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<sup>40</sup> Trivellato, "Merchant's letters across Geographical and Social Boundaries". 88

<sup>41</sup> See Chapter 2

<sup>42</sup> See for instance Silberner's excellent analysis of Early Modern economic thought in *Silberner, Edmund. La Guerre Dans La Pensée Économique Du XVIe Au XVIIIe Siècle. Paris: Librairie Du Recueil Sirey, 1939.*

<sup>43</sup> Miguel Ángel Echevarría Bacigalupe, "Guerra y economía en Flandes, siglos XVI-XVII" *Studia Historica: Historia Moderna* 27 (2009)

<sup>44</sup> Hale, J. R. *War and Society in Renaissance Europe: 1450 - 1620*. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1986. 181

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* 209-232

ruined. But the very moment that the rebels drove the Spaniards off their lands, trade was revived and the economy of Holland was flourishing. Nevertheless that happened at the expense of the hinterland which was struck by recession.<sup>46</sup> At the same time, Antwerp's downfall should not be attributed solely to the events that took place between 1566 and 1585. Causes outside of the war had already put the city's prevalence under pressure and war simply operated as an accelerator.<sup>47</sup>

To contribute to this discussion, this paper will attempt to answer the following questions: *How did this group of Spaniard merchants experience the Dutch Revolt? How were their lives and core beliefs affected by it and to what extent is their particular experience comparable to that of other Spaniards of similar status?* In order to tackle them, our first step will be to reverse the first question: instead of asking *How did the merchants experience the war?* as if they were active participants in this process, we shall wonder *What was the impact of war on them?* Of all the elements that compose their identity, i.e. place of origin, religion, ideas, beliefs, occupation, it is the latter that was primarily affected by the war. Therefore our first question will deal with the fate of their businesses during the war. Since their very existence, and the reason for their residence in the Low Countries was based on the success of their firms, it is only logical to turn our attention to the changes war inflicted upon trade. This is still only a part of their actual experience however. All of those material changes were reflected in a non-transparent way in their systems of ideas and beliefs. We will therefore try to shed some light on this relation between material reality and its perception by a particular group of people. Therefore our second question will tackle the topic of the merchants' views on core ideas relating to the war, ideas such as their affiliation towards their country, their religiousness, their views on the enemy and on the war as a concept. This can only be carried out via a comparative study and our study will attempt a two-dimensional comparison, on the one hand comparing their views on the aforementioned topics before and after the war, and on the other hand comparing these perceptions to those held by their compatriots. The social understanding of any phenomenon is the result of the interplay between the material impact of the given phenomenon on the lives of people and their pre-existing "ideology". Tracing out this interplay is crucial if we are to extrapolate our conclusions and attempt to add to the discussion of civilians' experiences in wartime.

As is the case with every study, this one comes with some limitations. Since the main sources for our research are letters a little bit of relativism is needed, as we can never be

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<sup>46</sup> 't Hart, *The Dutch Wars of Independence*. 176-177

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 174

certain whether our merchants were openly and frankly expressing their opinions or not. After all, as Daybell argues, letter writing in that era was seldom a task carried out by a single person. Often written by multiple people and addressed to wider audiences, correspondence should be discussed in the context of representing a social transaction.<sup>48</sup> It was hardly a private conversation between a sender and a reader and thus the former had to be extremely careful when expressing his opinions on a certain topic, as they were disseminated to the social circle of the reader. Therefore, it seems almost impossible for Ruiz's associates to have shared any views that would be deemed as incompatible with those prevailing in Spain. Therefore, complementary literature will be consulted in order to determine what parts of their writings can safely paint a picture of their actual views. Secondly, the reliability of correspondence is bound to the same criticism as modern day journalism is. Being charged with the task of informing Ruiz regularly, but having limited sources of information, some of the writers' intelligence might have not been accurate. As Jeannin argues, there was never enough time for them to verify their information which, passing from one man to another, was subject to alterations.<sup>49</sup> Last but not least, important events and significant pieces of information are sometimes missing from their narratives. While this absence can be dealt creatively in an effort to delineate their priorities in regards to what was going on and what they did not wish to write about, we have to relativise yet again. A lack of references to a particular event might indicate lack of interest as well as lack of reliable sources. The importance of any given event as well as their attitudes towards the events must both be taken into account when considering this limitation.

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<sup>48</sup> Daybell, *The Material Letter in Early Modern England*. 9-23. Not everything was intended for a public audience of course. Pierre Jeannin claims that the specifics of all the economic transactions were strictly for the sender and the reader only. See Jeannin, Pierre. "La Diffusion De L'Information." In *Fiere E Mercati Nella Integrazione Delle Economie Europee Secc. XIII-XVIII: Atti Della "trentaduesima Settimana Di Studi"*, 8-12 Maggio 2000, edited by Simonetta Cavaciocchi. Firenze: Le Monnier, 2001. 245

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 246

# 1. Business in Wartime: A window of opportunity or the beginning of an end?

*“Dios nos dé otros tiempos en que podamos negociar con más quietud y menos rriesgo, si conuiene para su seruiçio.”*<sup>50</sup>

## 1.1 Trade under pressure from political priorities and military operations

Ever since Alba's *tercios* set their feet in Flanders, normality was disrupted for good. This was not only due to the direct impact of war on trade such as battles, sieges, the necessity to satisfy the needs of the Spanish army as well as the consequences of its actions. These direct impacts, in addition to the byproducts of war i.e. piracy, privateering and blockades led to a second wave of indirect implications which were reflected on the unstable prices, the disrupted flow of goods and money, and limited entrepreneurial opportunities. Furthermore, the unstable international environment and the chain of events that followed the Dutch Revolt and further hindered seaborne or overland trade, rendered insurance a risky business and slowed down trade.

It was evident since the very first days of the iconoclasm of 1566 that commerce would suffer from this turmoil. Delays in payments were the first shock<sup>51</sup>, which was followed by panic on the merchants' side. Hernando de Frías Cevallos, one of Simon Ruiz's correspondents in Antwerp<sup>52</sup>, refuses to take any risks on behalf of Ruiz and does not carry out any kind of business.<sup>53</sup> Trade is in tatters. Everyone in Antwerp is petrified that they might lose their assets, wealth, and even their honour. Only a royal intervention could guarantee that the forthcoming fair would take place.<sup>54</sup> Although the Crown was quick to reply to these challenges, it is fair to argue that our entrepreneurs did not stand to gain much from the ongoing war. On many occasions they felt that their needs were put aside by the

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<sup>50</sup> “May God give us other times, during which we might negotiate with more ease and with less risk, if that be his will.” Martín Pérez de Varrón to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 31/5/1589, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol III*. 351

<sup>51</sup> Diego Pardo to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 24/9/1566, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol II*. 32-33

<sup>52</sup> Cevallos's relationship with Ruiz dated back to 1563. It went through a serious crisis three years later but the two men kept in contact until Cevallos's departure from Antwerp back to Spain in 1574. See Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol I*. 216

<sup>53</sup> Hernando de Frías Cevallos to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 1-21/12/1566, Ibid. 33-35

<sup>54</sup> Hernando de Frías Cevallos to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 27/6/1567, Ibid. 36-37

Crown. In 1568 five Spanish vessels under threat from Dutch privateers sought shelter in England. Queen Elizabeth decided to impound the cargoes which among other goods contained a stunning amount of money that was intended to pay for Alba's tercios. Alba responded by confiscating English possessions in Flanders, escalating the conflict that would only be settled 6 years later.<sup>55</sup> This delay in negotiations infuriates Cevallos, who insinuates that Philip could surely intervene in favour of the merchants, but that those in charge do not employ all the available and necessary means. His aphorism shows his bitterness: "When the reputation of princes is at stake, the interest of merchants are so easily put aside."<sup>56</sup> This incident caused much uncertainty and loss of trust within the community. Cevallos was patiently waiting for his king's intervention, which seemed to be the only remedy for this disaster, but to no avail.<sup>57</sup>

Alba never ceased to prioritise the needs of his army; a shortage of money was already imminent the moment he arrived due to the huge amount of *contados* he needed for his campaign. Being fully aware of this, the merchants were afraid that the war would deplete the financial resources of the region.<sup>58</sup> This fear tormented Cevallos too. Although in the end the payments were made without any trouble, he was still afraid that the next time things might not be so favourable for them.<sup>59</sup> Writing again in November of 1569, Cevallos was still complaining to Ruiz about the situation in the Low Countries. The market in Antwerp is bereft of money and the blame was placed on the excessive needs of the Spanish *tercios*.<sup>60</sup> To make matters worse, Alba's 1572 decision to impose taxes on locals took the merchants by surprise. Shops are closed in Brussels and the nearby cities as the businessmen could not afford to pay the heinous tenth penny. The products remained unsold, people fled to avoid taxation and Juan de Cuéllar<sup>61</sup>, Ruiz's main correspondent in the early 1570s, was left behind to curse those "*negras imposiciones*"<sup>62</sup>. While this situation was frustrating, things got

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<sup>55</sup> Phillips, William D., and Carla Rahn Phillips. "Spanish Wool and Dutch Rebels: The Middelburg Incident of 1574." *The American Historical Review* 82, no. 2 (1977). 314-315

<sup>56</sup> Hernando de Frías Cevallos to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 5/5/1569, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol II*. 55. What is striking here is that Alba handed over the negotiations to a merchant-banker and associate of Ruiz, a Genoese called Thomaso Fiesco. See Read, Conyers. "Queen Elizabeth's Seizure of the Duke of Alba's Pay-Ships." *The Journal of Modern History* 5, no. 4 (1933). 454

<sup>57</sup> Hernando de Frías Cevallos to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 15/3/1566, *Ibid.* 54

<sup>58</sup> Hernando de Frías Cevallos to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 18-22/6/1568, *Ibid.* 44

<sup>59</sup> Hernando de Frías Cevallos to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 2/10/1568, *Ibid.* 51-52. Also Hernando de Frías Cevallos to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 7/7/1568, *Ibid.* 46

<sup>60</sup> Hernando de Frías Cevallos to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 24/11/1568, *Ibid.* 58

<sup>61</sup> Cuéllar came from a family of merchants of Segovian origin. Juan established himself in Antwerp in 1531 and was mainly involved in wool trade. He was the correspondent of Ruiz from 1572 to 1576. See Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol I*. 217

<sup>62</sup> "Damned taxes". In Juan de Cuéllar to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 19/12/1571, 19/1/1572, *Ibid.* 78-79



completely out of hand when Spain went bankrupt in 1575. Payments were delayed, no money was to be found and everyone in the merchant community was anxious and upset.<sup>63</sup>

A shortage of money was hardly an exception in such circumstances. Every time Philip's treasury was pushed to its limits and the army devoured all available resources, merchants became victims of these extraordinary conditions. The situation was still critical in the years following the 1577 loss of Antwerp to the rebels. Even when some money managed to reach the Brabantine port, it was almost immediately smuggled out in specie or via the bourse.<sup>64</sup> Another wave of shortages started in September of 1581, and were to go on for more than half a year.<sup>65</sup> The situation could only escalate and six years later they render to trade by barter.<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless, as Van Der Wee points out the effects of war were not the only reason behind these shortages; an unprecedented famine, expectations of a different set of monetary policies and speculative exportation of money from Antwerp certainly added to the already dire situation.<sup>67</sup> Periodic *larguesas* of money were only sending false messages to the merchants and misleading the market.<sup>68</sup>

But it was not just a question of money and taxation for the merchants. The very safety of their merchandise was under severe risk during those turbulent years. Even if it did arrive in one piece, no one could guarantee that it would be sold at a reasonable price. On the eve of the spring of 1574, Cuéllar received complaints from Ruiz about the quality of upholstery the former had sent to his partner. He felt compelled to remind Ruiz that the prices were going up precisely because the only fabric of adequate quality was extremely expensive. After all, everything was expensive there due to the restrictions imposed by the military operations upon trade and more specifically on the movement of goods.<sup>69</sup>

Less than six months later Cuéllar mourned his fate. As long as the war went on, profits were not guaranteed since prices fluctuated even more than in peacetime, cargos were in danger and the costs were high.<sup>70</sup> This fluctuation in prices was directly connected to the ongoing rebellion, albeit the latter was not the only reason for it; money shortages were a further cause. The instability of prices began in the very first years of the war and at the

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<sup>63</sup> Juan de Cuéllar to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 30/10/1575, Ibid.162

<sup>64</sup> Van Der Wee, Hermann. *The Growth of the Antwerp Market and the European Economy: Fourteenth - Sixteenth Centuries. II - Interpretation*. Louvain: Publications Universitaires, 1963. 256

<sup>65</sup> Diego and Pedro de la Peña to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 26/9/1581, 25/4/1582, also Alonso de Palma Carillo to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 6/3/1582, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol III*. 80-104

<sup>66</sup> Martín Pérez de Varrón to Cosme Ruiz and Lope de la Gauna Arniziega, Antwerp, 30/7/1587, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol IV*. 174

<sup>67</sup> Van Der Wee. *The Growth*. 267

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. 243

<sup>69</sup> Juan de Cuéllar to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 26/2/1574, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol II*. 99-101

<sup>70</sup> Juan de Cuéllar to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 8/7/1574, Ibid. 114

beginning of 1572 a large number of Spanish merchants had already left Antwerp for France since the market was crashing.<sup>71</sup> At first prices went down, but were followed by an unexpected rise in 1573<sup>72</sup> only to stabilise again in 1575 for five years.<sup>73</sup> Eventually, Antwerp entered a long period of decline. From October 1581 onwards trade traffic was reduced, and prices skyrocketed once again since the supply of products could no longer boost the commercial activity. The departure of the Merchant Adventurers<sup>74</sup> for Middelburg marked the plummeting of Antwerp's market.<sup>75</sup> Farnese's operations and the closure of the Scheldt proved to be devastating for the local economy and already in 1588 Martín Pérez de Varrón<sup>76</sup>, another partner of Ruiz, admitted that the only kind of business carried out there is *asientos*.<sup>77</sup> Once Spain's operations utterly devastated their business, they made them completely dependent on the crown for their very survival.

Of course one would expect these kinds of losses and troubles in wartime. What made the situation even worse were the numerous occasions when soldiers went lawless after a prolonged delay in their payments. In 1576 the ill-disciplined Spanish troops stormed Antwerp, severely damaging the city's economy not even sparing the belongings of their compatriots as we will see in the following chapter. The damage they caused had various long-term effects. For example when the soldiers looted the *tapissierspand*<sup>78</sup>, the tapestry trade, a field in which the Spaniards were extremely active,<sup>79</sup> effectively froze.<sup>80</sup> But this was just the tip of the iceberg. Between 1568 and 1578, trade was seriously damaged by the ongoing military operations. Pirates and mutineers were the main threats to merchants living and operating in the Low Countries.<sup>81</sup> No wonder many of these merchants, including Spaniards, fled southwards to cities such as Rouen which in turn became a major hub in the Franco-Spanish trade.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, the French city's authorities granted letters of naturalization to no less than 22 Spaniards in the years that followed 1580, a great number of whom were

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<sup>71</sup> Van Der Wee. *The Growth of the Antwerp Market and the European Economy*. 239-240

<sup>72</sup> Juan de Cuéllar to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 26/2/1574, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol II*. 99-101

<sup>73</sup> Van Der Wee. *The Growth of the Antwerp Market and the European Economy*. 417

<sup>74</sup> The Company of Merchants Adventurers was a group of English merchants who were operating overseas.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. 259

<sup>76</sup> Pérez de Varrón was a Basque merchant who established himself in the Low Countries c.1558 where he operated his business until his retirement day fifty years later. His commercial activities included the trade of species, cochineal, wool, etc.

<sup>77</sup> Martín Pérez de Varrón to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 18/2/1588, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol IV*. 219-220. On *asientos* see Chapter 2.2.

<sup>78</sup> A sales and exhibition space for tapestries.

<sup>79</sup> Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol I*. 163

<sup>80</sup> Van Der Wee, *The Growth of the Antwerp Market and the European Economy*. 255

<sup>81</sup> Gelderblom, *Cities of Commerce*. 224

<sup>82</sup> Ironically, it was due to war and trade that Spanish merchants had to leave Rouen in 1585. See Phillips, *Spanish Merchants and the Wool Trade*. 270

previously living in nearby war-torn lands.<sup>83</sup> The bankruptcy of 1575 certainly added to that movement, as business froze for good and no one dared to carry out any payments. A complete loss of trust took over and only accelerated the commercial downfall. In De Gaunas's words:

"...los ánimos están tan atemorizados, que no se osan rescontrar con nadie ni fiar de ninguno."<sup>84</sup> Many merchants who were exposed to loans left Antwerp and others shut down their businesses. Those bankruptcies triggered a domino effect of failures, as the businesses were closely intertwined. When Gaspar de Añastro fled Antwerp leaving huge debts behind him, everyone else there was alarmingly exposed.<sup>85</sup> As of 1582, no more than 4 Spanish firms were active in Antwerp.<sup>86</sup>

Those who opted to stay had to face another threat, this time for their lives. Añastro's decision to collect the price that was put on Orange's head was disastrous for the rest of the merchants. The de la Peña brothers<sup>87</sup> confide to Ruiz that the lives and belongings of all merchants, and especially of the Spaniards, were in great peril. Moreover, their reputation was gradually declining and so was their credibility. With only four Spanish firms left in Antwerp, it was no surprise that they were all suspected of having close ties to Añastro.<sup>88</sup> Another assassination attempt on Orange, this time successful, further unsettled their lives. Even two years after Balthasar Gérard murdered the "loathsome heretic", Diego Pardo<sup>89</sup> advised his partner Ruiz to freeze all business in the Brabantine port until the circumstances become more favourable for them.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Benedict, Philip. *Rouen during the Wars of Religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981. 155

<sup>84</sup> "The spirits are so shaken, that no one dares to meet anyone, nor trust anybody." in Jerónimo Lope de Gauna, Nicolas y Lope de Gauna to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 4/4/1576, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol II*. 189

<sup>85</sup> Diego and Pedro de la Peña to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 31/3/1582, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol III*. 100

<sup>86</sup> Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol I*. 163

<sup>87</sup> Diego and Pedro de la Peña came from a family of Medina del Campo which had moved to Bruges in the mid-sixteenth century. They established their firm in Antwerp in 1578. This firm was expanded in the following years, since various members of their family joined it. Pedro's name no longer appeared in the firm after 1587 while Diego seems to have returned to Spain by 1590 after his bankruptcy. See Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol I*. 223

<sup>88</sup> Diego and Pedro de la Peña to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 25/4/1582, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol III*. 103-104

<sup>89</sup> Pardo himself is a really interesting figure. It is listed that the son of a Juan Pardo became the municipal councilor in Bruges in 1574. (See Fagel, Raymond. "Spanish Merchants in the Low Countries: Stabilitas Loci or Peregrinatio?" In *International Trade in the Low Countries: (14th - 16th Centuries): Merchants, Organisation, Infrastructure ; Proceedings of the International Conference Ghent-Antwerp, 12th - 13th January 1997*, edited by Peter Stabel. Leuven: Garant, 2000. 99) That same year, Fernando de Frías Cevallos left Antwerp for good, leaving his business in the hands of Pardo. (See Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Vol I*. 216-217) There is no reason to assume that these are two different people

<sup>90</sup> Diego Pardo to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 31/7/1584, *Ibid.* 210

If the murderous attacks commissioned by Farnese made the merchants feel a little bit edgy, when Antwerp was turned into a war zone once again a couple of years later they utterly lost their composure. Pérez de Varrón urgently left Brabant for Cologne precisely because the latter is a peaceful city,<sup>91</sup> while his colleague Diego de Luengas spoke about his concern for the imminent siege of Antwerp. Witnessing first-hand Farnese's encirclement of the city and the preparation and deployment of his army, he had no doubt that their business is going to suffer even more and prays to God to relieve these lands of all the burdens war has brought upon them.<sup>92</sup> Pardo himself was considering leaving Antwerp as soon as he completed some unfinished business. He advised Ruiz once again to not conduct any business in Antwerp while the city's future was uncertain.<sup>93</sup> They were not the only ones to worry about the situation in Antwerp however. Hanseatic merchants, shocked by the Spanish Fury and its impacts on the market of the Brabantine city, refused to trade there. Seaborne trade had been slightly revived ever since the city passed on under Calvinist control from 1577 to 1585 and it was apparently the only way to connect these lands with Germany. Overland trade was severely hampered, and the new siege Spaniards laid upon Antwerp convinced German merchants that their presence there was not worth it anymore.<sup>94</sup> Even the affluent Italians decided that Antwerp was no longer serving their interests and most of them left in the late 1570s and early 1580s. Among them were many Ruiz's associates such as the Bonvisis who moved to Cologne in 1578 as well as Lamberti who moved to Holland six years later and Balbani, who set up his business in Stade around the same time.<sup>95</sup> Not all the military actions of the Crown were seen as a menace however. While peace was most certainly preferred to war, in their most pragmatic moments our merchants seemed to believe that it was still best for them to operate in lands controlled by Spain. If Cuéllar is a little bit vague when he reassures Ruiz that a possible victory for Philip will serve their particular interests as well<sup>96</sup>, the capture of Antwerp fills them with joy. Two months after the end of the siege in 1585, Pérez de Varrón re-established himself in Antwerp<sup>97</sup>. At his return in January of 1587 Pedro de la Peña proudly professes to Ruiz that the city is a safer place and that all lives and

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<sup>91</sup> Martín Pérez de Varrón to Simon Ruiz, Cologne, 21/9/1584, Ibid. 222

<sup>92</sup> Diego Luengas to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 1/8/1584, Ibid. 212

<sup>93</sup> Diego Pardo to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 31/8/1584, Ibid. 215

<sup>94</sup> Harreld, Donald J. *High Germans in the Low Countries: German Merchants and Commerce in Golden Age Antwerp*. Leiden: Brill, 2004. 181

<sup>95</sup> Subacchi, Paola. "Italians in Antwerp in the Second Half of the Sixteenth Century." In *Minorities in Western European Cities (Sixteenth-Twentieth Centuries)*, edited by Hugo Soly and Alfons K.L.Thijs. Bruxelles: Institut Historique Belge De Rome, 1995. Nevertheless many of them quickly returned to Antwerp and took part in the profitable *asientos* of the last two decades of the sixteenth century.

<sup>96</sup> Juan de Cuéllar to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 26/4/1571, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol II*. 68-69

<sup>97</sup> Martín Pérez de Varrón to Simon Ruiz, Cologne, 4/11/1585, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol IV*. 52

belongings are now protected.<sup>98</sup> The Brabantine city was thus again ready to thrive economically under the Spanish rule. According to Geoffrey Parker, after a period of decline Antwerp reestablished old trade routes and colonial goods such as silk, sugar etc. were again flowing through there after 1589.<sup>99</sup> To what extent this should be attributed to Spanish rule is of course another matter.

Every cloud has a silver lining however. The mere presence of troops in Flanders opened up quite a few opportunities. As soon as the *tercios* arrived, the abundance of money in Antwerp boosted trade and the fair was flourishing again.<sup>100</sup> Only a year later new Walloon forces were raised and Cevallos was stunned at the extensive expenses involved. According to him, as long as the war drags on the money will be good and the business profitable. His optimism is amazing if we consider what actually followed those early days of enthusiasm. Even in the years to come though, opportunities did arise every now and then. Even in 1574 when the calamities of war had already killed all hopes of the merchants, Cuéllar did acknowledge that the demands for colourful uniforms rendered cochineal trade, one of his areas of expertise, really profitable.<sup>101</sup>

Marjolein 't Hart, studying the impacts of the Revolt on the economy of the Dutch Republic, argues that the situation was much more complicated than it might seem. As long as Holland was a theatre of war, her economic life, trade included, was undergoing a severe crisis. Merchants were fleeing either to the south or to German cities, the Sea Beggars<sup>102</sup> hindered sea trade and marauding troops showed no respect to private properties. Everything changed after 1576 when Spanish troops departed from Holland however. But this does not mean that every Dutch city profited from the war in total. Quite on the contrary, the centre of economy was shifted from old hubs to new ones. Zeeland, for instance, used to profit from the trans-shipments required for trade in Antwerp but ever since the Brabantine town fell into Spanish hands, this trade declined and the temporary ban imposed in 1598 struck a fatal blow to Zeeland's economy. Trade blockades in the 1590s hindered inland trade and adversely affected cities such as Deventer. All in all it is fair to assume that the coast of the Dutch Republic benefited greatly from the war, but it is hard to say the same about the hinterland.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Pedro de la Peña to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 31/7/1587, *Ibid.* 137

<sup>99</sup> Parker, Geoffrey. *Spain and the Netherlands: 1559-1659 Ten Studies*. London: Collins, 1979. 183

<sup>100</sup> Hernando de Frías Cevallos to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 7/9/1567, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol II*. 40

<sup>101</sup> Juan de Cuéllar to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 16/6/1574, *Ibid.* 111

<sup>102</sup> By this name are known those pirates who were granted letters of operation by William of Orange in 1569. Their actions severely damaged both the actions of the Spanish navy and the seaborne trade.

<sup>103</sup> 't Hart, *The Dutch Wars of Independence*. 172-177

In order to better understand this interplay between the needs of the Spanish army and the economic activity of the merchants of Antwerp, we need to take a closer look on the latter's loans to the Crown, the *asientos*.

## 1.2 Lending money to the Crown

Sustaining a prolonged war was hardly a feasible task for sixteenth century states. The increasing costs could by no means be covered by their unsophisticated fiscal systems and they had to render to money borrowing.<sup>104</sup> Spain funded her wars mainly via two types of loans, *juros* and *asientos*. The former were long term bonds paid off by revenues, and consequently Philip II never defaulted on them. *Asientos* on the other hand were short term loan contracts signed between the King and his merchant-bankers.<sup>105</sup> The *asiento* was signed by both representatives of the king and a team of merchants. The latter had to supply the Spanish paymaster with a fixed amount of money (or on many occasions garments), mostly through their partners in the Spanish Netherlands. (*Asiento de España*) An *asiento* could also be signed between the commander of the Army of Flanders and a team of local merchants. (*Asiento de Flandes*)<sup>106</sup> Since these loans did not come with any guarantee, it comes as no surprise that *asientistas* were ruined on several occasions.<sup>107</sup> Following the general settlement of 1577 for instance, they had to write off between 30% and 58% of their loans.<sup>108</sup> Nevertheless, their interest in signing new *asientos* with Spain continued, despite the fact that the latter saw her credibility severely damaged after a number of bankruptcies, the most notable being those of 1557, 1575 and 1596.<sup>109</sup> After all, a failure of the Crown to repay its loans would trigger a clause according to which the annual interest would rise to 10-12%.<sup>110</sup>

Simon Ruiz himself was patiently looking for an opportunity to enter into negotiations with the king. His first attempt in 1569 was in vain and so was his second one two years later. He finally succeeded in 1575 during the extraordinary events that followed Spain's

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<sup>104</sup> Parrott, David. *The Business of War: Military Enterprise and Military Revolution in Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. 71-72

<sup>105</sup> Drelichman, Mauricio, and Voth, Hans-Joachim. "The Sustainable Debts of Philip II: A Reconstruction of Castile's Fiscal Position, 1566–1596." *The Journal of Economic History* 70, no. 04 (2010). 818-819

<sup>106</sup> Parker, *The Army of Flanders and the Spanish Road*. 146-147

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.* 150-151

<sup>108</sup> Drelichman, Mauricio, and Voth, Hans-Joachim. "Lending to the Borrower from Hell: Debt and Default in the Age of Philip II." *The Economic Journal* 121, no. 557 (2011). 1209

<sup>109</sup> Borreguero Beltrán, Cristina. "De La Erosión a La Extinción De Los Tercios Españoles." In *Guerra Y Sociedad En La Monarquía Hispánica : Política, Estrategia Y Cultura En La Europa Moderna*, edited by Enrique García Hernán and Davide Maffi. Madrid: Fundación MAPFRE : Ediciones Del Laberinto : Consejo Superior De Investigaciones Científicas, CSIC, 2006. 452

<sup>110</sup> Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol I*. 139



bankruptcy.<sup>111</sup> Indeed, ever since the rebels consolidated their dominance in the seas around Zeeland in 1572, Philip found it more difficult to transfer money to the Low Countries and therefore had to cut deals with the local merchants.<sup>112</sup> Of course, those who were first to profit were the affluent Genoese bankers. Their growing influence on the Spanish economy, due to the latter's reliance on them, concerned Philip and the bankruptcy of 1575 turned out to be a great opportunity for him to cut his ties with them. As an alternative, Philip turned to Castilian, Portuguese and Florentine businessmen.<sup>113</sup> Some Spaniards were already lending money to Philip though. From 1567 to 1573, the likes of Frías Cevallos, Jerónimo Pardo, Hernando de Sevilla and of course Diego de Echávarri<sup>114</sup> were eager to assist Alba with substantial loans.<sup>115</sup> In 1573 only, Frías Cevallos, Echávarri and Fiesco jointly lent 400.000 écus whereas Cevallos had already lent another 1.200.000 earlier on. Echávarri himself signed a deal for another 112.531 écus with the court of the Low Countries in July of 1573 and 33.669 one month later with Diego Pardo. Juan de Curiel boasted of a loan that amounted to 1.5 million ducats although Priotti suspects him of concealing the name of his partners.<sup>116</sup> By the time Requesens took over the control of the Spanish army, its need for loans had already increased. Nevertheless, only roughly 26% of these *asientos* were signed in Flanders.<sup>117</sup> A firm of bankers consisting mainly of Juan Ortega de la Torre and Gregorio Ruiz de Urramendi seems to have lent great sums of money to the Crown even before 1575. Spain's bankruptcy led to a disaster for Torre and Urramendi. They shut down their firm and returned to Spain<sup>118</sup> where Torre eventually got back on his feet, taking part in another *asiento* in 1587.<sup>119</sup>

Not everyone could enter into negotiations with the Crown. In general, these deals were sealed between the Spanish authorities on the one side and a consortium of commercial houses on the other. Firms such as those of Juan Curiel de la Torre and Alonso Diaz de

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<sup>111</sup> Villanueva, *El Comercio Internacional*. 481

<sup>112</sup> Priotti, Jean P. "Commerce Et Finance En Flandre Au Xvie Siecle. - Les Activites De Diego De Echávarri, Consul De La Nation De Biscaye." *Handelingen Van Het Genootschap Voor Geschiedenis – Voorheen Annales De La Société D'Emulation* 132 (1995). 91. The bulk of the Spanish diplomatic activity was nonetheless focused on trying to secure a passage through France. See Lapeyre, Henri. *Simon Ruiz Et Les "asientos" De Philippe II*. Paris: 1953.15

<sup>113</sup> Kamen, *Empire*. 294

<sup>114</sup> Echávarri moved to Antwerp from Bilbao in 1541 and stayed there until 1577 when he moved to Bruges. See Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol I*. 231. According to Priotti, he was an affluent merchant, building his "empire" from scratch. See Priotti, *Commerce Et Finance En Flandre Au Xvie Siecle*. 82

<sup>115</sup> Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol I*. 141

<sup>116</sup> Priotti, *Commerce Et Finance En Flandre*. 91-92

<sup>117</sup> Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol I*. 142

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.* 219-220

<sup>119</sup> Lapeyre. *Simon Ruiz Et Les "asientos" De Philippe II*. 46-47.

Aguilar were deep into this game and hence quite exposed.<sup>120</sup> Most of the Spaniards were medium scale merchants however who paled in comparison to the Bonvisis or the Balbanis for example, and could not lend money to Philip. Some of them though, such as Diego de Echávarri and Andrés de la Maza, had the economic capacity to invest in the ongoing war in the hopes that they would profit from it. They quickly realised what a risky business it was.

Unable to fully compensate those who were struck by the bankruptcy of 1575, Requesens offered them half of their money back in the form of letters of exchange.<sup>121</sup> Echávarri found himself protesting to Ruiz in November 1575 about Requesens' untrustworthiness, stressing that everyone there has lost their trust in the Crown. His story is backed by the de Gaúna brothers who also seemed disillusioned. About a month later, Echávarri claimed that since the paymaster is turning a blind eye to their protests, the merchants are considering taking action.<sup>122</sup> Cuéllar joins this chorus since he sees his own interests in danger. Although he had not taken part in any *asientos*, some of his partners have and since they were yet to be compensated, they could not fulfil their obligations towards him. This domino effect ensured that everyone was in a precarious situation as one's exposure might lead to disaster for another. Cuéllar further argues that Requesens had proven to be the unreliable official Echávarri had accused him of being. Nonetheless, most of the Spaniards are quite hesitant to cut ties with Requesens. As long as he paid, (and according to Cuéllar he did not lack the money to do so), he would receive financial support.<sup>123</sup> Others could wait no more. On the same day, the De Gaúnas inform Ruiz that they will no longer fund the Spanish army. The paymaster has yet to show some kind of proof that he will pay them back and there are rumours that Philip himself puts forward his obligations towards them. They conclude that this shortage of money is unprecedented in these lands and many of the payments are carried out in cloth.<sup>124</sup> The whole business is a fiasco.

A few months later Echávarri claims that he is really exposed and there is so much at stake that he is prepared even to travel to Spain to sort things out with the Crown. He begs Ruiz to intervene, something that as we will see was not such an uncommon practice.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol I*. 142

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. 143

<sup>122</sup> Diego de Echávarri to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 29/11/1575 and 12/12/1575, Vazquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol II*. 168-170

<sup>123</sup> Jerónimo Lopez de Gaúna, Nicolás and Lope de Gaúna to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 22/2/1575 and 4/4/1576, and Diego de Echávarri to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 13/3/1576, Ibid. 180-189

<sup>124</sup> Juan de Cuéllar to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 22/2/1575, Ibid. 181-182. Payments in cloth were a frequently applied yet extraordinary measure. See Priotti, *Commerce Et Finance En Flandre Au Xvie Siecle*. 91

<sup>125</sup> Diego de Echávarri to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 13/3/1576, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol II*. 184-185

Echávarri's Odyssey is never-ending. Although in the summer of 1576 he blissfully informs Ruiz that they have reached an agreement with the Crown, two months later we find him mourning his fate, as he and his associates have yet to be compensated and rely on each other's support if they are to meet their business obligations. It is only in the following summer that Ruiz hears from him again, only to find out that Philip still owes the Basque merchant money. As we have already seen, quitting this business was hardly an option and consequently Echávarri, along with de la Maza, signed a new *asiento*. Nevertheless they had given up any hope that the money of the first loan will ever be returned, and simply pray that they might be compensated for the second one.<sup>126</sup>

His partner was in no better shape. An apparently influential merchant, former consul of the nation in Bruges and de facto leader of the merchants in Antwerp<sup>127</sup>, de la Maza was as exposed to Spain's debts as anyone. Being fully aware of the unreliability of his country, he quickly got in contact with the paymaster, Juan Escovedo, who reassured him that although the Crown is behind on its payments, he would not lose his money.<sup>128</sup> Echávarri confided in Ruiz that de la Maza was in a very delicate situation and in desperate need of the money. He repeatedly asked Ruiz to intervene if Escovedo did not pay in time. Echávarri himself was facing the same trouble. Having convinced some friends of his to take part in these *asientos*, he was now in debt to them. The only way to get their money back, Echávarri maintained, was to constantly remind Escovedo of his lord's obligation. Despite the situation, he does not lose trust in the paymaster, who he sees as a man who keeps his promise.<sup>129</sup> Ruiz finally decides to intervene in favour of his partners, although he only succeeds in securing them the money from the second loan. De la Maza receives this news bitterly, insinuating that he was expecting much more from his partner in Medina del Campo.<sup>130</sup> His situation was apparently so insufferable that he keeps on pushing Ruiz to send him proof that the Crown has promised him his money back, intending to use this proof in order to back his claims. He states over and over again the urgency of his request.<sup>131</sup> And while he could see some light at the end of the tunnel since he was expected to receive his payment in 1580, he still blamed Ruiz for the mess he was in.<sup>132</sup> Not only was he suffering from a lack of capital, but it seems that his

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<sup>126</sup> Diego de Echávarri to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 26/7/1576, 5/9/1576, 21/3/1577 and 12/7/1577, *Ibid.* 206-249

<sup>127</sup> Villanueva. *El Comercio Internacional*. 110

<sup>128</sup> Andrés de la Maza to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 13/7/1577, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol II*. 249-250

<sup>129</sup> Diego de Echávarri to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 17/8/1577, *Ibid.* 255-256

<sup>130</sup> Andrés de la Maza to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 13/7/1577 and 27/12/1577, *Ibid.* 279-282.

<sup>131</sup> Andrés de la Maza to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 15/7/1578, *Ibid.* 306

<sup>132</sup> Andrés de la Maza to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 9/1/1580, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol III*. 2

business partnership with Ruiz was also in peril.

As for Simon Ruiz, after 1581 he stopped taking part in *asientos* since foreigners were getting more and more involved in Spanish economy, dominating fields such as the thriving wool trade between Burgos and Northern Europe and the international money market.<sup>133</sup> From that point on, he only offered his services to his trustees, facilitating *asientos* and negotiating with the Crown on their behalf. His Spanish partners in Antwerp seem to have abstained from any deals as well, in large part since most of them had already fled the city. In addition, for the majority of the 1580s the Spanish army had no real need for *Asientos de Flandes*. The war in Portugal was over, and precious metals coming from the Americas were filling Philip's treasury, something that provided the sort of assurances Genoese financiers were asking for.<sup>134</sup> However, as soon as Antwerp was passed on to Farnese, new *asientos* were signed between the Italian governor and local merchants.<sup>135</sup> These new deals were a blessing in disguise. On the one hand, they destabilised the market of Antwerp stripping it out of money and thus triggering new price fluctuations. On the other hand however, they were deemed necessary by people such as Pérez de Varrón. *Asientos* "regulated" the market, although at a first glance this may not appear to be the case. As business opportunities were thin on the ground, loans were the only kind of transaction that could secure profits. In addition they should be seen as a channel for surplus capital that had stagnated for good. Of course, Pérez reminds there was a delicate balance involved. Too many *asientos* and the market suffered from shortages, too few and the market had to deal with an abundance of money.<sup>136</sup> Nevertheless, given the circumstances they consisted of the only profitable choice for merchants, and despite Spain's damaged credibility they were also relatively low-risk options (if we trust Pérez's words). Almost everyone was trying to find a window of opportunity and although Pérez did not seem to be very keen on this idea (because of some non-economic concerns), he nevertheless advises the Balbanis to sign an *asiento*.<sup>137</sup> It was not only the family from Lucca that took part in these loans however. Other Spaniards such as the

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<sup>133</sup> Kamen, *Empire*. 295

<sup>134</sup> Lapeyre, *Simon Ruiz Et Les "asientos" De Philippe*. 43

<sup>135</sup> Martín Pérez de Varrón to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 12/2/1587, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol IV*. 138 Until that time, the Crown could not use the services of the Bourse of Antwerp and had to render to merchants living in France, Italy, Spain or in the regions of Flanders that were still under Spanish control.

<sup>136</sup> Martín Pérez de Varrón to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 20/9/1587, 19/10/1588, 22/11/1588 and 7/1/1589 Ibid. 276-312

<sup>137</sup> Martín Pérez de Varrón to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 1/7/1587 and 30/7/1587, Ibid. 168-174

Camarenas are eager to do business with the Crown.<sup>138</sup> Alonso Camarena appears to have taken part in a number of *asientos* from the 25<sup>th</sup> of October, 1588 to his final one on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November of the following year.<sup>139</sup> A few months later he also found himself ruined, only to stand back up on his own two feet a few years later, and take part in another *asiento* in 1595.<sup>140</sup>

Was money borrowing a profitable business after all? It is really difficult to say for certain. As we have seen, Philip would not hesitate to default on *asientos*. In a letter to Ruiz in 1577, a merchant and agent of Ruiz in Bilbao called Diego de Vitoria states explicitly that having witnessed the results of many *asientos* he considers these loans to be a great risk for the merchants and thus an unwise transaction for them. He quickly changes his mind however, and only three years later he asks Ruiz to include him in any future deals with the king. Priotti argues that these merchants did not simply lend money to the king because they expected to profit from the transaction. Appeasing a monarch could guarantee the survival of their business in times of war, embargoes etc., while also providing them with the king's consent for the export of royal coin, something that demanded a license. This seems to be the issue in the *asiento* signed between Echávarri and de la Maza and king Philip. This deal authorised the exportation of 11.64 million *maravedís* and the loan itself was considered of secondary importance.<sup>141</sup> Many creditors of course also stood to profit from the interest from these loans. Taking into account delays in the payments (which were more than frequent) and hence the interest on the principal, the profit was enormous for those merchants who were eventually paid. For instance, Thomaso Fiesco was owed 60.000 *escudos*, half of which was to be returned to him in the Spring of 1569 and the other half in August of the same year. Eventually on the 12<sup>th</sup> of April 1570 Francisco de Lizalde<sup>142</sup>, the paymaster of Alba's army, paid him the incredible amount of 71.951 *escudos*.<sup>143</sup> In some cases interest rates could be tremendous indeed. In 1581, a loan of 100.000 *écus* from Lope de Arziniega and some of his partners (including Ruiz himself) was lent at an interest rate of 22.2%, more than twice the

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<sup>138</sup> Alonso Camarena to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 8/4/1589, Ibid. 333. For the Camarenas, see also Martínez Ruiz, Enrique, Enrique Giménez, José Antonio Armillas, and Consuelo Maqueda. *La España Moderna*. Madrid, Spain: Ediciones Istmo, 1995. 136

<sup>139</sup> Vázquez de Prada. *Lettres Marchandes Vol I*. 342-346

<sup>140</sup> Ibid. 175

<sup>141</sup> Priotti, Jean-Philippe. *Bilbao et ses Marchands Au XVIe Siècle: Genèse D'une Croissance*. Villeneuve-d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires Du Septentrion, 2004. 277

<sup>142</sup> On Lizalde see among others Rachfahl, Felix. *Le Registre De Franciscus Lixaldius : Trésorier Général De L'armée Espagnole Aux Pays-Bas, De 1567 À 1576*. Bruxelles: Librairie Kiessling Et Cie, 1902. and Lovett, A.M. "Francisco De Lizalde: A Spanish Paymaster in the Netherlands (1567-1577)." *Tijdschrift Voor Geschiedenis*, LXXXIV (1971): 14-23.

<sup>143</sup> Quatrefages, René. *Los Tercios Españoles*. Madrid, Spain: Fundación Universitaria Española, 1979. 214-215

still surprisingly high average of that period.<sup>144</sup> The decade following the recapture of Antwerp was perhaps the most profitable for merchants who took part in these deals. The increased demand for money to fund the campaigns against the rebels and England as well as the Spanish intervention during the French Wars of Religion was such that the merchants could by-and-large dictate the terms of the loans.<sup>145</sup> But it was not only for Spaniards and Italians that loans became such significant transactions. Even local authorities were in need of money in order to protect themselves. Such was the case of Antwerp, which had resorted to borrowing since the mid-sixteenth century. Their target group was the German nation, which moved its focus from trade to financial activities. The events that took place between 1566 and 1577 weakened the city's economy however and Antwerp could not pay off its debts. A new bankruptcy, this time in 1584, sent a message to creditors that the city could no longer satisfy their demands. From that point on all German activity in Antwerp was focused on efforts to collect the money they were due.<sup>146</sup> For them as for the Spanish and Italians, loans were a two-sided coin.

### 1.3 Unsafe waters, treacherous lands

The pre-war thriving trade between Spain and the Low Countries was quickly put to the test after the revolt broke out. The diplomatic episode between Spain and England in 1568 was indicative of what was about to come. Although the two sides reached an agreement England continued impounding Spanish cargoes for the next five years, a practice which culminated in 1571 when a dozen Spanish ships were attacked in the sea between France and the Cantabrian coast.<sup>147</sup> Spanish merchants had not seen the worst of it yet though. Trade routes between Spain and Flanders were insecure and that was deemed unacceptable. As early as 1568 Philip commanded all ships that were to sail to Flanders for commercial purposes to ask for a license. Those who did not were thus not allowed to transport their precious cargo to the Low Countries. Convoys loaded with wool headed for the Flemish ports, hoping that sailing side by side they would be able to better protect themselves. Numerous attempts failed, either due to bad weather or to the successful tactics of privateers.<sup>148</sup> In 1569 Orange went on the offensive and granted letters of operation to the infamous Sea Beggars. And ever since the

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<sup>144</sup> Lapeyre, *Simon Ruiz Et Les "asientos" De Philippe*. 43

<sup>145</sup> Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol I*. 147

<sup>146</sup> Harreld. *High Germans in the Low Countries*. 173-182

<sup>147</sup> Philips and Philips, *Spanish Wool and Dutch Rebels*. 314

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.* 315



capture of the town of Brielle in 1572 the North Sea was under Dutch control as the Sea Beggars effectively blockaded the Flemish ports, a blockade which was only lifted for Spanish vessels during the Twelve Years' Truce (1609-1621).<sup>149</sup>

By the late fourteenth century piracy was already a significant source of income for many Netherlanders. During the last years of Charles V's reign the privateers' fleet was large and bold enough to attack trade vessels repeatedly. They mostly targeted French ships but after the Dutch Revolt broke out they turned against Spaniards. Between 1584 and 1586 privateering was at its peak in the Netherlands; the city of Vlissingen on the banks of the Scheldt could boast of 50 privateering ships. Although there are records of privateers plundering Dutch vessels as well, the bulk of their actions took place against Spanish ships.<sup>150</sup> There were almost no geographical restrictions to their actions; they even tormented Philip's subjects who lived in Rouen.<sup>151</sup> Another field these privateers excelled in, was the kidnapping of wealthy merchants, further increasing Spanish merchants' sense of insecurity.<sup>152</sup> Adding to this perilous environment, the pirates of La Rochelle and Normandy were also operating in the nearby waters, making the transfer of merchandise quite a risky task.<sup>153</sup> In 1585 alone, 120 French and English privateers' ships were operating in the English Channel deterring any efforts to connect Northern Europe and Spain.<sup>154</sup>

It comes as no surprise that merchants did not dare to make any type of transactions. Their sense of uncertainty was fed by their ever-growing fear that war between Spain and England would break out soon and that the sea routes to Flanders would be closed to them.<sup>155</sup> It was in February of 1574 that their worst fears were realised. The capture of Middelburg by the rebels and the confiscation of a large stockpile of wool marked a turning point in the trade of this precious good between Spain and the Low Countries.<sup>156</sup> At this point uncertainty turned into an irrevocable loss of trust. No one really dared to undertake any risks, being paralysed by the sight of privateers in the North Sea.<sup>157</sup> Every kind of cargo was deemed

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<sup>149</sup> Israel, Jonathan I. *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness and Fall, 1477-1806*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995. 403.

<sup>150</sup> Lunsford, Virginia West. *Piracy and Privateering in the Golden Age Netherlands*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. 9-36

<sup>151</sup> Brunelle, Gayle K. "Immigration, Assimilation and Success: Three Families of Spanish Origin in Sixteenth Century Rouen." *Sixteenth Century Journal* 20, no. 2 (1989): 213

<sup>152</sup> Lunsford, *Piracy and Privateering in the Golden Age Netherlands*. 46

<sup>153</sup> Villanueva, *El Comercio Internacional Castellano*. 164-167

<sup>154</sup> Benedict, *Rouen during the Wars of Religion*. 172-173

<sup>155</sup> Hernando de Frías Cevallos to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 14/1/1569, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol II*. 52-53

<sup>156</sup> Philips and Philips, *Spanish Wool and Dutch Rebels*. 313

<sup>157</sup> Juan de Cuéllar to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 8/3/1574, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol II*. 102-103

precious by the latter; not even olives were spared.<sup>158</sup> The damage that was inflicted upon the merchants in the following years is stunning. The privateers of Zeeland alone secured a booty that amassed up to 432.000 florins solely from 1575 to 1577.<sup>159</sup> It is safe to assume that since they mostly targeted merchants from hostile nations, cargoes from Spanish merchants proved to be perhaps the primary source of the privateers' income. The years to come were not any better. After 1580 any king fighting against the rebels put his merchants-subjects at great risk.<sup>160</sup> In practice this further thinned the presence of Spanish vessels in the North Sea and maritime traffic was scarcer than ever before between 1583 and 1584.<sup>161</sup> In the following decade the supply of goods to Flanders could not fulfill the needs of the local merchants. Taking wool trade for instance, only a tenth of the wool that used to be dispatched to Flanders before the war was arriving annually between 1583-1594.<sup>162</sup>

Finding business opportunities was therefore a tremendous task under such unfavourable circumstances. Pérez de Varrón sent a number of letters which state clearly that Antwerp could no longer offer such opportunities and this was in large part due to the insecurity of the waters.<sup>163</sup> Even those who did undertake business found it tough Alonso de la Bárzena<sup>164</sup> points out the severity of the problem of piracy and takes drastic measures to ensure his cargo will reach Laredo safe and sound, chartering a fleet from Hamburg to follow the fleet of Lisbon in order to increase its chances of arriving intact at the Spanish port.<sup>165</sup> As if the action of the Dutch privateers were not enough the English came back into play, blocking the naval route to the Low Countries in the summer of 1589. The timing was fatal, as it occurred exactly when Philip needed to transfer large sums of money to Flanders. That transfer became extremely precarious and the subsequent shortage of money triggered a series of consequences. Farnese's army could not suffer another round of mutinies, and neither could the Italian general see off the joint Dutch and English threat without investing in his army and fleet. The remedy was obvious: *asientos*. In such an uncertain environment however and with the market in deep agony, such loans only added to the problem by suffocating the

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<sup>158</sup> Juan de Cuéllar to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 20/4/1576, Ibid. 189

<sup>159</sup> Lunsford. *Piracy and Privateering in the Golden Age Netherlands*. 17

<sup>160</sup> Gelderblom. *Cities of Commerce*. 146

<sup>161</sup> Villanueva. *El Comercio Internacional Castellano*. 158

<sup>162</sup> Phillips, Carla Rahn. "The Spanish Wool Trade, 1500–1780." *The Journal of Economic History* 42, no. 04 (1982). 780-782

<sup>163</sup> See for instance Martín Pérez de Varrón to Simon Ruiz, Cologne, 4/11/1585, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol IV*. 52

<sup>164</sup> De la Bárzena was a merchant of Cantabrian origin. He was the employee and associate of Luis Alvares Caldeira in 1586.

<sup>165</sup> Alonzo de la Bárzena to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 6/5/1586, Ibid. 79

market even more.<sup>166</sup> As Varrón states in despair, Drake's naval operations drove the final nail into the coffin.<sup>167</sup>

By no means should we assume that the closure of the Scheldt paralysed our merchants. Resourceful as they were, they quickly sought another way to continue business with their partners. The ports of Hamburg and Nantes replaced those of the Low Countries. A standardised practice can be seen in one of Varrón's letters. To satisfy an order from his Spanish partners and for his shipment to arrive safely, he splits it in two; the bags he sends to Cosme Ruiz and Arziniega are dispatched from Nantes whereas the garments he sends to Simon Ruiz are sent via Hamburg.<sup>168</sup> Such strategies did not put an end to the nightmares of the Spaniards however. To begin with, both dispatch and insurance costs were now raised as the distance the merchandise had to cover and the dangers it may have had to face were increased.<sup>169</sup> Pardo is quick to inform Ruiz about a new plague - that of tariffs imposed upon them by the king of France in the autumn of 1586. Up until then merchants had to pay a one-off 10% tax on the value of the goods. This new tax practically doubled the fee and was applied to all textiles going through Normandy. Prado attributes it to a vindictive decision of the French king, who aimed to cut off all routes connecting Spain to the Low Countries and avenge the merchants for snubbing the port of Nantes due to the already enormous economic burden.<sup>170</sup> It was only five months after its implementation that the impact of this tariff really hit them. If we take the merchants for their word, there was only a slight margin for profit and trade was now barely worth the trouble.<sup>171</sup> Indeed, the route through Normandy was the shortest one to Nantes. There was another route through Paris but after 1586 the French capital was hit by another tax and hence avoided as well.<sup>172</sup> The merchants had to find another route and of course they did.<sup>173</sup> But the longer the distance, the more they had to pay and the longer it would take for their merchandise to reach Nantes. Moreover, during the War of the Three Henrys the Huguenots took control of the roads to Nantes.<sup>174</sup> Pérez de Varrón states that should the wars in France go on and the routes remain as treacherous as they were, many merchants would move away from Antwerp. In a desperate move, he ordered the goods he

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<sup>166</sup> Martín Pérez de Varrón to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 6/9/1587, Ibid. 182

<sup>167</sup> Martín Pérez de Varrón to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 1/10/1587, Ibid. 191

<sup>168</sup> Martín Pérez de Varrón to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 12/2/1587, Ibid. 138

<sup>169</sup> Martín Pérez de Varrón to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 3/1/1587, Ibid. 133

<sup>170</sup> Diego Pardo to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 16/10/1586, Ibid. 116

<sup>171</sup> Pedro de la Peña to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 9/3/1587, Ibid. 142. Also Diego Pardo to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 24/3/1587, Ibid. 146

<sup>172</sup> Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol I*. 35

<sup>173</sup> Diego Pardo to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 6/11/1586, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol IV*. 124-125. Also Martín Pérez de Varrón to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 3/1/1587, Ibid. 133

<sup>174</sup> Martín Pérez de Varrón to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 22/11/1588, Ibid. 300-301

was about to send to Cosme Ruiz and Arziniega to be detained in Lille, petrified that they would never make it to Nantes. It took him six months to lose all hope and send them to Rouen in order to be loaded on the first ship set to sail for Spain.<sup>175</sup> Pardo warned Ruiz that unless Farnese found a way for Antwerp to be directly connected to Spain again, trade would never be revived.<sup>176</sup> Hamburg still remained however an option and the merchants seemed to have been advising one another to opt for its port<sup>177</sup>, but as we are about to see the insurance costs rendered the German port the most expensive of their options. A seemingly unrelated event, the French Wars of Religion had a great impact upon the lives of Spanish merchants precisely because of the war in the Low Countries. As the Dutch successfully blockaded Flemish ports, Spaniards were exposed to contingencies that under normal circumstances would be of minor if of any importance to them. Having to travel through France was one of them and thus French problems became their problems too.

But darkness did not fall solely upon the head of Spanish merchants. Dutch embargoes damaged German trade too. The Fuggers for instance were already protesting in the summer of 1584 that the presence and activities of Dutch warships would be the end of commerce in those lands.<sup>178</sup> And while blockades did not particularly bother Dutch merchants, the latter were not immune to the attacks of privateers.<sup>179</sup> Nevertheless the war and particularly the closure of the Scheldt accelerated an already ongoing process, that of the shift of the epicentre of northern trade from Antwerp to Amsterdam. Consequently, in the long-term Dutch merchants stood to gain from Antwerp's downfall even if in the short term they suffered losses as well.<sup>180</sup> It is safe to assume that several groups of merchants were not quite as inconvenienced. Italian merchants who were involved in the trade of luxurious textiles, would send their merchandise to Italy via various overland routes that were less perilous.<sup>181</sup> But when it came to the Spaniards, things were clear. Those who lacked the means or the will to move were doomed.

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<sup>175</sup> Martín Pérez de Varrón to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 7/1/1589, 3/5/1589 and 12/7/1589, Ibid. 311-363.

<sup>176</sup> Martín Pérez de Varrón to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 3/12/1586, Ibid. 130

<sup>177</sup> Pedro de la Peña to Cosme Ruiz and Lope de la Cámara Arziniega, Antwerp, 18/5/1587, Ibid. 154-155

<sup>178</sup> Harreld, *High Germans in the Low Countries*. 181

<sup>179</sup> 't Hart, *The Dutch Wars of Independence*. 144

<sup>180</sup> On the debate on whether the Dutch Revolt and the blockade on Scheldt was the driving force behind this shift see 't Hart, Marjolein. "From the Eighty Years War to the Second World War: New Perspectives on the Economic Effects of War." *Tijdschrift Voor Sociale En Economische Geschiedenis* 11, no. 2 (2014). 265-275

<sup>181</sup> Subacchi. *Italians in Antwerp in the Second Half of the Sixteenth Century*. 74-80

## 1.4 The indirect implications: Mail delivery and insurance fees in wartime

It goes without saying that all entrepreneurs operating in the Low Countries had to ensure that their firms would be able to survive any type of contingency. Consequently, merchants had two additional concerns if they aspired to reduce the risks they were taking. First, it was crucial to have access to credible information which came to them mainly (but not solely) in the form of letters from various parts of Europe. Equally important was insuring the merchandise dispatched to their partners in Spain. Since normality was disrupted however neither of these activities followed any predictable rules or patterns.

Communicating with Ruiz and with their partners was a daily task for the merchants. Both parties had to keep the flow of information going if they were to keep up-to-date with the prices of goods, the security of the routes etc. The significance of commercial correspondence was such, that merchants assigned the supervision of this activity to their consulates which invested a substantial amount of money to make sure that letters would be delivered in time. The consulate of Burgos for instance allocated 5% of its budget to this task.<sup>182</sup> According to Casado Alonso the Castilian consulate in Bruges was renowned for its insistence on punctuality; their contracts with post agencies included bonuses for fast deliveries and penalties for delays.<sup>183</sup> Postal delivery from the Low Countries to Spain was conducted either via the sea route or through France. The former was significantly faster, although the envoys were less regular rendering this option less appealing. In order to cope with the dangers and uncertainties, merchants would send up to three or four copies through different routes. Land routes and sea routes could even be combined. What mattered most was flexibility and adaptability to the ever-changing circumstances. At the peak of the Religious Wars in France, mail was sent by ship from the Bay of Biscay to the Low Countries. When the conflict was spatially restricted to La Rochelle, the post was sent to Nantes and then it followed a land route to Flanders.<sup>184</sup> The optimal route was never the same for more than a few years.

Indeed, even a sophisticated postal system could not overcome the challenges posed by war. The crucial land mass was France and Spanish merchants were heavily reliant on the good will of their neighbour, the French King, and of course on a political order that seemed a distant possibility in the second half of the sixteenth century. Philip's involvement in the Wars

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<sup>182</sup> Casado Alonso. "Los Flujos de Información En Las Redes Comerciales Castellanas De Los Siglos XV Y XVI": 46

<sup>183</sup> Ibid. 46-47

<sup>184</sup> Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol I*. 38-42

of Religion did not make things easier. Since Philip wanted to avoid the rise to power of a Protestant dynasty in France, especially as he was fighting heretics in the nearby Low Countries, he rushed in support of the Catholics. Thus, France was no longer a friendly place for Spanish mailmen. Cevallos mourned the capture and imprisonment of several of them, which meant that the payments for the fair in June would not be carried out. It was at this point that they realised how precarious this route was and Cevallos suggested that all mail be sent via the sea. On several occasions, not only were mailmen captured, but the letters were burnt too and so was the precious information they contained.<sup>185</sup> Alba was already aware of this situation and sent his personal mailmen by sea.<sup>186</sup> His decision is revealing. He opted to dispatch his mail via the slowest route despite the urgent nature of his correspondence with the Court. That shows that crossing France was no longer an option for Spaniards. Some chose to take their chances anyway however. In March of 1569 Cevallos sent four copies, by four different paths to Spain in the hopes that at least one would reach Ruiz. His concern was genuine as he had not received any mail from Ruiz in the previous five months.<sup>187</sup> We can only estimate the extent of the damage to business caused by this lack of communication.

The blockade on the Scheldt a few years later made things even more difficult for the merchants. From that point on they were highly dependent on the internal affairs of France. When the situation escalated, as it did in the late 1580s due to the War of the Three Henrys, they were in severe danger of missing out on precious information. The flow of letters was severely disrupted and for several months in 1587 no letters from Antwerp reached Medina del Campo. Writing in March of that year, Pedro de la Peña informs his partners that some of the mailmen were ambushed by Frenchmen on their way to Antwerp and many letters were lost. Some of those letters contained information regarding business conducted in the previous three months as well as the price rates for the February fair.<sup>188</sup> This was hardly an isolated incident. Even in 1589 Pérez mentions that mail travelling all the way from France to Antwerp is subject to all sorts of threats and no mailman is safe.<sup>189</sup> Pardo's fate was even worse. In the summer of 1586 he was trying to start a business with two gentlemen going by the names of Torrequemada and Medina. Being unable to charter a ship to dispatch his merchandise, he attempts to inform his new partners of this contingency. His pessimism is

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid. 40

<sup>186</sup> Hernando de Frías Cevallos to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 25/10-9/11/1567, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol II*. 42

<sup>187</sup> Hernando de Frías Cevallos to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 15/3/1569, Ibid. 54

<sup>188</sup> Pedro de la Peña to Cosme Ruiz and Lope de la Cámara Arziniega, Antwerp, 18/5/1587, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol IV*. 154

<sup>189</sup> Martín Pérez de Varrón to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 7/1/1589, Ibid. 311-312



evident when he says that news does not travel fast and no one is kept up-to-date. He had sent several couriers, each one following a different road to Spain but he was still waiting for a response from his partners. Without it he could take no action whatsoever.<sup>190</sup> Clearly, as long as they were kept in the dark, they were paralysed.

In his work on the flow of information within Spanish merchant' networks, Casado Alonso shows beyond any doubt the impact war had on the delivery of mail. He demonstrates that military confrontations significantly slowed down the arrival of letters while at the same time increasing the cost (see Figures 1 and 2 respectively).<sup>191</sup> Cities that lied in war theatres watched their postal systems suffocate under the pressure of war. On the one hand, delivery times were such that even the most credible information could be outdated by the time it arrived at its destination, if it ever arrived of course. In cities such as Antwerp or Rouen, a letter could take up to 120 days to be delivered in Spain. The unpredictability and instability of the postal system was also a concern for the merchants. Not knowing what to expect and the mere act of sending a letter being deemed risky created a rather unstable commercial environment. Comparing Antwerp with Genoa can prove quite telling as a merchant residing in Genoa knew what to expect. A letter would be delivered in Spain within 35-45 days. At the same time, the best-case scenario for those in Antwerp was for their mail to arrive in less than 10 days, although the average time for delivery was 33 days, and in the most turbulent of times this time might be quadrupled. In addition, the fees were more than significant for those merchants who opted to operate in war-torn cities. The threats mailmen had to face not only increased delivery time, but also increased the rewards. A businessman had to pay up to 190 *maravedis* for a letter that might never reach its destination.

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<sup>190</sup> Diego Pardo to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 30/7/1586, Ibid. 95-97

<sup>191</sup> Casado Alonso. "Los Flujos de Información En Las Redes Comerciales Castellanas De Los Siglos XV Y XVI": 46

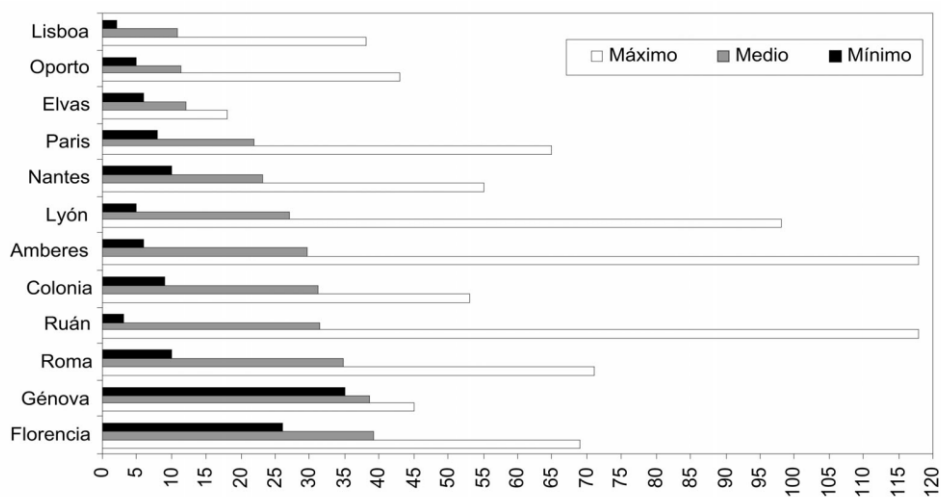


Figure 1: Mail delivery times to Medina del Campo in days.

Source: Casado Alonso, Hilario. "Los Flujos De Información En Las Redes Comerciales Castellanas De Los Siglos XV Y XVI." *Investigaciones De Historia Económica* 4, no. 10 (2008): 55

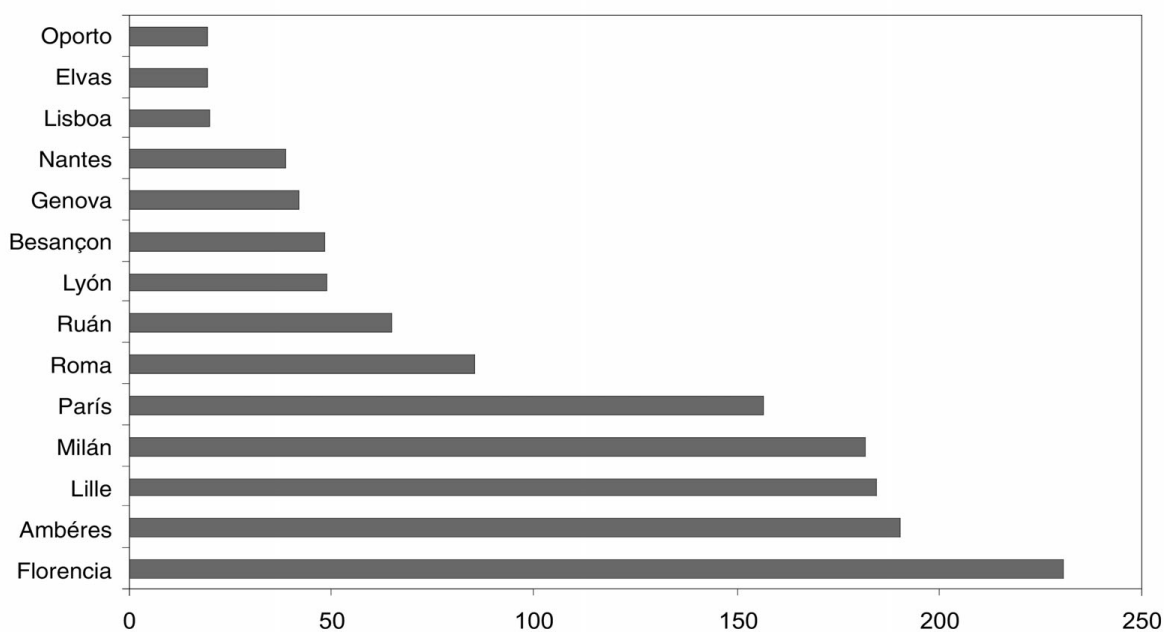


Figure 2: Average cost of sending mail (in maravedís).

Source: Casado Alonso, Hilario. "Los Flujos De Información En Las Redes Comerciales Castellanas De Los Siglos XV Y XVI." *Investigaciones De Historia Económica* 4, no. 10 (2008): 55

Even more compelling is the case of maritime insurance. The innovative insurance techniques that firstly appeared in Italy c.1300 during the so-called Commercial Revolution<sup>192</sup> and imported to the Low Countries in the following decades, proved to be of utmost importance to merchants. And while the Anglo-Spanish incident of 1569 was the first sign, the capture of Middelburg five years later sent a clear message to the Spaniards who could no longer ignore the threats.<sup>193</sup> Insurers were of course aware of these threats, and by 1569 they had already increased their premiums accordingly. To make matters worse, three years later Philip prohibited the insurance of ships against enemy attacks, inflicting a massive blow to Flemish commerce.<sup>194</sup> The Antwerp Insurance Office, established in 1559, could offer little help to the merchants. Although Alba's efforts between 1569 and 1571 to reform maritime insurances proved to be time-resistant<sup>195</sup>, Van Niekerk casts serious doubts if it ever functioned effectively, especially after 1571, and most merchants had to render to the Antwerp Registration Office when it came to conflict resolution.<sup>196</sup> Insurance was, after all, a highly sophisticated tool. The prerequisites to insure cargo were significant, including the listing of the name of the captain, the itinerary and the means of transport. The more information the insurers had, the better as they could estimate whether it would be profitable for them to insure their cargo or not. While fees would of course increase when the cargo had to pass through war torn regions or waters patrolled by pirates, the primary criterion that by-and-large dictated the cost was the distance to be covered. Some tried to minimise the risks by commissioning non-Spanish vessels to transport their goods as these were less subject to piracy.<sup>197</sup>

Nevertheless there was little they could do, as the generally unstable environment pushed insurers to demand higher and higher fees. Before the war broke out, the average fee for a shipment going from the Low Countries to Spain was around 5%. However this rate quickly doubled, and peaked in the 1580s.<sup>198</sup> As shown in Figure 3, insurance fees skyrocketed in the years that followed the capture of Antwerp by Farnese. Even sending cargo from Nantes to Laredo was deemed precarious. In those cases where the vessels had to travel

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<sup>192</sup> De Roover, Florence Edler. "Early Examples of Marine Insurance." *The Journal of Economic History* 5, no. 02 (1945): 173

<sup>193</sup> Gelderblom, *Cities of Commerce*. 194

<sup>194</sup> Philips and Philips, *Spanish Wool and Dutch Rebels*. 330

<sup>195</sup> Janssens, Gustaaf. "The Duke of Alba: Governor of the Netherlands in Times of War." In Maurits Ebben, Margriet Lacy-Bruijn, and Rolof Van Hövell Tot Westerflier, eds. *Alba: General and Servant to the Crown*. Rotterdam: Karwansaray Publishers, 2013. 110

<sup>196</sup> Van Niekerk, J.P. *The Development of the Principles of Insurance Law in the Netherlands from 1500 - 1800*, Vol. I (Cape Town: Juta, 1998). 203-206

<sup>197</sup> Villanueva. *El Comercio Internacional Castellano*. 208-212

<sup>198</sup> Phillips. *Spanish Merchants and the Wool Trade*. 277

across the North Sea, the rates were simply not worth it. Indeed, only a few insurers would risk covering cargo that was more than likely to be looted and as a result the premiums they demanded were barely affordable. Business clearly suffered therefore, as only a few merchants would dispatch their merchandise without any assurances that they would not be in danger of losing it all. Those who did so, could hardly make a profit. Let us not forget that the interests of the merchants were close-knit and losses and debts were contaminating. If one or two merchants had their cargo seized, the other merchants (who in most of the cases were the ones underwriting insurance policies), could usually afford to cover the former's losses. But if the whole community suffered a massive blow, no one was able to compensate them.<sup>199</sup> In order for the nation to survive, it had to act very carefully in the insurance market.

The case of Diego Pardo is particularly telling. Pardo was trying to send merchandise to Spain for a deal he sealed with Ruiz and the two aforementioned businessmen, Torquemada and Medina. In his correspondence, he stresses the extremely high fees due to the risk of piracy, reluctant insurers, and the size of his shipment all of which rendered the chances of being able to sign an insurance policy rather thin. A few weeks later he joyfully declares that he will hire the services of an insurer in Madrid who is significantly cheaper than the ones in Hamburg.<sup>200</sup> The next letter that reaches Ruiz's hands is dated a year later and lets him know that the ships are about to sail from Hamburg. Unable to cut a deal with the insurer in Madrid, he had to accept the fees of insurers in Hamburg. The delay in the dispatch of the merchandise is considerable and Pardo hopes that his clients will cover a part of the cost. Mourning his fate, he begs Ruiz to intervene as if he is not partly compensated, he will be the one suffering the most from this delay, since he had to pay from his own account. Eventually, his clients refuse to compensate him, infuriating Pardo, who puts the blame on Ruiz for bringing the two sides into contact.<sup>201</sup> Not only the deal took more than a year to be completed, but Pardo had to pay from his own purse: not only did he lose time and money, but his relationship with Ruiz had hit the rocks.

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<sup>199</sup> Gelderblom, *Cities of Commerce*. 194

<sup>200</sup> It seems that insurance was a newly-introduced tool in Hamburg, thanks to the merchants who abandoned Antwerp in 1585. Consequently, it abided by the laws and customs of Antwerp and therefore merchants like Pardo were more familiar with it. See Van Niekerk, *The Development of the Principles of Insurance Law in the Netherlands from 1500 - 1800*. 206

<sup>201</sup> Diego Pardo to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 30/7/1586, 1/8/1586, 2/9/1586, 6/11/1586, 3/12/1586, 24/3/1587, 12/6/1587 and 24-27/7/1587, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol IV*. 98-164

<u>Itinerary</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Place of insurance</u>	<u>Type of merchandise</u>	<u>Fee</u>
Lisbon – Flanders	28/1/1573	Lisbon	Jewellery(?)	4,5%
Lisbon – Flanders	28/1/1573	Medina del Campo	Jewellery(?)	6%
Lisbon – Flanders	4/11/1574	Lisbon	Salt	4%
Nantes – Bilbao	25/3/1575	Nantes	Textiles	5,5%
Nantes – Bilbao	25/7/1575	Nantes	Textiles	5%
Lisbon – Flanders	17/4/1576	Burgos	Indigo (natural dye)	8%
Lisbon – Flanders	18/5/1576	Lisbon	Indigo	6%
Calais – Laredo(?)	15/6/1577	Burgos	Linen	10%
Calais – Laredo(?)	26/10/1577	Antwerp	Linen	9%
Calais – Laredo	19/12/1577	Antwerp	Textiles	9%
Zealand – Laredo(?)	22/10/1578	Antwerp	Textiles	6%
Zealand – Laredo(?)	22/10/1578	Antwerp	Textiles	6,5%
Nantes – Bilbao	7/4/1586	Madrid	Various	9%
Hamburg – Laredo	6/5/1586	Antwerp	Various	15,5%
Hamburg – Laredo	3/12/1586	Antwerp	Various	15,25%
Hamburg – Laredo	28/1/1587	Antwerp	Copper	16%
Hamburg – Laredo	9/3/1588	Antwerp	Various	15%

*Figure 3: Insurance fees.*

*Source: El comercio internacional castellano. p.234-235*

## 1.5 Concluding remarks

To sum up the previous discussion, it is fair to conclude that at least when it comes to Spanish merchants, the Dutch Revolt proved to be quite a disaster for business. The optimism of the early days when the needs of the army boosted trade was followed by the crude reality of war. Three main factors are of nodal importance in our case: the massive needs of the army, its operations, and finally the perilous roads. The demands of the army for raw materials, goods and above all money, effectively paralysed many of the merchants' activities. By-and-large the market was abiding by the rules that were set by those very needs. Fluctuation in the flow of money and of prices were the rule rather than the exception. Those who could afford it quickly realised that they had to adjust to the new environment and turn their interest to money-lending. This was also risky however. Spain defaulted frequently and many of the merchants who lent money to the Habsburgs found themselves in a very delicate situation. To make matters worse, even those who refused to or simply could not sign any *asientos* were in great danger due to the domino effect stemming from the bankruptcies of local firms. Henri Lapeyre in his monumental study of the *asientos* signed between the Crown and Ruiz and his partners provides us with a detailed account of those transactions.<sup>202</sup> Nonetheless, his work focuses on the *asientos* themselves and offers room for other students to trace the impact those loans had on other local merchants and uncover the effects of these impacts on their wartime experiences. In any case, the ongoing war did not offer many alternatives. The operations of the Spanish army caused havoc in nearby lands and the resulting uncertainty sent many businessmen away. Sieges, retaliations, sackings and blockades became routine, and they gradually led all entrepreneurs to realise that their future, did not lie in Antwerp or in any other city reeling from the calamities of the war. To make matters worse, the Spanish army was exposed on many fronts and the actions of Dutch and English privateers along with the consequences of the Spanish intervention in the French Wars of Religion cut off Antwerp from the Iberian Peninsula. The waters were controlled by enemy vessels while the travelling by land, and especially in the French countryside, was equally dangerous. No one could guarantee that merchandise would arrive intact at its destination. As soon as the merchants realised this, they resorted to maritime insurance. Nevertheless there was no remedy: the fees insurers demanded were kept in line with the tremendous risks they had to take and pretty soon the premiums tripled. Mail delivery was stalled or hampered and its cost increased. The

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<sup>202</sup> Simon Ruiz Et Les "*asientos*" De Philippe II.

stronger the sense of insecurity, the less risks merchants were willing to take and their business stagnated as a result. Marjolein 't Hart's observation that war was a disaster for the regions caught in the middle is spot on.<sup>203</sup> Citizens of cities such as Amsterdam who monitored the events from a distance prospered while those in war-torn cities such as Antwerp paid the price. One after another, the vast majority of merchant communities left the Brabantine port for good. Does this mean that no one profited from the opportunities created by the war?

The truth is a little more complicated. While even prominent firms such as the Guinigi were not immune to bankruptcies,<sup>204</sup> not every businessman in the Low Countries failed. The aforementioned tale of Thomaso Fiesco stands out as an example of a merchant who managed to secure a massive profit from loans. Geoffrey Parker is right to remind us that some military contractors, bankers and sutlers also benefited from the war.<sup>205</sup> For the group focused on here however, this appears not to be the case however. With a couple of exceptions, their social and economic status was not high enough to allow them to adapt and profit from the needs of the war. Those who could not allocate any funds to the Spanish cause had to sit back and endure the agony. Those who could, lacked the leverage to secure their profits however. Unlike the tycoons that lent money to Philip, our merchants were deemed insignificant. The only solution to their problems was to run away and re-establish their firm in a different place. Not all of them could do this however. Jerónimo de Curiel and his partner Diego Bernuy went bankrupt in 1570. The former had to go back to Spain to settle his affairs only to come back to Antwerp six years later.<sup>206</sup> His case is even more interesting since he was an agent of the Spanish Court.<sup>207</sup> After 1575 there was another massive wave of failures and a large number of businessmen went bankrupt in 1585<sup>208</sup> Pedro de la Peña who so proudly returned to Antwerp in 1587 was drowning in debt only three years later. He embarked upon a series of negotiations in order to pay off his colleagues, which included the Balbanis.<sup>209</sup> Even those who had the means to move away were faced with a limited set of choices. German cities like Cologne were indeed an option, as Pérez de Varrón quickly found out. As we have seen, others went to Rouen, but the disasters of war followed them there. It is

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<sup>203</sup> 't Hart, *The Dutch Wars of Independence*. 172-174

<sup>204</sup> Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol I*. 169

<sup>205</sup> Parker, *Spain and the Netherlands*. 183

<sup>206</sup> Vázquez de Prada. *Lettres Marchandes Vol I*. 218-219

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid*. 164

<sup>208</sup> Stabel, Peter, B. Blondé, and Anke Greve. *International Trade in the Low Countries (14th-16th Centuries): Merchants, Organisation, Infrastructure: Proceedings of the International Conference Ghent-Antwerp, 12th-13th January 1997*. Leuven: Garant, 2000. .85

<sup>209</sup> Vázquez de Prada. *Lettres Marchandes Vol I*. 174

clear that they could not follow the massive wave of immigration to Amsterdam, a clearly hostile city, and consequently many went back to Spain. As Hale argues, we tend to overestimate the opportunities offered by war. Profits were circumstantial and had more to do with the increased need for the products certain merchants traded in than with an economic superstructure created by the revolt. Still, Hale continues, it is precarious to claim that even these merchants profited, as only a thorough search through their personal accounts can reveal whether their new activities were as profitable as those they were involved in during times of peace.<sup>210</sup> If we take our merchants' words at face value, they really had it tough. This misery is reflected in the way they described their everyday reality and the pessimism that painted their views of the future. They clearly lost all confidence in the Crown, and their patience grew thin. The Dutch Revolt turned out to be quite a disaster for them.

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<sup>210</sup> Hale, *War and Society in Renaissance Europe*. 209-232



## 2. The war in Flanders: Enemy, identity, and the vanity of war

*“A Dios con devoción, al rey con lealtad e a la patria con amor.”* – Hernán Pérez del Pulgar.<sup>211</sup>

### 2.1 Forming an image of the enemy

No attempt to paint a picture of the mindset of the Spanish during the Dutch Revolt can ever be complete without a thorough description of the image of the rebels in Spanish eyes. Since the two peoples were in continuous contact due to both the political ties and the economic relations between them, sixteenth century Spaniards quickly formulated an idea of the archetypical Netherlander<sup>212</sup>. This image consisted of contradictory elements. On the one hand we have views such as those of Calvete de Estrella, a scholar in the Habsburg court who accompanied Philip on his visit to the Netherlands in 1548 and four years later wrote about the people living in those lands. His texts about the Netherlands were an ode to these people as he barely mentions any negative characteristics. Quite on the contrary, he believes them to be loyal to the king and among his most religious subjects.<sup>213</sup> Such a view was widespread in Spain prior to the Rebellion<sup>214</sup> which explains the shock and the fury of the Spanish when the news of the upheaval reached them. Nevertheless, Calvete's descriptions had a propagandistic purpose. Indeed, he was trying to flatter the Netherlanders and demonstrate the magnificence of his king; after all, his book was first published in Antwerp. Calvete was an exception to the rule however as many Spanish scholars thought differently of their northern trade partners. Questioning their definition of morality (which was overly-flexible for the pious Spanish) and considering them greedy and arrogant, they believed that all they cared about was Spanish gold and consequently that the Spanish were in fact the Netherlanders' victims.<sup>215</sup> Vicente Álvarez, a Portuguese household officer of Philip II, takes a middle-ground approach. He admits that while they are indeed peaceful, honest, cultivated and industrious, they are not the

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<sup>211</sup> “To God with devotion, to the King with loyalty and to the fatherland with love” in Rodríguez-Salgado, M. J. “Christians, Civilised and Spanish: Multiple Identities in Sixteenth-Century Spain.” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 8 (1998): 238

<sup>212</sup> The term “Netherlander” will be used to denominate the citizens of the Low Countries in general.

<sup>213</sup> Rodríguez Pérez, *The Dutch Revolt*. 39-45

<sup>214</sup> Rodríguez Pérez, Yolanda. “The Pelican and Its Ungrateful Children: The Construction and Evolution of the Image of Dutch Rebelliousness in Golden Age Spain.” *The Journal of Early Modern History*, 2007, 288-89.

<sup>215</sup> Rodríguez Pérez, *The Dutch Revolt*. 34-38

best Christians the Pope could boast of; six out of ten are “bad ones”, as he claims.<sup>216</sup>

This contradictory picture became much clearer from the very first day of the rebellion. The religious fury of the iconoclastic days made the Spanish question the true motives of the rebels. Unexpectedly it was Calvete who rejected Álvarez’s aforementioned notion of peaceful Netherlanders. He drew inspiration from classic authors such as Tacitus and Caesar calling his enemies wild, fierce, and blood-thirsty rebels, in line with their Batavian ancestry.<sup>217</sup> Diego Pardo, writing to Simon Ruiz on the 17<sup>th</sup> of August 1566 seems genuinely worried and quite suspicious at the sight of nearly twenty thousand Calvinists attending sermons while bearing arms.<sup>218</sup> While he reassures Ruiz that despite the polemic character of the sermons, Philip’s subjects are still loyal to him, only a week later he explodes as the news of the desecration of churches reaches him. He insists that those who were behind these unholy actions were in fact heretics and that the confrontation is based on religious grounds. Those scheming people, Pardo says, made generous promises to the masses and allowed everyone to do whatever they pleased, tricking them into joining the iconoclastic campaign.<sup>219</sup>

It therefore comes as no surprise that many chroniclers of the rebellion depicted Netherlanders as very naive, deceitful,<sup>220</sup> credulous and easily manipulated people that were lured by their leaders into forsaking Philip and rebelling against his rightful kingship. Being so simple-minded and ignorant, they allowed themselves to be misled.<sup>221</sup> Of course contemporary scholars have every reason to doubt these accusations, as all evidence points to a cold-blooded, rationalistic choice on behalf of the rebels. Wells argues that both the noblemen and the Estates quickly realised they were no longer in need of the central government and hence of the Habsburg monarchy. All the latter ever did was ask for new loans without compensating the Netherlanders for previous ones, while at the same time stripping them of their privileges.<sup>222</sup> But when it comes to Pardo and the chroniclers, it is clear that their anger and disappointment coloured their views. They felt betrayed by the rebels, and saw them as ungrateful people who did not appreciate Philip’s clemency and sincere love and

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid, 48

<sup>217</sup> Ibid. 109-110

<sup>218</sup> Diego Pardo to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 17/8/1566, Vázquez De Prada, Valentin. *Lettres Marchandes D’Anvers. Vol. II. Paris: 1960.* 32

<sup>219</sup> Diego Pardo to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 24/9/1566, Ibid. 32-33

<sup>220</sup> García Dorao, María Teresa, *Correspondencia internacional de la familia Quintanadueñas: 1580-1635* (Phd thesis, Universidad de Granada, 1962). 329

<sup>221</sup> Rodríguez Pérez, *The Dutch Revolt through Spanish Eyes.* 70-72

<sup>222</sup> Wells, Guy Edward, *Antwerp and the Government of Philip II: 1555-1567* (Phd thesis, Cornell University 1982). 547-548

interest for his subjects.<sup>223</sup> Cornejo, one of the most prolific chroniclers of the war, goes as far as to depict Philip as a paternalistic, almost divine figure that takes good care of his subjects. He insists that the king is eager to welcome back his prodigal sons, when they realise they have been wrong in defying his rule.<sup>224</sup>

But are the Netherlanders really willing to go back to the previous status quo? It appears not, since their actions became bolder and bolder as the years went by. Cevallos writing on July 7<sup>th</sup> 1568 seems quite furious with the rebels' arrogance and describes them as cowardly, shameless, poor and desperate people, so perverse that they aspire to live without obedience to any law or any king. He does not consider them a worthy enemy as they are really poor and ill-disciplined soldiers with little resilience or courage. Indeed, as he informs us, the guard of Bergen went outside the city walls to engage in a skirmish, but as soon as the Spanish army entered the city their defense collapsed. God should make them flee, crash and burn, as this is precisely what they deserve, concludes Cevallos.<sup>225</sup> And how could it be any different? The mere sight of the experienced *tercios* is enough to cause mutinies and to make them run away according to Cevallos. It is only natural to wonder how vain they must be to believe that they could win the war.<sup>226</sup> Cevallos' comments are quite interesting if we take into consideration how his enemies are presented in the war chronicles, where they are accused again and again for their arrogance and their unbelievably stubborn idea that they can indeed beat the Spanish army. Netherlanders do not seem to share these views. Instead, they are bragging and boasting of their military potency, claiming that the *tercios* are no match for their army.<sup>227</sup> Cevallos would laugh off at their over-confidence if he was aware of their sayings.<sup>228</sup> It is doubtful that we could say the same about Juan de Cuéllar. He was the first to point out the naval superiority of the rebels that made it difficult for Requesens to capture Zierikzee.<sup>229</sup> From this point onwards, national pride and arrogance cede their place to pragmatism and more composed analyses of the strengths of the enemies began reaching Ruiz's ears.

The change in the opinions Spanish merchants held about the Netherlanders who took

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<sup>223</sup> Rodríguez Pérez, *The Dutch Revolt through Spanish Eyes*. 74

<sup>224</sup> Rodríguez Pérez, *The Pelican and its Ungrateful Children*. 287

<sup>225</sup> Hernando de Frías Cevallos to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 7/7/1568, Vázquez De Prada, *Lettres Vol II*. 46

<sup>226</sup> Hernando de Frías Cevallos to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 2/10/1568, *Ibid.* 51-52

<sup>227</sup> Rodríguez Pérez, *The Dutch Revolt through Spanish Eyes*. 72-74

<sup>228</sup> In a quite unexpected conclusion, since we dismisses the claims of his fellow Iberian chroniclers, Antonio Carnero, a Portuguese chronicler who was writing for a Spanish audience did not believe that the Dutch were either arrogant or overly ambitious! He agreed that they are greedy and deceitful however. See García Dorao, *Correspondencia internacional de la familia Quintanadueñas*. 323-329

<sup>229</sup> Juan de Cuéllar to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 20/4/1576, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Vol II*. 189-190

part in the rebellion is remarkable. It was only a few years prior to the war that many of their compatriots were praising the industrious and peaceful nature of the citizens of the Low Countries. This was no longer the case once the rebellion began as Cevallos failed to find anything positive to say about them -and he was not alone. Cuéllar, commenting on the negotiations between the rebels and Spain during the last days of 1574, calls the former shameless and untrustworthy and thinks of their demands as ridiculous.<sup>230</sup> This notion of untrustworthy rebels was shared among the merchants who were apparently shocked by the actions of the Netherlanders. Jeronimo de Curiel, a man who took a great risk by staying in Antwerp and who was facing great danger as he wrote on September of 1576 that he had no love or sympathy for his enemies. Brussels' authorities, now hostile to the Spanish cause,<sup>231</sup> had imprisoned several of his compatriots which he deemed an act of treason. This transgression was not circumstantial; quite the opposite. According to Curiel, although the rebels' needs were served under Philip's governance, they were biding their time until they could stab him in the back despite his clement and attentive governance. He argued that if they took off the mask the whole world would see their ungrateful and rebellious nature.<sup>232</sup> That very idea of a rebellious nature is omnipresent in the writings of many war chroniclers as well. Luis Valle de la Cerda in his chronicles entitled "*Avisos en materia de Estado y Guerra para oprimir rebeliones o hacer paces con enemigos armados, o tratar con súbditos rebeldes*" attributed the revolt to an overly ambitious, almost arrogant need of the Dutch people to defy Philip's right to rule them. He went as far as calling them usurpers. For Cornejo, the rebelliousness of these people was more a natural tendency rather than a reaction to Philip's modest governance. He argued that this arrogance will be their nemesis, as they clearly overestimated their powers and God who punishes conceit would most certainly punish them too.<sup>233</sup>

Of course the chroniclers were not expressing their minds freely. Their works were to be used for propagandistic purposes in order to justify the war on the one hand and back Philip on the other. Nevertheless the inclemency in the words of the merchants and the chroniclers did not just fall from the sky; it was rather a common pattern among sixteenth century Spaniards. The soldiers of the *tercios*, most of whom were of course of Spanish origin, had a very poor opinion of the Netherlanders. They were not able to differentiate between

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<sup>230</sup> Juan de Cuéllar to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 25/11/1574, Ibid. 128-130

<sup>231</sup> Let us not forget that on the 4<sup>th</sup> of September of the same year, the Council of State was arrested in Brussels.

<sup>232</sup> Jerónimo de Curiel to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 8/9/1576, Ibid. 216

<sup>233</sup> Cited in Rodríguez Pérez, *The Pelican and its Ungrateful Children*. 290-291

loyalists and rebels and they called them all, “Lutherans and beggars”.<sup>234</sup> As for Alba himself, he was hardly any different. He felt no pity for the poor devils that were caught in the middle of this fight as he deployed the infamous scorched-earth policy. As Hale points out, contrary to popular belief, the aforementioned policy was a rather unusual measure that was used by the Spaniards predominantly against the Moors of Granada. If it was reserved for the enemies of the faith, then it makes perfect sense that Alba justified this policy by explaining to Philip that he was only using it because he had to deal with heretics.<sup>235</sup> Interestingly enough a man who was more adept to speak about heresy than Alba, an Augustinian monk called Lorenzo de Villavicencio seemed to have had a more humane approach, advising his king to adopt a lenient tactic when dealing with rebels. For Villavicencio, believing that locals are “beasts and drunks” instead of “human beings” is misleading, and treating them in a harsh way will only unite them against their common enemy, Spain.<sup>236</sup> Benito Arias Montano, a polyglot cleric, advised Philip to show some leniency as it was evident that the rebels did indeed have a case with so many of them accusing Spain of repression. As he argued, they were fighting a fair war. Medinaceli’s council<sup>237</sup> seconded Montano’s suggestions, if only for more pragmatic reasons. They believed that concessions to rebels were the only means to stop this war.<sup>238</sup>

Overall the Spanish image of the rebels might seem a little bit harsh if we take into consideration the fact that they believed that the populace was being manipulated. Nevertheless they seem rather reserved in comparison to what they say about the nobility. Indeed, the chroniclers seemed to believe that one of the primary reasons why the Netherlanders revolted was precisely the greed and ambition of these master manipulators, their noblemen. All the chronicles portray the latter as indebted and unreliable, and believe they are to take all the blame for the mess they caused.<sup>239</sup> William of Orange is the main target of their attacks. This comes as no surprise. Not only was he the leader of the rebels, but he also stood for everything the Spanish hated: he was a traitor both to his master and to his faith since he was born and raised a Catholic. In all the chronicles Orange is an unreliable, insincere manipulator who united his people against Philip by spreading lies, such as the allegation that the Holy Inquisition would be introduced to the Netherlands. Trillo, in his “*Historia de la rebellion de guerras de Flandes*” accuses him of violent acts against other

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<sup>234</sup> Pollmann, Judith. *Catholic Identity and the Revolt of the Netherlands, 1520-1635*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. 88-89

<sup>235</sup> Hale. *War and Society in Renaissance Europe*. 184-185

<sup>236</sup> Kamen, Henry. *The Duke of Alba*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004. 86

<sup>237</sup> The 4<sup>th</sup> duke of Medinaceli was appointed as governor of the Low Countries in 1572.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid. 128-130

<sup>239</sup> Rodríguez Pérez, *The Dutch Revolt through Spanish Eyes*. 75-77

people's belongings, which Orange committed due to his supposedly greedy nature. According to Trillo, the leader of the rebels was pursuing his own interests and his ultimate goal was to establish some sort of tyrannical governance. Orange was as much *persona non grata* as the Duke of Alba was for the Dutch.<sup>240</sup> Farnese is no less magnanimous, in an edict of outlawry which he issued in 1580. In that document he goes as far as to call Orange "a hypocrite...a plague on Christendom...an enemy of the human race".<sup>241</sup> No wonder Cornejo dedicates himself to writing a response to Orange's "Apology", which resulted in an equally propagandistic book called "Antiapología". Cornejo argues Orange did not really embody the Dutch passion for liberty but instead deceiving and exploiting his people, presenting the Spaniards as the devil in order to lure the locals away from their duty to serve their king. He embodies the most heinous characteristics one can name, those of hypocrisy, lies, deceit, tyranny etc. He is the one to be held responsible for the unrest, for the poverty he brought upon these lands, for the blood that was shed, for Philip's harsh response.<sup>242</sup>

Orange was also held in low regard by the Spanish merchants. Cevallos was shocked by the arrest of all of the noblemen who assisted the rebels, and speaks highly of some of them. Nevertheless, he does not fail to mention that Orange had fled to Germany to avoid detention. This "furtive, sly act"<sup>243</sup> committed by a nobleman is a paradox of its own. How can Cevallos respect Orange when he abandons his people only to save himself? He simply cannot. He does not even believe he is a decent leader, as he states in one of his letters. When Cevallos received news claiming that Orange had passed away he genuinely hoped that the rumour was true - not because he was capable of leading his people to victory, as Cevallos quickly underlines, but because his death would have a devastating impact on the morale of his people, leading them to surrender.<sup>244</sup> They really trusted him with their lives, and since they are so deceitful and sly according to Cevallos, Orange was the kind of leader they deserved.

It is worth noting that the Spanish had a hostile approach towards all noblemen and the Catholics among them are not spared this hostility. Indeed, the Counts of Egmont and Horne, close associates to both Orange and Alba, were criticised for their role in the wave of iconoclasm. The tragic execution of these men moved a few Spanish scholars. Some chroniclers such as Trillo and Del Río argue that their decapitation was a fair punishment, for

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<sup>240</sup> Ibid. 78-81

<sup>241</sup> Rodríguez Pérez, *The Pelican and its Ungrateful Children*. 286

<sup>242</sup> Ibid. 293-295

<sup>243</sup> Hernando de Frías Cevallos to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 11/9/1568, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Vol II*. 40-41

<sup>244</sup> Hernando de Frías Cevallos to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 24/11/1569, Ibid. 58



they did nothing to prevent the rebellion and quite on the contrary, they encouraged it. Nevertheless, it seems that most were rather equivocal at the announcement of their punishment. Cornejo and Ulloa argue that they should be seen more as an example of noblemen who made a terrible mistake and had to pay for it because Philip had to set an example.<sup>245</sup> All the pejorative attributes are gone when it comes to those two pious Catholics, despite the fact that they had allowed the construction of Protestant temples.<sup>246</sup>

If war chroniclers had to be relatively harsh with Egmont and Horne for political purposes, merchants such as Cevallos who were considerably more distant from military operations, approached this topic from a different angle. For Cevallos, these counts had nothing to do with the heinous heretics. They made a mistake and had to be punished, but they were fully aware that their fate was justified and they died an honourable death. Even at the scaffold they were true gentlemen, as one would expect from two noblemen.<sup>247</sup> After all they were deeply loved and respected by everyone and deservedly so. Cevallos finally confesses that it was a shame that Egmont was arrested.<sup>248</sup> Other civilians were even more merciful. Egmont for instance was held in such a high regard by the Spanish, that one of them visited his wife only to warn her that her husband was a wanted man and should flee the country as soon as possible.<sup>249</sup> Here yet again, the importance of religion as a criterion of differentiation between those who merely committed a mistake and those who are rebellious by nature is evident.

Of course the main point of divergence had to do with whether the citizens of the Low Countries pledged loyalty to Philip or sided with the rebels. By all means, Spanish chroniclers tried to stress that not all Netherlanders fell into the aforementioned category, that of traitors. While Cornejo seems to have lost his temper when speaking about the rebellious nature that prevails over their logic, all other scholars are fully aware that they should not be so harsh with their allies, and they reject Cornejo's essentialist notions. After all, their support is very much needed and appreciated. Hence, we have on the one hand the "lost heretics and rebels" and on the other the loyal allies. The latter even continued to be described with all the positive characteristics that were attributed to all Netherlanders before 1566.<sup>250</sup> It is clear that the chroniclers were doing their best to appease the loyalists, and therefore it is unwise to trust

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<sup>245</sup> Rodríguez Pérez, *The Dutch Revolt through Spanish Eyes*. 76

<sup>246</sup> Pollmann. *Catholic Identity and the Revolt of the Netherlands*. 81

<sup>247</sup> Hernando de Frías Cevallos to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 18-22/6/1568, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol II*. 44

<sup>248</sup> Hernando de Frías Cevallos to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 11/9/1567 Ibid. 40-41

<sup>249</sup> Kamen. *The Duke of Alba*. 83

<sup>250</sup> Rodríguez Pérez, *The Dutch Revolt through Spanish Eyes*. 69-70

them completely if we are to find out whether the Spanish indeed spared the loyal Netherlanders from the treatment doled out to their rebellious compatriots.

Where did the Spanish merchants stand in this discussion? Unfortunately they have nothing to say about those who decided to side with Philip. All their references to the local population are limited to those who took up arms against their king. While it might be tempting to assume that the misery this rebellion brought upon their everyday lives and businesses led them to group the Netherlanders into a single type, this does not seem to be the case. Indeed, every single one of the merchants refers to their enemies as “*herejes*”, “*rebeldes*” or simply “*enemigos*”. They clearly differentiate between loyal and rebellious Netherlanders, and in fact refer to this war as a civil war more than once, rather than a war between two separate entities, two different peoples.<sup>251</sup> Why this lack of interest in the loyalists then? One possible explanation might have to do with the fact that these people were the norm; they were not doing anything extraordinary; they obeyed their master and worshipped God as the Spanish did. But there is more than that. The very nature of this correspondence made it improbable that the merchants would express their opinions about their law-abiding neighbours. The merchants were sending these letters to Ruiz to inform him about anything that had to do with their common economic interests. The rebels definitely fit into this picture, as the war had a profound impact on trade. Why would Ruiz want to know about the peaceful populace of the Low Countries? The answer is simple: he would not.

The aforementioned stereotypes were dominant in the mindset of the Spanish people, even among those who lived several thousands of miles away. During the Twelve Years’ Truce, several theatrical plays were dedicated to the Dutch Revolt. Since theatre was such so popular in sixteenth-century Spain,<sup>252</sup> it is fair to assume that these plays largely shaped the views Spanish people had of the loathsome Nordic rebels. Yolanda Rodríguez Pérez makes a very interesting point when tracing how these stereotypes were transmitted to the Iberian Peninsula. She argues that while in the Low Countries writers put more emphasis on the religious aspect of the conflict, their compatriots back in the fatherland deemed the revolt to be a political act. For them, Netherlanders were primarily “rebels”.<sup>253</sup>

The case of the merchants is much more complicated and even more interesting. In their first letters, the term “heretics” is omnipresent. They paint a picture of a war between the

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<sup>251</sup> See for instance Cuéllar’s outburst: “...hartas guerras çiviles...” in Juan de Cuéllar to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 24/5/1572, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol II*. 84 or Cevallos’s letter in Hernando de Frías Cevallos to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 3/7/1574, *Ibid.* 113

<sup>252</sup> Rodríguez Pérez, *The Dutch Revolt*. 15

<sup>253</sup> Rodríguez Pérez, *The Pelican*. 299



keepers of the true faith and those trying to sabotage the unity of Christendom. As the years go by however, in most of their letters they refer to their opponents as “rebels” or “enemies”. It is quite probable that during the first years of the war when the memories of the Iconoclasm were still vivid in the minds of locals, the merchants perceived the rebels as a bunch of hardcore Calvinists who were merely defying the Pontiff and the *Rex Catholicissimus*. Later on they realise that the lines were blurry and that their enemies were not necessarily following any of the Protestant doctrines. Since many Catholics had joined their cause and since their demands were predominantly political, the rebels could no longer be seen as mere heretics.

## 2.2 The role of religion

Whether religion was the driving force behind the actions of the rebels or not<sup>254</sup>, there are a few scholars who doubt the impact religion had on the minds of sixteenth century people. One might suggest that Spanish merchants had to appear pious in their letters, as they had to paint a picture of themselves as proper Spanish businessmen, but there was definitely more to it than that. Fernando Frías Cevallos for instance was a devout Catholic. He spent an incredible amount of money just to buy a hotel in Antwerp that he allocated to the Jesuits in order for them to establish their Company of Jesus in the Brabantine city.<sup>255</sup> Jeronimo de Curiel was another fine example. He was charged with the compilation of a list of all the merchants who operated in Antwerp and had embraced Protestantism.<sup>256</sup> Apparently he lived up to Philip’s expectations. Not only did he inform the latter of the names of those merchants and of their networks which spanned all across Europe (Spain included), but he also advised him to impose financial penalties on them. His zeal was tremendous; even the friends of heretics were deemed suspicious and everyone who denounced Catholicism was accused of funding the rebels.<sup>257</sup> While Cevallos and Curiel were just two of the most telling examples Van Der Essen argues that merchants are as much concerned about their spiritual status as about their material one. They built networks of support based on their common faith and funded the

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<sup>254</sup> All of the literature on the causes of the Dutch Revolt cannot be listed here. One of the most comprehensive articles however is Andrew Pettegree’s *The Religion and the Revolt*. In *The Origins and Development of the Dutch Revolt*, edited by Graham Darby, 67-84. London: Routledge, 2001.

<sup>255</sup> Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol I*. 216-217

<sup>256</sup> Van Der Essen. "Épisodes De L’histoire Religieuse Et Commercial D’Anvers Dans La Seconde Moitié Du XVIe Siècle. 340

<sup>257</sup> Particularly interesting is the fact that de Curiel finds it less scandalous that some of these merchants were of Spanish origin. See *ibid.* 346-362

armies who defended the true doctrine.<sup>258</sup> They even had some Jesuit and other Catholic fathers preaching exclusively for them and the Italian nation of the city.<sup>259</sup> Therefore, it was only natural for them to have been devastated at the actions of the angry Protestant lot during the turbulent days of iconoclasm. Writing about the Catholic population of Ghent, Judith Pollmann gives a precious description of their reactions following the heretics' wrath. According to her, they could hardly process the disaster that had fallen upon their faith. With their churches burnt, desecrated and plundered by the furious Protestant lot, they wandered in the streets at a complete loss for words. Terrified and shocked, they wondered why there were no divine signs warning about this disaster.<sup>260</sup>

Cevallos himself was equally stunned. Since the very first days of the rebellion, he had been certain that they were dealing with fearsome heretics. Writing in December of 1566, he tells Ruiz how they preached their beliefs, speaking to very large audiences despite the fact that they might even preach against each other. They had reportedly vandalized and robbed 42 churches, and the total cost to the Church of their distractive activities reached up to 250.000 ducats. It was very hard for Cevallos to believe that a true Christian would turn himself against the houses of the Lord. The fear they inspired was such that even the Spanish army could not intervene as no one could guarantee that the blood-thirsty heretics would not exact revenge on the poor, innocent Catholic citizens.<sup>261</sup> Of course such fears did not stop Alba from setting up the infamous Council of Troubles to persecute the heretics. After all, for Alba and many of the scholars around him, this war was a religious campaign, launched in the name of the true faith. Alba confiscated more books and executed more people than the notorious Spanish Inquisition did<sup>262</sup>; after all as he wrote to Philip:

*"As for religion, Your Majesty can be sure that it is entirely uprooted and that it needs to be planted again, not even in England was it so ruined."*<sup>263</sup>

There is little doubt that Alba was a loyal soldier of the cross. Pope Pius V held Alba and his actions in the name of Christendom so high in regard, that in 1569 he dispatched a delegation in the Low Countries to present to him two consecrated items: a hat and a sword.<sup>264</sup> Baltasar

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid. 322-323

<sup>259</sup> Marnef, *Antwerp in the Age of Reformation*. 51

<sup>260</sup> Pollmann. *Catholic Identity and the Revolt of the Netherlands*. 16

<sup>261</sup> Hernando de Frías Cevallos to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 1-21/12/1566, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol I*. 33-35

<sup>262</sup> Kamen. *The Duke of Alba*. 92-93

<sup>263</sup> Cited in Kamen. *The Duke of Alba*. 83

<sup>264</sup> Ebben, Maurits. "The Grand Duke of Alba (1507-82). Admiration, Condemnation, and Fascination: The Road to New Insights." In Maurits Ebben, Margriet Lacy-Bruijn, and Rolof Van Hövell Tot Westerfliet, eds. *Alba: General and Servant to the Crown*. Rotterdam: Karwansaray Publishers, 2013. 8

de Vargas, one of Alba's followers seconded the views of the Spanish general. For Spaniards, this expedition was a campaign against heresy and more specifically, against the people who had embraced Calvinism.<sup>265</sup>

There were a few moderate voices of course. Although most Spanish, unlike their Netherlanders brothers in faith, agreed that there was no room for spiritual confrontations and that education was the way to overcome heretic preaching<sup>266</sup>, others such as Francés de Álava, a former Basque ambassador and trustee of Philip II truly believed that Catholics could co-exist with people of different dogmas and faiths, even with Muslims if they had to.

Nevertheless Alba begged to differ, warning that those heinous Protestants posed a greater threat to Christendom than the Turks.<sup>267</sup> Trying to convince Philip to allocate more funds for the defense of the Low Countries, he wrote to him:

*"I beat my head against the wall when I hear them talk of the cost here! It is not the Turks who are troubling Christendom but the heretics, and these are already within our gates."*<sup>268</sup>

The idea of Protestants falling under the same category as Muslims did not wear off with time. Martín Pérez de Varrón, an outspoken merchant writing twenty years later than Cevallos, accuses the rebels of siding not only with heinous heretics such as the English and Henry of Navarre, but also with Turks and Moors.<sup>269</sup> For him this was not a simple political decision since the motives for this act had to do with the rebels' profound hatred of Catholicism and ultimately, of Christianity. Indeed, every time the rebels launched a dangerous campaign to strike a blow in Spanish hopes of suppressing the rebellion, the merchants felt that the very survival of Christendom was at stake. The news that Orange was approaching with a new army, composed largely of German troops reaches Cevallos in April of 1569. In his letters, he prays to God to protect his holy Church and to punish the heretics who dared to set their eyes on Antwerp.<sup>270</sup> Even Juan de Cuéllar, generally moderate and distant in his accounts of the rebellion, bursts out in anger when he speaks about his enemies and "*su maldita religión*".<sup>271</sup> The fall of Middelburg was a disaster for Spain, both strategically and economically, but Cuéllar claims that it was a blow for Christianity as well. The priests, monks and friars of the city were petrified that the rebels would desecrate and

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid. 79

<sup>266</sup> Pollmann. *Catholic Identity*. 46

<sup>267</sup> Kamen. *The Duke of Alba*. 120

<sup>268</sup> Cited in Kamen, *Empire*. 188

<sup>269</sup> Martín Pérez de Varrón to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 1/7/1587, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol IV*. 168

<sup>270</sup> Hernando de Frías Cevallos to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 5/4/1569, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol II*. 55

<sup>271</sup> "Their damned religion" in Juan de Cuéllar to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 27/11/1575, Ibid. 167

plunder the churches, as they had already done on several occasions before that day. It was a day to forget for Cuéllar, as the whole of Christendom was in mourning, except for England and France, who had on so many occasions helped the rebels.<sup>272</sup> In 1574, even the Catholic French are indicted by Cuéllar. His message is clear: those who side with the heretics are to be considered heretics as well. There was no doubt for the merchants; the war Spain was fighting was a Holy War and God would crown it victorious, for a victory for Spain is a victory for the true faith.<sup>273</sup> Even when the soldiers of God had it tough, he would intervene precisely as he did in the Siege of Zierikzee when supernatural phenomena decided the fate of the battle. Cornejo and Mendoza described comets flying up in the sky while Trillo saw clouds fighting and light prevailing over darkness, equating it to Christianity prevailing over heresy.<sup>274</sup> The allegory here is compelling: Spain was fighting against the forces of darkness.

One could argue that the reasons behind this hatred are purely political. The truth however, is that the merchants were undoubtedly religious, and religion played an important role in their lives, influencing their everyday decisions. Pérez de Varrón left Antwerp for Cologne, only to come back a few years later. Although his business was struggling in the Low Countries due to the blockade of the Scheldt, he states that a very important reason for his reallocation to Cologne was the fact that the German city was Catholic.<sup>275</sup> No wonder he returned to Antwerp as soon as the city was once again under Spanish control. After all, as Pedro de la Peña boasts, from that point on Antwerp went to once again serving God's true will.<sup>276</sup>

Still, the merchants' anathemas pale in comparison to what war chroniclers had to say about their heretic enemies:

*"Their faces did not betray that they were going to die, more often they seemed to be on their way to a banquet, so deceived and immersed are these satanic martyrs in their sect."*<sup>277</sup>

Cornejo cannot bring himself to see them as human beings who fear and worry and suffer. For him it is as if they were possessed by a demonic force that turned them into satanic martyrs as he calls them, unable to feel anything human, such is their devotion to seeing the Holy Church crash and burn. For Carnero, these Protestants were despicable. While Netherlanders were

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<sup>272</sup> Juan de Cuéllar to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 26/2/1574, Ibid. 99-101

<sup>273</sup> Martín Pérez de Varrón to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 10/8/1588, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol IV*. 267-268

<sup>274</sup> Rodríguez Pérez, *The Dutch Revolt through Spanish Eyes*. 87

<sup>275</sup> Martín Pérez de Varrón to Simon Ruiz, Cologne, 21/9/1584, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol III*. 222

<sup>276</sup> Pedro de la Peña to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 31/1/1587, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol IV*. 137

<sup>277</sup> Cornejo's narration of the siege of Haarlem is cited in Pérez, *The Dutch Revolt through Spanish Eyes*. 72

among the first Northern Europeans to embrace Christianity and had proven to be true servants of God, at that point they “degenerated to the state of their ancestors”. His comments get even more bitter as he goes on: “They have turned into a disgrace, destroying churches with their sacrilegious arms...”.<sup>278</sup> He does not even call them heretics: they behave as their pagan ancestors, for even a heretic would respect a church. Cornejo shares this view when he rebuts Orange’s arguments that the rebels demand freedom of conscience. The Spanish chronicler quite convincingly argues that it is rather hypocritical for the rebels to say such a thing while they desecrate Catholic churches and destroy monasteries and hospitals.<sup>279</sup> If the aforementioned assessments seem a little bit over the edge, Ramón in his theatrical play “*Don Juan de Austria en Flandes*” goes well beyond that. He groups the wars of Spain against the Turks, the Moors and the Netherlands into a single struggle in the name of Christendom. Don Juan himself holds a crucifix that is hit by an arrow, symbolising the pain heretics inflicted upon the true faith.<sup>280</sup> There is no doubt that this image is profoundly allegoric and reminiscent of the Crusades. No arrows were used during the time of the Dutch Revolt. It was Muslims who were renowned for using their bows against the Knights of the Holy Cross. But for the merchants, in this war it was again the enemies of Christianity who were trying to maim it with their diabolic arrows.

## 2.3 Patriotism or a proto-national identity in sixteenth-century Spain

It is now clear that the Spanish people, and of course the merchants amongst them, had forged an identity via negation. Comparing themselves to the Netherlands, they felt different. After all, they were the keepers of the faith, the loyal and honourable subjects of their master. But it would be wrong to limit ourselves to this partial identity. It is widely accepted among scholars that a sense of a common Spanish identity was already in place in sixteenth-century Spain. The latter was of course a union of separate kingdoms, but nevertheless a notion of unity in terms of culture and religion was prevalent in the thoughts of Spain’s leaders and the expulsion of Jews and Moors that did not convert to Christianity only contributed to this unity. The incorporation of Spain into a multiethnic and linguistically diverse empire, only strengthened this proto-national bond among the inhabitants of Spain who realized how much

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<sup>278</sup> Van Der Essen, Léon. "Épisodes De L’histoire Religieuse Et Commercial D’Anvers Dans La Seconde Moitié Du XVIe Siècle." *Bulletin De La Commission Royale D’Histoire* 80 (1911): 329

<sup>279</sup> Rodríguez Pérez, *The Pelican and its Ungrateful Children*. 297-298

<sup>280</sup> Ibid. 108

they had in common, regardless of whether they lived in Aragon or in Castile. Of course it would be inaccurate to claim that Spaniards had lost their devotion to their regional particularities. They identified themselves as Castilians or Aragonese but this diversity was the unique element that constituted Spanish identity.<sup>281</sup> There is no doubt that this identity was primarily forged under pressure from external forces and more specifically, from the wars Spain had to fight, first against the Moors and later against the Netherlanders. The hatred Spaniards inspired to their enemies only aided in building solidarity, offering people from different regions of Spain a reason to stand united.<sup>282</sup>

What constituted this Spanish identity? Yet again, Rodríguez Pérez's analysis of chronicles and theatrical plays proves to be very useful here, offering a description of how Spanish writers presented themselves. However, we should be careful with this archetype of the sixteenth-century Spanish man. Most of these works aspired to persuade their audiences that the wars Spain was fighting were just and that they perfectly suited to the nature of her king's subjects. Francisco de Quevedo y Villegas for instance argues that the Spanish are proud people that embody all the great values of honourable warriors.<sup>283</sup> His work is rather normative, as he speaks about the Spanish as they should be, proud descendants of glorious ancestors.<sup>284</sup> Lope de Vega adds to this notion of the ideal Spanish by stating that the latter is brave, courageous, pious, loyal, and ready to sacrifice himself for the glory of his nation.<sup>285</sup> Such a nation cannot give in to the demands of its enemies. It is its holy duty to fight back and defend its rights. This sense of belonging to a common fatherland was not limited to those who resided in Spain. A sense of duty towards the *patria* kept their nation at the forefront of their minds.<sup>286</sup> This is evident in the case of Pedro de la Torre, probably a discharged soldier, who was exiled from Bruges after refusing to renounce his king. In one of his letter to the Quintanadueñas family, he wonders to himself "How was it possible to renounce his king without being disrespectful to his nation?"<sup>287</sup>. Although the term *patria* was vague and could

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<sup>281</sup> Rodríguez-Salgado, Christians, Civilised and Spanish. 234-238.

<sup>282</sup> Fagel, Raymond. "National Identity Under Habsburg Rule: A Comparison Between Spain and the Low Countries." (Unpublished paper presented at the European Social Science History Conference, Berlin 2004). 6-8

<sup>283</sup> Rodríguez Pérez, Yolanda. "Defining the Nation, Defending the Nation: The Spanish Apologetic Discourse during the Twelve Years' Truce (1609-1621)." In *The Roots of Nationalism: National Identity Formation in Early Modern Europe, 1600-1815*, edited by Lotte Jensen. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016. 187-188

<sup>284</sup> Ibid. 186-190

<sup>285</sup> Rodríguez Pérez, *The Dutch Revolt through Spanish Eyes*. 127-128

<sup>286</sup> Gil Pujol, Francisco Xavier. "Un Rey, Una Fe, Muchas Naciones. Patria Y Nación En La España De Los Siglos XVI-XVII." In *La Monarquía De Las Naciones: Patria Nación Y Naturaleza En La Monarquía De España*, edited by Bernardo José García García and Antonio Álvarez-Ossorio Alvaríño. Madrid: Fund. Carlos De Amberes, 2004. 41-42

<sup>287</sup> García Dorao, *Correspondencia Internacional de la Familia Quintanadueñas*. 350



be used to refer to their place of origin as well, it was more than obvious that when it came to war, Spain was the fatherland. The *tercios* were already using the term *nación* to refer to their small community. In order to quell mutinies, troops were called on to maintain order through an appeal to their common origin. “*We are from the same nation as you, all Spaniards*”, soldiers serving in Holland wrote to their colleagues who mutinied in Aalst. This was not even a new type of appeal. In the Italian wars, a commander asked the soldiers to pick up their pikes and fight once again since “*the whole of that kingdom of Spain, of which we are sons, has its eyes fixed on you*”.<sup>288</sup> It was not only those who were actively participating in military operations who had this sense of belonging however. Merchants in Early Modern Europe who were residing in lands far away from their birth place felt foreign indeed. They tried to shape their environment to be reminiscent of that of their fatherlands, requesting to be recognised as unique entities and feeling alien to the culture, language, and customs of their new towns. Those feelings were reciprocal, as locals thought of these merchants as suspicious outsiders.<sup>289</sup>

Simon Ruiz’s associates were a unique case. It is more than obvious that they did not watch the military operations as distant and neutral spectators. The Spanish army was always referred to as *nuestro ejercito* (our army) or *nuestra armada* instead of merely being the king’s army, which it in fact was. A sense of pride can be observed in Cevallos’ incredibly detailed letters in the wake of a glorious victory.<sup>290</sup> His zeal in narrating the events, results and aftermaths of Alba’s campaigns goes to show how much he identified with the Spanish cause. Of him it could not have been any different: after all, his country was the land of peace and Christianity.<sup>291</sup> Of course Cevallos is not the only who takes great pride in the deeds of his compatriots. Andrés de la Maza finds it worth mentioning to Ruiz that two unnamed Spanish merchants from Antwerp managed to pay off their debts within three days against all odds. He says that all the nations there were stunned and they could not help but admire the Spaniards for their integrity. “*Nuestra nación*”, he says, is deemed honourable and reputable.<sup>292</sup> Nevertheless this love for the fatherland was not expressed only in the good times but also in the bad. While it was only natural for them to worry about possible defeats for the Spanish army in the Low Countries, Pérez de Varrón’s genuine concern for an English naval campaign against Spain in the Iberian theatre is remarkable. We would of course expect

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<sup>288</sup> Both quotes are cited in Kamen, *Empire*. 333-334

<sup>289</sup> Harreld, *High Germans in the Low Countries*. 47-48

<sup>290</sup> Hernando de Frías Cevallos to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 28/7/1568, Vázquez De Prada, *Lettres Vol II*. 47-50

<sup>291</sup> Hernando de Frías Cevallos to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 1-21/12/1566, *Ibid.* 33-35

<sup>292</sup> Andrés de la Maza to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 18/10/1581, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol III*. 82

him to make use of his network in order to inform Ruiz, but he does not limit himself to that. He and his compatriots, as he says, think about Spain every single day. Between April and August of 1589, he sends six letters to his colleague in Medina del Campo, in which he repeatedly prays to God for Spain's safety, expressing his concern for England's initial success and his joy at its ultimately unsuccessful attempt to strike a blow at the heart of Philip's empire. A few weeks later, the flow of information is reversed and it is he who asks Ruiz to keep them updated about the course of this campaign.<sup>293</sup> Nevertheless, this strong proto-nationalism is put to the test the moment their interests clash with those of Spain, and that moment comes when the war breaks out.

## 2.4 Level of interest and views on the war

Around the turn of the 16<sup>th</sup> century wars evolved into broad, prolonged confrontations that had a deeper impact on societies, and especially on civilians who suffered the unfortunate fate of living in the theatres of war. War was associated with misery, slaughter, plunder, rape and destruction and soldiers were deemed a menace regardless of whether they belonged to friendly or enemy regiments. On many occasions people had to leave their homelands due to the imminent threat of an approaching army, only to come back when peace returned. In addition, many casualties resulted from diseases brought upon the local populations by the soldiers who were raiding their lands. Cities such as Hondschoote were wiped from the face of the earth during the Dutch Revolt.<sup>294</sup> While military tactics, the composition of arms within regiments, the sizes of armies etc. had all undergone profound transformations, medieval notions such as chivalry and military valour still dominated the mindset of people in the sixteenth century, shaping their perceptions of war, battles and soldiers.<sup>295</sup> This was emphasized through the significant production of propagandistic literature narrating the glorious victories of the Spanish armies over the enemies of the nation. Books addressing to wider audiences such as "*relaciones de batallas*" and theatrical plays were quite popular and aimed at transmitting to the masses ideas and values that justified the actions and interests of Spain. Such ideas were associated predominantly with defending the prestige of the king, but

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<sup>293</sup> Martín Pérez de Varrón to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 18/4/1589, 3/5/1589, 24/5/1589, 31/5/1589, 8/8/1589 and 9/8/1589, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol IV*. 334-367

<sup>294</sup> Hale, *War and Society in Renaissance Europe*. 179-180

<sup>295</sup> García Hernán, David. "Guerra, Propaganda Y Cultura En La Monarquía Hispánica: La Narrativa Del Siglo De Oro." *Obradoiro De Historia Moderna* 20 (2011): 289



also military spirit and the struggle against heresy.<sup>296</sup>

Brian Sandberg argues that for many Early Modern Europeans, battles and sieges were a spectacle. Civilians would gather together to enjoy a good siege, as the women of the countryside around Le Pouzin did during the siege of the French town in 1628. Indeed, people were so familiar with violence that it was omnipresent, even in their comedy.<sup>297</sup> In this contradictory perception, war was a spectacle and a menace at the same time. The war in Flanders was no different. On the one hand it was associated with disaster while on the other hand it certainly triggered the interest of the people. It was not only for first-hand witnesses who were hypnotised by the sheer brutality of it all. Lope's plays show a dual, ambiguous vision of the war in Flanders. Enchanted by the deeds of the Spanish army, he praises the glorious achievements of the soldiers and generals of Spain, justifying the king's military intervention. He has no doubt that war itself is disastrous however, bringing misery upon both the soldiers and the inhabitants of the war-torn lands.<sup>298</sup> This two-sided perception of the war, as hell on earth and as a spectacle at the same time can help us understand how our merchants experienced those disastrous years in Flanders.

The interest of people such as Cevallos, Cuéllar and Pérez de Varrón in the campaigns of both Spain and her enemies is worth noting. Cevallos for instance closely followed Alba's campaign in modern-day East Frisia and was able to present an incredibly detailed description of the Battle of Jemmingen to Ruiz. Cevallos seems even to know the exact time the Spanish army arrived at the battlefield, which regiments were guarding the camp, etc.<sup>299</sup> Whether his information is accurate or not, what is stunning is his genuine interest in a battle that took place far away, without having the slightest impact on his life and his business. Not only is he interested in learning about the operations of the Spanish army, he is eager to offer his wisdom and expertise in order to help Ruiz better understand the peculiarities of the war in the Netherlands. Indeed, he seems to be aware of the military tactics sixteenth-century armies employ: skirmish, the use of artillery, etc.<sup>300</sup> Cuellar might have been more down-to-earth and less enthusiastic in narration of Alba's and Requesens' campaigns, but his network of

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<sup>296</sup> Ibid. 285-287

<sup>297</sup> Sandberg, Brian. "To Have the Pleasure of This Siege": Envisioning Siege Warfare during the European Wars of Religion." In *Beholding Violence in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*. Edited by Allie Terry-Fritsch and Erin Felicia Labbie Farnham: Ashgate, 2012. 143-145

<sup>298</sup> Rodríguez Pérez, Yolanda. "Los Neerlandeses En El Teatro De La Primera Fase De La Guerra De Flandes (1568-1609)." In *España Y Las 17 Provincias De Los Países Bajos: Una Revisión Historiográfica (XVI-XVIII)*. Edited by Ana Crespo Solana and Manuel Herrero Sánchez. Córdoba: Universidad De Córdoba, 2002. 827-829

<sup>299</sup> Hernando de Frías Cevallos to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 28/7/1568, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol II*. 47-50

<sup>300</sup> Hernando de Frías Cevallos to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 7/7/1568, Ibid. 46-47

information was impressive. He claimed to have been receiving mail on a regular basis from the Maestro del Campo in Holland, Francisco de Valdés.<sup>301</sup> There is little doubt that men like Cuéllar would never go to such trouble if it were simply for news about the war. All seasoned merchants were fully aware of the impacts this war could have on their business. A blockade on a port was enough to cut off all trade routes from Antwerp to Spain, a prolonged campaign in Southern Brabant could hinder overland trade and so on. Nevertheless the level of detail Cuéllar included in his narrations rules out simplistic explanations for his motivations. Moreover, he seemed to have a decent understanding of military campaigns. While others might have been petrified at the news that a powerful army of German mercenaries under the command of Orange was approaching Maastricht, Cuéllar's composure is remarkable. He briefly goes over the prices for the goods Orange's army needs, the geomorphology of the lands around Maastricht and the weather and goes on to rebut the arguments of those who are certain that the enemy would successfully strike a blow to Spain's ambitions.<sup>302</sup>

This pattern is still evident ten years later. Pedro de la Peña is a very interesting case. Despite the fact that he only rarely wrote to Ruiz, it seems that he was quite interested in military operations, and was well-informed. Writing from his house in Antwerp, he informed Ruiz about all the specifics of a Dutch mutiny.<sup>303</sup> One of de la Peña's colleagues, Alberto de Barzena, had equally detailed and sophisticated intelligence about a French campaign against the city of Grave.<sup>304</sup> Pérez de Varrón was even more engaged. He started writing to Ruiz around the same time Francis Drake, a heinous figure in the eyes of the Spanish people, undertook action in the North Sea. Pérez de Varrón gathered intelligence regarding Drake's actions, pointing out that Drake had amassed a large and powerful fleet that he intended to use against Spain.<sup>305</sup> Although unlike Cuéllar he does not reveal his sources, he makes sure Ruiz is fully aware of the naval campaign England was about to launch in January of 1588.<sup>306</sup> The imminent arrival of the Invincible Armada caught his attention, and he rushed to consult his sources about the Spanish navy's expedition, the Battle of Gravelines, and the fate of the remains of Medina Sidonia's fleet.<sup>307</sup> He does however question the credibility of his sources, as he is not fully convinced that the news he receives is accurate.<sup>308</sup> What is of interest here

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<sup>301</sup> Juan de Cuéllar to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 26/7/1574, Ibid. 117-118

<sup>302</sup> Juan de Cuéllar to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 13/3/1574, Ibid. 103

<sup>303</sup> Pedro de la Peña to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 9/3/1587, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol IV*. 142

<sup>304</sup> Alonzo de la Bárzena to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 6/5/1586, Ibid. 83

<sup>305</sup> Martín Pérez de Varrón to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 1/10/1587, Ibid. 191

<sup>306</sup> Martín Pérez de Varrón to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 25/1/1588, Ibid. 215

<sup>307</sup> Martín Pérez de Varrón to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 10/8/1588, Ibid. 267-301

<sup>308</sup> Martín Pérez de Varrón to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 28/8/1588, Ibid. 268-269

however is the effort he put into trying to collect bits of information in order to paint an accurate picture of the war. After all, his pessimism had always turned out to be justified. His fears about the strength of the English navy in the Battle of Gravelines only reflected the true balance of powers in the given circumstances of the North Sea. Equally justified was his concern that Spain would eventually fail to capture Bergen-Op-Zoom, despite being suitably prepared.<sup>309</sup> Farnese was forced to lift the siege after six fruitless weeks. Pérez de Varrón's sources were after all quite credible.

Not only was war a spectacle, one that caught the eye of many people, but it was also a glorious event. As one of the heroes in a famous *novela morisca* proudly confesses, "*Ninguna cosa despierta tanto los corazones de los hombres, como el continuo ejercicio de las armas*". After all, an honourable man had to engage in war as it was unacceptable to spend his time fooling around and being lazy.<sup>310</sup> The values of patriotism and military spirit were close-knit and fed into one another. Being a patriot was all about feeling proud and having a common goal: the interests of the Crown.<sup>311</sup> One might be tempted to argue that it would therefore only be natural for a bunch of Spanish merchants who were living in the lands of the enemy to take great pride in the successes of *their* army. The reality was more complex however. The Battle of Jemmingen, a brilliant display of Alba's tactical brilliance, was received with joy by Cevallos, who speaks of a glorious victory for the Spanish. He does not hold back in his narration: the Spanish lost no more than ten men, whereas only 500 of their troops managed to route 12,000 of Orange's soldiers. Should one of the latter's commanders have been late to arrive at the battlefield, no enemy would have lived to tell the story.<sup>312</sup> This example is quite telling of our protagonist's pride, but on other occasions Cevallos attributed almost supernatural abilities to the Spanish soldiers. It was only a few days earlier that he argued that a battle just outside of Bergen had resulted in a glorious victory for Spain, as not a single one of her soldiers was killed or injured! His optimism is not surprising. He was always certain that Spain would eventually prevail, although he was still slightly afraid that the enemy might prove to be a strong opponent.<sup>313</sup> The odds were still with Spain, and even in 1571 Cuéllar spoke confidently about Alba's chances of suppressing the rebellion.<sup>314</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> Martín Pérez de Varrón to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 3/10/1588, Ibid. 283

<sup>310</sup> "Nothing awakens the hearts of men that much as the continuous exercise of weapons." This quote is cited in García Hernán, Guerra, Propaganda Y Cultura. 289

<sup>311</sup> Ibid. 284

<sup>312</sup> Hernando de Frías Cevallos to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 28/7/1568, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol II*. 47-50

<sup>313</sup> Hernando de Frías Cevallos to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 14/1/1569, Ibid. 52-53

<sup>314</sup> Juan de Cuéllar to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 26/4/1571, Ibid. 68-69

But this was perhaps the last moment of optimism for the Spanish merchants. By the following year it was evident that this was not just another upheaval, and that the rebels were there to stay. Cuéllar seemed to be the first to take notice of this turn of events. Optimism and pride gave place to pessimism, weariness, and fear - fear of the impact of the wars in France on the Spanish cause,<sup>315</sup> or the fact that Spain was waging war in too many theatres for her own good.<sup>316</sup> Pessimism predominated, both in regards to the prospects for Alba's army in its campaigns against the rebels<sup>317</sup> and the looming continuation of a never-ending war.<sup>318</sup> His weariness can clearly be sensed in his narration of events. Cuéllar no longer celebrates Spanish victories or glorifies the deeds of the army. He is surprisingly distant, objective, almost neutral in his narration of the battles, presenting various points of view about the situation of both armies, the casualties, etc.<sup>319</sup> Even on occasions when one would have expected him to celebrate the annihilation of the Dutch army, which in a battle against the *tercios*, lost half of its manpower on the battlefield, Cuéllar maintains his cool. The lack of emotions in his words is remarkable.<sup>320</sup> The interval of Netherlandish rule that started in 1577 and lasted until the recapture of the city by Farnese is succeeded by a renewed interest in the events of the war. Pérez de Varrón yet again offers the most illuminating example of that shift of interest. Although his letters are revealing of his passion and genuine concern over Farnese's efforts to control the lands and waters where rebels prevailed, what is even more interesting is his unprecedented pessimism. His greatest fear does not concern the rebels though. It is the English who scare him the most. He doubts how "invincible" the Armada really is, having lost all hope that victory is in Medina Sidonia's hands. In almost every single letter he writes in the first six first months of 1588, he prays to God more than once to guard the Spanish fleet.<sup>321</sup> And while divine intervention, especially when it comes to a Holy War, was something all pious Spanish expected, Pérez's prayers betray his terror at the thought that Spain might fail in her attempt to put an end to the English plans.

The merchants' fear and negativity clearly demonstrate their situation. War had become a living hell for them. Cevallos uses a metaphor to describe their feelings in Flanders, stating that it is as if they were surrounded by a fence blocking all routes to the city and

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<sup>315</sup> Juan de Cuéllar to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 12/7/1572, Ibid. 85

<sup>316</sup> Juan de Cuéllar to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 1/2/1572, Ibid. 80

<sup>317</sup> Juan de Cuéllar to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 12/7/1572, Ibid. 85

<sup>318</sup> Juan de Cuéllar to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 11/6/1573, Ibid. 93-94

<sup>319</sup> Juan de Cuéllar to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 14/7/1573, Ibid. 94-95

<sup>320</sup> Juan de Cuéllar to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 22/4/1574, Ibid. 107-108

<sup>321</sup> Martín Pérez de Varrón to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 25/1/1588, 8/4/1588, 8/6/1588, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol IV*. 215-247. Same when the Armada reaches its destinations, see Martín Pérez de Varrón to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 10/8/1588, Ibid. 267-268.

effectively cutting Antwerp off from her communication and trade networks.<sup>322</sup> The vanity and brutality of the war is more evident in the letters where our merchants deal with the consequences of the revolt in the lives of those who were actively involved in it. As is discussed in the following section, a concept of the war as the ultimate plague sent by God built up gradually in their minds, especially in view of the collapsing of their economic plans.

## 2.5 War and People

The merchants' views on the very people who waged war - commanders and soldiers - are revealing. Cevallos, of course, glorified Spanish soldiers, bragging that they (along with the Walloons) were the only trustworthy ones. Even when the Germans had proven their resilience and effectiveness, Cevallos remarked that they had behaved as if they were Spanish.<sup>323</sup> Cuéllar adopted a more humane approach when describing the war. His increasing displeasure at the almost pointless confrontation might have been why he turned his eye to the particular experiences of the protagonists in this war. Soldiers', generals' and civilians' lives on the front are the focus of his discourse. As for the soldiers, Cuéllar seems rather sympathetic to their particular problems. Whereas a mutiny was detrimental to the Spanish cause, he expresses his understanding of the situation, pointing out that the life of a soldier is full of misery, hunger, thirst and ultimately death.<sup>324</sup> This is not to say that he was defending mutineers; quite the opposite in fact. Although he expresses his sympathy, he is alarmed at their plundering, and says that they stole as if they were Turks.<sup>325</sup> A couple of years later, although still expressing his sympathy for the mutineering soldiers, he complains that if they had kept on fighting, the war would have already been over.<sup>326</sup> Yet again Cuéllar's views are down to earth. His treatment of the soldiers is more pragmatic, as he addresses their human nature. For him they are not just war machines that can go on winning one battle after another and proudly serve their country even if they have to sacrifice their personal interests and endure pain, poverty and humiliation.

Comparing his perceptions to those of his contemporary chroniclers only stresses this

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<sup>322</sup> Hernando de Frías Cevallos to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 30/1/1569, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol II*. 53-54

<sup>323</sup> Hernando de Frías Cevallos to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 7/7/1569, Ibid. 46. This is not a unique pattern. A nobleman writing his experience of the Thirty Years' War argues that some German troops, stunned at the courage of their mighty Spanish colleagues, cried out in glory "*Viva España!*". See Kamen, *Empire*. 335

<sup>324</sup> Juan de Cuéllar to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 25/11/1574, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol II*. 128-130

<sup>325</sup> Juan de Cuéllar to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 26/7/1574, Ibid. 117-118

<sup>326</sup> Juan de Cuéllar to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 16/8/1576, Ibid. 210

point. For Ulloa, this war was a fight between the heroic Spaniards and the rebels. In his view, to narrate the events of the Dutch Revolt is in fact to narrate the deeds of the brave Spanish *tercios*, whose deeds prove how courageous and disciplined they are. In fact, their bravery is matched only by their magnanimity. Far from being vindictive, they do not seek revenge once they prevail over their enemies, nor do they hate them.<sup>327</sup> There is not really much to be said regarding Ulloa's depictions, as the atrocities committed by the Spanish army on numerous occasions speak for themselves. What is interesting to point out here is that Cuéllar seems to be speaking his mind freely, without any ulterior motive. His descriptions of the war seem much more realistic than the ones we find in the propagandistic literature of that era. Apparently, Cuéllar and the other merchants who abstain from making any derogatory remarks about Philip's troops seem to be the exception to the rule as outlined by Ruff. According to him, during wartime civilians despised the soldiery, going as far as murdering troops when they had a chance to do so. After all, the soldiers rarely treated their compatriots any better than the enemies.<sup>328</sup> The merchants saw things differently however. Perhaps they identified with the soldiery, themselves being people who dealt with money and consequently were able to appreciate someone's fury at broken promises and delayed wages. Or perhaps it was their peculiar status, that of Spanish people living in the lands of the enemy, which enabled them to identify with the soldiers and understand their problems.

Cuéllar is quite critical of Alba and his management of his soldiers, and places the blame for the mutinies solely on the Duke's shoulders.<sup>329</sup> And he is hardly the only one; other civilians were disillusioned with Alba's methods as well. A former admirer of Alba, Benito Arias Montano, asked the king to show leniency instead of severity, to go easy on the rebels instead of inspiring fear among them. These views were shared by many prominent statesmen serving under the Habsburgs, such as Medinaceli and Granvelle. Even Julián Romero, a seasoned commander, was perturbed by the brutality shown by Alba and his son Fadrique.<sup>330</sup>

Cevallos, as usual supportive of the Spanish cause, was perhaps the only one to praise Alba's handling of the situation. Writing in November of 1567, Cevallos maintains that Alba had taken all the correct measures to stop the rebellion and restore peace under favourable

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<sup>327</sup> Rodríguez Pérez, *The Dutch Revolt through Spanish Eyes*. 83-88

<sup>328</sup> Ruff, Julius R. *Violence in Early Modern Europe: 1500-1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge, 2001. 52-66

<sup>329</sup> Juan de Cuéllar to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 22/4/1574, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol II*. 107-108. Surprisingly, he changes his mind a few months later, arguing that Alba is doing the best he can and everyone there acknowledges his efforts. See Juan de Cuéllar to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 26/7/1574, *Ibid.* 117-118

<sup>330</sup> Kamen. *The Duke of Alba*. 115-119



conditions for Spain.<sup>331</sup> Requesens, Alba's successor, was received in praise by Cuéllar who held the new commander in very high regard.<sup>332</sup> Others focused on the skills of the generals instead of their behaviour or their management of the political aspect of the crisis. Cevallos, obsessed with war as always, expressed his displeasure at the defeat at Groningen in 1568 in a most bitter way. He argues that Count Aremberg's boldness and carelessness was the direct cause of this disaster: Aremberg fought like a knight, and not like a general as he should have done.<sup>333</sup> Cevallos seems to neglect every other factor that affected the outcome of this battle, remaining loyal to the spirit of the era according to which the role of the *Great Man* was the focal point of all historical narratives.<sup>334</sup> Nevertheless, it was not solely when these commanders delivered that the merchants praised their skills. Pérez de Varrón vehemently defends the Duke of Medina Sidonia despite his unsuccessful command of the Armada. Pérez claims that at least according to the accounts that have reached his ears, the Duke was not to be held accountable for the defeat. According to de Varrón it was almost inevitable; it was divine punishment for Spain's sins, and his *nación* needed to appease God if she wanted His protection.<sup>335</sup> Other generals such as Mondragón were greatly praised by chroniclers who stress his wisdom, valour and magnanimity,<sup>336</sup> although there is almost nothing about him in Ruiz's correspondence. Surprisingly, little is said about Farnese, arguably the most successful of Philip's commanders. Neither is he openly praised, nor is he accused for his reluctance to assist in the Battle of Gravelines.<sup>337</sup> There is no doubt about his ability to lead Spain to victory, and the merchants do seem to trust him, but the absence of any comments is nevertheless worth noting. Equally interesting is their ambivalence when it comes to the very acts and decisions of the aforementioned generals and soldiers, acts that had an impact on civilians like them. Although civilians and soldiers were in touch throughout the course of the war, as on many occasions the latter were (in part) housed in the homes of the former, perhaps their most

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<sup>331</sup> Hernando de Frías Cevallos to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 25/10-9/11/1567, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol II*. 42

<sup>332</sup> ("...la bondad del Comandador Mayor era tanta que...") See Juan de Cuéllar to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 30/10/1575, *Ibid.* 162

<sup>333</sup> Hernando de Frías Cevallos to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 18-22/6/1568, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol II*. 44

<sup>334</sup> Rodríguez Pérez, *The Dutch Revolt through Spanish Eyes*. 83-85

<sup>335</sup> Martín Pérez de Varrón to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 22/11/1588, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol IV*. 300-301

<sup>336</sup> Fagel, Raymond. "La Imagen De Los Militares Españoles Decentes En El Ejercito Del Duque De Alba En Flandes: Cristóbal De Mondragón Y Gaspar De Robles." In *Encuentros De Ayer Y Reencuentros De Hoy: Flandes, Países Bajos Y El Mundo Hispánico En Los Siglos XVI-XVII*, edited by Patrick Collard. Gent: Academia Press, 2009. 80-83

<sup>337</sup> Stradling, R. A. *The Armada of Flanders: Spanish Maritime Policy and European War, 1568-1668*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. 7-8

interesting interaction was the sacking of cities. Plundering a town often followed both mutinies and successful sieges. Generals either encouraged these atrocities in the hopes that they would serve as a reminder that those who do not surrender in a siege may suffer the same fate, or they turned a blind eye, considering them a lesser evil if the alternative was to be a mutiny. Alba was fully aware of the power of plundering, and since he lacked the money to pay his troops in 1572, he channeled their fury into sacking Mechelen. For four consecutive days they plundered the belongings of the locals, an act that was questioned and condemned by everyone there.<sup>338</sup> But agreement among the Spanish commentators was not always the case when it came to mutinies. Spanish scholars such as Francisco de Vitoria and Luis de Molina did not believe that killing civilians was wrong or even immoral. Although they were moderate voices – Vitoria for instance rejected the notion of “Holy War”<sup>339</sup> – they argued that differentiating between soldiers and civilians was, after all, almost impossible, as the latter might well have assisted the former during a siege. Of course, if it was evident that someone was innocent it was ill-advised to kill them. However, the condemnation of mutinies was based on political and not humanitarian or ethical grounds. Sacking a town was a deplorable act according to Molina, as it involved a series of murders, torture and rapes against innocent people. Nevertheless, sometimes even the most despicable actions may be justified according to the actual needs of the war. If sacking a city could aid your cause, Molina argued that it is perhaps for the best to do so.<sup>340</sup>

Propagandistic literature from the Spanish Golden Age went even further. A very popular novel of that era justified the sacking and plundering that followed a successful siege, as it was deemed a fair prize for the winner.<sup>341</sup> This ambiguity can be seen in the merchants’ letters as well. When Alba’s *tercios* sacked Bergen, Cevallos reminded Ruiz that they were really careful not to desecrate any of the Church’s possessions.<sup>342</sup> While Cevallos had some moral restrictions, he was concerned solely with people and belongings that fell under the aegis of the Holy See. It is clear that he would not shed any tears for heretics. Whereas the harsh treatment of locals by the Spanish troops made Cevallos look the other way, Cuéllar on

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<sup>338</sup> Kamen. *The Duke of Alba*. 110

<sup>339</sup> Rosenstock, Bruce. "Against the Pagans: Alonso De Cartagena, Francisco De Vitoria, and Converso Political Theology." In *Marginal Voices: Studies in Converso Literature of Medieval and Golden Age Spain*, edited by Amy Aronson-Friedman and Gregory B. Kaplan. Leiden: Brill, 2012. 131

<sup>340</sup> Hale. *War and Society in Renaissance Europe*. 186-187 Also, Fernandes, João Manuel A.A. "Luis De Molina: On War." In *A Companion to Luis De Molina*, edited by Matthias Kaufmann. Leiden: Brill, 2013. 247

<sup>341</sup> García Hernan, Guerra, *Propaganda Y Cultura*. 289

<sup>342</sup> Hernando de Frías Cevallos to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 7/7/1568, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol II*. 46-47



the other hand was quite severe in his criticism of the aftermath of the siege of Duiveland<sup>343</sup> and was sympathetic towards the citizens of Zierikzee who were starving during the siege of the city by the Spanish army.<sup>344</sup> Still, even Cuéllar turns a blind eye to massacres if he has to pick a side. An outspoken sympathiser of soldiers, the moment Brussels' authorities state that they would treat mutinied soldiers as enemies, he finds the sacking of Aalst reasonable as a form of retaliation. After all, Spanish officials such as Julian Romero were detained in Brussels and this was deemed an act of rebellion by Cuéllar.<sup>345</sup> If we consider the Spaniards' sufferings during the Sack of Antwerp in 1576, it comes as no surprise that from this point onwards, no remarks about such despicable acts are to be found in their letters. Atrocities such as those committed after the siege of Maastricht, where according to Hale up to a third of the city's population was slaughtered in retaliation,<sup>346</sup> or even during the Spanish Fury<sup>347</sup>, do not seem to concern the merchants. The answer might lie in a clash of interests. On the one hand, those who wrote to Ruiz had to be very careful, as their words could easily get them into trouble. Since the content of their letters was accessible to more than just their partner, they had to appear supportive of Philip's cause and glorify the actions of the *tercios*. On the other hand, after a certain point they could no longer turn a blind eye on the brutality of the war, justifying acts reminiscent of the Sack of Antwerp during which several of them fell victims of the soldiers who went berserk.<sup>348</sup> Ever since Cuéllar expressed their disgust, the atrocities of the *tercios* were rarely conveyed and if so, they were criticised. That makes perfect sense as on the outside they tried to appear calm and loyal to their fatherland whereas on the inside they were torn between their affection towards Spain and their genuine and everlasting fear that disaster was imminent for them and their families. It was this clash of interests that ultimately shaped their views of the Dutch Revolt.

## 2.6 Personal versus national interests

We have seen so far that the merchants, although pessimistic and disillusioned after a certain point, were supportive of the Spanish cause - a Holy War against heretics who defied Philip's rule. Nevertheless, this eagerness gradually faded, as it soon became evident that their

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<sup>343</sup> Juan de Cuéllar to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 30/10/1575, Ibid. 162

<sup>344</sup> Juan de Cuéllar to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 20/4/1576, Ibid. 189

<sup>345</sup> Juan de Cuéllar to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 16/8/1576, Ibid. 210

<sup>346</sup> Hale. *War and Society in Renaissance Europe*. 195

<sup>347</sup> Ibid. 195

<sup>348</sup> Gelderblom, *Cities of Commerce*. 33

prosperity was put into question by the ongoing war. The war was fair, or even necessary as Pérez de Varrón put it, but on the other hand it seemed to last forever and its impact on business was devastating.<sup>349</sup> While there was little doubt amongst them that the rebels needed to be punished, they began having second thoughts as to whether Spain should sign a peace treaty, even if that meant recognising a certain level of self-governance for the Netherlanders. “Glorious victory” gradually ceded to peace at any cost as the one and only goal. On several occasions, Cuéllar prays for peace<sup>350</sup> The same can be said of Diego de Luengas<sup>351</sup>, and even of Alonzo de la Bárzena, despite the fact that when he wrote in 1586, Farnese was winning one battle after another.<sup>352</sup> It comes as no surprise that de la Bárzena ceases to complain a couple of years later, since by that time part of his transactions regarded the provisions of Farnese’s army during its mission to support the Armada, something, that meant that even for a short period of time, de la Bárzena directly profited from war.<sup>353</sup> Pérez de Varrón was torn between his national pride driving him to hope for victory<sup>354</sup> and his personal interests which dictated peace at any cost.<sup>355</sup> He was furious at the stalling of negotiations between Spain and England in 1588, and his comments on the English representatives are indicative of his feelings. He equates their behaviour to “an interlude of a comedy that intends to entertain the king”. Their lust for peace is such that they strengthen their positions in the sea, he comments in irony.<sup>356</sup> Even Diego de Echávarri, a man who never seemed to bother himself with the war, broke his silence to express his happiness and relief that Spain and the rebels had agreed upon an apparently temporary pacification in March of 1577.<sup>357</sup>

Many of these merchants took great risks in their efforts to assist Spain. One particular merchant called Gaspar de Añastro even took part in a plot to assassinate William of Orange. It seems however, that the only motive behind his actions was the fee that he badly needed due to severe financial troubles.<sup>358</sup> Going back to Cuéllar, there were indeed many moments when he seemed to take great interest in campaigns and battles, expressing his hope that Spain

<sup>349</sup> Martín Pérez de Varrón to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 1/7/1587, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol IV*. 168

<sup>350</sup> Juan de Cuéllar to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 22/4/1574, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol II*. 107-108, also Juan de Cuéllar to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 1/2/1576, *Ibid*. 176-177.

<sup>351</sup> Diego de Luengas to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 1/8/1584, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol III*. 212

<sup>352</sup> Alonzo de la Bárzena to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 6/5/1586, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol IV*. 79

<sup>353</sup> Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol I*. 224

<sup>354</sup> Martín Pérez de Varrón to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 30/7/1587, *Ibid*. 174

<sup>355</sup> Martín Pérez de Varrón to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 1/7/1587, 27/11/1587, 25/1/1588, *Ibid*. 168-215.

<sup>356</sup> Martín Pérez de Varrón to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 25/1/1587, *Ibid*. 215

<sup>357</sup> Diego de Echávarri to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 21/3/1577, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol II*. 238

<sup>358</sup> In the end he did not even carry out the task as he got cold feet, delegating it to his servant Juan de Jauregui. See Fagel, Raymond. "Añastro E Isunza, Gaspar De."

<http://www.dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/dutch/personen/A/Pages/anastro.aspx>. Accessed May 15, 2016.

would ultimately win. But even in those cases, Cuéllar did not have in mind the suppression of the rebellion in full, but only key battles, success in which might facilitate his business. Writing in 1572, he reminds Ruiz that half of the Dutch cities are in the hands of the rebels, but what is even worse is that they control all of the ports, blocking the entrance to any ship they deem to be hostile.<sup>359</sup> A year later, he writes that he hopes Zeeland will be rid of the local rebels, who do nothing but hinder trade.<sup>360</sup> Gorinchem must fall to the Spanish, if only to clear a path to Holland.<sup>361</sup> His honesty is compelling. As long as Alba's army captures towns and ports of strategic importance to trade, he is a vocal supporter of the Duke's campaigns. He never ceases to complain about the requirements of those campaigns however, such as the heinous tenth penny.<sup>362</sup> Pérez de Varrón seems to be equally concerned with the reopening of the Scheldt to Spanish vessels, hoping that the arrival of the armada will settle this issue for good.<sup>363</sup>

Nevertheless, this behaviour does should not make us question their genuine sense of belonging to the Spanish nation and their embracing of the common goal of restoring order and suppressing heresy. It was only natural for these merchants' interest in Spain's priorities to grow thin and for their concern for their own matters to grow. To put it in Pérez's words, "...here there is such a shortage of commodities... because the calamities of this wretched land so deep in sorrow are so many that they deprive those poor people of every good thing, of every kind of substance of human life..."<sup>364</sup> Even their own lives were at risk. De la Peña states in 1587 that moving from one city to another is still unsafe. The roads are perilous, as the war has forced many people to lurk around looking for travellers to rob them of their valuables, making it advisable to travel with an escort.<sup>365</sup> Idealistic approaches to war were crushed under the pressure of the hard reality. For the merchants, the survival of their families, their businesses and themselves is what dictated their mindset. It is precisely that mindset that contradicted the norms literature aimed to propagate amongst Philip's subjects back in Spain. Scholars such as Navarrete tried to set an example for the youth, creating the image of a brave Spanish man, one that would pick war over peace on any given occasion.<sup>366</sup> Around the same time, on the occasion of the expedition of the Armada, a Jesuit scholar asked "If the honour of

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<sup>359</sup> Juan de Cuéllar to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 12/7/1572, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol II*. 85

<sup>360</sup> Juan de Cuéllar to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 8/4/1573, *Ibid.* 90

<sup>361</sup> Juan de Cuéllar to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 16/6/1574, *Ibid.* 111

<sup>362</sup> Juan de Cuéllar to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 1/2/1572, *Ibid.* 80

<sup>363</sup> Martín Pérez de Varrón to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 27/11/1587, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres Marchandes Vol IV*. 203-204

<sup>364</sup> Martín Pérez de Varrón to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 2/9/1586, *Ibid.* 105-107

<sup>365</sup> Pedro de la Peña to Simon Ruiz, Antwerp, 31/1/1587, *Ibid.* 137

<sup>366</sup> Rodríguez Pérez, *Defining the Nation. Defending the Nation*. 191.

Spain is at stake, what Spaniard would fail to seek the fame and glory of his nation?”<sup>367</sup> The answer both here and to Navarrete’s bragging is quite simple: those Spanish civilians who were experiencing firsthand the terror and vanity of the war.

## 2.7 Concluding remarks

To sum up, we have been looking at the various aspects of war through the eyes of the Spanish merchants. The uniqueness of the group they form can be traced in their writing, especially when these are put into a broader perspective and seen as a continuous dialogue with the narratives that were quite popular back in their fatherland. Before we drag ourselves into this comparison, it is useful to outline the shift in perceptions of the merchants.

While it might be problematic to outline such a pattern when only dealing with a limited number of people, their behaviour is so consistent that we can rule out an explanation based on their particular personalities. They all seem to share a common national identity, one that is only reinforced by their religious sentiments. They are not only Spanish, but they are Catholics as well. Therefore, their hatred towards the rebels is beyond any doubt. Those who took up arms against Philip stood for everything they despised. For the merchants, the rebels were defying their king and stabbing Christendom in the back. It was only a matter of time before God would strike back. Nevertheless, what began as a confident, arrogant approach that glorified war, justifying the acts of Spanish soldiers and attributing every kind of derogatory characteristics to the enemy, gradually evolved into something completely different. It did not take long before the merchants realised that this rebellion was not to be taken lightly. The enemies were not as worthless as they originally thought, and they lose interest in them quite soon. This scarcity of references to their enemies points to a change in opinion about who was to be blamed: yes, the rebels did defy Philip’s law and their blasphemous beliefs deserved punishment, but they were no longer the solely responsible for this menace: Habsburgs’ decisions are questioned too. Rodríguez Pérez’s study of chronicles and theatrical plays paints a completely different picture. Spaniards who did not reside in the Low Countries had no reason to question their king’s handling of the crisis. At the same time, they had every reason to hate an enemy that lived so far away and that they can easily dehumanise, forgetting that the rebels suffered the same problems as their compatriots, the

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<sup>367</sup> Rodríguez-Salgado, *Christians, Civilised and Spanish*. 238

merchants and soldiers.<sup>368</sup> Henry Kamen's work on Alba offers insight into the mindset of certain low-level officials of the Spanish Court in the Low Countries, who appeared to be even more sympathetic towards the rebels than our merchants were.<sup>369</sup> This variety of opinions can be explained if we take into consideration three main factors: proximity to the war, the level of risk for those who spoke their minds, and everyday interactions with the rebels.

A similar change occurred in beliefs regarding the abilities of the Spanish army. What had been an army of heroes suddenly consisted of ordinary human beings, soldiers that could lose a battle or two, or maybe even the war. The freshness and excitement of the early stages of war dissipated as the years passed by, and no resolution was to be seen on the horizon. It was only natural that this hypnotic, romanticised vision would disappear and for people to become disillusioned. This frustration clearly affected their views. War was no longer a thing of glory. It only brought misery, and consequently peace, needed to be found as soon as possible, and at any cost. It seems that the medieval notions of war that were still prevalent in the late sixteenth century started to be questioned, and Sandberg's claims of battles being quite the spectacle for civilians<sup>370</sup> does not seem to apply in this case. Quite on the contrary, Hale's description of the misery wars brought upon the poor populace is verified by the content of the merchants' letters.<sup>371</sup>

It is at this point that their particular interests started to clash with those of Spain, as although a prolonged war might eventually lead to the recapturing of all rebellious cities, it would also lead to the utter destruction of trade. Their ambivalence when it came to the military operations of the Spanish army is telling of that conflict of interests. On the one hand, they seemed to genuinely care about the result of the war and the fate of those who took part in it, such as the soldiers, generals and civilians. On the other hand, they could not help but question the rationale of an everlasting war. As we have seen, this contradiction between their socially-inscribed urge to support Philip's cause and their natural aversion to the atrocities and the concern caused by the prolonged duration of the war is the main prism through which we can understand their writings.

Not all of them seemed to be concerned about the war though. There are dozens of letters that do not offer any information whatsoever about the Dutch Revolt. Diego de

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<sup>368</sup> Rodríguez Pérez, *The Dutch Revolt through Spanish Eyes*. 39-110. Also in Rodríguez Pérez, *The Pelican and Its Ungrateful Children*, 286-299.

<sup>369</sup> Kamen, *The Duke of Alba*. 83-130

<sup>370</sup> Sandberg. "To Have the Pleasure of This Siege". 143-145

<sup>371</sup> Hale, *War and Society*. 179-181

Echávarri, one of the wealthiest Spanish merchants - if not the wealthiest, had absolutely no interest in the operations of the Spanish army, despite the fact that he was involved in a series of *asientos*. Andrés de la Maza, one of his partners in those *asientos*, sent a significant number of letters to Ruiz without making any reference to the war. We can only guess why merchants of such calibre did not find it necessary to discuss such events with someone as informed as Ruiz. Perhaps their information networks were adequately comprehensive, and they were not in need of additional intelligence. It is also possible that they did not find it necessary to be the bearers of news about the revolt as they were less dependent on him and did not need to seek his favour. Or perhaps they simply did not have any time to waste on topics that were not directly connected to their business.

Even those who do dedicate some words to letting Ruiz know what was going on in those turbulent times fail to mention certain events of significant importance. We have gone through all the topics they dealt with, and have often discussed what was left out of their correspondence, but this is just a fraction of the information that is missing. They do not comment, for instance, on the collapse of the negotiations in Breda despite the fact that they longed for peace. Nor do they speak about some of the most important battles, such as the Battle of Gembloux. Cuéllar writes a letter on the 25<sup>th</sup> of November 1576, less than three weeks after the Spanish Fury, and still he almost deliberately avoids making any remarks on those events, which shook the port of Scheldt. Of course each of these cases must to be examined separately in order to determine the reasons behind the silence. Limited access to reliable sources of information, the fear of expressing their thoughts openly, the presumption that Ruiz might not be interested in a given incident, etc. could all potentially explain the missing information. After all, the flow of letters was disrupted between 1576 and 1585, while merchants from other nations maintained regular communication with Ruiz throughout these three decades. These merchants may have spoken to him about topics their Spanish colleagues did or could not.

Nevertheless, the Spanish merchants' letters are precious as they provide us with insight into the war that chronicles and propagandistic literature cannot offer. This is precisely because these merchants did not have an official status, one that would force them to serve the needs of the Crown and promote its interests. They did have their own agendas and were certainly careful when writing to a man like Ruiz back in Spain, but there is perhaps a greater level of candour and veracity in their words. As the war continued, the aforementioned veracity became more and more evident. They did not try to beautify war, nor did they aspire to present the Spanish army as an invincible force and the rebels as a bunch of worthless

adversaries. Their letters are pivotal in understanding the brutal reality of war in the sixteenth century and the misery it brought upon people's lives. The merchants saw both the generals and the soldiers as human beings who could fail, be scared, starve, and suffer, and civilians who suffered the unfortunate fate of needing to defend their hometowns as children of God who should be treated as such. They were not considered inhuman figures deserving either enormous praise for their heroic actions or absolute condemnation for their treacherous nature. The merchants' situation as Spanish people living in the lands of the enemy is unique and revealing. They break the stereotype of Spanish men ready to devote their lives to the cause of their king, of brave people longing for battles and deeming peace dishonourable. Contrary to what we read in García Hernan's work and in Rodríguez Pérez's analysis of propagandistic literature which rather surreptitiously aspired to present Philip's affairs as the duties of the entire nation and in the interests of Christianity,<sup>372</sup> our merchants have no love for the war and are eager to renounce the image of Spaniards as ready to sacrifice everything for their fatherland.<sup>373</sup> All in all their views on the war when compared to those of scholars, have a twofold value. On the one hand, they show more emphatically the political purposes that drove scholars to write about war and present it in a way that would justify it and move the masses. On the other hand, they offer us a more realistic portrait of everyday life in wartime.

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<sup>372</sup> García Hernan, *Guerra, Propaganda y Cultura En la Monarquía Hispánica*. 284-289

<sup>373</sup> Rodríguez Pérez, *Defining the Nation. Defending the Nation*. 186-191



## Conclusion:

We can now go back and connect all the dots. We have studied the evolution of the views of our group of merchants throughout the course of the Dutch Revolt vis-à-vis the ongoing events and the material reality they encountered. We have also tried to shed some light on the ways in which they perceived their experiences and how they expressed them in their own words. Their views were largely shaped by their precarious position in the commercial market of Antwerp and evolved according to the unfolding of the war.

During the first years of the war, our merchants were loyal to their king's cause. Optimistic and proud, albeit worried about the unpredictable nature of the war, they speak of Alba's *tercios* with great admiration. At first, they felt closely affiliated with this army, which they saw as their national army. These views are in accordance with the emerging proto-nationalism or proto-patriotism of the sixteenth century, and demonstrate that this sense of national pride was shared among Spaniards regardless of their place of residence and despite of their regional identities. In addition, mesmerised by the propagandistic literature that circulated en masse (for early modern standards) Spain, they genuinely believed that their army was invincible and that their enemies would prove to be no match for the fearsome *tercios*. There was therefore no reason why they should not wait patiently for a glorious victory for their *patria*. Along with these views, they adhered to the notion of a glorious war, which was still prevalent in Renaissance Europe. Victories were seen as the result of magnificent plans conceived by the most brilliant tacticians and carried out by brave and disciplined warriors, the earthly forces of the Divine being guided against the archenemy, the heretics. The latter are seen as heinous, untrustworthy and rebellious by nature - people who wish to hurt the Holy Church and betray their benevolent and clement king. This hatred is restricted to those Netherlanders who decided to side with William of Orange however. The rest were seen as pious, loyal subjects and did not seem to be of much interest to the Spanish merchants. It was a civil war after all, and the enemy was not attributed any national identity. They were simply the devil's pawns, the sworn enemies of Christendom, a bunch of ungrateful, greedy and arrogant rebels. This pre-existing identity confirms the conclusions Rodríguez Salgado drew regarding the infantile stages of nationalism in sixteenth-century Spain. She paints a picture of a common national identity that superseded the various regional ones and went hand in hand with a sense of national duty. As this identity was forged via negation in the wake of the final years of the *Reconquista*, it was only brought back to surface,



even reinforced, when the Dutch Revolt broke out<sup>374</sup>

The fragility of their world of ideas became clear as the years went by, and no solution could be seen on the horizon. War lost its charm and became a horrible task some poor devils have to carry out. It was a menace to both soldiers and civilians, both Spaniards and Netherlanders. Their exaggerated descriptions of the belligerents were gradually softened. References to the evil nature of their enemies became increasingly scarce, and at the same time they came to see their own people through a more realistic prism. They saw their soldiers as human beings just like them, and defeat was now a possibility. While their hatred towards the rebels had not completely worn off, they were less likely to be blamed for the disaster. The actions and intentions of royal agents and the king himself started to be questioned, shyly at first but more vocally in later years. Peace was requested at all costs. Perhaps the turning point in this shift from an adamant patriotism to a pessimistic pragmatism was the closure of the Scheldt. From that point onwards, the Spanish merchants in the Low Countries gradually came to realise two things: First, suppressing the rebellion was not the easy task they had believed it to be, and second, their businesses were now in grave danger. While things did not necessarily look promising for them even in the first days of the war, their trust that it would not drag on for long and the belief that they could secure some profits by facilitating the needs of the army was crucial to their composed way of looking at the war. The revolt inflicted a number of plagues upon their businesses however. To begin with, it created an unstable market with frequent monetary crises, fluctuating prices and shortages of goods. Trade was hampered as there were no certainties whatsoever, and everyone was hesitant to carry out even the most ordinary of transactions. Moreover, the needs of the army strangled nearly all commercial activities that did not revolve around the war. In addition, the seas and lands that connected Brabant to Spain were increasingly perilous. Privateering and blockades cut off Antwerp from the Iberian Peninsula, which was the main place of operation for the Spanish traders. The brutal actions of the *tercios*, along with the shift in the main theatre of war to Flanders and Brabant only served to terrorise the inhabitants of these lands, whose population was shrinking by the day. Finally, the merchants' networks of information and their maritime insurance policies were hampered by the war and its byproducts. The rebellion left the Spanish businessmen exposed to any disasters caused by events in the nearby areas, events such as the French Wars of Religion, which under normal circumstances would not disrupt their commercial transactions. It comes as no surprise that they blame the war in the Low

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<sup>374</sup> Rodríguez Salgado, *Christians, Civilised and Spanish*: 238

Countries for their misfortune, even when they operate through the ports of France or Hamburg. What made them even more certain about this was the fates of other mercantile communities in the Low Countries. Donald Harreld proves beyond any doubt that the Germans were also in deep shock. Not only did the frequent bankruptcies in Antwerp leave them exposed since they were her main creditors, but the uncertain environment that followed the Spanish Fury and the perilous roads that were being ravaged by ill-disciplined troops pushed them to look for alternative places to set up their businesses.<sup>375</sup> Paola Subacchi claims that the Italians were also affected by such disasters, fleeing Brabant in mass numbers for more peaceful cities.<sup>376</sup> The Spaniards were well aware of this, and were equally aware of the new business opportunities opening up in Amsterdam, a city that enjoyed the fruits of peace. Of all the merchants residing in Antwerp, those who stood to profit from the war were the ones of superior socioeconomic status. Since most of the Spaniards were middle-class merchants, they were doomed to suffer.

It is at this point that we observe a sharp change in their mindset. Their personal interests clashed with those of their country, and they became very cynical, expressing their sentiments about the war in the most bitter way. At the same time, instead of speaking of a glorious victory, they prayed for the war to end, even if this was at the expense of their ruler. Their references to the war no longer aimed to transmit news to Ruiz, nor do they speak proudly about the successes of the *tercios*. In their eyes, the army should only fight in order to open new business possibilities for them. Therefore no battles, sieges or campaigns were narrated unless they were directly linked to their interests. Peace was requested even when the course of war favoured Farnese while the enemies were now heinous not because of their rebellious and heretic nature, but simply because of their refusal to agree upon a peace treaty. This unexpected change in outlook seems to contradict Daybell's argument that letter-writing bore a particular culture and involved a specific ritual that made the sender very cautious. As their letters were to be read out in public, Daybell claims that the writers had to take into account the fact that their writing had to appear decent by common standards.<sup>377</sup> Nevertheless, our merchants' aversion to the war was such that they did not try to hide their feelings. Both the Crown and the commanders decided that the needs of their subjects had to be put aside and that their actions should serve the interests of King Philip. Now their subjects wanted it the other way around, giving the Crown a taste of its own medicine.

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<sup>375</sup> Harreld, *High Germans in the Low Countries*. 173-181

<sup>376</sup> Subacchi, *Italians in Antwerp in the Second Half of the Sixteenth Century*. 78-81

<sup>377</sup> Daybell, *The Material Letter*. 9-23

Their dynamic perception of the war is emphasised if seen next to the static views of chroniclers. The latter seemed to be singing (with only a handful of exceptions) the same tune. While it is clear that theatrical plays drew inspiration from the chronicles, the gap between the years in which the latter and the former were written would make us expect some differences. Alas, what we see is that these texts propagate the same messages, preach the same ideas and remind Spaniards of the same duties, as if nothing really happened during that gap.<sup>378</sup>

Does this mean that the merchants were alienated from their motherland? Not quite. Their concern for the affairs and safety of Spain, and for Philip's subjects, as well as their active participation in certain side operations of their country's army, and the national pride they felt (even on a number of seemingly unrelated occasions, as we saw for example in de la Maza's letter on his two colleagues who, against all odds, paid off their debt) speaks volumes about their affiliation. Their national identity was rather resistant to shocks. However, they prioritised their own interests to the point that they did not seem to care about the result of the war. We should not take it for granted that their personal interests and those of the Crown could never have been bridged. Obviously a victory for the latter would bring peace and boost trade once again. By all means though, trade was not the only thing that occupied the minds of the merchants. As long as the royal treasury could stand on its own two feet, Philip would be able to compensate the merchant-creditors of his army. In practice of course, our group of merchants did not take part in many deals, and even those who did were infuriated by the lack of credibility and integrity the Crown was renowned for. For the rest of them, the payments to *asientistas* was important only because the interests of all merchants were intertwined, and one man's failure was another man's disaster.

The views and experiences of these Spanish merchants allows us to paint a more general and theoretical picture. We have seen that their perception of the war, and consequently their actual experiences were the result of a process. This process consisted of an interplay between their pre-existing beliefs about the world around them and the material reality that was constantly pulling them down to earth. Having all been born and raised in Spain, it is only natural that this mental framework that bound together ideas, political views, superstitions and metaphysical notions, stereotypes and prejudices largely coincided with the one that was prevalent in their fatherland. This set of ideas was of course socially inscribed and therefore bound to transformation, should their social background be dramatically

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<sup>378</sup> See for instance Rodríguez Pérez, *The Dutch Revolt through Spanish Eyes*, 39-133, Rodríguez Pérez, *The Pelican and Its Ungrateful Children*, 286-298 or Rodríguez Pérez, *Los Neerlandeses En El Teatro De La Primera Fase De La Guerra De Flandes*. 813-830

contradictive to these ideas. Such was their everyday lives in Antwerp, putting their previous perceptions to the test. The disaster war brought upon their businesses and lives on the one hand, and its cruel nature on the other, challenged their initial understandings and depictions of the rebellion. The crude reality mediated the effects of Spanish propagandistic literature and exposed its very nature as normative rather than representative of the average sixteenth-century Spaniard mindset. Indeed, chroniclers and playwrights depicted their compatriots as fervent patriots, valiant, invincible, bloodthirsty, yet noble and chivalrous. The letters sent by Spanish merchants living in the Low Countries shows how distant these depictions were from reality.

It is therefore fair to assume that nothing was the same for them after this war. Some, such as Curiel or de Añastro, put their lives at risk, and the vast majority had to leave the Low Countries. Not a single day passed without them drowning in fear and concern regarding the ongoing events. As a result, they became more cynical and less idealistic in their understanding of the world around them. Abstaining from making any overly-patriotic comments, from attributing any metaphysical abilities to their compatriots, or from glorifying war, their words were no longer in line with those of the chroniclers and play-writers. Since the latter had never been to the Low Countries (even if they had, they were no longer there), they did not experience the shock of the Revolt. This small community of Spanish merchants in the Low Countries consists a unique group indeed. They were literate but not scholars, had an official legal status without being agents of the Crown, were torn between their economic interests and their affinity to their *patria*, and they were witnesses to the war but yet were distant from the military culture. Their views can help us understand the perplexity of war as a social phenomenon

There are of course limitations to studying the correspondence of a limited number of persons, each one with his particular personality and unique way of expressing himself, or even with his own interests. While this objection seems legitimate, there are a number of commonalities and consistencies that uncover a pattern which can help us see beyond these obstacles. It seems that the first months or years that a merchant spent in Antwerp were characterized by a certain freshness, an eagerness to endure war and a willingness to suffer through its effects for the greater good of *la patria*. This enthusiasm is evident in their letters, which barely talk about anything other than the war. (Cevallos, Varrón, even Cuéllar) Nevertheless, all of them gradually come to forge a different perception of the Dutch Revolt. They all expressed the same concerns, shared the same fears, and had the same hopes. Their similar status added to this as well. Those of higher status communicated with Ruiz rather

sporadically and did not seem to take any interest in the war; all they spoke about was their business.

In addition, what the merchants do *not* say is as important as what they do mention. A number of important events, the outcomes of crucial battles, the fates of commanders such as Alba and Requesens, and almost all the actions of the rebels were excluded from their narrations. We can only speculate as to why, particularly since on several occasions they refer to things that had even less to do with their business. The answer certainly does not rest on a supposedly limited network of information, as the merchants had proven themselves to be as informed as any other well-connected person living in the Low Countries. Surely we can attribute these omissions to a lack of interest in those particular events, but this is rather contradictory to their general behaviour, and seems to clash with the pattern of news they sent to Ruiz. A study comparing the letters of these merchants to the information merchants of other nations passed on to their partner in Medina del Campo could potentially shed light on this issue.

Equally uncertain is the legitimacy of their writing. We have seen that in the correspondence culture of that era it was customary for these letters to be read out loud and for their content to be shared with others. In this context, our merchants' views had to align by-and-large with those of their readers, and they had to appear as if they condoned Philip's strategies, even if the writers did not. After all, they were obviously aware of Ruiz's opinions on the topics they speak about and it is more than likely that they moderated theirs in order to convey their messages. In addition, it is difficult to determine if they were open and frank about their economic situation, as they were speaking to a partner in the eyes of whom they had to appear trustworthy, credible and successful. Furthermore, they did not wish to come across as either too busy to accommodate him or sufficiently secure economically so as to not require him to pull some strings for them on occasion.

Finally, any extrapolating from this case to other groups of Spanish merchants in the Low Countries must be undertaken with caution, as Antwerp's particular position and its turbulent history provided our group with a very particular social background. Consequently, Spanish merchants who were living in other cities of the region, such as Bruges, may have had different yet still comparable experiences. The same can be said about other mercantile groups living in the Low Countries. Nation, religion, specialisation, and economic status all mediated merchants' experiences of the war. Studying and understanding the differences in the particular situations of merchants, and pinpointing events such as the Spanish Fury or the recapture of Antwerp in 1585 that had little impact on the lives of residents of other cities,

while at the same time taking into account general problems such as money shortages or closed ports, is pivotal if we aspire to construct a more comprehensive image of the lives of businessmen in wartime.

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